



UNIVERSITÄT **BONN**



**BASA**

## From “Bronze Rooster” to Ekeko –

IMPULSES TOWARD ETHNOLOGICAL PROVENANCE RESEARCH IN UNIVERSITY  
COLLECTIONS AND MUSEUMS

Volume 1  
CRITICAL VIEWS ON HERITAGE OF THE AMERICAS |  
MIRADAS CRÍTICAS SOBRE PATRIMONIO DE LAS AMÉRICAS



*Edited by*  
**DANIEL GRANA-BEHRENS & KAROLINE NOACK**



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*Volume 1*

Critical Views on Heritage of the Americas |  
Miradas críticas sobre patrimonio de las Américas

BASA Museum (Bonn Collection of the Americas)



Daniel Grana-Behrens, Karoline Noack

(editors)

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Bonn 2020

**Cover:**                *From “Bronze Rooster” to Ekeko*

**Photo:**                Daniel Grana-Behrens

From “Bronze Rooster” to Ekeko – Impulses toward Ethnological Provenance Research in University Collections and Museums

**Volume Editors:** Daniel Grana-Behrens & Karoline Noack

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*To Elvira Espejo Ayca, Director of the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore  
(MUSEF) in Bolivia (2013-2020)*





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## Presentation of the Series:

### Critical Views on Heritage of the Americas |

### Miradas críticas sobre patrimonio de las Américas

The aim of this series is to create a multivocal platform that brings critical views of heritage constructions and processes in the Americas (and other regions of the so-called Global South) into dialogue with each other, in all their complexity and diversity. Drawing on a holistic approach to perspectives of diverse stakeholders in heritage, it will illustrate the ambiguous meanings, negotiations and contradictions that linger around this concept. It will further bring them into critical discussion with existing and dominant theories, institutions and practices in order to challenge and deconstruct them from a postcolonial point of view. This discussion may include epistemic and ontological understanding of heritage, as well as national and international legal norms and systems for protecting heritage—phenomena that have been emerging alongside the rise of modern nation-states and are dominated by Western value systems. Certainly, heritage cannot be understood as a clearly defined or closed concept. Moreover, discourses taking place between the multiple agencies involved are diverse and often contradictory, and they may cause conflicts between different interest groups. Thus, narratives of non-academic actors and newly gained knowledge from the field of heritage must be considered because they contribute to a deeper understanding of concepts of heritage.

Indigenous groups and other communities have developed diverse practices, based on indigenous and local knowledge systems, to ‘safeguard’, manage and keep their heritage alive. During the last two years, the debate concerning the return of material and human remains from European museums – located in states from the so-called Global North – to their source communities and groups – mostly situated in the so-called Global South – has entered the political stage. The debate is an important illustration of how heritage is globally entangled in very complex processes that encompass the past, present and future. Without a doubt, the first step towards truly collaborative practices concerning heritage must be to restore the agency of marginalized stakeholders and communities.



## Foreword

What I have seen in international museums is that they mainly collected the beautiful finished objects. Still, in their collections, they frequently do not take into account the objects that are part of the *chaîne opératoire* of production. I was astonished to see that academics, curators, and professionals have made enormous mistakes for not knowing the practical part. I saw several archaeological tools of textile production badly cataloged and with terminologies alien to the objects. Instead, I saw them and knew what they were, how they worked. Researchers often fragment and manage superficial readings from the outside because they do not work with the communities. Or these communities do not have access to the academic books that theorists write for the theorists, and the practice remains there. That is epistemological looting.

In our research on the broad dynamics of the *chaîne opératoire* of textile production in the Andes, we worked with weavers in the communities, systematizing all structures and techniques of textiles in our indigenous languages based on the practice, on how to make an object. It was essential for us to create this bridge between theory and practice, to take the practice to the academic realm so that the academics can understand us and, in that way, to deepen the knowledge. It is an arduous job, and there is still much work to do.

In some international museums, it was sad to experience that they didn't even pay attention or appreciate the work I was doing there. I perceived an unfair hierarchical view like they are the employees, the hired ones, and I, as a weaver, can come and help and deliver the information, the terminologies, but without being paid. That hurt because it was hard for me to learn, too. We do narrate, we are also thinkers, but the texts are from the researchers, and they only put you in the acknowledgments, and we, what do we gain? Nothing.

I hope this can change. Hopefully, we can overcome that separation and work together with mutual respect between academics and non-academics. I think we have to rethink science as joint integration of knowledge from both the theoretical and practical sides. We need to think about how we can collaborate so that the information can flow horizontally.

Elvira Espejo Ayca\*, August 2020

\* Elvira Espejo Ayca was Director of the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (MUSEF) in La Paz from 2013 to 2020. In April this year she was awarded the Goethe Medal by the German Goethe-Institut for her work. Two months later she was dismissed from her office by the Interim Government of Bolivia, which was voted out on October 18, 2020.



# Introduction

*Karoline Noack\** and *Daniel Grana-Behrens\*\**

In the aftermath of the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés in 1519 – the beginning of the colonization of the Americas – the first American objects arrived in Europe. But they were not loot. Quite the contrary: they were gifts from the Aztecs and their emperor, Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin, who ruled from 1502 until his death in Spanish captivity in 1520. Some of these objects may even have been produced by the Aztecs specifically for these foreigners (Russo 2011: 244). The Spaniards, too, initially responded with gifts for the indigenous couriers and their ruler. During this first phase of contact and before the native peoples of Mexico were subjugated by the Spaniards, Cortés sent to Spain objects that he described in his writings, such as jewelry made from gold, silver, feathers and precious stones, as well as two indigenous accordion-fold books (codices), weapons, animal hides and cotton clothing (Bujok 2009: 18, Russo 2011: 231-234). The ‘best piece’ was presented to the Spanish Crown as compensation in the form of the *Quinto Real* or Royal Fifth. The gifts from the indigenous Mexicans were thus transformed into curiosities (Feest 1993: 2), and into goods with which Cortés tried to legitimize his position before the Crown. This strategy was necessary because the invasion of Mexico had been initiated without royal authorization. But Cortés by no means intended to conduct trade or forge long-term political alliances with the indigenous peoples. As had been the case earlier in the Antilles, his goal in Mexico was to acquire booty. Indeed, the ‘plunder economy’ became the expansionary element fundamental to the Spanish conquest in general (Spalding 1984). Colonial exploitation of the indigenous population and the expansion that came with the trans-Atlantic slave trade became self-perpetuating in a kind of vicious circle of plundering. This process was accompanied by a “transformation from predation to privilege” (Huber 2019: 235, 363).

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In contrast to the first objects that were sent back to Europe, however, many other items met a different fate in the wake of the conquest. Even during their first, temporary occupation of Tenochtitlan between November 1519 and June 1520, the Spaniards melted down Aztec objects made of silver and gold. This practice of melting down precious metals was widespread across all Spain's colonial territories in the Americas and eventually became part of the earliest accumulations of capital in Europe (see Helms 1996, Noack 2020). It is only in a rare stroke of luck that survivors of this process still be located today, such as an early sixteenth-century bar of Spanish gold that was discovered in 1981 during excavations in Mexico City; X-ray fluorescence analysis recently proved that its composition resembles that of other gold objects from the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan (Mexicon 2020: 6-7). The bar was presumably lost by the Spaniards during their last-minute flight from Tenochtitlan on 30 June 1519, as it was recovered along their known route of retreat.

For objects that post-date the initial phase of gift-giving, it cannot be clearly determined what was handed over voluntarily and what was violently seized (Huber 2019: 171, 186). This shift can be described as the dawn of large-scale plundering of objects from the Americas. It is unknown how many plundered items from the Americas reached Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. However, it is estimated that fewer than 300 of these objects are still extant today. Indigenous documents or codices, like those of the Mayas or Mixtecs, were confiscated and destroyed, both during the initial invasion and throughout later centuries in the context of Christianization. The few codices known today are almost all located in European archives and collections (Laurencich-Minelli 2012).

What was initially a mutual exchange of gifts during the relatively early conquest of the Americas was followed by widespread raiding. This sequence demonstrates that wonder, curiosity and amazement mingled with economic forces – invitations to reciprocal exchange on the one hand, plundering and looting on the other – in a newfound “passion for the collecting of things” (Helms 1996: 355). This zeal, moreover, emerged as a response to the crisis of knowledge that was catalyzed by Iberian colonial expansion in the Americas. Later trade journeys were always collecting expeditions as well (Pratt 1992). This phenomenon highlights the first challenge of conducting provenance research on Europe's Latin American collections (i.e., collections of objects that originated from regions that are today considered part of Latin America), as well as on collections in Latin America itself. Although the Americas were colonized relatively early, most American objects currently held in European collections arrived in Europe in the nineteenth and twen-



tieth centuries in the context of large collecting expeditions undertaken by museums, especially by the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (Royal Museum of Ethnology, now the Ethnologisches Museum) in Berlin. That was also the period during which the nations of Latin America gradually achieved independence. As such, they themselves also became actors in the process of modern collecting. Collectors Alexander von Humboldt and Prince Maximilian Wied zu Neuwied had experienced the eve of Latin American independence during their travels, Humboldt through the Americas (1799-1804) and Prince Maximilian in Brazil (1815-1817). According to the guidelines released by the Deutscher Museumsbund (German Museums Association; DMB) for *Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* (2019), one consequence of this situation for provenance research is that the majority of objects in collections today are not considered “Objects from formal colonial rule contexts” (Case 1).

The subject of ‘ethnological provenance research’ was first comprehensively discussed at the conference *Provenance Research on Ethnographic Collections from the Colonial Era* organized by the Working Group ‘Museum’ of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie (German Anthropological Association) and the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich in 2017, and the contributions were published one year later (Förster et al. 2018; for more details see Fründt: this volume). Ethnological provenance research, now as before, primarily focuses on collections from regions that were subject to German colonial rule (Hoffmann: this volume). Another important perspective on ethnological provenance research is expressed in the Heidelberg Statement: “Above all, however, our museums preserve cultural heritage from highly differentiated contexts of acquisition and collecting and, therefore, represent much more than colonial heritage. Thus, it is equally evident that the relations which have been entered into during the acquisition of the objects oblige us to much more than merely return objects” (Heidelberg Statement 2019). In other words, the “contexts of acquisition and collecting” of ethnographic collections were diverse (Hauser-Schäublin 2018: 327, 329-330), in contrast to the pieces looted under the Nazi regime with which the term ‘provenance research’ has long been associated in German-speaking countries. Existing gaps in ethnological provenance research, primarily with respect to collections from Latin America and especially ethnographic collections at universities, provide our point of departure for the present volume.

The focus on Latin American, and here especially South American, collections can further refine our image of ethnological provenance research. First, the issue of whether it is sufficient to assign Latin American objects and collections currently

held in Germany that did not originate from Case 1 (“formal colonial rule contexts”) to Case 2 (“Objects from regions which were not subject to formal colonial rule”) (DMB 2019), and which courses of action could result from this designation, can only be determined in the course of conducting provenance research. Second, the situation of *pueblos indígenas* or *pueblos originarios* (indigenous peoples) in Latin America is different from other global regions and varies among the countries of Latin America as well. In general, they are not as well-organized in national contexts or as well-connected internationally as in instances of so-called settler colonialism, such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia or New Zealand (see Hauser-Schäublin 2018: 328-329). This situation is apparent, of course, in the politics of indigenous organizations, both small and large, and in Latin American states generally with respect to provenance research and restitution. Third, these characteristics, combined with the relatively early period during which the Americas were colonized and the idiosyncratic development of the field of Anthropology of the Americas in Germany, require that archaeological-ethnological provenance research be conducted as a single enterprise in many cases (see contributions in this volume by Montero Fayad, Rattunde and Jaimes Betancourt).

No systematic program of provenance research exists for Latin American collections. In an allusion to the field’s scope, the DMB cites textiles from Guatemala (Example 1), pre-Hispanic (Example 3) and religious objects (Example 4) as Latin American examples of “Case 2” (DMB 2019: 28-29). Especially after 1980, when Guatemala was in the midst of a civil war, members of indigenous populations in the country, including many internal refugees, sold textiles to Europeans who were working there as teachers or diplomats, for instance; they also sold objects looted from archaeological sites. Since the 1990s, it has been precisely these Europeans who have been offering Guatemalan textile collections to European museums upon their return to the continent. Moreover, the “Museum Age” (Baur 2013) of the nineteenth century was the dawn of institutionalized ethnology and archaeology, in addition to many other disciplines. This phenomenon essentially doubled the energies invested in ‘collecting’ archaeological materials for European museums. Over the course of Christianization, too, ‘religious objects’ were ‘voluntarily’ or involuntarily turned over. The third case described by the DMB (2019: 30) concerns “objects that reflect colonialism”, i.e., objects that reflect ‘colonial thinking’ through their reception. One such example from the Americas are the various series of *casta* paintings, such as the one held in the Museo de América in Madrid (Estenssoro Fuchs et al. 2000).

In their descriptions of context, the guidelines of the DMB (2019) represent an approach distinct from international and national as well as public and private law (on the latter, see Ochoa Jiménez 2019). However, both approaches have essentially the same goal, namely, to identify spaces for ethical and legal negotiations. Ochoa Jiménez emphasizes that, due to prohibitions on *ex post facto* application of relevant laws, it is not possible to negotiate restitution of objects collected during the colonial era from a judicial perspective alone. In Germany's case in particular, the international convention (UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970) was signed quite late, in 2007, and corresponding national regulations have only recently come into effect (Act on the Protection of Cultural Property, 2016) (see Rattunde, this volume). Given the legal complexities of negotiating international repatriation claims and the vague guidelines from the DMB, investigation of individual objects and case-by-case decisions are inevitable. As such, it is necessary to conduct research on object provenance and how institutions that currently hold these objects acquired their collections. This process is a scholarly but also a legal necessity, especially in cases when objects may possibly be repatriated (Ochoa Jiménez 2019: xxii).

Ochoa Jiménez presents a classification of international cases of restitution of 'cultural objects' from the perspective of private international law, which legally delimits the scope of negotiations. They also include some paradigmatic cases involving Latin American states or institutions (Republic of Ecuador vs. Danusso, Government of Peru vs. Johnson, the agreement between Yale University and the Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cuzco concerning repatriation of artifacts from Machu Picchu in 2011 and 2012, repatriation of seven archaeological artifacts to Colombia based on a bilateral accord between Colombia and Ecuador) (Ochoa Jiménez 2019: 37ff.).

The objects that have been repatriated from European museums to Latin America as a result of international legal proceedings are few in number but telling in scope. Here, we present three examples that span very different contexts: 1) nationality politics in the context of *indigenismo* activism; 2) a clear case of illegal acquisition; and 3) human remains in an equally obvious context of illegal acquisition.

- 1) In 2014, the Bernisches Historisches Museum repatriated an Ekeko (god of abundance and prosperity) stone figurine to Bolivia. The Ekeko was received at the El Alto International Airport in an act of state and is currently on display in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología in La Paz. Natural scientist Johann Jakob Tschudi (1818-1889) had brought the figurine with him to

Switzerland in 1858, and the Museum had acquired it from his heirs in 1929. With the help of some cognac, Tschudi had pressured the former owner to sell it to him (Ponce Sanginés 1969: 18). Even a year after the restitution, there were still diplomatic tensions between the Canton of Bern and Bolivia with respect to the way in which the object was handled.

- 2) Also, in 2014, the Världskulturmuseet (Museum of World Culture) in Gothenburg returned a subset of its 89 Paracas textiles to Peru. The museum had been safeguarding them on behalf of the city of Gothenburg and put them on exhibit in 2011 under the title *A Stolen World*. The textiles had been illegally brought to Gothenburg in the 1930s during a period of political unrest in Peru. As early as 2014, the repatriated textiles were already being displayed in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú in Lima. Restitution of the remaining Paracas textiles in Gothenburg is to be concluded in 2021.
- 3) So-called human remains represent a special category (DMB 2013). In the context of a state visit in 2012 by then-President of Peru, Ollanta Humala, the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich repatriated a 600-year-old mummy from the Department of Ancash, which had been smuggled out of Peru just thirty years earlier under unknown circumstances. After being seized by police, the mummy had been handed over to the museum in 1986.

The goal of the present volume is to address other typical – and much more ambiguous – areas of provenance research on objects from Latin America that are currently held in university and other collections, in Europe as well in Latin America. In addition, it aims to discuss the challenges of such work in exemplary depth. Focusing particularly on university collections in ethnological provenance research entails examining the conceptual breadth that the term ‘provenance research’ can acquire in the context of university projects that integrate ethnological, archaeological and object-based approaches to research. Moreover, it requires considering procedural guidelines or questions for future research and problems in managing collections that can arise from such work.

The following contributions stem from the roundtable *Vom „Bronzehahn“ bis zum Ekeko – Impulse für eine ethnologische Provenienzforschung in universitären Sammlungen und Museen* (From “Bronze Rooster” to Ekeko: Impulses Toward Ethnographic Provenance Research in University Collections and Museums), which

took place on 10 April 2019, the first Day of Provenance Research, in the BASA Museum (Bonner Amerikas-Sammlung, Bonn Collection of the Americas) of the Department for Anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn.<sup>1</sup> The roundtable addressed questions about provenance research and restitution concerning Latin American collections in Germany, while also considering the various relevant actors in Latin America. With these efforts, we call attention to the special circumstances of ethnological provenance research on such objects in university collections, based on the case of the BASA Museum. The group's general focus on Latin American collections is complemented by the insider perspective of Silvia Dolz (Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden), curator of the collections of Africa, on the Benin Dialogue Group's exemplary handling of objects in restitution and provenance research. The latter case paradigmatically demonstrates the complexity of communication among the necessarily very different actors involved in processes of repatriation.

This perspective is represented in the volume's title by the 'Bronze Rooster.' Sarah Fründt (Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste, German Lost Art Foundation) offers concluding expert commentary on the contributions and ties them into the larger context of debates surrounding provenance research and "restitution, return and repatriation" (see Fründt: this volume).

The contributions compiled in this volume provide an exemplary sample of the broad discipline of ethnological provenance research (Förster et al. 2018; Brandstetter and Hierholzer 2018; Schorch 2020). On behalf of the then Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Konrad Theodor Preuss (1869-1938) collected, among other things, 21 stone statues from the archaeological culture of St. Agustín and two ritual masks from the Kogui in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, under two very different circumstances. Verónica Montero Fayad demonstrates that in one case, the owners of the land where the statues were located stood on equal footing in their relations with the collector; in the other case, however, the collector exploited internal conflicts, and communication with Kogui authorities was very complicated and unequal. It is precisely these different spaces, situations and entanglements, spanning national and local levels, that shape the conditions structuring restitution. Beyond the various actors, questions must address the definition of objects as archaeological and/or ethnological, former and current owners, the objects' intended use (exhibition versus ritual practice) and, if applicable, the place where they would be held upon successful negotiation of their repatriation.

<sup>1</sup> Participants (in alphabetic order): Diego Ballesterio, Anna Maria Brandstetter, Silvia Dolz, Sarah Fründt, Daniel Grana-Behrens, Carla Jaimes Betancourt, Verónica Montero Fayad, Karoline Noack, and Naomi Rattunde. The *Day of Provenance Research* was declared by the working group 'Provenance research'. See <<https://www.arbeitskreis-provenienzforschung.org/index.php?id=ag-kolo-niale-provenienzen&lang=de>> (05/15/2020).

Naomi Rattunde focuses on acquisition contexts in the BASA Museum, a university institution. These contexts also include collection decisions made by the 'big' ethnological museums. She points to tension between the paucity of data about archaeological objects and knowledge about the collectors themselves, especially about their ethnographic objects. This tension delineates the space in which the potential for researching objects and their contexts and practices of collection, i.e., provenance research in the best sense of the term, can be identified and put to use. Pronounced differences between knowledge of context, ethical questions, legal regulations and practices of knowledge in dealing with archaeological and ethnographic collections are decisive for provenance research and repatriation in various forms, from potential repatriation of archaeological objects to developing "shared knowledge" (Scholz 2017 and 2020) in joint research projects with source communities. Her contribution makes a case for more robust provenance research during the acquisition process.

Beatrix Hoffmann's contribution also calls for an expanded conception of provenance research, as illustrated by an object biography that begins with the object's planning and production. It is worth noting, too, that this same perspective is being incorporated into the approach that the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore in La Paz, led until recently by Elvira Espejo Ayca, is taking toward objects' *chaîne opératoire*. Thus, provenance research considers objects' many interdependencies and explores relevant contexts that predate their arrival in the museum. Using the case of Apalai and Wayana objects in the BASA Museum that were collected by Manfred Rauschert, Hoffmann demonstrates the diverse ways in which the collections *per se*, as well as individual objects, can be 'read.' From the collector's perspective, they are the product of his efforts toward 'cultural preservation;' from a methodological perspective, they are the result of interactions between the collector, sellers and producers; from a historical perspective, many arose from interest among Apalai and Wayana actors in their 'original' culture; and finally, from an anthropological or culture-historical perspective, they reflect the complex ethnic, cultural and political situation in French Guiana, which can be characterized as a "contact zone" (Pratt 1991).

In her 'thick ethnographic description,' Carla Jaimes Betancourt addresses the role of archaeological objects and collections in and for *comunidades indígenas* (indigenous communities), specifically in the Bolivian Amazon. She also discusses the agency of these groups in transmitting knowledge to the next generation, as well as the meaning of archaeologists' presence on-site. Tsimane community members, for example, store artifacts in their homes and are familiar with nearby

archaeological sites, which play an important role as territorial markers in defending their land rights. The author advocates for multivocalic debate in archaeology as well, by incorporating ‘other’ forms of knowledge<sup>2</sup> into archaeological interpretation. She also calls for a socialization of archaeological heritage, which entails *comunidades* redefining archaeological and colonial heritage. For ‘western’ archaeology, this approach means diverging from the basic concept of conserving archaeological heritage and accepting that ‘culture’ is and always has been subject to constant transformations.

Diego Ballesterro describes the management of indigenous human remains from southern Argentina (e.g., Mapuches, Tehuelches) that were handed over to the Museo de La Plata in the second half of the nineteenth century as evidence for the then-dominant ethnological conception of ‘primitive’ peoples. The remains also include those of Mapuche and Tehuelche individuals who lived in the museum between 1885 and 1890, in a sort of ‘human zoo.’ This period has only recently received critical scrutiny through ethnological provenance research. Various actors from politics, the museum, the scientific community and *comunidades indígenas* interact in the process of repatriating human remains. The author illustrates how early repatriations directly influenced the museum’s exhibition and collection management practices and continue contributing to the institution’s efforts to overcome internal colonialism.

Martin Künne and Werner Mackenbach direct their attention to ‘lost’ documentation from the early twentieth century of indigenous languages of Central America. These materials, which are now housed in European archives and collections, include the *Nachlass* of Walter Lehmann (1878-1939) in the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute) and his 1920 publication *Die Sprachen Zentralamerikas* (The Languages of Central America). Until now, this comprehensive work in comparative linguistics has only been available in German, but Künne and Mackenbach are now making it available for researchers in Central America for the first time. Instead of simply translating it into Spanish, however, the authors opted to produce an ethnohistorical-critical edition that incorporates important references from Lehmann’s travel journals and notebooks. Some materials, such as those concerning the endangered Rama language, were simultaneously incorporated into a long-term language documentation project. According to the authors, ethnological provenance research includes repatriating representative linguistic materials for studying language identity and revitalization, as well as examining the cultural and historical contexts of language documentation.

<sup>2</sup> See also <<https://blog.uni-koeln.de/gssc-humboldt/das-wissen-der-anderen-in-der-provenienz-forschung/>> (06/05/2020).

Using the case study of the Benin Dialogue Group, founded in 2010, Silvia Dolz demonstrates how it is possible to engage in trustworthy and transparent handling of looted Benin bronzes, which were plundered from the former kingdom of Edo (modern-day Nigeria) in 1897 under colonial rule and have since been held in various museums in Europe and elsewhere. She specifically addresses the differing legal conditions on local and national levels that impact facets of museum collaboration and restitution. One initial result of these efforts has been supporting construction of a new museum in Benin City for displaying significant objects still located in Nigeria, along with a large part of looted bronzes from European museums. In this important project and unprecedented cooperation, the African and European actors involved see an opportunity to make the cultural treasures – scattered throughout the world by colonial history – accessible to the people of Benin City, Edo State and Nigeria, while at the same time firmly anchoring them in the world as cultural ambassadors and important cultural heritage of Africa. Alongside works of art and artifacts, modern re-interpretations of these objects will be included in the exhibits, as well as aspects of immaterial cultural heritage (music, dance, language, film, photography).

The contributions in this volume showcase a wide spectrum of ethnological provenance research on Latin American collections. The necessity of integrating source communities into this research demonstrates that understanding the diverse provenances of objects and collections is not a research goal in and of itself. The Heidelberg Statement, which was released on the occasion of the Annual Conference of the Directors of Ethnographic Museums in German Speaking Countries (2019), underscores the belief that only “cooperative provenance research” can advance the decolonization of collections and museums. This approach entails joint negotiations and mutual decision-making in issues of heritage, even in dynamic times of multifaceted change and especially through use of digital technologies. University collections and museums like the BASA Museum represent an interface between institutions, museum ethnology and archaeological and ethnological research with source communities; as such, they assume a significant role in ethnological provenance studies.

The duties and expectations associated with this role can be summarized as follows:

- 1) University collections and museums need stable funding sources and personnel to be able to conduct cooperative provenance research in collaboration with ‘source communities.’ Moreover, future programming by sponsors should put ethnological provenance research – in a form that



serves the interests of source communities and transparent handling of the institution's own history – at the center of collections research. Such cooperation is indispensable from the very beginning of a project's conception.

- 2) Although stewardship of objects and collections in ethnological museums entrusted with caring for them can be a cause for restitution, one must also attend to conserving this material cultural heritage. Appropriate storage and conservation, including those that incorporate 'other' forms of knowledge and source community interests, are prerequisites for this heritage remaining available to future generations. Digital reproductions cannot substitute for actual objects; however, possibilities for using digital technologies in ethnological provenance research, for instance to collaboratively generate knowledge and make it available to broader publics, merit further exploration.
- 3) Engagement with material cultural heritage, including the Latin American objects and collections discussed here, entails significant responsibility. Ethnological provenance research in the form of case studies can provide a basis for restitution. The relationships that are initiated when objects are incorporated into collections, however, "oblige us to much more" (Heidelberg Statement). Ethnological provenance research opens ethical and legal spaces for fruitful interactions with source communities, knowledge production and negotiation of legal issues on local, national and international levels, in an entanglement of scholarly and legal perspectives.

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# To Whom Belong the Sculptures, to Whom Belong the Masks? Colombian Repatriation Claims to the Ethnological Museum in Berlin as a Challenge in Provenance Research

*Verónica Montero Fayad\**

## Introduction

In 1913, German archaeologist and ethnologist Konrad Theodor Preuss (1869-1938) arrived in Colombia with the aim of collecting archaeological and ethnographic material for the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) in Berlin. Preuss excavated in the region of San Agustín in the Department of Huila, but when the rainy season hindered his digging, he traveled south, where he carried out ethnographic research among the Uitoto, Tama, Carijona and Coreguaje indigenous groups settled near the Orteguzza River. In 1914, Preuss traveled to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in order to conduct ethnographic studies among Kogui native communities (Fig. 1). The German scientist returned to his country in 1919 with hundreds of artifacts, including archaeological remains, around 300 ethnographic objects, phonographic recordings and photographs. Among the collected materials are 21 stone sculptures from San Agustín (Fig. 2) and two ritual masks from the Kogui (Fig. 3 and 4).

One hundred years after their acquisition, however, diverse social sectors in Colombia are now petitioning for the objects to be returned. Despite the fact that the artifacts were all obtained by the same collector, they were acquired in different circumstances and posit different perspectives on repatriation debates. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to examine the complex panorama of repatriation demands for the San Agustín statues and the Kogui masks, going beyond legal

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aspects of the discussion. I briefly illustrate the context in which Preuss obtained the statues and masks. Then, I give an overview of the state of the repatriation claims in Colombia concerning these objects, and finally, I present some questions and challenges that these two specific cases raise.



Figure 1: Map of Colombia indicating the areas where Preuss investigated. Map: Courtesy of Rodolfo Franco 2020.



**Figure 2:** San Agustín Statue (106 x 59 x 32 cm), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, VA 61987. Photo: Edgar Guzmanruiz and Yomaira Puentes Rivera.

## Context of Acquisition: How Did Preuss Obtain the Objects?

Preuss' collection of archaeological and ethnographic objects would not have been possible without a good network of relations and partnerships. By the time Preuss arrived in Colombia, diverse ties already existed between Germany and the South American country. Several German explorers, travelers, scientists and entrepreneurs had visited Colombia before Preuss. In addition, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin already held some collections from the country (Botero 2006: 140-168). To some

extent, these previous relationships facilitated planning of Preuss' expedition and his fieldwork.



**Figure 3:** Kogui mask (16,5 x 16 x 10 cm), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, VA 62649. Photo: Martin Franken.

In her dissertation, Aura Lissete Reyes (2016) describes in detail the arrangements and networks that Preuss created prior to his journey to Colombia and during his fieldwork. Before Preuss traveled to the country, he had already established a network of contacts, which included Colombian diplomats, politicians, and intellectuals. These individuals helped him with recommendation letters for carrying out his endeavors in Colombia and with logistical arrangements, such as cargo transportation and taxes exemptions for luggage. For example, Preuss received recommendation letters from the Colombian diplomat Gustavo Michelsen (1850-1936), who introduced him to Colombian authorities and politicians. Another example is a letter from the German government addressed to the Colombian Ministry of Foreign



Affairs, which indicated that Preuss' luggage should be exempted from importation taxes (Reyes 2016: 91-93). Once in Colombia, Preuss contacted not only local administrative authorities, like a customs agent at the harbor in Barranquilla, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also intellectuals and directors of cultural and state institutions, such as Eduardo Posada (1884-1972), director of the Colombian Academy of History; Carlos Cuervo Márquez (1858-1930), head of the Ministry of Public Instruction (now the Ministry of Education) and member of the Academy of History; and Ernesto Restrepo Tirado (1862-1948), director of the National Museum of Colombia and co-founder of the Colombian Academy of History (Reyes 2016: 91-93). Through recommendation letters, the local and national authorities were informed about Preuss' plans to conduct archaeological excavations in San Agustín, as well as ethnographic studies among indigenous communities of Colombia (Reyes 2016: 92-93).



**Figure 4:** Kogui mask (17 x 17,5 x 10 cm), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, VA 62650. Photo: Martin Franken.

Preuss' object acquisition strategies in San Agustín and among the Kogui of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta were dissimilar, not only because of the kind of research, methodologies and materials, but also because of the populations with whom he was dealing. Whereas he negotiated directly with owners and tenants of the land where he sought to excavate in San Agustín, he encountered a series of obstacles that prevented him from obtaining artifacts among the Koguis, as described below. In San Agustín, Preuss acquired most excavated remains through purchase and few through donation, a practice made possible by the fact that landowners were considered owners of objects found in their domains (Reyes 2016: 173, 255). Even though Colombian Decree No. 21 of 8 March 1918 addressed "antiquities", it did not prevent their exportation if they had not yet been entered into the National Museum. Furthermore, removal of lithic statues from their original contexts was a common and accepted practice in San Agustín. For instance, Carlos Cuervo Márquez bestowed one small Agustinian sculpture upon the National Museum of Colombia, and two other small sculptures were donated to the museum by a family who owned a *hacienda* in San Agustín (Cuervo Márquez [1893] 1920: 227).

In the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, however, Preuss had difficulties reaching Kogui settlements and was therefore dependent on the non-indigenous population inhabiting native territories. They supplied him with mules and groceries, in addition to serving as mediators between him and the Kogui (Preuss [1926] 1993: 29). Another problem was that Preuss initially could not find an informant among the Kogui who could translate between Spanish and Kogui. What's more, in most Kogui villages that Preuss visited, the inhabitants were reluctant to establish contacts with him (Preuss [1926] 1993: 22, 35, 38; Reyes 2016: 158-164, 174-179). Limited communication, misunderstandings, mistrust and uneven relations between Preuss and Kogui natives contributed to him eventually acquiring sacred objects. In the case of the masks, Preuss himself describes how he obtained them by taking advantage of an internal dispute between two Kogui authorities from different villages. The objects were supposed to rest in a temple safeguarded by a spiritual leader or *mama*. However, the masks were in hands of the *mama's* nephew, who, Preuss claimed, was himself not a *mama* (Preuss [1926] 1993: 40). It is important to mention that, when Preuss obtained them, these artifacts were being used by the Kogui during the summer and winter solstices; however, recent studies show that they are from the fifteenth century and had been passed down from one generation of *mamas* to the next until they were collected for the Ethnological Museum (cf. Oyuela-Caicedo and Fischer 2006).

## Repatriation Claims

The repatriation claims for the San Agustín statues began in 2012 when a letter signed by many San Agustín residents was sent to the Minister of Culture and the director of the Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia (Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History; ICANH), which is the governmental institution in charge of archaeological and ethnographical heritage in Colombia. This initiative was headed by David Dellenback, a United States citizen who obtained Colombian citizenship and has lived in San Agustín for more than 30 years. The signers requested repatriation of 21 San Agustín sculptures housed at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, arguing that they had been illegally obtained and that Colombian constitutional law considers protection and conservation of the nation's cultural heritage to be a state duty.

Paradoxically, a year later, the Colombian Ministry of Culture and ICANH declared 2013 to be the year of Agustinian culture, commemorating the centenary of the first archaeological excavations in San Agustín that had been carried out by Preuss. A series of celebratory activities was planned, including an exhibition at the National Museum of Colombia in Bogotá with 20 sculptures from the San Agustín archaeological park. Two regional governmental institutions from the Department of Huila, the Gobernación del Huila and the Concejo Municipal de San Agustín, supported the sculptures' transportation to and exhibition in Bogotá (Sanabria 2014: 9). Nevertheless, the initiative encountered tough opposition from San Agustín local communities, along with some Yanacona indigenous members. The Yanacona underwent a re-indigenization process in 1989 (Zambrano 1995: 128) and since 2001, some of them have been relocated to an area next to the San Agustín archaeological park (Ruiz Velásquez 2018: 5). Historically, this indigenous community had no cultural affiliation with the San Agustín culture before they settled there. The local community argued that they had not been included in decision-making processes concerning the region's cultural heritage. Furthermore, they were doubtful that the sculptures would be returned to the archaeological site after the exhibit's conclusion. Eventually, the exhibition did take place in Bogotá, but without the archaeological monoliths, and its name was changed from *El retorno de los ídolos* (The return of the idols) to *El silencio de los ídolos* (The silence of the idols). Indeed, in her article Fischer (2019) explores the different and often conflicting and ambivalent attributions to the Augustinian sculptures that were talent since Preuss' times and became visible with the commemoration of the centenary of his excavations.

This incident opened a national debate about cultural heritage, specifically about archaeological heritage, and renewed and reinforced Colombian repatriation demands for the Agustinian sculptures in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. In 2018, the Gobernación del Huila sent a letter to the Colombian Vice-Minister of Multilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Francisco Javier Echeverri Lara, informing him of the results of research demonstrating that Preuss had illegally acquired the San Agustín statues. Moreover, the Gobernación urged the Vice-Minister to approach the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning potential repatriation of the statues (letter from Carlos Arturo Montealegre Motta to Francisco Javier Echeverri Lara, January 21 of 2018).

Recently, the Tribunal de Cundinamarca, the juridical entity which took on the repatriation demands interposed by the San Agustín community through legal action, is revising the possibilities for repatriation. As part of this process, it requires the statues' identification numbers, descriptions and current locations. Twenty-one statues in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin have been identified as having been obtained by Preuss in San Agustín. According to the Cultural Heritage Research Group of the ICANH, the objects were identified using the 2015 catalog *La Voz de las Piedras* (The Voice of the Stones) compiled by anthropologist David Fajardo. In February 2019, the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a verbal petition to the German Embassy asking to send experts to visit the Ethnological Museum. A month later, the German Embassy answered, expressing the possibility of a future encounter mediated by two civil servants, one from the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute) in Berlin and one from the Ethnological Museum (Cultural Heritage Research Group, ICANH, personal communication, March 29 of 2019).

In contrast to the great attention given in Colombia to the Agustinian sculptures and the campaign for their return, the repatriation claims of the Kogui for two ritual masks have gone unnoticed. In 2013, two Kogui representatives, Cabildo Gobernador José de los Santos Sauna and *mama* Pedro Juan, visited the Ethnological Museum with the intention of getting acquainted with objects from their ancestors housed at the museum, in particular with the two masks. The delegation was escorted by the Colombian ambassador at the time, the director of the non-governmental organization Fundación ProSierra, the president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the director of the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin, curators of the Ethnological Museum and a documentary producer (Reyes 2016: 286; Kraus and Fischer 2014). Nevertheless, the two Kogui visitors were not allowed to touch the masks because, according to the museum's staff, they had been treated with

toxic chemicals for conservation. Touching them, therefore, would have posed a health risk (Deliss and Keck 2014).

The repatriation claims for the masks, which are ritual objects as well as symbols of power and authority among the Kogui, are strongly tied to the configuration of indigenous territory, according to which the relationship between land, natural environment, culture and sacred objects is indissoluble. The ritual objects are mediators between the material and spiritual worlds, crucial for preserving the stability of Kogui culture and the equilibrium of the environment. Since the masks are trapped inside the museum, they are incarcerated and thus cannot fulfill their purpose as stabilizers (cf. Londoño 2012). Hence, to regain the masks would mean to recover the territory and the equilibrium within it.

Although the masks belonged to the Kogui, their return is claimed in conjunction with the other three ethnic groups settled in the Sierra Nevada, namely, the Arhuacos, Kankuamos and Wiwas. This effort is part of a joint initiative among the Sierra Nevada natives to assert collective economic, social and political demands regarding management of their own resources, land property and cultural self-determination and autonomy. However, to appeal for the objects' return from the museum to their communities, the indigenous groups have to present their claim to the Colombian state and its institutions, as the state is the official representative for requesting repatriation of objects from foreign museums (Hauser-Schäublin and Prott 2016: 6). Yet natives from the Sierra Nevada have a conflictive relation with the Colombian state, as the latter has previously granted license to mega-infrastructure projects in the region, such as dams and commercial harbors. Such undertakings have vast, negative impacts on the environment and restrict access of indigenous inhabitants to their sacred sites located within construction areas (cf. Mora Rodríguez 2010; cf. Rodríguez 2010). So far, ICANH and its juridical bureau, as the state bodies in charge of repatriation processes, have not received an official petition from Sierra Nevada indigenous communities asking for repatriation of the masks in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin (Cultural Heritage Research Group, ICANH, personal communication, March 29 of 2019).

## Questions and Challenges Raised

The potential repatriation of the statues from San Agustín and the Kogui masks posits several questions and challenges that are not easy to solve and require very close examination of each case. One question that arises concerning the San Agustín statues is, which objects should be repatriated? Or more specifically, why, although Preuss collected hundreds of objects in San Agustín, including millstones, mortars, flint axes and fragments of other artifacts, are the people of San Agustín requesting only the 21 statues? Why a selective repatriation when, in repatriation of archaeological collections, the complete lot is normally returned? Another question pertaining to the San Agustín stone statues is, why repatriate them, or rather, what are the reasons behind the repatriation demands for them? Are the motivations nationalist or regionalist?

In the event that the San Agustín sculptures and the Kogui masks were to be repatriated, the resultant, additional challenges would not be insignificant. For instance, would these objects be exhibited or preserved in a museum storeroom? If they were to be put on display, then where? In the case of San Agustín sculptures, would they be exhibited in the museum at the archaeological park, in the archaeological park itself or in the National Museum of Colombia in Bogotá, as these artifacts are national heritage? Similarly, would the masks be exhibited in a regional museum or in the National Museum? And if the statues and the masks were not exhibited, where would they be stored? In the ICANH depot? Or, in the case of the masks, in a temple or at a secret site only known by the Kogui? For context, it is worth mentioning the project of Christoph Balzar and Hanune Shalati, *No es arte* (It is not art), which aimed to repatriate a Tayrona gold collection to the Kogui. The collection had been purchased at auction in London by a private collector who collaborated with Balzar and Shalati. Once the collection was returned to the indigenous community, it was hidden in a secret, sacred site (Balzar and Shalati 2014).

Further questions concerning the masks include, what use would these masks have if they were to be returned? Would they be used for the solstice rituals, or would they assume another function? Could the Kogui really use the masks again, taking into consideration that they are fragile, very old and contaminated with chemicals?

The objects' ownership presents similarly immense challenges. For example, who would be the owner of the San Agustín statues: the Colombian state, the local community, all Colombian citizens or even all humanity, if one takes into account that the San Agustín archaeological park has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site

since 1995? Who would be the owner(s) of the masks, the four groups of the Sierra Nevada or only descendants of the original owners? And if the masks were to be returned to the descendants of the original owners, would it provoke a dispute over ownership of these objects, since Preuss acquired them precisely by taking advantage of such a conflict? Last but not least, establishing the competence and responsibility for preserving these objects is a difficult task, too. The case of the masks is paradigmatic in this respect. Since they date to the fifteenth century and are very fragile due to their material and conservation conditions during the past century, the challenge would centre on who would assume responsibility for them, curators and conservators in a museum or Kogui *mamas*?

Some of these questions and uncertainties could only be answered through repatriation of the San Agustín statues and the Kogui masks. Even in that case, however, new problems and issues would likely arise considering that the repatriation debate goes beyond the simple question of whether or not objects in foreign museums should be returned to their places of origin.

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# The Path of the Bodies – Provenance Research and Repatriation of Human Remains at the Museo de La Plata (Argentina)

*Diego Ballester\**

## A Catalog of Human Variability

In 1910, German anthropologist Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (1872-1938), chief of the Museo de La Plata's anthropology department, published a catalog of the objects under his charge. According to the publication, the anthropological collection comprised 5,500 elements, including disarticulated skulls, mandibles, and other bones; whole skeletons; plaster skull casts; preserved brains; mortuary masks; scalps and desiccated heads; and cadavers.<sup>1</sup> This collection was mainly composed of skeletons and skulls collected by Francisco Moreno (1852-1919), former director of the museum, during his travels to the south and northwest of Argentina in the mid-1870s (Farro 2009).<sup>2</sup>

The presence of these latter elements in particular made the Museo de La Plata's osteological collections internationally relevant to physical anthropology research on human evolution. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, indigenous peoples of South America, like their counterparts in Australia or Africa, were conceptualized as primitive representatives of humanity, anachronistic beings in whom scholars could observe the anatomy and behavior of the first humans. Studies of these peoples made it possible to obtain empirically objective information that

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<sup>1</sup> The details for the osteological components are as follows: disarticulated skulls from Argentina (1,334), Bolivia (87), Peru (20), United States (4), Europe (137); disarticulated mandibles from Argentina (143); skeletons from Argentina (39), Paraguay (1), Brazil (6), Bolivia (2), Chile (3), Europe (4); other disarticulated bones from Argentina (3,461), Europe (86) (Lehmann-Nitsche 1910).

<sup>2</sup> Other osteological remains included bones collected by museum personnel and travel naturalists in the coastal region of Buenos Aires, donated and purchased skulls from the Chaco and north-western Argentina, and, finally, remains of the Mapuches and Tehuelches who had lived in the Museo de La Plata between 1885 and 1890 (Farro 2009).

could fill the existing ontological gaps in the linear evolution proposed for mankind (Ballestero 2014).

Lehmann-Nitsche's catalog specifies the geographical origin of the skeletal remains, the possible gender of each individual, the person who found them, and their acquisition by the museum. In reconstructing an object's itinerary, its formal registration in a collection is a significant moment because documentation associated with this step tends to be qualitatively and quantitatively abundant, as the preceding paragraph shows. Elements of such documentation contributed to elucidate the particular epistemological configuration that allowed and conditioned the construction, appropriation, circulation and study of certain objects by the scholars (Legêne 2000). Of particular interest here are the strategies used to obtain the skeletal remains. According to Lehmann-Nitsche's catalog, the main strategies of acquisition, at least until the mid-twentieth century, were purchase, exchange, donation, tomb looting, and collection at execution sites or in the context of punitive expeditions.

While he inventoried the osteological collections, Lehmann-Nitsche began to order them as well.<sup>3</sup> Although his main reference for layout and organization was the geographical arrangement suggested by Swiss scholar Enrique Delachaux (1864-1908), Lehmann-Nitsche also followed the recommendations presented in *Die anthropologischen Sammlungen Deutschlands* (1874) and the craniological catalogs of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) (Ballestero 2014).

The osteological remains were placed in large cedar wood and glass showcases, prioritizing establishment of an osteologically representative series for South American indigenous peoples. Although compilation of a comprehensive comparative collection was an epistemological requirement at the time,<sup>4</sup> exhibition of certain elements (skulls, skeletons) also evidenced the intertwined relationship of the museum with the nascent Argentine state's political and economic projects of control over its vast territories (Ballestero 2014; Lehmann-Nitsche 1910).

Anthropological practices in late nineteenth-century Argentina developed in an asymmetric process of violence promoted or legitimized by different sectors of government, a process that promoted the image of the indigenous peoples as

<sup>3</sup> According to ten Kate, the chaotic state of the collections was a result of housing exhibition and research materials in the same space. He warned Lehmann-Nitsche that stoicism and calm were necessary for working at the museum because Moreno's lack of motivation to maintain and order anthropological collections frequently undermined the projects submitted by museum department heads (ten Kate 1897).

<sup>4</sup> This standard entailed multiple observations of a particular collection to obtain objective, reliable and comparable data (Blanckaert 1991; Dias 1989).

evolutionary relics destined to disappear through the passage of time and the evolutionary progress of civilization. Thus, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, visitors to the museum could observe the skeletons of the “old lords of the Pampas”: the chief Tehuelche Inakayal, his wife, Rutukar and Sam Slick. At the same time, the “pantheon of autochthonous heroes” was represented by the skulls of the Mapuche chiefs Calfucurá, Panguitruz Güor, Gherenal, Indio Brujo and Gervasio Chipitruz (Lehmann-Nitsche 1927: 256-257) (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1:** Anthropology Hall of the Museo de la Plata at the end of the nineteenth century. Source: Revista del Museo de La Plata (1890-1891).

As several authors have pointed out, interest in the study of indigenous bodies should be understood as part of a specific set of techniques for subjugating them within specific state structures (Turnbull 1991; Fforde 2004). The indigenous body was a site of oppression where knowledge generated from and about it served to develop and sustain colonial relations (Hallam et al. 1999; Mignolo 1998). In this sense, exhibiting the remains of significant individuals in Mapuche and Tehuelche history promoted a fundamental discourse from which the nascent state sought to construct its national identity: Argentina was a country without indigenous peoples and the government had effective control over an integrated territory.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The individuals whose remains were displayed were *caciques* who had controlled extensive territories in the current regions of Patagonia and La Pampa, with close relationships to explorers and politicians. In most cases, their graves were looted by the military and their remains donated to Francisco Moreno. Inakayal, in contrast, had died in the Museo de La Plata, where he had been moved after the end of the so-called Conquest of the Desert, along with his family, cacique Foyel's family and Rutukar's father. Gherenal's remains were retrieved from the battlefield (Ametrano 2015).

By 1930, the museum had reduced the amount of material on exhibit, although this reduction did not correspond with the removal of osteological remains from view or even a change in the manner in which they were presented to the public (Sardi et al. 2015). We had to wait another seven decades for structural modifications to the form and elements used to exhibit anthropology's object of study.

## Provenance Research and the Questioned Museum

Currently, museums are increasingly facing questions raised by critical review of their political and epistemological histories, which have a direct impact on the exhibition, conservation and management of collections. This critique can be traced back to the early 1960s, when it surfaced in the context of post-structuralist theories and political uprisings by historically marginalized sectors that rejected universal values and grand, linear teleological narratives (Eagleton 2003). These elements found an institutional and methodological channel in the so-called new museology that arose in the 1980s (Vergo 1989). This new museology drew attention to the need for a trans-disciplinary approach to understanding the economic, cultural and political dimensions that intersect with and compose the itinerary of museological objects (Juergensmeyer 2014). These studies were further enriched by Latin American theoretical developments in political and epistemological decolonization, which question hegemonic forms of knowledge production and demand inclusion of new social actors who exercise their right to claim what they consider a constitutive part of their history, culture and collective memory (Ballesterio et al. 2020).

In this context, provenance research is fundamental. In German-speaking countries, this field is largely associated with provenance studies of cultural goods illegally appropriated under the Nazi regime; however, the concept has been extended in the last 20 years to describe research into any type of museum collection acquired in contexts of asymmetric power relations (Hoskins 2006; Kravagna 2009). Historical-cultural contextualization of objects present in museums has been one of the main epistemological premises of anthropological practice since the end of nineteenth century, but current provenance research wants to go further, confronting anthropology as a discipline with its conflictive and denied history (Brandstetter and Hierholzer 2017).

## Repatriation of Human Remains at the Museo de La Plata

In 1973, Argentinian historian José Mayo claimed ‘custody’ of the skulls of Calfucurá, Gherenal, Indio Brujo and Chipitru. Mayo was the son of European immigrants without any indigenous ancestry and no indigenous representatives were involved in the claim, which was not analyzed. Local authorities agreed to build a ‘Mapuche Pantheon’ in the local Catholic cemetery where the skulls would be deposited. The absence of legal precedents for and the informal character of the claim must have influenced this resolution, but the main reason were undoubtedly the replacement of public officials and the discontinuation of all proposed projects that followed the civil-military *coup d'état* in March 1976 (Podgorny and Politis 1990).

At the end of the 1980s, however, repatriation demands benefited from a convergence of circumstances that made it politically, institutionally and socially impossible for the Museo de La Plata to ignore them. Firstly, normative frameworks were gaining hold, in Argentina and abroad. Key international components included enactment of Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples<sup>6</sup> (1989) and legal precedents established by repatriation requests in New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the United States. At the local level, the reform of Argentina’s constitution in 1994 included ratification of Convention 169 and recognition of indigenous peoples’ ethnic and cultural pre-existence. In addition, The Aboriginal Restitution Act was enacted in 2001 and went into effect in 2010. Lastly, growing support from students and participation by anthropologists from the Museo de La Plata in indigenous peoples’ claim processes added to the growing visibility and mobilization of claimant groups (Ballestero et al. 2020).

In 1989, the Mapuche Tehuelche Indigenous Council submitted a formal claim to Inakayal’s mortal remains. This legal Council allowed the claimants to establish dialogue with authorities from the Museo de La Plata and the Universidad Nacional de La Plata on equal footing, at least in legal terms. Although the claim was widely supported by the academic, civil and political community, it was rejected by the lawyers of the university’s Upper Council. A year later, an Argentine senator presented a bill for the restitution of Inakayal, which was approved. A partial repatriation of Inakayal, which did not include his scalp or brain, was carried out on 1994. The remains were transferred with military honors in an air force plane to the city of Tecka, where they were deposited in a monument (Ametrano 2015; Sardi et al. 2015) (Fig. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Sanctioned by the International Labour Organization, the convention recognizes indigenous peoples’ legal rights to the constitutive elements of their tangible and intangible heritage and the importance of restitution in the continuous construction of both.



Figure 2: Repatriation of Inakayal. Source: El Día (1994).

In 2001, the remains of Panguitruz Güor were repatriated as well. As in Inakayal's case, this transfer was forced by the passing of a law that required the museum's anthropology division to comply. Participants in the repatriation included the Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Affairs), which managed the dialogue between claimant communities, politicians and academic authorities as the formal consignee of the remains. For the first time, an *ad hoc* commission was established to analyze the case and provide information that was potentially relevant to ascertaining the claim's validity. The repatriation ceremony was attended by academic and political authorities, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and 18 Lonkos (chiefs). The remains of Panguitruz Güor were flown by presidential plane to La Pampa, from where they departed to their final resting place, a monolith located in Leuvucó (Ametrano 2015; Sardi et al. 2015).

These first two repatriations achieved considerable progress by setting an important political, legal and social precedent that encouraged future claim processes and substantial modification of the Museo de La Plata's institutional policy on the collections of human remains. Among the main changes are renewal of the museum's exhibition proposals, opening of spaces that are normally restricted to the public for performing ritual practices, addressing repatriation claims through a rigorous program that encourages co-management with claimant communities and removing American human remains from public exhibition (Sardi et al. 2015).

Additional repatriations have been made as part of the museum's new institutional policy. In 2010, the human remains of two Aché: Kryggi and Caibú were returned to their communities. One year later, however, Kryggi's head, brain and



other organs were found in the Charité's anatomical collections. They had been presented to German doctor Hans Virchow (1852-1940) by Lehmann-Nitsche in 1908. In 2018, a jar with another 36 fragments of epidermis was located in the museum's anthropology division. Research on the jar's associated documentation and Lehmann-Nitsche's private correspondence led to the conclusion that the epidermal fragments belonged to Kryygi as well. To date, the authorities of the Museo de La Plata have not yet announced how they will proceed (Sardi and Ballesterro 2017) (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3:** Kryygi's repatriation ceremony. Source: Sardi and Ballesterro 2017.

In 2014, Inakayal's outstanding mortal remains were repatriated together with those of his wife and Rutukar, as well as mortuary masks, three brains, and a poncho that Inakayal had given to Francisco Moreno. That same year, the remains of Gherenal, Indio Brujo, Chipitruz and Manuel Guerra were repatriated to the 'Cacique Pincén's' community of Trenque Lauquen. At the same time, Sekriot and another three Selk'nam were repatriated to the community 'Rafaela Ishton' of Tierra del Fuego (Fig. 4).

In 2017, the mortal remains of ten Mapuche/Tehuelche indigenous persons were repatriated, six of whom belonged to the 'General Cacique of La Pampa Cipriano Catriel's' community and four others to the community 'Peñi Mapu'. In 2018, nine Qom Caciques were repatriated to the indigenous colony 'Napalpi', while the remains of 'Sam Slick' were returned to the 'Ceferino Namuncurá-Valentín Sayhueque's' community of Chubut. Finally, in June 2019, the remains of a Nivacle child were repatriated to the 'San José de Río Muerto's' community (Fig. 5).



**Figure 4:** Repatriation of Gheneral, Indio Brujo, Chipitruz and Manuel Guerra. Source: <<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/restituyen-los-restos-de-4-caciques-mapuches-tehuelches-nid1946270>> (08/08/2019).



**Figure 5:** Repatriation Ceremony of the Nivacle child. Source: <<https://unlp.edu.ar/institucional/el-museo-de-la-unlp-restituyo-restos-humanos-al-pueblo-nivacle-16247>> (08/08/2019).

Repatriations claims that are still in process as of the time of writing include those for Yamana Maish Kenzis and the Mapuche Cacique Calfucurá, which require final approval by museum authorities. In addition, there are thirteen individuals for whose remains no restitution claims have yet been received: six from the Mapuche/ Tehuelche people, one from the Alakaluf people and six from the Terena people of Brazil.

## The Unfinished Itinerary

In local and regional context, the Museo de La Plata is the institution that has made the most progress in the repatriation of indigenous human remains. Although the museum does not have a provenance research department *per se*, the research that the 'Department of Academic and Community Demands' has been carrying out for more than a decade fulfills this function. The principal objective of this division is to intercede in repatriation claims by elaborating reports with information that contributes to the decisions made by the claimant community and authorities from the Museo de La Plata. Working in coordination with the division for 'Collections, Documentation and Registration', the group produces reports covering bio-anthropological aspects and especially biographical and historical data about the processes and actors that were involved in obtaining the remains and incorporating them into the collections of the Museo de La Plata.

The Department's works aims to initiate further changes to the exhibition policies implemented for human remains in 2006. Although the new procedures did represent substantial modifications of the museum's traditional practices, they only included American human remains and mummified bodies, omitting ethnological objects that are essential for indigenous peoples' collective construction of memory and cultural history. This omission would suggest that the museum's repatriation efforts thus far represent a forced political response to growing social pressures that are impossible to ignore or silence. In this sense, the repatriation experiences described in this chapter offer an opportunity to consider repatriation as a strategic step in the epistemological decolonization of the Museo de La Plata by producing a critical history of the traditional epistemological and ontological categories that have constituted the cornerstone of anthropological knowledge for decades (Ballesterio et al. 2020).

The itinerary of museological objects never ends; it only alternates between states of mobility and stillness. Consequently, the itinerary of indigenous mortal remains is unfinished as well. Their repatriation is not a final step, quite the opposite; it is the continuity of the collective memory and identity that were severed in the past. These human remains are defined and shaped within a broad network of relationships, and their re-entry into the community's social order is the continuation and the beginning of a multiplicity of stories. Similarly, one can argue that the potential of provenance research lies not in attempting to write the final page of an object's history, but in highlighting its inherent capacity for creating and articulating infinite universes of cultural significance, identity and memory.

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# Donated, Purchased, Inherited, Investigated: Provenance and Potential of New Acquisitions into the BASA Museum

*Naomi Rattunde*\*

## Introduction

This contribution provides insight into new acquisitions into the BASA Museum (Bonner Amerikas-Sammlung, Bonn Collection of the Americas) over the last ten years. Whereas some newly incorporated objects and collections offer great potential for provenance research, insufficient information on the provenances of most of the proffered objects confronts us with the challenging question: “What do we do with these objects?” Moreover, do answers for the BASA Museum, as a teaching and study collection as well as an experimental museum and laboratory, differ from those that other ethnological museums may reach?

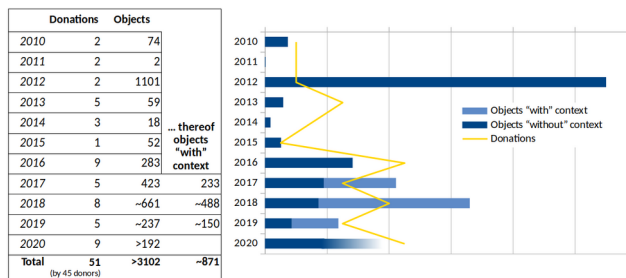
After a brief overview of new acquisitions into the BASA Museum, I will discuss the difficulties associated with insufficient contextual information, especially in the case of archaeological objects, and reflect upon the BASA Museum’s collection policy. The second part is devoted to three collections that differ significantly from most new acquisitions in terms of their provenance, that is, their contexts of origin and acquisition and the corresponding documentation thereof. They offer enormous potential first and foremost for researching the objects and associated contexts and practices of collecting, as well as for studying the institution that is now housing them. In the conclusion, I juxtapose collections ‘with’ and ‘without’ context as part of a plea for intensified provenance research during the acquisition process.

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## New Acquisitions into the BASA Museum

First, it must be noted that the BASA Museum is no longer proactively collecting to expand its collections, as it was from the 1950s to the 1980s. During those four decades, the staff of the collection of the then Seminar für Völkerkunde (Seminar for Ethnology) collected objects during their research trips and commissioned students and guest auditors to do the same on their travels. In addition, objects from the Americas and other regions were exchanged with other museums. A budget was allotted specifically to purchases; in some cases, external funds for acquisitions were raised as well, from sources such as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation; DFG). Such financial means have not been available since the mid-1980s, however, and these practices are also *passé*.

Nevertheless, the collection continues to grow—through objects and collections that private individuals bequeath to the BASA Museum as donations. Many of these persons lived in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s for professional reasons, working for example as teachers or diplomats. Others went there on holiday and purchased (more single or few) objects during their trips. Many donors live in Bonn or the surrounding area, have reached retirement age and approach the BASA Museum when they are in the process of cleaning out their homes. They want the objects to be in ‘good hands’, namely, in a museum, where they assume that these objects belong. In some cases, it is not the collectors themselves, but their children or other relatives who contact the BASA Museum to get rid of collections that they have inherited or will soon inherit because they themselves have no interest in preserving them themselves.



**Figure 1:** New acquisitions into the BASA Museum since 2010. Graphic: the author.

As Figure 1 shows, the volume of new acquisitions has been growing in the last ten years and especially since 2014. This trend might reflect developments in the recent history of the collection, which was closed to the public from 1989 to 2009 due to a



lack of suitable facilities. In 2009, however, the BASA Museum was relocated, together with the Abteilung für Altamerikanistik (Department for the Anthropology of the Americas), to its current location on Oxfordstraße in the center of Bonn. After major reconstruction measures that effected an opening to the city public and increased its visibility, the BASA Museum reopened in 2014 (Natho and Schmitz 2015).

In the last five years, the number of donors has more than doubled relative to the first half of the 2010s, with the volume of each donation ranging from one to several hundred objects. The most extensive single collection by far, which was incorporated into the BASA Museum in 2012, comprises over 800 (small) archaeological objects and almost 200 textiles that were collected in Guatemala in the second half of the twentieth century. Most collections offered to the BASA Museum consist of archaeological objects, among them mainly ceramics; sometimes, they include textiles or, very rarely, stone or metal artifacts. Most objects were collected in Peru, many in Bolivia or Guatemala, and some originate from other parts of the Americas.

Although I do not intend to imply direct causality, it is noteworthy that this rise in 'donation offers' by predominantly retired persons from specific (professional) groups within the bourgeois class coincides with three significant, large-scale developments in Germany: 1) the passing of the long-overdue Kulturgutschutzgesetz (Act on the Protection of Cultural Property; KGSG) in 2016, 2) the publication of the *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* by the Deutscher Museumsbund (German Museums Association; DMB) in a first and a revised second edition (DMB 2018, 2019), and 3) an unprecedented scale of public discussion about provenance research and restitution of collections with the participation of high-ranking politicians and intellectuals.

It is the 'nature' of any ethnological museum to preserve collections predominantly or exclusively from colonial contexts. In the case of the ethnographic and archaeological Bonn Collection of the Americas, most objects in the inventory and all newly received objects belong to "Case 2" of colonial contexts, defined by the DMB as objects "from an area that was not under formal colonial rule at the time of collection, manufacture, purchase or export of the object, but in which there were informal colonial structures or which was under the informal influence of colonial powers" (DMB 2019: 28). The above-mentioned acquisition of an ethnographic textile collection from Guatemala equates to "Example 1" for "Case 2" in the DMB's definition (DMB 2019: 28). "Example 3" for "Case 2," which addresses "Pre-Spanish objects from Latin America" (DMB 2019: 29), corresponds with the new acquisitions of archaeological objects that are discussed in following.

## Archaeological Collections without Context

The BASA Museum decides whether to accept proffered objects or collections based on basic information concerning their origin and acquisition circumstances and on photos that we receive from prospective donors. For many years, however, this information was neither systematically collected nor documented by museum personnel, a problem exacerbated further when staff members liaising with donors 'take' this information with them upon leaving their position at the museum. In addition, the increase in new acquisitions presents practical challenges for the limited personnel and resources of the BASA Museum. In light of these issues, as of 2019, potential donors are required to fill out a registration form that requests data on the acquisition context, as well as information on the collector's interest in the objects and the existence of written sources or images related to their collecting activity.

According to donor information, the archaeological objects have been acquired in manifold ways: some were purchased from traders at markets or from private individuals, whereas others were received as gifts or picked up as surface finds. In some cases, we have indications of the persons from whom they bought the objects, such as *campesinos* who found them in their fields and sold them to foreigners to generate additional, albeit small, income. Overall, however, information on time and location of acquisition tends to be very vague and can hardly ever be verified.

This lack of information is problematic not only from an ethical and legal point of view but also for scientific handling of these objects, because we know nothing about the contexts or even the sites of the findings and have to assume that they were not excavated by professional archaeologists. Nor do we know, except in a few cases, about the routes that the objects took before they came into the hands of 'our' collectors or donors. The longest sections in the biographies of these objects lie in the dark.

As a university institution, the BASA Museum enjoys certain freedoms compared to other, 'big' ethnological museums. For example, we can and have accepted archaeological objects that were brought to Germany after 1970. The year in which UNESCO adopted its *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* is regarded by most ethnological museums in Germany as an ethical boundary in a legal grey area. As the Federal Republic of Germany did not ratify the Convention until 2007 and did not create a legally binding basis for it until 2016 with the *Act on the*

*Protection of Cultural Property*, however, archaeological objects from the Americas that would have been accepted into no other museum in Germany could still end up in the BASA Museum, instead of being sold on the art market or eBay, or simply being thrown in the trash. As the DMB (2019: 29) also clarifies, accepting such objects that have found their ways into European museums—or private collections, as in the case of the objects offered to the BASA Museum—even after 1970 has been prohibited in Germany since the 2016 legislation on cultural property.

Although this change of the legal situation for “Pre-Spanish objects from Latin America” (“Example 3” for the DMB’s “Case 2”) was an important step, we are not happy with the current situation because the fundamental question of what we can or should do with these objects that continue to be offered to museums remains without a practicable solution. Combined with limited logistical and personnel capacities, it is hardly possible to accommodate and preserve so many new objects long-term. Therefore, the BASA Museum intends to develop a comprehensive collection policy based on previous internal considerations, the *Guidelines for Collecting and Deaccessioning Museum Property* from the DMB (2011) and relevant legal provisions. The BASA Museum collection policy will regulate how the museum deals with donation offers, specify the criteria according to which objects will be incorporated into the collection and indicate options for dealing with objects that do not meet these criteria. One possible procedure for dealing with illegally imported objects, for instance, is to involve the respective embassies of countries of origin by informing them about objects offered to us, inquiring about any interest that the country may have in them being returned and determining further steps bilaterally. Nonetheless, questions concerning the usefulness of such an initiative on the part of a university museum and its possible effects on the broader debate over restitution must be taken into account.

Considerations regarding the handling of objects and collections whose provenance and history remain largely unknown must also address their scientific relevance. After all, if the objects are to be preserved in the BASA Museum, they should be actively incorporated into teaching and research as well. They represent a corpus that students can use to practice documenting, classifying and describing archaeological objects, a practice that since 2019 has increasingly become part of BASA Museum internships. They could also be used to address questions of ‘authenticity,’ falsification or imitation. Obvious forgeries and copies, especially of single objects, have not been included in the BASA Museum inventory to date. However, it is possible that the museum’s larger collections of archaeological objects contain falsifications or imitations that have not yet been identified as such.

Furthermore, lack of information about the objects can itself be foregrounded as an occasion for conducting ethnographic research about the collectors. Such studies could examine the biographies of these Germans who temporarily lived and worked in or traveled to Latin America, their collecting practices and motivations, their ideas of and interest in pre-Columbian cultural heritage and contemporary indigenous populations, as well as their social networks, taking into account the role of power relations which, although not formally colonial, were nonetheless unequal. The conditions for this research are difficult to establish, especially because it requires the willingness of the collectors. However, such work is crucial to understanding contexts of non-scientifically motivated, 'leisure-time' collecting in the second half of the twentieth century, a period during which ethical conceptions of and legal regulations concerning cultural property from formerly colonized areas changed decisively.

## Ethnographic Collections with Context

Three collections that have come to the BASA Museum since 2017 stand out in contrast to the decontextualized conditions described above: those donated by Ulf Lind, Erich Wustmann and Walter Hausmann, respectively, each a collector with his own, interesting collector's personality. It is not only the extensive documentation of the respective contexts that makes working with these collections worthwhile, but also close contacts to the collectors and donors and, particularly in the case of the ethnologist Lind, his wish for something to be 'done' with his collection in the museum.

### Ulf Lind Collection

The Ulf Lind Collection comprises over one hundred objects that Lind acquired in 1969-70 during his field research on the Ayoróde in Paraguay (cf. Lind 1974). In 2017, he decided to bequeath them to the BASA Museum. He would have liked to return the objects to the Ayoróde but lacked knowledge of the complex processes required for such a return, which could not be achieved 'in passing.' Eventually, we agreed to stipulate in the donation contract that the BASA Museum would support,

within the scope of its possibilities, any future efforts made by third parties to make the collection accessible to the Ayoróede living in Paraguay today.

Lind's second wish, an exhibition of 'his' objects to make the culture of the Ayoróede more widely known, was fulfilled with the exhibition *eramone | Weltsichten* (wood/world | world views) in 2018, which I developed with a group of students within an internship at the BASA Museum and published in a catalog (Rattunde et al. 2019). Lind's donation and the exhibition of his collection also inspired us to look at other collections of Ayoróede objects at the BASA Museum and to examine the multi-layered connections between Bonn and the Ayoróede in Bolivia and Paraguay that these objects materialize. For this reason, the collection and research histories were a central topic in the exhibition itself. In its aftermath, an additional study explored in greater detail the interrelationships between ethnographers associated with Bonn and working with the Ayoróede (cf. Rattunde 2020).



**Figure 2:** Diorama "Collection and research history," with selected objects from the five Ayoróede collections in the exhibition *eramone | Weltsichten* at the BASA Museum, Bonn, October 2018. Photo: the author.

In the run-up to the exhibition, an excursion to Bolivia, including a visit to the Ayoróede in Santa Cruz, provided an opportunity to update historical connections (cf. Jaimes Betancourt et al. 2018). In contrast to usual acquisition practices and motivated by this special occasion, we acquired the BASA Museum's most recent collection of objects of the Ayoróede during this trip in order to create a link to the Ayoróede present within the exhibition.

Also on display were some of the approximately 350 photographs that document Lind's collecting and research practices. Nearly half of these slides, which were digitized at the BASA Museum several years ago, were described and analyzed in a comprehensive term paper by Master's degree student Annkatrin Benz (2018), who conducted, documented and evaluated two long interviews with Lind to

explore his work and the context of the photographs in more detail. At present, the entire slide archive of Lind, which he documented sparsely but carefully, is temporarily in the care of the BASA Museum in order to be digitized completely. Part of Benz's work and many of Lind's previously unpublished photographs were included in the bilingual exhibition catalog (Rattunde et al. 2019), which is also available in Bolivia and Paraguay.



**Figure 3:** Ulf and Marianne Lind talking with Ayoróde children; in the background, the Ayoróde camp in the mission El Faro Moro, 1969-70. Photo: Alfredo Tomasini. Source: Ulf Lind Archive.

### Erich Wustmann Collection

The Erich Wustmann Collection was transferred from Bad Schandau in Saxony, Germany, to Bonn between 2017 and 2019. Erich Wustmann (1907-1994), who became known as an author of travelogues and children and youth books, traveled in South America, particularly to Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, between the 1950s and 1970s. He visited more than 30 indigenous groups, many of whom had had little contact with their respective national societies, and lived with some of them for months, observing, documenting and writing, as well as exchanging and collecting. Parts of his extensive collections are located in Leipzig, Dresden and Bad Schandau. More than 500 (mostly ethnographic) objects from Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador now enrich the collections of the BASA Museum as well, thanks to contacts between his elder daughter, Synnöve Wustmann, and Karoline Noack, director of the BASA Museum.

Synnöve Wustmann worked as secretary and manager for her father. Today, she is administering the estate of the “ethnological entrepreneur” Erich Wustmann and his “family business” (Noack 2017), which, in addition to carefully prepared records of the objects, also includes photographs of the travels. Some of these materials are now part of the archive of the BASA Museum and hold enormous potential for researching Wustmann’s work and, above all, his collecting practices, which still remain largely unknown. Noack (2017) began studying them, concentrating especially on Wustmann’s activities in Brazil. In my dissertation project, I am focusing on the collection of Waorani objects that Wustmann acquired in 1977 on a research trip to Ecuador. This research is simultaneously the ethnological project within the joint research project ‘SiSi’ (Sinnüberschuss und Sinnreduktion von, durch und mit Objekten. Materialität von Kulturtechniken zur Bewältigung des Außergewöhnlichen; Excess and reduction of meaning of, through and with objects. Materiality of cultural techniques for coping with the extraordinary), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).<sup>1</sup> Wustmann’s younger daughter, Ingrid, who holds a PhD in ethnology and worked at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden, accompanied her father on this trip to Ecuador, as well as on other travels in South America. In addition to numerous high-quality photographs, Ingrid Wustmann’s travel diary and a lecture (1977, 1979) and Erich Wustmann’s travelogue, *Abschied von den Indianern* (1980), are invaluable sources for understanding these individuals’ ethnological endeavors, including their collecting activities.



**Figure 4:** During inventory of the Erich Wustmann Collection, in front: Waorani feather tufts, in the background (above): object list by S. Wustmann of the sub-collection from Ecuador, BASA Museum, 2019. Photo: the author.

<sup>1</sup> See <<https://www.sisi.uni-bonn.de/>> (20/03/20).

It is precisely through reading Ingrid Wustmann's diary that we learn in detail, for instance, about interactions and dynamics that took place when ethnographic objects were acquired or about the 'currencies' (money or specific objects of exchange) with which they were purchased. We also learn, for example, why there are so many necklaces in the collection: they were the objects that the Waorani most frequently offered for exchange. I had a similar experience while conducting field research in 2019. Although I did not intend to collect, I had to start doing so very soon. The fact that necklaces are the main subject of my research is certainly not the only reason why I brought back, above all, necklaces, which had been given to me as presents.

Both Ingrid Wustmann (1977) and Erich Wustmann (1980) describe the production of individual objects that are now part of the collection at the BASA Museum. The making of a spear by a man named Cogui, for example, was documented photographically. The Wustmanns' photos in particular played a crucial role in my field research, as I met—more by chance than by plan—some Waorani with whom the Wustmanns had made acquaintance in 1977, many of whom are Cogui's relatives. The 'discovery' of these direct connections materialized in the objects became visible to all participants through the photos, which they looked at with much interest, and provided an impulse for developing ideas for further collaborations with my Waorani partners, especially with Manuela Omari Ima Omene, one of Cogui's daughters.



**Figure 5a:** Cogui producing a spear in Tzapino, 1977. Source: photo album Ecuador by Ingrid Wustmann.





**Figure 5b:** Cogui with some of his family members and the author in Tiwino, 2019. Photo: Romelia Angelica Papue Mayancha.

## Walter Hausmann Collection

The Walter Hausmann Collection is unique in that Hausmann collected exclusively from afar. Between 1960 and 1990, he was in regular correspondence with two Mennonite families living in Paraguay who sent some 200 objects, mainly from the Ayoróde and Lengua, to his residence in Berlin. Hausmann himself produced inventory cards for these objects, including brief descriptions, details of the time and place of acquisition and often a drawing of the object. He also retained letters and photographs sent to him and numerous editions of the local Mennonite publication in Paraguay, *Mennoblatt*, in which he also published from time to time. The collection of objects and archival materials from this professional collector who was not a formally trained ethnologist has yet to be inventoried but represents a treasure trove in which there is still much to be discovered.

## Conclusion

These three collections offer enormous potential for researching object provenance and entangled histories, as well as for posing questions that go beyond these

concrete examples. In contrast, the starting point for provenance research on most new acquisitions into the BASA Museum is much less favorable, as illustrated by Table 1.

Collections 'with' context	Collections 'without' context
more ethnographic objects/collections	more archaeological objects/collections
object documentation by collectors	usually non-existent
more focused collecting practices	more casual collecting practices
most objects collected directly in contexts of origin	largely unknown object biographies
well-known acquisition circumstances, often with (audio)visual documentation	usually vague or unknown acquisition circumstances
special (research) interests of collector	more general interest
published and/or unpublished writings of the collector on objects, collections or collecting	usually non-existent

**Table 1:** Comparison of background information and research potential of collections 'with' and 'without' context.

The deliberate dichotomization and the exacerbated gap between collections 'with' versus 'without' context described in Table 1 could be overcome, or at least diminished, by exploring the collections and collectors about which we know very little. Using ethnographic methods and approaches, we can generate 'missing' contextual information to understand the circumstances of collecting and collectors' interests. To this end, all potentially relevant information about collectors and donors should be systematically recorded, whether in written form or as audio or video recordings of interviews. Of equal interest are photographs, if they exist, of journeys on which objects were collected or of objects in the collectors' homes. For donations that have already been incorporated into the museums, these contexts may be explored retrospectively.

It must be assumed that the influx of objects will not diminish in the coming years. As Figure 1 suggests, acquisition of objects, which by definition is one of the core tasks of museums, continues to be necessary. Although it is no longer a proactive undertaking at the BASA Museum, it dominates our daily routine because it is time-consuming. Modes of collecting have changed throughout the BASA Museum's history—and now, the time may have come to see provenance research itself as collecting and an indispensable part of any acquisition practice. As a result, 'collections without context' would no longer be so, could acquire entirely new

meanings and would matter in very different ways. The difficulties and opportunities of provenance research outlined here must also be negotiated explicitly and transparently in and with the public. An exhibition of the latest acquisitions, which is currently in preparation at the BASA Museum, wants to make an initial contribution to this effort.

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# For a Broader Notion of Provenance Research

*Beatrix Hoffmann\**

## Introduction

In the course of preparing for the opening of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, provenance research in German ethnological museums and collections has gained considerable momentum, which has also revived discourse about its significance and future (cf. Förster 2019: 79). Despite a broadened perspective, evidenced for example by the second version of the *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* (Deutscher Museumsbund; DMB 2019), provenance research still focuses primarily on collections from regions in which Germany once exercised colonial power. Such provenance research primarily considers the circumstances under which objects were transferred from their context of origin to a collection or a museum. Power relations between donor/manufacturer and recipient/collector are examined to identify colonial contexts or power-related asymmetries which dominated the conditions of object transfer. The results of this kind of provenance research constitute the basis for decisions about how to handle individual objects or entire collections that were acquired under ethically questionable or unacceptable circumstances.

## Potentials of Provenance Research

Provenance research, however, can and must achieve much more. It is an integral part of general and especially ethnological museum research. With regard to object biographies, this is not limited to the investigation of the circumstances of an

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acquisition but begins with the conception and production of an object. Provenance research must investigate the pre-museum contexts of use and identify changing owners of an object as well as consider its present status as part of a collection. The latter facet in particular has received little attention in provenance research to date, although considerable risk persists that former (neo)colonial relations will be continued or even that new ones will be established. Such problems can arise, for example, from improper handling of objects, especially culturally 'sensitive objects;' from incorrect connections made between objects and information; or from deaccession of so-called duplicates, objects that have already been integrated into a museum's collection (cf. Hoffmann 2010). The task of future provenance research must be to analyze object biographies in their completeness and to work out their various interdependencies. This way, ethnological museums, which have long been the subject of postcolonial criticism, can be made fit for the future.

At their annual meeting in 2019, the directors of German ethnological museums and collections committed themselves to reporting on the use of their collections in response to the challenges with which provenance research is confronted. The adopted statement reads as follows:

All world cultures and ethnographic museums and collections understand that it is their duty to ensure maximum transparency when dealing with the history and contents of their collections, with cooperative provenance research as a general standard. (Heidelberg Statement 2019)

This accountability will hopefully increase awareness of the fact that use and storage of objects in public museums far away from their places of origin must occur in accordance with the ideas and self-images of the source communities. This awareness is a prerequisite for establishing an equal relationship with source communities and for eliminating power asymmetries in dealing with the testimonies of their cultural history that arise through appropriation, defamation or concealment of their relationships to the objects. This work, in turn, requires profound knowledge of the origins, biography and significance of the objects, which can only be achieved through broad, multi-perspective provenance research based on communicative exchange. Consequently, provenance research must look at object biographies against the backdrop of their complex ethnocultural, historical, social and economic interdependencies; at the same time, it must permit different perspectives on the objects.

## Interdependence of Perspective and Provenance

I illustrate this potential, as well as the relevance and necessity of a more open provenance research, using the example of the two collections of Manfred Rauschert (1928-2006) in the BASA Museum (Bonner Amerikas-Sammlung, Bonn Collection of the Americas) at the University of Bonn (on Manfred Rauschert's life and work, see e.g., Dietrich 2009, Noack 2017 and Hoffmann 2019). Both collections were examined in collaboration with representatives from the source communities as evidence of cultural transformation processes. This collaboration occurred as part of the research project *Mensch-Ding-Verflechtungen indigener Gesellschaften* (Men-Thing-Entanglements of Indigenous Societies; 2015-2018) at the University of Bonn, sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The two collections were acquired by the BASA Museum in 1956 and 1977 and were assembled mainly between 1954 and 1977 from several indigenous groups in northern Brazil. The largest collections come from the Hixkaryana-Schauwiyana [Xowiyana] (rio Nhamundá), the Tiriyo [Trio] and Scharuma [Saluma/Xaluma] (upper reaches of rio Erepecuru), the Apalai [Aparai] (rio Maicuru) and the Apalai and Wayana (rio Paru). Other objects come from the Maroons and Caboclos. My comments concentrate on the objects that Manfred Rauschert 1) collected from the Apalai at the rio Maicuru in 1955-56, and 2) acquired from the Apalai and Wayana living on the rio Paru since about 1963. The time frame of acquisition can be precisely determined for the objects from rio Maicuru, but not for the collection acquired in 1977. According to information on the associated index cards, most pieces were manufactured in one of two places, Mashipurimo (founded in 1968) or Aldeia Bona (founded in 1963). The few pieces for which no concrete place of origin is given may have been acquired earlier, during an excursion that Rauschert led to the rio Paru during his third stay in South America (cf. Rauschert 1982: 236). According to María Susana Cicolletti (2000: 1), the objects were collected in 1976-77, but this date contradicts Rauschert's own biographical information, according to which he stayed on the rio Paru in 1972-76 and 1977-78. The invoice for the collection, however, dates to 21 December 1977 (see BASA Museum, inventory book entry No. 3322), suggesting that Rauschert was in Germany at that time.

The corpora of the two collections, as well as their individual objects, can be read and interpreted in a variety of ways. First, from the perspective of collector Manfred Rauschert, they are the result of his efforts to document, reconstruct and revive long-forgotten cultural traditions of the Apalai and Wayana. Second, from a

methodologically critical perspective on the collecting process, many objects owe their existence to interactions between collector and seller, of whom the latter was often also the producer. On the one hand, their interrelationship was influenced by the perspective of a scholarly autodidact who, based on oral, written and pictorial sources, developed his own ideas of an ancient culture and wanted to bring it back to life. On the other hand, the objects' manufacturers reacted to this perspective with their own imagination and creativity, which were economically stimulated by the collector. This process is particularly apparent in the second collection. Third, from the historical perspective of the Apalai and Wayana, many objects owe their existence to the interest of certain indigenous individuals in their own cultural history, which may have been first awakened by Rauschert's activities (Rauschert 1973: 113). Today, the two collections strengthen the cultural identity and self-confidence of former manufacturers and their descendants *vis à vis* the politically and economically dominant national societies of Brazil and France. However, some objects also challenge cultural, regional or ethnic differentiation among today's Apalai and Wayana. Fourth, from an anthropological and culture-historical perspective, the objects in both collections reflect the complex ethnic, cultural and political situation in French Guiana, which can be described as a contact zone as defined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991; 1992) and which is characterized by its transnationality. The objects are inscribed with diverse ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political interdependencies and processes of exchange between actors of different origins who were or still are active in the Guianas. They reflect these actors' mutual perspectives on each other, as well as resulting strategies for action. The Guianas include today's Guyana, Suriname, the French overseas department French Guiana, the region between Amazonas and Rio Negro in Brazil, and the areas east of the Orinoco in Venezuela. The zone is covered with dense rainforest and has served as a refuge for many indigenous groups for centuries. It is mainly, but not exclusively, inhabited by Carib-speaking groups, which in the past were highly segmented.

## Interrelations

The collector, material examiner and ethnographic autodidact Manfred Rauschert was born in Bonn and lived with the Carib-speaking Apalai and Wayana for most of the period between 1951 and 1977, with only a few, short interruptions. Stephanie-



Thalia Dietrich (2009: 98) mentions a longer visit in Brazil in 1978-1979, but there is no reference to such a stay in Rauschert's published texts (e.g., 1982: 237), nor in the documents in the BASA Museums archive (Biographisches Archiv zur Anthropologie, Akte Rauschert). However, for her master's thesis (2009), Dietrich was able to consult writings from the Rauschert estate, which currently are not freely accessible for research.

The settlement area of the Apalai and Wayana peoples lies in the border region between Brazil, Suriname and French Guiana. The Apalai live exclusively in Brazil. The Wayana live in villages along the rio Paru in Brazil, together with the Apalai, as well as in French Guiana and Suriname. There, too, they often live together with other ethnic groups, such as the Tiriyo. This is particularly the case in Suriname, where they live with the Tiriyo in common villages. Many of these villages are now multi-ethnic, so that members of other groups usually also live there.

Rauschert's history as a collector and ethnographer in the Guianas began in 1951-1952 with the Wayana. During several months living north of Maripasoula, French Guiana, on the outskirts of their settlement area, young men from the surrounding Wayana villages used to visit him. They taught him their language and accompanied him on excursions to the south of the country (Rauschert 1967: 166ff). During these journeys, Rauschert often saw the Wayana using industrially produced goods. He viewed this phenomenon as evidence for cultural decline as a result of European influence. He saw further evidence for this interpretation in young Wayana men's ignorance of the myths which Rauschert asked them to reproduce—regardless of whether this ignorance was genuine or feigned to protect the Wayana's intellectual property (cf. Rauschert 1973: 106). In reaction to this supposed decline, which he later noted among the Apalai as well, Rauschert developed an extensive ethnographic collection. His collecting activity showed parallels with the founding generation of German ethnologists and above all with Adolf Bastian (1926-1905), the first director of today's Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) in Berlin. Rauschert used the materials to reconstruct what he considered an original form of indigenous culture. This approach resembled Bastian's ethnological concept of reconstructing archetypes of human culture through a diversity of ethnographic objects. Bastian called these archetypes "Elementargedanken" (elementary thoughts) (Bastian 1881: 178; Fiedermutz-Laun 1990: 119).

But unlike Bastian, Rauschert was only secondarily interested in material culture. He mainly collected indigenous stories, myths and songs, which he recorded with a tape recorder. Over the years, he made more than 4,000 recordings, some of which he translated in collaboration with native speakers. On the basis of this

material and with other sources, such as illustrations of travelogues and ethnographic literature, as well as studies of collections in ethnological museums, Rauschert identified traditions and practices that he had not observed in everyday or ritual life among the Apalai and Wayana. Consequently, Rauschert promoted (re-)admission or establishment among his indigenous hosts of the practices that (supposedly) had been abandoned.



Figure 1: *Maka-maka* board (BASA Museum, 380). Photo: the author, 2016.

The success of this undertaking varied, due not only to the target indigenous users' desire for modern conveniences, which he deplored, but also, for example, to the influence of Evangelical missionaries who had been present at rio Paru since the 1960s and who later had a strong influence on life in the area (cf. Rauschert 1966: 136; 1977: 1). As it turned out, it was much more difficult to replace the long-established matches with older fire sticks or (re)introduce certain festivities than to encourage talented craftsmen and artists to produce objects that were supposedly or really out of use. Through clever enticement, Rauschert succeeded in arousing the interest of some Apalai and Wayana in their culture and its preservation to such an extent that they participated in Rauschert's project of cultural reconstruction. An additional incentive for this work, however, were the good prices that Rauschert paid for 'reconstructed' ethnographic objects. In addition, this phenomenon yielded a series of objects that were invented during his stay with the Apalai at rio Maicuru in 1955-1956, although Rauschert did not notice at first that they were innovations. Only later did he realize that the *maka-maka* board (Fig. 1) owed its existence to the

interrelation between his desire for 'original' objects and the creativity and economic interests of its creator (Rauschert 1973: 108). Rauschert acquired the piece as a decorative board, the deeper meaning of which he thought had been forgotten but had never actually existed (Rauschert 1963: 175). He himself saw the board as a parallel to the *maluwana*, a round wooden disc that is placed under the rooftop of the *tucushipan* (the community hut) and painted with mythical motifs.

## Reconstruction or Creativity?

At the beginning of his research among the Apalai and Wayana, Rauschert apparently did not recognize such new creations. Soon thereafter, however, he seems to have adopted a rather liberal attitude to 'originality' or 'authenticity.' He painted a *maluwana* that a collector in French Guiana had ordered from the local Wayana and had asked Rauschert to decorate because of his knowledge of Wayana traditions and culture (Rauschert 1982: 125).<sup>1</sup> Rauschert, in turn, promoted the production of polychrome painted, zoomorphic benches (BASA Museum, inventory number: 4530) that had not existed before, for example, as well as zoomorphic wooden figures. Elaborately crafted wooden objects such as benches have only been made among the indigenous people of the Guianas since iron tools, especially axes, became available to them. In the border area of Suriname, Brazil and French Guiana, these instruments were long delivered only by Maroons, descendants of former African slaves who were able to escape from plantations on the coast into the dense virgin forests of Suriname. They had lived there since the eighteenth century and later also founded villages in French Guiana. Until the twentieth century, Maroon traders controlled and organized trade between the European coastal areas and the interior. The Apalai and Wayana not only received tools from Maroons, but probably also learned from them the basics of woodworking and some of their styles. One such style may be the oval seat of some benches, a form that is also used by the Sa'amakka, one of the five Maroon groups living in the Guianas. In her master's thesis, Dietrich (2009) examined Rauschert's influence on the production of the zoomorphic and partly polychrome painted benches, of which more than 30 pieces, including four polychrome ones, are still in his estate. Rauschert sold another four

<sup>1</sup> I thank Maïke Powrozniak and Barbara Frey for this suggestion.

zoomorphic, polychrome benches to the Museum der Kulturen (Museum of Cultures) in Basel in 1971-72 (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2:** Colorfully painted zoomorphic bench (Museum der Kulturen Basel, IVc 14826). Photo: Jana Brass, 2019.

The BASA collection of 1977 also contains a bright blue painted fish (Fig. 3), which also owes its origin to the interplay of Rauschert's ideas and the colorful creativity of the indigenous artist. At the same time, this wooden fish reflects the complex cultural and ethnic conditions in the Guianas and falsification of their reality through inaccurate knowledge transfer by non-indigenous actors. According to Rauschert's information on the object's index card, such wooden figures were carried around on fishing rods at long-forgotten festivals. This use cannot be proven for the Apalai nor for the Wayana, however, neither from reports and illustrations nor based on objects from other collections. There is, however, film footage of a member of the Tupi-speaking Wayãmpi, who lived in the headwaters of the rio Paru and its neighboring rivers in the first half of the twentieth century, carrying a wooden fish on a fishing rod. The images were shot by Otto Schulz-Kampfenkel (1910-1989) when he visited the Wayãmpi in early 1937 and can be seen in Schulz-Kampfenkel's documentary film *Rätsel der Urwaldhölle* (Riddle of Hell's Jungle) from 1938. Schulz-Kampfenkel made the journey to the Wayãmpi, accompanied by some Apalai and Wayana, with the aim of collecting ethnographical objects. Those objects are now in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, where incorrect information on the index card links them to the Apalai. It cannot be ruled out that Rauschert saw these pieces in the collection of the Museum at Berlin and after-

wards encouraged his Apalai and Wayana ‘co-workers’ to reconstruct these ‘forgotten’ artifacts. In return, he provided them with tools and sometimes also with materials, in addition to offering them good compensation.



Figure 3: Colorfully painted fish figure (BASA Museum, 3342). Photo: the Author, 2016.

There is also no clear evidence that *tamoko* masks (Fig. 4) existed outside Manfred Rauschert’s sphere of influence or before 1970. However, there is much to suggest that this type of mask is closely linked to Rauschert’s ideas of an original Apalai and Wayana culture and dates back to his interventions. Rauschert knew about *tamoko* from myths in which they are described as forest spirits and sometimes also as water creatures. However, the Apalai and Wayana knew neither of a mask that embodied *tamoko* nor of a festival at which the spirits appeared in the form of masks. Rauschert attributed this ignorance to the cultural loss that he believed to be observing. He assumed that every spirit being known from Apalai and Wayana mythology had been represented in earlier times by a mask that had been worn at appropriate festivals. He arrived at this conclusion from stories by his indigenous hosts, but above all from literature, such as the travelogue of Jules Crevaux (1883).

Within the framework of his “research program *tamoko*,” Rauschert systematically asked the Apalai and Wayana again and again over a long period of time about the shape of the ‘forgotten’ *tamoko* mask. But it was only during his penultimate, longer stay at the rio Paru (1972-1976) that he met an old woman, Mirato, who thought she remembered (Rauschert 1977: 6). According to her specifications, the first *tamoko* masks were made with materials that Rauschert had partially acquired in Belém. Today, these *tamoko* masks are represented in the collections of many ethnological museums and continue to be produced for sale to tourists and collectors. However, Rauschert’s success was limited, as he succeeded in integrating

the *tamoko* mask into local material culture, but not in establishing a corresponding celebration at which the mask would be worn (Rauschert 1982: 207).



Figure 4: *Tamoko* mask (BASA-Museum, 3321). Photo: Heinrich Natho, 2016.

While this type of mask has since become part of the material culture of the Apalai and Wayana living in Brazil, the French Wayana are distanced from and even hostile to it. This became clear during a workshop with representatives of the French Wayana, which was conducted in 2016 in the context of the research project *Mensch-Ding-Verflechtungen indigener Gesellschaften* at the BASA Museum. In view of their reticence, the *tamoko* masks may even be treated as ‘sensitive objects’ for the French Wayana. Consequently, general consideration should be given to how they should be stored and, if necessary, exhibited to the public. Nonetheless, the French Wayana’s disassociation from the *tamoko* mask could also result from complete lack of any relationship to this type of object, since its origins lie in Brazil.

## Reconstruction and Copies

Over the years, Apalai and Wayana artisans produced a whole compendium of objects that were more or less ‘reconstructed,’ invented or copied under the influence of Manfred Rauschert. These objects also include a bichrome basket with a zigzag pattern, which is unusual in the graphic traditions of the Apalai and Wayana. The manufacturer had seen the motif during a visit to his relatives in French Guiana and reworked it at Rauschert's request (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5:** Basket with zigzag decoration (BASA Museum, 3340). Photo: Wiebke Adams, 2019.

A basket from the Tiriyo, who often decorate their baskets with zigzag patterns, may also have entered a Wayana household through close contacts between the two groups and served as a model. However, Rauschert does not seem to have recognized this connection. Nor does he seem to have realized during his first collecting trip to Brazil (1954-1956) that the ceramic plate he received from a Caboclo woman in Oriximiná was actually of indigenous origin (Fig. 6). He acquired it as a molding plate for ceramic pots, but in the indigenous households of the region, these clay plates were used to bake *beiju* (manioc bread). Felix Speiser purchased a very similar example of one such unglazed ceramic plate from the Apalai at the rio Paru in 1924, which today belongs to the collections of the Museum der Kulturen Basel (inventory number: IVc 4201).



**Figure 6:** Ceramic plate for baking cassava (BASA Museum, 420). Photo: Igor Karim, 2017.

## Object and Information in the Context of the Collection

The information on the index cards for the 1977 collection shows that many objects were either reconstructed or commissioned by Manfred Rauschert. The ethnic classification for these objects is indicated on the index cards as “Aparai-Wajana.” This ethnonym was introduced into academic discourse by Swiss anthropologist Daniel Schoepf (1976) with the spelling ‘Apalai-Wayana.’ His reasoning behind use of the



new ethnonym was the spatial and cultural rapprochement between the two groups that had already been underway along the rio Paru for several generations, with Wayana from the north repeatedly marrying into Apalai villages.

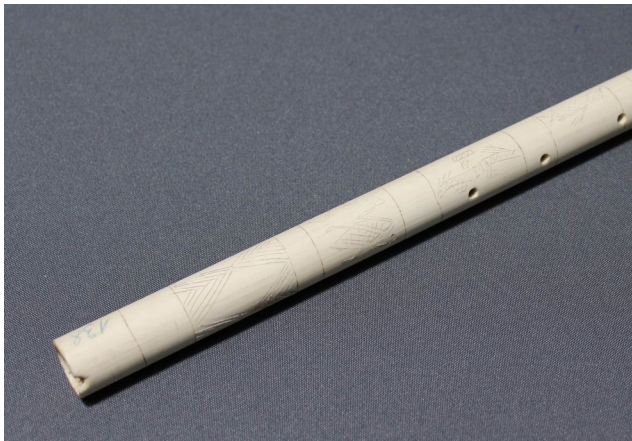
Yet in spite of these interethnic connections and common descendants, strong awareness of the two groups' respective cultural identities has been preserved to this day. Their identity is closely bound to the language and depends on the origin of the father (Camargo 2017: 225). Rauschert himself increasingly used the term 'Aparai-Wajana' from the 1970s onwards and exclusively in the 1990s. It is therefore questionable whether the information on the BASA index cards actually originated from Rauschert himself. It is conceivable that this exonym was instead first linked to the objects over the course of the museum's inventory. This situation underscores the necessity for provenance research to examine the taphonomic processes (Fowler and Fowler 1996: 132) to which an object is subjected during and after entering a museum collection. For there was and is no 'Aparai-Wajana' ethnicity, and today's Apalai and Wayana expressly reject the ethnonym, according to Cécilia Awakeo Apalai, president of the Associação Dos Povos Indígenas Wayana Apalai (Association of the indigenous people Wayana Apalai) (personal communication to the author in Macapá on 12/12/2017).

It was probably also during inventory that the objects in the 1977 collection were assigned misleading information about their geographical origin. For almost all objects, the concrete places of their production or acquisition that are indicated in the inventory files are situated along the rio Paru. Nevertheless, a superordinate geographic reference links the whole collection not only to the rio Paru, but also to the rio Maicuru, although not a single piece of the collection is said to come from there – in contrast to Rauschert's entire first Apalai collection from 1955-1956. Here, too, an account of the objects' use can and must ensure unambiguity. These contradictory indications of origin are not only misleading, but also contribute to concealing the actual living conditions of the Apalai and Wayana populations at the time. Settler activities and construction of an airstrip had put them under increasing pressure at the rio Maicuru beginning in the late 1950s. By the mid-1960s, all Apalai except two families had moved to the rio Paru. The two remaining families planned to follow soon thereafter (Rauschert 1966: 139).

Finally, I would like to conclude my contribution by looking at two flutes that also belong to the 1977 collection but were probably not produced under the influence of Manfred Rauschert. They were not made of bamboo or bone as usual, but of plastic and metal. Therefore, according to Rauschert's logic, they would offer evidence more of cultural decline than of the creative processes of cultural trans-

formation. Rauschert was extraordinarily contradictory on this point and lacked the ability to critically reflect on his own actions and activities among the Apalai and Wayana. In short, he regarded the new objects created under his influence as reconstructions of a fictitious Apalai and Wayana cultural past based on his personal ideas. At the same time, he interpreted similar creations beyond his sphere of influence as expressions of cultural decay.

Both flutes represent the increasing influence of national societies on the lives of indigenous peoples in regions of Guyana that were difficult to access until the mid-twentieth century. The plastic pipe of the one flute (Fig. 7) apparently reached Aldeia Bona (today Aldeia Apalai) because the place quickly developed into a cultural contact zone after its foundation in 1963. Due to its favorable location in the savanna and the construction of a nearby airstrip, non-indigenous people, especially missionaries and military personnel, soon came to Aldeia Bona and stayed there for some time. In order to maintain their western way of life, they brought necessary equipment and materials with them. The pipe could therefore have reached Aldeia Bona as part of the construction of a water pipeline.



**Figure 7:** Flute made of plastic (BASA Museum, 3362). Photo: the author, 2016.

The material for the aluminum flute at BASA Museum (inventory number: 3366), on the other hand, comes from an airplane that had crashed in Suriname, according to the file card. Beginning in 1959, seven airstrips were laid out as part of Operation Grasshopper to connect nearby villages with the coastal region. After an airplane accident near the village of Paloemeu, the wreckage served as a source of material for the Tiriyo and Wayana living nearby. Since indigenous people of the Guianas still frequently visit each other – irrespective of ethnic affiliation or national borders – aluminum parts of the airplane quickly found widespread use. The easy-to-process

metal was very popular and was used to make a wide variety of objects, such as pendants, bracelets, manioc rubs and flutes.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relevance and necessity of a broader conception of provenance research, based on the case study of various objects from the collections which Manfred Rauschert handed over to the BASA Museum in 1956 and 1977. The examples show that, beyond questions of the colonial contexts of a collection's acquisition, various circumstances and constellations may also influence the biography of museum objects and thus their significance. Furthermore, this process changes depending on the viewer and his or her perspective on and relationship to each object.

The origin and biography of objects from the Rauschert collections thus highlight what provenance research must achieve beyond mere investigation of the acquisition circumstances. Its work also includes highlighting ethnological museums as socially relevant institutions in the midst of culturally pluralized and globally intertwined societies and opening up spaces for museums to act, which will enable a sustainable future with a decolonized collection. Provenance research with a broader focus makes the complex interrelationships of ethnographic objects visible and reveals that their existence always owes itself to an interaction, which may be more or less pronounced, between indigenous and non-indigenous actors. Consequently, descendants of the former creators of ethnographic museum objects must also be included in such processes of knowledge production. At the same time, this approach creates the prerequisite for continuing existing interdependencies and reviving the ones, that had been lying fallow. It offers further potential for the future of ethnographic museums by enabling them to establish themselves as places where cultural differences are no longer the subject of discussion, but rather where commonalities in cultural diversity are discovered and negotiated.

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# “Getting Here Instead of Taking it There” – Objects That Intertwine Stories and People<sup>1</sup>

*Carla Jaimes Betancourt\**

When the great wind came, the fire, the mud, which used to be people, were transformed into mud. It is for this reason that we find dolls on earth even today that have arms, fingers, a face, a willy or tits and a belly. They are the people from before. It's not good to give dolls away; you have to keep them in the house. If one takes them out (of the house), these dolls send *faratazik*, magic. For these reasons, it has been impossible for us to obtain an archaeological piece among the Chimane of the Maniqui and Chimane rivers (Riester 1993: 334).

I begin with the story written by Jürgen Riester (1993) during his field work with the Tsimane in 1971, because it introduces us briefly to the subject of this chapter: the relationship of the Tsimane to their archaeological objects and the role that archaeological collections play in their communities. The present work is based on my personal experience, which took place in 2016 in the humid forests west of the alluvial plain of the Beni department, Bolivia, within the Territorio indígena Chimane (Chimane Indigenous Territory), in the communities of Arenales and Cara Cara.

The Tsimane are one of the largest groups in the Bolivian Amazon, with a population of approximately 9,000 inhabitants distributed among 115 small communities, according to data from the Great Chimane Council (Díez Astete 2011: 296). The Tsimane culture is the most prominent one in the municipality of San Borja and the one that suffers most strongly from the impacts of the Yucumo-San Ignacio main road, because the Tsimane lived in relative isolation until the second half of the twentieth century (Riester 1976: 241). Although first contacts were made during Spanish colonization in the seventeenth century, the Tsimane abandoned many of their ancestral settlements to avoid contact with Europeans and moved to more isolated areas, such as the headwaters of the Maniqui and Apere rivers, where some of their settlements are still located today (Chicchón 1992; Nordenskiöld 1924).

The relative, and partially intentional, isolation of the Tsimane was ended by force in the second half of the last century when road construction, timber ex-

<sup>1</sup> This contribution also appears in Spanish as “Llegar acá en vez de llevar allá” – Objetos que entrelazan historias y personas. In: Carla Jaimes Betancourt, Karoline Noack and Naomi Rattunde (eds.) (2020): *Global turns, decolonización y museos*. Bonn/La Paz: Bonner Altamerika-Sammlung und Studien (BASS) and Plural editores, pp. 189-210.

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traction and the arrival of new waves of missionaries and highland settlers began (Reyes-García et al. 2014). Since then, social scientists have been investigating the processes of gradual transformation affecting the world in which the Tsimane lived and their environment (see Chicchón 1992; Daillant 2003; Ellis 1996; Godoy et al. 2005, 2010; Pérez-Llorente et al. 2013; Reyes-García et al. 2007, 2011; among many others).

During a road trip from Rurrenabaque to San Ignacio de Moxos, I visited the Tsimane community called Arenales, near the town of San Borja. Due to heavy flooding in 2014, the Arenales community had been relocated and is now less than 50 meters from the road. My attention was drawn to the white houses with corrugated metal roofs, which the villagers told me had been built very quickly by the central government as a relief response to the disaster that had occurred when the river Maniqui had overflowed and swept away all the people's houses.

Talking to some of the people in Arenales and unable to control my curiosity as an archaeologist, I asked them if they had seen clay pots or ceramic fragments along the river Maniqui. My experience of almost twenty years in Mojeño archaeology had taught me that local populations have a georeferenced conception of the landscape and that no matter how thick the vegetation grows or how much river courses have changed, they know where traces of the past are to be found, whether they be chestnut forests, *terra preta* soils, canals, mounds or cultural materials. After a short boat trip on the river Maniqui and crossing to the other bank, I was shown a place called San Rafael where a newly cut stream had exposed a layer of dark soil with several large, scattered fragments of pottery. They reported having found large, globular vessels covered by a plate. Unfortunately, only scattered fragments remained of the possibly ceremonial (burial) contexts. I marked the site on my GPS and noted in my field journal that the pottery demonstrated characteristics of what we refer to in Amazonian archaeology as the "corrugated horizon" (de Saulieu et al. 2016; Lima et al. 2016).

It was getting late and I decided to spend the night in San Borja, the nearest town. The next day, as I passed through Arenales again, the community of Cara Cara was waiting to tell me that they had a collection of ceramic pieces that they wanted to show me. I must admit that this was the first time I had heard that a community in Mojos had a collection of archaeological pieces, and I did not want to show a lack of interest. I ventured into the Cara Cara community. Upon my arrival, I was amazed at how many children were playing there happily. It was a typical Amazon scene in which children were running around, climbing trees and laughing freely.





**Figure 1:** Indigenous of Cara Cara showing their archaeological collection. Photo: the author.



**Figure 2:** Some of the documented vessels from this collection. Photos: the author.

I asked for the *corregidor* of the community and introduced myself (“I am Carla Jaimes, the archaeologist. Is it true that you have clay pots?”). The *corregidor* welcomed me and was pleased by my visit. We have a collection in my house, he told

me. They took out a long bench and then he, his wives and their many children began to take out the pots, one by one, lining them up for me to admire (Fig. 1). They were small pots, all decorated by incised or modeled motifs of snakes, faces and spirals (Fig. 2). Neither the forms nor the decoration resembled pottery from the monumental mounds of the southeast Mojos (Jaimes Betancourt 2012, 2016b), nor from the ridges and small mounds of the central area (Jaimes Betancourt 2013, 2017), much less the ceramic styles of the northeast Mojos (Jaimes Betancourt 2016a). This was undoubtedly another ceramic style of unknown chronological position. While I was observing the ceramic pieces, the questions began: "How old are the pots, *doctorita*? Who made these vessels, *doctorita*? Where did the people who previously occupied our territory come from?" Although archaeology has criticized the use of distributions of ceramic styles as proxies for human migration, some questions I was asked by the Tsimane reminded me of the discussions we have in archaeology regarding the relationship between ethno-linguistic groups and ceramic styles in the Amazon (Heckenberger 2002; Hill and Santos Granero 2002; Hornborg 2005; Hornborg and Hill 2011; Neves 2007, 2011; Silva and Noelli 2017).

I asked, how did they know that this pottery is not Tsimane? "Because we don't make it like that," the *corregidor* answered. "We have never seen these drawings; we don't know how to do this; they are different pots." It is true; an ethnography from 1915 mentions that the household items of the Tsimane were very simple and consisted of some unadorned clay pots, wooden bowls, wooden spoons and fountains made from the heart of a palm tree (Nordenskiöld 1924). I noticed that the Tsimane expressed a certain fascination with the vessels. All the pots were intact, except for one whose neck had been glued with resin. "Who repaired the pot?," I asked. "My son," answered the *corregidor*. I was amazed that, despite the many children running around, the pots had remained intact. Had Nordenskiöld (1924: 118) not written that "Chimanes are big children who quickly get tired of one thing"?

As I began to look closely at each pot, I asked where they had found them. "Very close to here," the man answered, and he continued with a story that I will try to re-narrate here: "When we go hunting, sometimes we come back empty-handed. Then we pass by this place at the bank of a river. The rain digs up some pots and we carefully take them out. They are not deep ... First, there is a black layer with only broken pots, and underneath the black layer are the whole pots." The *corregidor* had just described to me the stratigraphy of the archaeological site.

"What are you going to do with the pots?," I asked. "What can be done with them?," they answered with another question. "What do you think about donating

them to the Departmental Archaeological Museum (Kenneth Lee Ethno-Archaeological Museum)?,” I suggested. At that moment, I heard myself repeating the same, state-created discourse in which the state declares itself owner of the goods of the past, with a duty to preserve them. “The local office of the *corregidor* wants to build a museum in San Borja,” they told me. “But we want to know more about the people who made the pots,” they added.

The relationship that the local communities of the Amazon have with archaeological heritage within processes of recognizing and appropriating objects from the past has been discussed in recent years in efforts to legitimize source communities’ discourses about the past and archaeological heritage (Bezerra 2012, 2013; Gnecco and Ayala 2010). However, in this case, it was the Tsimane who were waiting for answers.



**Figure 3:** *Corregidor* showing the lithic pendant that he found. Photo: the author.

I asked permission to photograph the pieces, and we improvised a table with a pink tablecloth. As I took the photographs, members of the community came up to me to show me stone axes, spinning wheels, vessels, vessel lids. The *corregidor* proudly showed me the stone pendant around his neck (Fig. 3). Bezerra (2012) would say that it is a unique way of enjoying the past.

Being surrounded by people showing me the objects that they had stored in their houses made me recall Marcia Bezerra's masterful talk during the Congress of Archaeological Theory of South America, held in 2015 in the city of La Paz. Marcia spoke and later published about the coexistence, understanding and appropriation of "things of the past," and how this process moves us away from the notion of "heritage" invented by the state (Bezerra 2017). I was there, in Cara Cara, surrounded by the Tsimane population, and they were taking charge of breaking down the state's discourse that I had heard so many times in various academic and bureaucratic circles: "they are ignorant, they don't value it," "they don't care," "they have no idea that it is old."



**Figure 4a:** Vessel lid decorated with fine incisions. Photo: the author.



**Figure 4b:** Photographic documentation of archaeological pieces in the indigenous community of Cara Cara (TICH). Photo: Torrico.

A middle-aged woman approached me, shyly showing me a black ceramic lid. Someone muttered that “it looks like letters.” “What is written here?” they asked me. The lid was one of the most beautiful objects I have seen in Mojos (Fig. 4a). It was a fine, very well-fired ceramic with a polished surface; on the outside, fine incisions formed complex motifs that were very well-organized and obviously looked like glyphic writing. I did not answer ... I just photographed the piece (Fig. 4b). I asked Mrs. Chela Viatavo, who had shown me the ceramic lid, how and where she had found it. She told me that a tractor had made a path near the community and many pottery fragments had come out. The *corregidor* and other people proposed to show me the places from where their collection came the next day. “Why not right now,” I insisted. “We need at least three hours and it’s already starting to get dark. You can’t walk in the forest anymore; you could get lost!,” they warned me.

I arrived the next morning and when I saw Chela, I remembered Nordenskiöld’s (1924: 117) description: “[Tsimane] women have an imposing presence. Their constitution is thick-boned and of a naivety and dignity reminiscent of the Swedish women of Dalarne.”

Together with two other Tsimane people from the community, we went to visit two archaeological sites, both relatively close to Cara Cara. We walked through high grass and I could not help but look with admiration at Chela’s bare feet floating through the jungle, and compare these brave, bare feet with Pedro Hisa’s feet dressed in shoes and Elise Catumare’s feet in her white rubber boots. Somehow, the chronology of three generations, their absence, presence and type of shoes, allowed me to elucidate their current working relationships. My three companions

moved through the forest 'like a fish in water,' while I walked awkwardly in my pair of trekking boots.

We arrived at the first archaeological site where the ceramic lid had been found. A small stratigraphic layer of black, very sandy soil had been exposed by heavy machinery and was clearly visible. The ceramic fragments were dispersed across an area larger than one hectare.



**Figure 5a:** View of the platform where the archaeological sites of Cara Cara are located. Photo: the author.



**Figure 5b:** View of the collapse platform, Cara Cara 3. Photo: the author.

The second and largest archaeological site is currently a pasture and is located on private property, although the boundary between this property and the Tsimane territory is disputed. My companions reported that the site had previously been on

their land, but the owner had had invaded the Tsimane Indigenous Territory by systematically moving the posts that delimit his property.

The large platform (Fig. 5a) seems to have been a pre-Hispanic residential site and cemetery. Most of the community's collection of pots (Fig. 5b) came from a landslide that has revealed a layer of black, sandy, *terra preta* soil almost one meter thick, with a high concentration of ceramic fragments, as well as complete, decorated pots that are buried two meters deep.

Similar to the San Rafael Site, this site is located on the highest point of the landscape and has a beautiful view of the river Maniqui. When we arrived at each archaeological site, my companions would disperse and quickly locate newly discovered pottery or stone within the layer of soil that was eroding and sliding toward the river (Fig. 6a, 6b). At the end of the day, the *corregidor* told me: "Let's make an office here!" "An office, here?," I repeated. "Yes, an office for people like you to come, see the objects and tell us more about them." For hundreds of years, archaeological objects have been taken out of local communities, with the justification that they are cultural heritage and that it is up to the state to take care of them. In the best-case scenario, the state ends up storing the objects in obscure museum storage facilities. Just like the facilities that also exist in Europe, full of objects from all over the world that wait in darkness until they are brought to light to tell their story. I believe that the idea of the 'office' expressed by the *corregidor* of Cara Cara was a concept of a space created as a center of memory, documentation and research of or for the Tsimane. That is, a museum as an indigenous institution (see the example of the Kuahí Museum, Gomes 2016).



**Figure 6a:** Doña Chela Viatayo collecting decorated fragments from the Cara Cara site. Photo: the author.



**Figure 6b:** Elise Catumare collecting a stone axe. Photo: the author.

This experience showed me that the archaeological objects of Cara Cara have entered the dynamics of the present, becoming part of everyday life in the community. Through the objects, some people could remember certain episodes of their lives related to the day or place of the find. As Silva proposes (2016), objects are the materialization of social relations. Moreover, the objects are never blank slates; they bring with them diverse subjectivities that manifest themselves in different situations or contexts. Riester's story (1993) in the opening quote confirms that for the Tsimane, objects are like people; they have agency and act in people's lives by provoking emotions, actions and reactions.

I said goodbye to the community of Cara Cara, and when I passed by the community of Arenales, they had already taken out a large number of broken ceramic fragments from a house to show me. I did not ask them why they had not shown them to me on the first day. I left thinking that it must be common for the villagers to have small collections in their houses.

The experience that I outline in this text recently led me to reflect on the relationship between communities and 'things of the past,' their agency and the role that we as archaeologists play in the present and in people's lives.

The objects and circumstances of discovery themselves generate learning and transmission of knowledge between different people and generations (Silva 2016). Archaeological sites are also territorial markers and are thus fundamental to the recognition and protection of local territory (Rocha et al. 2014). In recent years, important contributions to studies of cultural heritage and indigenous communities have been published. All of them question the role of archaeologists. Some authors



have focused on debates about multivocality in research (Silva, Bepalez and Stucchi 2011), the socialization of archaeological heritage (Barreto 2013) and the resignification of archaeological and colonial heritage by communities (Bezerra 2012), as well as their close relationship with archaeological objects and the creation of domestic collections (Troufflard 2012). Recent research also proposes the need to include other forms of knowledge in archaeological interpretation (Cabral 2015; Silva 2002), to analyze relations of identity and otherness of the local population with respect to archaeological heritage (Gomes et al. 2014) or to carry out more holistic analyzes that include current environmental management and its interference in the constant reconstruction of landscapes (Machado 2014). While many of these contributions are examples from the Brazilian Amazon, the approaches all transcend geographical boundaries (see Ayala 2007; Gnecco and Ayala 2010; Gianotti et al. 2015; Okamura and Matsuda 2011; Pyburn 2009; Rivolta et al. 2014). I hope that this example from the Bolivian Amazon will help to problematize existing relationships between indigenous populations and archaeological objects, both locally and regionally.

I believe I am not alone when I postulate that archaeological objects should remain in communities. Thus, Silva (2016) proposes that the objects recall people, stories and events, and thus are part of processes of memory construction. Objects are fundamental to identity construction or, as in the specific case of the Tsimane, they can advance processes of otherness, because they are part of the dynamics of people's relationships with 'others' (whether these 'others' are other indigenous, non-indigenous, Carayanas or supernatural beings).

I suppose that this is how I became part of a decolonization process, a vision from different territories and geographies, learning to listen to the stories, histories, legacies of multiple subjectivities, struggles, worldviews or ontologies, who – in the case of the Tsimane – lived and are still experiencing colonial segregation.

As expressed by Walsh and Mignolo (2018: 3), it was necessary for me as an archaeologist to unlearn the Western idea of time, its linearity and its belief that there is only one temporality. I needed to pay attention to what, why, with whom and how I was doing archaeology, since theory and practice are necessarily interrelated and it is necessary to be, to think, to know, to theorize, to analyze, to feel, to act differently. Perhaps I am wrong, but I believe that no one decolonizes anyone; it is a reflexive verb conjugated in the first person. Everyone decolonizes her- or himself.

I believe that it is not enough to recognize the relationship of indigenous peoples with the remains of the past; alternative, inclusive and creative methodologies

must be developed that allow researchers, indigenous communities and government institutions to work together.

Western thought tends to ignore the value that indigenous peoples attribute to the things and archaeological sites found in their territories (Miranda 2019). According to the definition of the International Council of Museums that has been under debate since 2007, the museum is considered

a non-profit institution [...] that acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and recreation.

For decades, involvement of indigenous communities has been disassociated from this institution, both in decisions about the management and protection of cultural heritage and in the conception of museum exhibitions. However, I believe that some important changes are beginning to take place, such as those mentioned in this book. Museums should be conceived as open, inclusive spaces that protect memory and attempt to capture the richness of cultural diversity, not of humanity in general, but rather by making each ethnic group visible in particular, highlighting the perspectives of indigenous populations on their own cultures and according to the logic of their own schemes (Gomes 2016).

In a present that is still subject to deep social inequalities and capitalist extractivism, ethnological museums must assume their role as spaces for criticism and reflection on the social problems that affect indigenous peoples, especially those who are still fighting or returning to fight for their territories and environments. Museums increasingly need to act as centers for research and education, breaking down geographical, linguistic and cultural (and institutional) boundaries.

Museums around the world should make active and permanent use of collaborative practices in order to incorporate other meanings into objects, allowing us to continually review our 'theoretical practice' as researchers and practitioners writing about the past, present and future. Silva (2016: 76), drawing on the work of other authors (see Shannon 2009; Brady 2009; Stark 2011; Marstine 2011), proposes a new ethics of museums that seeks to reflect and revise the structural bases of curatorial practices, such as the asymmetry between 'authoritative' and 'alternative' discourse; the operational chain of museums (collection, research, conservation, outreach, etc.); museum activism on issues related to social inclusion and human rights; proposals for museum policies and practices (collection acquisition, participatory curatorship, shared monitoring, etc.) that are transparent and anchored in the different indigenous demands and ethics; distribution of authority in management of ethnographic collections; and deconstruction of stereotypes about

indigenous peoples. Some of these criteria are already being considered for a new definition of the museum. However, as the aforementioned authors point out, new curatorial practices do not correspond to eradication of traditional colonialist practices. There is still a long way to go before we can truly experience the decolonization of museums, which requires ongoing reflection on the impacts of colonialism on cultural productions of indigenous peoples and the role that museums have had and still have in building ethnocentric representations of them (Silva 2016: 75).

If I had a chance to go back to Cara Cara, I would stay longer in the community. I would observe more closely the people's relationship with the objects of the past, listen to what they have to say about them, wait for them to tell me anecdotes about their memories associated with the objects, pay attention to their interpretations of the objects and the archaeological sites. I would learn more about the rich Tsimane mythology compiled by Riester (1993) and Huanca (2006), with the aim of learning other local knowledge and practices that suggest other theories and analytical perspectives on the archaeological record, using as a point of entry the relations that the Tsimane establish between themselves, archaeological objects and their natural and cultural environment. González Ruibal's (2012) proposal of an archaeology that denies temporal limits; that is participative, public and political, creative, interdisciplinary and revitalizing for materiality; that originates in the peripheries and generates theory undoubtedly responds better to the reality of indigenous peoples of the Amazon. We need a science that no longer thinks hierarchically about the construction of knowledge, a science that instead allows a diversity of perspectives on the past.

On the other hand, my experience with the people of Cara Cara and listening to their questions shows us how transcendental it is to address questions in archaeological research that are relevant to the communities. The interest shown by the Tsimane in the history of their territory can facilitate their active participation in creating knowledge, while also safeguarding the relevance of archaeology and reclaiming its importance for the study of the pre-Hispanic past. In the end, archaeology as a social science must respond to the needs of the present and address political issues that in many cases concern the inclusion or subordination of indigenous peoples.

Finally, I must clarify that during my visit to the Cara Cara community, I did not perceive any evidence of an illegal or clandestine trade in archaeological pieces. The residents appreciate the objects for their aesthetic value and have incorporated them into what have been called "domestic collections" (Bezerra 2011). Although the Tsimane relate them to a past and an 'otherness,' the objects play an

important role in their daily life. The challenge of archaeology is to understand the role of materiality in constructing subjects in each historical and cultural context. Hamilakis (2007: 24-27) proposes that we question power structures and reflect on dynamics within and outside the discipline. According to him, we would be reproducing the same power structures instead of diminishing them, and we must remember that the concept of conservation as developed in the West is not universally accepted. I believe that it is necessary to move away from the focus on conservation of archaeological remains as a fundamental principle and accept that tangible and intangible culture has been and still is undergoing constant transformation and change. Instead of creating rifts between archaeology and indigenous communities by stripping communities of their collections and storing them in state museums, it is better to aim to consolidate archaeologists' relationships with communities, thus forging a more inclusive and politically relevant science.

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# The Critical Restitution of Walter Lehmann's Linguistic Legacy

*Martin Künne\* and Werner Mackenbach\*\**

## Abstract

This contribution describes an international editorial project dedicated to the translation and annotation of Walter Lehmann's linguistic records from Central America, which to date have only been published in German (1920). Pre-dating widespread Hispanicization of Central American indigenous populations and implementation of corresponding state policies, the selected documents include many linguistic testimonies that have since been lost. Critical annotation and re-edition of these materials, which have been preserved at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (Ibero-American Institute) of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation; Berlin, Germany), was coordinated by the two authors of this article. The larger project was embedded into several lectures supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and given by Künne at the Central American University (Nicaragua) and the University of Costa Rica between 2006 and 2019.

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## The Linguistic Area

Central America is a long, narrow land bridge that connects the northern and southern continents of the Americas. The region is considered an ecological and cultural corridor that, despite its small extent, included a large number of indigenous languages and cultures prior its colonization by Europeans. Whereas the southern Chibcha languages were widespread as far as the Colombian highlands, the Mangue, Nahuatl and Mayan languages are regarded as characteristic of the Mesoamerican culture area immediately to the north. The languages' speakers were integrated into supra-regional interaction systems whose rural polities included both village (in the south) and urban settlement centers (in the north). Components of their material cultures ranged from greenstone and metalworking to writing and polychrome pottery. The region's linguistic heritage includes areas with hard linguistic boundaries, as well as others characterized by dialectal continuums and multilingual social groups.

Although the Spanish conquest is often claimed to have resulted in the "disappearance" of the indigenous populations of the Americas (for Nicaragua, see e.g., Newson 1987), their descendants in the center of the Americas cannot be overlooked. However, the vast majority no longer want to be discriminated against as 'indigenous' or 'tribal' peoples and now define themselves as equal members of their respective, Spanish-speaking national societies. Current speakers of autochthonous American languages comprise no more than five to nine percent of modern Central American populations, with the remarkable exception of Guatemala where their portion is up to forty percent. Even in regions where indigenous ethnic groups form a demographic majority (e.g., Comarca Ngäbre-Buglé, Talamanca Bribri or the region around Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas), they normally represent a social minority today.

## The Historical Context

During the Republican era (1821 to present), Euro-American liberalism has wanted to wake up the 'sleeping landscapes' of Central America in order to develop the supposedly backward region through profitable investments. In rural areas, estab-

lishment of a plantation economy and the associated expulsion of ancient Indian<sup>1</sup> landowners created a need to save their “original” cultures. Often, indigenous peoples were regarded as survivors of primitive societies (Sapper 1900b: 251-75) or as last evidence of an American antiquity (Squier 1860). Objects and data collected about them were thus thought to form part of a global library composed by European museums, archives and universities. According to the standards of a unipolar modernity, they were to be used later for research on the unenlightened ‘others’ of pre-industrial times.

However, the self-destruction of nineteenth-century evolutionary utopias and distortions of unregulated globalization have left present-day Central America in an ambivalent situation. In Europe and North America, there are numerous Americanist collections that have been separated from their regions of origin without having been adequately investigated. In addition to archaeological and ethnographic compilations, they also include numerous linguistic records. Due to their decontextualization, they were long considered inaccessible and have been studied primarily from the perspective of art history or museum acquisition.



**Figure 1:** Itinerary and whereabouts of Walter Lehmann on his first journey across Central America (1907-1909). The black squares show the places where the German scholar conducted linguistic archival studies. In contrast, the white squares mark the locations of his own linguistic recordings. The white circles show archaeological sites excavated by Walter Lehmann. Map: Courtesy of Künne and Mackenbach (2019: 9).

<sup>1</sup> In Latin America the term ‘Indian’ describes a tribute relationship that existed between landlord and servant until the liberal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century

## The Exploratory Journey

Since the end of the twentieth century, long-term studies, new analytical approaches, alternative techniques of investigation, and digitalization have made it possible to analyze forgotten data collections of the past from a transdisciplinary point of view. At the center of the restitution project presented in this chapter are several linguistic compilations embedded in Walter Lehmann's magnum opus, *Die Sprachen Zentral-Amerikas* (The Languages of Central America; 1920). The underlying historical material is preserved in Berlin at the Ibero-American Institute. Most re-edited data originate from a research voyage that led the German scientist through all seven Central American countries (with the exception of Belice) and Mexico between 1907 and 1909 (Künne 2003: 155-75).

Although his itinerary followed mainly the paths along which pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures were assumed to have expanded (Künne and Noack 2014: 7-31), Lehmann also visited the Bribri and Cabécar in the highlands of Chirripó, the Maleku on Río Frío (Costa Rica), the Sutiava of León, the Mangue of Monimbó, the Sumu-Mayagna on Río Coco, the Miskitu of Cabo Gracias a Dios, the Rama on Rama Key (Nicaragua), the Lenca of Chilanga, the Matagalpa of Cacaoopera and the Pipil of Izalco (El Salvador). In order to link his linguistic recordings to those of previous travelers, the young German followed in the footsteps of C. Hermann Berendt (Mangue), Carl Sapper (Chirripó, Sumu), Bernhard A. Thiel (Bribri, Maleku) and missionaries from the Moravian Church (Miskitu). As such, Lehmann's linguistic documentation was based on models that originally had been formulated for Indo-European languages (Müller 1879; Sievers 1881; Thalbitzer 1904; Schmidt 1907).

In the field, however, he used the *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen* (Guide to Scientific Observations on Travels; Neumayer 1906) and the *Tabelle zur Aufnahme südamerikanischer Sprachen* (Table for Recording South American Languages; Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde zu Berlin [n.d.]). The questionnaires contained in the latter booklet elicit vocabulary related to the natural environment, social organization and everyday life. In addition, it solicits different word classes and inflection patterns. For his interviews, the young linguist looked for informants who were of advanced age or had good knowledge of Spanish. Among his indigenous contacts were shamans and graduates of catholic seminaries, as well as craftsmen, rubber collectors and plantation workers. The interviews that he conducted with them demonstrate a structured or semi-structured character. All data were recorded during short-term stays (Bribri, Maleku, Rama) or repeated visits (Sutiava, Pipil). In addition to lexical information, Lehmann also

collected text fragments (Paya), prayers (Sutiava), dirges (Chirripó), fairy tales (Miskitu) and indigenous dance plays (Güegüence).



**Figure 2:** The historical photo was taken in the Salvadoran village of Chilanga (Departamento de Morazán) visited by Walter Lehmann on 12 and 13 August 1909. It shows the young linguist in the circle of his indigenous interview partners. In his right hand there is the questionnaire he used for the recording of the searched vocabulary. Photo: Courtesy of the Ethnological Museum Berlin.

## The Original Edition

The materials compiled by Lehmann have been published in two volumes, which together comprise 1,090 pages. They were conceptualized as the final part of a trilogy dedicated to the archaeology, ethnography and linguistics of Central America. In order to show the region's cultural interactions with Mesoamerica, the German scholar placed special emphasis on the comparative aspect of his language study. From a geographical perspective, the publication is composed of three sections describing the languages of southern (Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica), central (Nicaragua, Honduras) and northwestern (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala) Central America, respectively.

At the same time, the Berlin linguist typologically distinguished between seven language groups, which do not always correspond to the territorial organization of his publication. They include the Garífuna,<sup>2</sup> Barbacoa, Aruáco, Chocó, Chibcha, Mangue and Nahua language families. Each further breaks down into

<sup>2</sup> Designations of indigenous languages and ethnicities follow the terms applied by Lehmann and often reproduce traditional names and spellings of the twentieth century. In this context, 'Paya' corresponds to modern 'Pech', 'Jicaque' stands for contemporary 'Tolan' and 'Pipil' refers to present-day 'Nawat'.

several linguistic branches. Paying special attention to the Chibcha group, Lehmann was the first to combine Sumu-Mayagna, Miskitu and Matagalpa into a subfamily of its own, which he called Misumalpa. The last language group that he cataloged consisted of those languages (Xinca, Lenca, Paya and Jicaque) that at the beginning of the twentieth century were considered unclassifiable.

Although the analytical and interpretative focus of Lehmann's compilation is on Mesoamerican languages of the northern Pacific region (280 pages), the Chibcha (410 pages) and especially the Misumalpa (190 additional pages) languages occupy the largest space of his study. For Lehmann, the Chibcha group included Cuna-Cueva and the languages of the Talamanca, the Costa Rican highlands, the Maleku on Río Frío and the Rama on Río San Juan. His own documentation is accompanied by records of other explorers who worked on indigenous languages of the Central American isthmus during the same period (C. Hermann Berendt, Philipp Valentini, Daniel G. Brinton, Ephraim G. Squier, William M. Gabb, Henri F. Pittier, Otto Stoll). In addition, the German scientist included in his publication numerous vocabularies that were recorded by Moravian missionaries or Central American researchers. Among them are the lexical compilations of Georg Reinke Heath (Miskitu), the word lists of Alfonso Valle (Matagalpa) and the notes of Eustorijo [?] Calderón (Xinca and Lenca). Although Lehmann's linguistic opus is thus uniquely rich in material, it is only available in a few German-language copies. It has never been translated into English or Spanish and is not available in Central America itself.

## The Consulted Sources

Restitution of Lehmann's linguistic material was based on a quantitative study (Künne 2012) of his complete *Nachlass*, now at the Ibero-American Institute. In light of these holdings, Lehmann's legacy is among the most extensive of all German antiquarians and anthropologists. The examined materials are arranged according to major geographical area and incorporate numerous compilations related to other researchers (Paul Ehrenreich, Eduard Seler). Lehmann's American Archive includes, in addition to Central America, records on South America (Andean region and lowlands), Mexico (Central Highlands and Yucatán Peninsula) and North America (USA and Canada).



His Central American collection consists of nine capsules, which are arranged by country and contain archival material with information on paleography, linguistics, archaeology, ethnography and regional studies. The holdings consist of personal writings (notes, letters and postcards, notebooks and diaries), research manuscripts (lists, lectures, travel reports, work manuscripts, transcriptions), a library and a picture archive (negatives, photos, copies, rubbings, sketches, cuttings), as well as a map index. While almost fifty percent of the archival materials contained in Lehmann's *Nachlass* represent pictorial sources, around forty percent of the holdings examined by the authors consist of ordered and loose notes.

An additional thesaurus comprises 201 containers, which, in turn, are arranged thematically (geography, linguistics, archaeology, ethnography, regional studies). The linguistic material contained therein comes from source studies on indigenous populations, either as reported in colonial times or from long-distance travels that led Lehmann and other collectors to modern ethnic groups of Central America. Although their linguistic methodology and recording techniques only partially corresponded to European scientific standards at that time, the resulting materials are often the only historical sources available on the languages in question.

## The Importance of Walter Lehmann's Linguistic Work

Lehmann aimed to reconstruct the cultural history of Central and Mesoamerica based on the geographic distribution and extension of indigenous languages, using regional source materials from the pre-Hispanic era. He worked with the awareness that he may have been documenting and classifying the indigenous languages of the region for the last time before their disappearance.

In this context, his principal linguistic opus stands out by virtue of the extent (Bribri, Rama) and systematic structure of the material presented (phonetics, morphology, syntax and lexis), the inclusion of manuscripts and publications by other authors (William M. Gabb, Bernhard A. Thiel, Henri F. Pittier, Alphonse Pinart), the discussion of colonial sources (Manuel M. de Peralta, León Fernández), numerous notes on almost-extinct languages (Cacaopera, Chilanga, Sutiava) and the reliability of the typological conclusions drawn (Misumalpa, Rama and Maleku). His representation of Chibcha languages was largely based on living speakers, whose languages he recorded during short-term visits and repeated consultations. In this regard,

Lehmann's historic edition clearly surpasses the competing compilations of Albert Gatschet (1900: 87-92) and Cyrus Thomas and John R. Swanton (1911), who worked in the same region simultaneously.

## The Restitution Project

Critical preparation and restitution of the German antiquarian's linguistic records (Lehmann 1920) focused on those compilations in which the countries of origin had a particular interest. The authors assumed that such interests were present if several regional actors (e.g., ministries, museums, universities, indigenous groups, non-governmental organizations) expressed a desire to maintain and preserve an endangered cultural tradition.

Such was the case with data that Lehmann had recorded on the Rama language (Nicaragua) from 8 to 18 March 1909. Currently, the language is only spoken by around 50 people living on the island of Rama Cay in the Bahía de Bluefields (Craig 1987: 10-15). Most of the German linguist's materials originate from interviews conducted in Rama Cay, as well as in Bluefields. His linguistic corpus comprises 1,604 lexical entries (Lehmann 1914), which are accompanied by ethnographic commentaries and supplemented by a short grammar. This work constitutes the historical core of a dictionary on modern Rama (see <<http://www.turkuka.net>>), which Colette Grinevald and Maricela Kauffmann (2011: 227-46) have been developing since 1985. Initiated at the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) their *Proyecto Lengua Rama* (PLR) was continued at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) and the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU). Editing process included transcription, translation, digitalization and revision of Lehmann's historical lexemes. To this day, no other materials from the German linguist have been so attentively integrated into modern science.

Lehmann's Rama corpus treated by the authors (Künne and Mackenbach 2019: 703-56), in comparison, contains 1,175 entries that are supplemented with critical annotations and historical reports. They should shed light on the antiquarians working conditions and his concept of American culture history. Among them are a translation of Lehmann's travel report (1910) and commented extracts from his notebooks and travel diaries (Künne 2011: 81-171). They illustrate the scholar's networks and have been edited by the Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y

Centroamérica (IHNCA) of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) (Künne and Navarro 2011). In addition, the latter publication was presented at a scientific symposium held in 2011 and at a public meeting of the indigenous community of Mozote (Departamento Nueva Segovia).

Special interest in restitution of Lehmann's linguistic records was also assumed by the authors if significant political actors in the countries of origin expressed interest in revitalizing cultural traditions that were already extinct. This situation applies to the data that Lehmann recorded on the Sutiava language in the Nicaraguan town León, from 21 to 28 November 1908 as well as on 10 and 11 June 1909. Although the language was spoken by about 200 people in 1899 (Sapper 1901: 29), Lehmann met only 25 to 30 native speakers during his field studies (Lehmann 1920: 917). His recordings include 892 lexical entries that are based on interviews with Victoria Carrillo, Bernardo Suazo and Ángela Vásquez. The Berlin antiquarian also recorded many regionalisms and toponyms that nowadays appear to Nicaraguan Spanish but were borrowed originally from Mangue or Sutiava languages (Künne 2012).

Although the Sutiava language is extinct at present, the community of the same name preserves a living, commemorative culture related to its Indian past. In this context, the district of Sutiava founded a regional museum, which documents the area's earlier political autonomy (until 1902) and cultural specificity. Its efforts toward social emancipation were supported by the IHNCA-UCA with the restoration, annotation and edition of the *Títulos Reales*, which documented the land rights of the Sutiava community (Rizo 1999).

Maintenance of local cultural traditions, in contrast, is represented by the community's efforts to revitalize the region's original language. The revitalization project is supported by the Consejo de Ancianos and forms part of annual processions in honor of San Jerónimo. These festivities take place annually on 29-30 September and include traditional dances and plays performed by neighborhood groups. Although the specific texts, costumes and movements of ancient dances have been largely forgotten, a modern tradition has been created from remembered fragments by the formerly indigenous community, which after the turn of the millennium extended to the entire urban area (Künne and Vannini 2010: 50-51). The linguistic materials prepared by the restitution project were presented to the municipality of Sutiava and published at the IHNCA-UCA (Künne and Navarro 2011).

An additional, important criterion for linguistic restitution was the representativeness of the selected materials from Lehmann's linguistic work. His records of the Rama language were the subject of his doctoral dissertation at the then-Royal

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Lehmann 1914), whereas his studies on Sutiava comprised the topic of his first habilitation treatise (Lehmann 1915). In documenting the Rama, Lehmann wanted to register the individual language as completely as possible. Working at the beginning of the twentieth century the German scientist was able to rely on a functioning social system and a language that was largely alive. His recordings followed strict linguistic criteria and largely renounced special diacritical signs. The language of Sutiava, on the other hand, was treated as evidence for cross-cultural contacts and pre-Hispanic migrations. Most recorded data, in this case, are based on linguistic fragments whose treatment often follows comparative criteria and cultural-historical speculations.



**Figure 3:** In 1920 Walter Lehmann published the linguistic results of his first research travel in a comparative study, which appeared in an edition of 400 copies. His *Opus Magnum* consists of two volumes and a colored linguistic map based on his own records and the fieldwork of C.H. Berendt, W. Gabb, G.R. Heath, F. Pittier, C. Sapper, O. Stoll and B. Thiel. Photo: Courtesy of Künne and Mackenbach (2019: 827).

The preliminary endpoint of our restitution project was the re-edition of selected chapters from Lehmann's magnum opus, *The Languages of Central America* (1920), that are dedicated to the Chibcha languages spoken in Panama and Costa Rica. The prepared materials comprise Sections VIII (pp. 96-142), IX (pp. 143-177) and X (pp. 178-356) of the original publication, as well as the chapters on the Maleku (pp. 375-415) and Rama (pp. 416-61) languages. In this context, the restitution project's main focus was on Lehmann's systematic records of the Bribri (pp. 307-33) and Maleku (pp. 380-91) languages, including the accompanying grammars. The German researcher integrated his re-edited materials into his linguistic-ethnographic analysis of Spanish relations, which describes the territorial organization of indigenous groups during the early colonial period. Although the ethnogenesis of the

Bribri and Maleku groups has been a long and conflicting process, it seems that there may be several cross-references going back to that remote era (Künne and Arias 2019: 21-63).

The revised records were summarized in a monograph and supplemented by an additional introductory critical commentary. All sections were published by the Cátedra Wilhelm y Alexander von Humboldt en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales at the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) (Künne and Mackenbach 2019). The editors and authors presented the same volume at an international symposium held in San José de Costa Rica that was dedicated to the work of Alexander von Humboldt, German ethnology and the linguistic opus of Lehmann (Mackenbach 2019: 11-17). Additionally, the event was designed as an alumni seminar of the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service; DAAD), with speakers and scholarship holders in attendance from all countries of Central America and Colombia.

Wherever possible, the restitution project tried to address research desiderata in modern linguistics as well. In the depots of the Ibero-American Institute, Künne and Arias came across unpublished material that merits further research, including records of dialects of the Bribri language. Currently, these sources are being analyzed by Julio Arias as part of his Master's thesis at UCR. Lehmann's linguistic documentation also includes unedited settlement plans and demographic registers of the Costa Rican Bishop Bernhard A. Thiel that refer to the Maleku on Río Frío. Finally, the restitution project found the oldest extant record of the Nicaraguan dance *El Güeguence o Macho Ratón*. The Spanish text, written in 1867, stems from Masatepe (Meseta de los Pueblos) and includes many loan words and parts of sentences taken from the Nahuat-Nicarao language. The comedy with its 14 pieces of accompanying music are performed each year between 17 and 27 January and have been included in UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2005.

## The Project's Feasibility

Lehmann's linguistic work can be understood both through its specific professional arrangement and through its integration into scientific networks of his time (Künne and Vannini 2010). With the researcher's first journey as a point of departure, the

restitution project wants to examine his linguistic as well as his historical, ethnographical and antiquarian interests. In this way, the project's methodology differs from many other cataloging endeavors dedicated exclusively to objects of material culture. Given the quantity of collections and actors at play, cataloging projects often emphasize a comparative perspective to visualize how scientific interests, discourses and networks intertwine.

The re-edited texts can be read on professional, literary and discursive levels. Thus, in addition to linguistic analyses, they also allow insights into the societies of their respective authors and their interactions with Central American interest groups. While Lehmann traveled across a semi-mythological landscape constituted by his own education (Künne 2011: 81-171), Sapper felt during his extensive walking tours that he was being transported back to the prehistoric era of human history (Sapper 1900a: 1-8). Many Central American liberals, for their part, wanted to dispose of the region's Indian past as quickly as possible because cultural diversity was seen as an obstacle to the development of a modern society. By crystallizing the researchers' different points of view, our project's approach can show the extent to which contemporary reflections continue to be shaped by the assumptions of the nineteenth century.

Selection of texts and their professional preparation were designed to begin at the margins of Lehmann's linguistic work before advancing to the center. Initially, we evaluated the feasibility of the project's plans according to the authenticity, volume and verifiability of the materials to be indexed. Further criteria included accessibility of the original records and contextual information accompanying them. Consultation of Lehmann's *Nachlass* was particularly helpful in formally structuring our work with the materials, interpreting gaps in documentation or clarifying contradictory statements. In this regard, the 1920 edition represents a published manuscript, rather than a study that has been completed in terms of content and style.

Translating the German original into Spanish caused especial difficulties given the excessive style of Lehmann's cultural-historical discussions. Lehmann intended the complex syntax of his sentences to present the greatest amount of information possible at a single glance. This stylistic concept is reminiscent both of German idealism's philosophical treatises and of the *Schauprinzip* (literally 'exhibition principle') practiced by cultural-historical museology at the time. Like Lehmann's run-on sentences and lexical charts, *Schauprinzip*-based museum exhibits presented as many objects as possible in a single cabinet, without having previously classified them according to time, form, function or decoration. Furthermore, the

Berlin antiquarian supplemented his reflections with numerous excerpts, quotations and annotations, which he did not always identify. His extraordinarily extensive and detailed footnotes almost represent a parallel text. Additional excursions in foreign languages, frequent use of Latinisms, repetitions of content and the semantic ambivalence of many sentences also attest to the unfinished nature of the 1920 publication.

The graphic reproduction of Lehmann's phonetic transcriptions also posed a significant challenge. At the time of his first research expedition, there were no generally accepted standards for transcribing the indigenous languages of the Americas. Therefore, the young German scholar developed his own phonetic model, which he thought would enable him to register all indigenous languages spoken on the continents. His framework attempted to represent consonants and vowels as precisely as possible, always starting from their articulatory dimensions. In total, Lehmann's transcription conventions distinguish a total of 122 consonantal and 44 vowel sounds. They are illustrated by a multitude of diacritics based on elements from the Latin alphabet. His scheme, which also engaged with the older works of C. Hermann Berendt (1869) and Pater Wilhelm Schmidt (1907), can be understood as a parallel development with the North American Phonetic Alphabet (NAPA) and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which today are considered the standard alphabets of modern linguistics (Arias 2019: 77-87).

Despite of the original print edition's oversize dimensions and large number of tables, we have maintained the revised records' graphic design as close as possible to the original publication. Thus, the historicity of the contents will become visible even simply through their specific, formal representation.

The restitution project had to be undertaken in several stages, due to precarious funding and the large quantity of unremunerated labor required. The project's working conditions also placed increased demands on the enthusiasm, technical expertise and professional security of all cooperative partners. Another factor that proved difficult to calculate was the political feasibility and financial viability of publications, conferences and meetings planned in association with the project in order to present the re-edited material in public spaces where they could reach broader audiences.

Despite its generally uncertain framework, however, the long-term project could always count on the support of the DAAD, the Cátedra Wilhelm y Alexander von Humboldt and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs as represented by its embassies in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Without their reliable aid, our many years of work not would have been possible. In Nicaragua and Costa Rica, the IHNCA, the

Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica (CIDCA) (both originally situated at the UCA), as well as the Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de América Central (CIHAC) at UCR deserve many thanks. They always have supported the individual components of this project with all the resources at their disposal. Additionally, the Colegio de Costa Rica promoted the translation of Lehmann's Costa Rican compilations with a grant. In Granada, Nicaragua, the Casa de Tres Mundos supported the project logistically as well.

## The Conditions of Reception

Many actors involved in the project defined themselves as mediators between disciplines, regions and epochs, rather than as exclusive experts. In addition to European scholars such as the two authors of this article, they always included researchers (Margarita Vannini, Rigoberto Navarro, Julio Arias, Mario Rizo, Danilo Salamanca, Diego Quesada, Maricela Kauffman, María D. Torres) and translators (Mario Urtecho, Alvaro Rivas) from the region under study. Their shared interests united behind critical preparation of Lehmann's linguistic materials for local teaching and research and in its submission to the respective indigenous communities.

In this regard, one of the editors most important tasks was to embed the prepared materials into their historical context and to show the framework, persons and interests behind the records. With this approach, we wanted to indicate the strengths and failings of the materials and to counteract their possible romanticization.

In Central America itself, the restitution project has encountered different discourses about the region's cultural and historical past. In nations with mestizo state policies (Nicaragua, Guatemala), our re-edition of Lehmann's material wants to pay tribute not only to the original author's outstanding work, but also to the cultural achievements of socially underprivileged indigenous groups. In these nations, the prepared data can be used for emancipatory claims based on the special role that they document for indigenous populations. In nations that define themselves as largely European (Costa Rica, El Salvador), on the other hand, the project is more likely to be associated with efforts to visualize the pluricultural roots of Central America and the transculturality of modern societies.



In both cases, the restitution project aims to enable critical examination of the respective nations' histories by showing their connections to international processes of knowledge production, distribution and reception. From this perspective, the authors hope to contribute to the reunification of the globally scattered collections left behind by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In doing so, "lost" compilations from the past may support a historiography or a commemorative culture that is based on the perspectives of indigenous actors themselves.

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# Benin Dialogue and World Heritage – Antagonistic Positions and Prospects?

*Silvia Dolz\**

## Preliminary Remarks

In my many years of provenance research on the collections preserved in the ethnographic museums of Saxony, it has been important to regularly revisit a number of fundamental issues that extend beyond the question of origin, such as trans-cultural meanings and rights of disposal over these museum collections. We are currently engaged in highly contentious discourse, sometimes involving radical positions, about the (il)legality of these collections, restitution or even challenges to the very existence of museums with translocal collections. But no setting other than the museum offers such a concentrated, intense and comprehensive means of experiencing what characterizes humanity and appreciating the diversity of human culture. It is therefore impossible to over-emphasize the importance of one of the most significant insights gained from the study of the world's cultures: namely, that there is not only one way of understanding the world, nor only one formation of universal consciousness, and that a multivalent process of (trans)cultural interaction has been underway since time immemorial (Mbembe 2016: 59-60, 2017: 182-193, in particular 186-187 and 190; Juneja 2012: 6-12 and lecture in 2015). The aforesaid museums and their collections stand at the junctures between these different worldviews and knowledge traditions. It is precisely there that knowledge and responsibility, appreciation and respect, develop; and it is there that we not only constantly address questions of provenance, but also recognize the multiple perspectives that endow cultural assets with different meanings, and where we actively further the process of decolonization. For it is indeed this extensive and in-

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depth knowledge of the objects and their history and contexts that clearly shows just how important it is to dismantle power hierarchies and to bring cultures, and hence people, into dialogue with each other, irrespective of boundaries.

The starting point is the material cultural artifact with its multiple meanings and purposes, in both its original and its external contexts and knowledge systems. How and why do functions and meanings change? What culture-specific concepts exist of tradition and preservation, as well as of reflection? The same applies to the contrasting concepts of earthly transience and non-preservation (impermanence as part of the circle of life, value depreciation due to functional loss) or concepts of exclusion. What we are almost always concerned with is the question of the interdependence of culture and cultures, which is revealed through the history of relationships between human communities and between individual people. When investigating the changing biographies of museum objects, we never look only at their original local or regional context, but always consider their global context as well; this consideration includes the histories of specific collections and institutions. Challenging the legitimacy of museums with translocal collections would be to call into question the encyclopedic knowledge acquired by generations, and it would mean enormously restricting opportunities for remembrance, discussion and fruitful exchange between cultures.

## Positions

By the time the *Königliches Zoologisches und Anthropologisch-Ethnographisches Museum* (Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographic Museum) was established in the Dresden Zwinger between 1875 and 1878, a large collection of 'exotic' non-European artifacts had already long been held at the Saxon court, in the *Kunst-kammer* (Cabinet of Curiosities) and the *Rüst-kammer* (Armoury). Among the most remarkable objects was a group of decorative spoons which had entered the collection in 1590. They were later identified as Afro-Portuguese ivories from the eastern part of the Guinea coast, in modern Nigeria (Dolz 2010: 66). These exotic works of art served to enhance the prestige of European princes; with the broadening of geographical perceptions of the world at the threshold of the modern era in Europe, they also began to assume importance in a scholarly context as cultural artifacts

from distant civilizations (Dolz 2017: 21-34). Hence, these early objects of global cultural transfer became evidence of a diversified cultural perspective.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, museum collections were greatly expanded as a result of the colonial partitioning of the world. The conquest and colonization of Nigeria by Britain led to violent looting of treasures from the Kingdom of Benin in 1897. Between 1898 and 1904, Arthur Baessler (1857-1907), patron of the Dresden Ethnographical Collection, purchased an assortment of objects from London-based dealer William Downing Webster (1868-1913) and donated them to the Dresden museum. The collection included sculptures, relief plaques, ritual instruments, jewelry, vessels, stools and chairs made of brass, ivory and wood.

In 1899-1900, the Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum of Ethnology) in Leipzig, another important Saxon ethnographical museum which had been founded in 1869, received Benin objects from its patron, geographer and publisher Hans Meyer (1858-1929), who had likewise obtained them from various dealers in the UK. Fifty-three of the objects, which had previously been looted by the British in Benin City, were given to the Leipzig museum on permanent loan, including memorial heads and relief plaques made of brass. After the reunification of the two German states in 1990, Meyer's heirs demanded that this collection be returned to them. The Free State of Saxony purchased it from the heirs with the assistance of other sponsors, such as the German Federal Cultural Foundation, to keep the collection together and preserve it for the public (Göbel et al. 2002).

But to return to Dresden: In the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a change in research focus at the Ethnographical Museum in the Dresden Zwinger under its new Director, Arnold Jacobi (1870-1948, Director from 1906 to 1936). The Darwinist-evolutionist approach that had been favored by the Museum's founder, Adolph Bernhard Meyer (1840-1911), was superseded by new theories of complex cultural development through 'migration, diffusion and superimposition' throughout the world, taking into account the intimate interdependency of nature and humanity. On this basis, Jacobi began expanding and restructuring the collections according to cultural-geographic regions. His stated intention was that the exhibition should not merely present, but also elevate and accentuate the cultural achievements of humanity in all parts of the world. His aim was therefore to "fill in major gaps and cover entirely new areas; expanding the collections to create a medium-sized museum about humanity living at an autonomous level of civilization would be the task for the coming decades" (Jacobi 1925: 52). Hence, in the early twentieth century, the purchase of the Benin collection for Dresden served as part

of a remarkable new style of exhibition that was designed to reflect the diverse cultural development of the world (Fig. 1). Although reference is made here specifically to Dresden, similar developments took place in many European museums; for this phenomenon, there is hardly a more fitting description for this phenomenon than the statement by Bénédicte Savoy (2018: 48), a scholar who specializes in processes of cultural translocation: “The museum is, or at least it long was, the setting for physical encounters with foreign worlds, the archive of human creativity, one of those places where history prepares the way for the future.”



**Figure 1:** ‘Benin showcase’ in the Zwinger, Anthropologisch-Ethnologisches Museum Dresden, c. 1910. Source: Archive of the Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

From 1909-10, the works of art from Benin that were on display in the Dresden Zwinger attracted the attention of *avant-garde* ‘Brücke’ artists, above all Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Of particular interest for modern artists of the period were questions relating to artistic representation of space and perspective, as well as life and movement in unfamiliar forms of artistic expression. But their engagement with these objects went beyond the mere perception of forms; what mattered was the essence of existence, even life itself (Dalbajewa and Bischoff 2001: 41-45), which associated European artist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner with the African masters of Benin who, through their works, created a meaningful manifestation of their own universe (Fig. 2a, 2b).





**Figure 2a:** Relief plaque depicting the *Oba* with companions, Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria, sixteenth to eighteenth century, brass, 43 x 40 cm, Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photo: Eva Winkler.



**Figure 2b:** Drawing by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1911, pencil, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Source: Dolz 2018: 150.

Starting in the early thirteenth century, the territory of modern Benin City, located in today's Nigerian state of Edo, was the local center of the Eweka dynasty, whose head bore the title of *Oba*. According to legend, this dynasty had genealogical connections with the holy city of Ife, 200 km away, and its founders in Yorubaland (Igbafe 2007: 43-44). In the fifteenth century, the Kingdom of Benin underwent a period of social and political restructuring. During the period of the 'warrior kings' particularly during the reign of Ewuare the Great (1440-1472), the city, whose name had been changed from Ubini to Edo (Igbafe 2007: 46-47), developed into a center of trade and consumption of luxury goods, with links to territories to the north and west inhabited by the Nupe and Hausa, as well as to the cities of Owo, Eko (Lagos) and Ouidah, and even to the distant Ashanti region.

The first European to reach Edo (today's Benin City) was João Afonso d'Aveiro in 1486 (Egharevba 1968: 26; Ryder 1969: 24-32). He established a mercantile relationship which promoted trade and economic development, in addition to enhancing the prestige of the *Oba*. Moreover, this connection reinforced the dominant position of the *Oba* in the region by providing support in the form of Portuguese soldiers equipped with modern weapons. This connection led to a wide-ranging and long-term process of cultural exchange. The most sustainable effect resulted from the import of copper and brass ingots – often in the form of rings known as *manillas* – most of which were made in Birmingham (Roth 1903: 5). They were not only a valuable means of exchange; they were also a highly desirable raw material which enabled the art of metal casting at the royal court of Benin to flourish as never before (Ryder 1969: 40).

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the sphere of influence of the kings of Benin extended over an area measuring approximately 100,000 square kilometers. In that period, their capital city, which incorporated the palace quarter, residential districts and extensive ramparts, saw considerable growth. It was regarded as a focal point in which the sacred and the profane were united, a space in which worldly existence connects with the hereafter; hence, it was considered the center of the universe (Roese 1991: 405-418). Very few of the original mud houses with an atrium and impluvium have survived, one exception being the Ogiamien Palace, the residence of a historical dignitary that was founded in the twelfth century (Fig. 3). Like the figural stucco decoration on the traditionally constructed gallery walls of the *Oba's* palace complex today, covered verandas constructed here during various periods were originally embellished with figural reliefs made of metal (Dapper 1670/1967: 486) (Fig. 4). The form of the buildings in the palace quarter has significantly changed and, apart from the more than two-meter high wall featuring a clay

relief pattern, they now blend into the modern city, which features many palatial villas, high-rise buildings and large churches, and which has prosperous international connections. At the same time, the monumental sculptures made of concrete or metal and set up in public spaces in honor of royalty, the *Oba* and urban dignitaries indicate the importance of such memorials in identity formation (Fig. 5).



**Figure 3:** Historic building in the Ogiamien Complex dating from before 1897, featuring an atrium and impluvium; at the center is an ancestral altar with ancestral staffs and staffs of office, ceremonial swords and stool, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.



**Figure 4:** Stucco relief depicting an Oba, Oba Palace, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.



**Figure 5:** Sculptural group depicting an *Oba* with companions and leopards, concrete, Benin City, Oba Market, 2013. Photo: the author.

Following the deportation of *Oba* Ovonramwen (reigned ca. 1888-1897) by the British occupiers of Benin, his son Eweka II reestablished the kingship in Benin City in 1914 under the British colonial system of ‘indirect rule’. The palace quarter was rebuilt, the craft guilds reactivated and the royal ancestral altars reassembled. The craft guilds were part of palace society, with their own chiefs who supervised the work and ensured its high quality. The most important guilds included the *Igun Eronmwon* (bronze casters), the *Eronmwon* (iron forgers) and the *Igbesamwun* (ivory and wood carvers). Igun Street in Benin City is still the seat of the bronze casters’ guild, which consists of several large, time-honored family associations and still produces important insignia for royal ceremonies (Fig. 6). As part of an unbroken

tradition, the artworks produced by today's bronze casters still reflect the power of the kingship and the well-being of the *Oba* and society. Many see this tradition as a component of national identity construction for the Edo in the modern state of Nigeria.



**Figure 6:** Entrance to Igun Street, location of the bronze casters' workshops, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.

The insignia newly produced after the colonial conquest of Benin City include ceremonial staffs, swords and masks, as well as ancestral staffs and jewelry (Fig. 7). Every altar dedicated to the memory of a deceased king featured brass heads. In these stylized sculptures, the 'head' is honored as a symbol of creativity, humanity and responsibility. Although these royal ancestral altars are no longer on public view, during an audience at the court it is possible to see the royal attendants or *Omada*<sup>1</sup> who, as weapon and sword-bearers, present the *Ada*. This important symbol of sovereignty signifies both worldly authority and spiritual association with the royal ancestors. The ceremonial objects are subject to unchanged design codes, and the high quality of the products is both a matter of honor and an incentive to continue. Awareness of their historical and spiritual associations means that none of the insignia produced to this day is considered an imitation, despite their being identical in form and execution. Indeed, each object is unique, as they are still produced using the lost wax technique or lost mold casting.

Nowadays, the formerly royal guilds are no longer exclusively tied to the royal court; otherwise, their economic survival would not be guaranteed. Against the background of their ancient connections with royalty, in the twentieth century they began to create new works of art on historical themes. History thus came to be

<sup>1</sup> Audience with *Oba* Erediauwa (1979-2016) on February 19, 2013. Since October 2016, *Oba* Ewuare II has been in office as the 39th king of the Eweka Dynasty.

associated with a new form of iconography, as apparent for example in the famous image of the deportation of *Oba* Ovonramwen, who was captured by the British in 1897 and exiled by boat to Calabar (see Fig. 10). These and other sculptures produced by the bronze casters of Igun Street are not so much items that boost the tourist market as responses to demand among the wealthy in Benin, who often commission life-size busts and highly naturalistic sculptures in memory of deceased individuals or as a prestigious declaration of loyalty to the kingship (Fig. 8).



**Figure 7:** Eben ceremonial sword from the workshop of Johnbull Ekunwe, Igun Street, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.



**Figure 8:** Naturalistic life-size sculpture of a bronze caster's workshop on Igun Street, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.

Such sculptures display economic power and social status. Today, we find both side by side: classical iconography and new, even bizarre developments. The creative work of the bronze casters not only preserves and continues Benin's historical heritage; it remains, in large part, the measure of all things in the artistic life of Benin. The extent to which the products of the bronze casters of Benin City are alive and important to this day is evident when one visits non-court dignitaries of the city.

High Priest Osemwegie Ebohon is a respected figure in society. He describes himself as a "playwriter, poet, historian, antiquarian, journalist, teacher, theater administrator and native doctor" (Ebohon 2012), and, like many people in Benin, he bases his philosophy on occultism (Ebohon 2009-10). He founded the Ebohon

Cultural Centre in Benin City, where the symbolic architectural structures in the grounds include a number of shrines. The High Priest cultivates the tradition of kingship through ceremonial performances by musicians and dancers, thus keeping history alive. The high esteem in which he is held derives from his activities as a “traditional religionist” (i.e., a fortune-teller, healer and magician) using spiritual powers. High Priest Ebohon owns a large private collection of cast brass objects relating to the deities of Benin and to its royal dynasty, which include belt masks, leopard figures, vessels, Osun heads and sculptures depicting members of the royal family and important court dignitaries<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 9). He also runs the Igodo Gallery, where he sells brass sculptures to which he grants the status of consecrated shrine figures or which simply have value as works of art.



**Figure 9:** Brass figures of Benin court culture from the private collection of Chief Osemwegie Ebohon, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.

Like the religious center run by High Priest Ebohon, the compound belonging to Victor Uweifo contributes to cultural awareness at the level of performance, not only carrying on the cultural heritage of Benin, but also constantly renewing it. Professor Sir Victor Uweifo is descended from the royal family and is a national music star, artist, writer and collector. His American-style ‘White House’, which is also open to the public, contains monumental bronze casts that reference historical experiences, such as slavery and the deportation of the royal family (Fig. 10), as well as traumatic events from more recent history, like the execution of Nigerian author and civil rights campaigner Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Visit to the Ebohon Cultural Centre in Benin City, February 20, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Visit to the Uweifo Cultural Centre in Benin City, including a meeting with the artist, February 24, 2013.





**Figure 10:** The deportation of *Oba* Onvonramwen to Calabar in 1897 and a procession of slaves. Contemporary cast sculptures in the private collection of Sir Victor Uweifo, Benin City, 2013. Photo: the author.

Finally, the Benin City National Museum, which was founded in 1976, is an exhibition space that features not only objects relating to the court, but also items of material culture expressing other aspects of life in Benin (music, religion and the mask tradition) and in neighboring cultures. Despite being located in the center of the city, close to the palace area and Igun Street, the museum, which is administered by the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), currently attracts little attention. It holds and exhibits a number of bronze casts relating to the Kingdom, which are modeled on pre-1897 originals held in the extensive National Museum of Nigeria in Lagos.

## Prospects

In 2001, while preparing a research visit to Nigeria, I approached the Nigerian Embassy in Berlin and the Goethe Institute in Lagos in order to establish contacts with colleagues and partners in Nigerian national museums, especially in Lagos, Benin City and Ile Ife. I referred to the Benin collection in Dresden and expressed my desire to exchange ideas about how we could work with this cultural legacy in the future. In Nigeria, I conducted exploratory talks in all three cities concerning the historic kingdoms and their art treasures. My initiative was met with bewilderment, and I was told that there was little chance of any response to my proposals. In Ile

Ife, it was explained to me that just a few weeks before, three valuable bronze heads had been stolen from the Palace Museum of the Oni of Ife; they showed me photographs of the lost objects and asked me to call attention to this matter in European museum circles.

My research eventually led to an exhibition that was on show between 2006 and 2008; it was the first time that the Dresden Benin collection had been displayed since the World War II. The exhibition was entitled *Schätze aus Afrika: Benin. Die Schenkung Baessler* (Treasures from Africa: Benin. The Baessler Gift) (Dolz 2006). The Benin collection in Leipzig, by contrast, has always been on public display in permanent and interim exhibitions, except during periods of construction work or relocation.

At about the same time, my colleague Barbara Plankensteiner, from what was then called the Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum of Ethnology) in Vienna, began working on a remarkable collaborative exhibition project. With institutional and financial support, she succeeded in initiating dialogue with Nigeria and in incorporating numerous works from European museums as well as a number of loans from Nigeria into her exhibition *Benin. Könige und Rituale. Höfische Kunst aus Nigeria* (Benin: Kings and Rituals. Court Arts from Nigeria) (Plankensteiner 2007)<sup>4</sup>. An international conference in Vienna timed to coincide with the opening of this exhibition also provided an opportunity not only to determine the current state of cultural and art historical research, but also to discuss the issue of provenance.

Cultural exchange and joint exhibition projects between Germany and Nigeria had occurred previously. In 1983, the Roemer-Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim, then part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), had hosted the much-acclaimed exhibition *Kunstschätze aus Alt-Nigeria* (Treasures of Ancient Nigeria), organized by Ekpo Eyo, Director of the National Museums of Nigeria, and Frank Willett, Director of the Hunterian Art Gallery of the University of Glasgow. This effort was followed by a German Democratic Republic (GDR) version, organized by Ekpo Eyo and Walter Rusch of the Humboldt University of Berlin and presented in the Pergamon Museum in 1985 under the title, *Schätze aus Alt-Nigeria. Erbe von 2000 Jahren* (Treasures of Ancient Nigeria: The Legacy of 2000 Years) (Eyo and Willett 1983; Eyo and Rusch 1985). Both exhibitions, which were part of a worldwide series extending from San Francisco to Leningrad, focused particularly on the masterpieces held in the Nigerian national museums.

<sup>4</sup> The exhibition was presented in four venues: Vienna, May-September 2007; Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, October-January 2008; Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, February-May 2008; The Art Institute of Chicago, June-September 2008.

In 2010, against the background of successful collaboration on exhibitions, an important workshop took place in Vienna that was to have significant implications for the future. It elevated dialogue on Benin, which had hitherto been conducted only informally, to a new level and raised the prospect of continuity. The topic of the workshop was *New Cultures of Collaboration. Sharing of Collections and Quest for Restitution: The Benin Case*. In addition to state representatives of the Nigerian NCMM, it was attended by representatives of the Royal Court of Benin. This newly initiated Benin Dialogue involved European museums with important collections of Benin objects, notably those in Vienna, London, Berlin, Dresden/Leipzig, Stockholm and Leiden. The main purpose of the meeting was to create transparency and promote trustful relationships while exchanging specific ideas for collaboration. For this purpose, it was decided to establish an inventory of Benin objects held in important museum collections outside Africa.

In October 2011, the second meeting of the Benin Dialogue Group (BDG) took place at the Berlin Ethnological Museum. An initial survey showed that there are approximately 50 to 60 museum, university and private collections around the world that hold objects from Benin, among them the BASA Museum (Bonner Amerikas-Sammlung, Bonn Collections of the Americas) at the University of Bonn with two similar, small bronze objects (Grana-Behrens 2019: 174-175, 314). The historical contexts of the collections belonging to participating museums were presented at this meeting to enable the Nigerian partners to appreciate the complexity of specific national and legal conditions affecting the states involved. In Germany, as in other countries, these conditions include the declaration of state museum collections as 'national treasures', of which one important consequence is that they cannot be sold and must be preserved for and kept accessible to the public. The Nigerian side requested expert know-how and support for improving museum conditions in Nigeria, as well as assistance with training museum professionals, to facilitate the exchange of collections and exhibitions in future. At the same time, the NCMM agreed to enhance professional education opportunities in Nigeria to enable the national museums to develop into public centers of education and research.

The third meeting took place in Benin City on 19 and 20 February 2013, the days of remembrance of the invasion of Benin City during the British punitive expedition of 1897. The impact of this event was also felt at the meeting, and there was a spirit of confidence and pride in the cultural and political renewal taking place in Edo State and Benin City. A Benin Plan of Action was approved and a Memorandum of Understanding signed. By then, the participating European museums had com-

pleted their databases of their holdings of Benin objects, which were submitted to the Nigerian partners. Little progress had so far been made on the Nigerian side in training museum professionals, but they remained conscious of their responsibility. Legal guidance during the talks was provided by Professor Folarin Shyllon from the University of Ibadan, Faculty of Law, who informed the participants about the Nigerian national and the international legal conditions and possibilities for exchange and restitution.

During the fourth meeting in March 2017, held in Cambridge, England, the circle of participants was expanded through the addition of important British museum partners. Furthermore, the group decided upon important working steps and, above all, the group initiated a project for an exhibition to be held in Benin City, in which objects from European museums will be displayed.<sup>5</sup> At the subsequent meeting in Leiden in October 2018, the planned joint exhibition for Benin City took further shape with the presentation of the plan to erect a new museum close to the royal palace. Further significant steps included the establishment of a steering committee, co-chaired by Barbara Plankensteiner from the Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt (Ethnological Museum) in Hamburg and Prince Gregory Akenzua from the Benin Court, as well as the appointment of a secretary to improve coordination of the group's work.

The most recent meeting of the international BDG was held in early July 2019, again in Benin City. It took place at the invitation of the Governor of Edo State, Godwin Nogheghase Obaseki. The renowned British architect David Adjaye has been commissioned to design the new Palace Museum. The decision to build this new cultural center of national importance was announced with joy and pride by the Edo State Government. David Adjaye, who has been involved with constructing numerous museums all over the world, and the BDG participants discussed how to connect the new museum with research on the history and archaeology of Benin City with historical crafts and arts, and above all with the vibrant contemporary art scene, as well as how these different aspects could be blended together. As a result, Adjaye also plans to create a sculpture park at the new museum for presenting works by contemporary Benin artists. The Palace Museum is due to open in 2021 or 2022.

<sup>5</sup> British Museum partners included representatives of the Horniman Museum in London, the Museum for Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Cambridge and the Pitt Rivers Museum of the University of Oxford. A new German partner also joined, the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (Museum at the Rothenbaum – Cultures and Art of the World, MARKK) in Hamburg. The Musée du Quai Branly in Paris sent an observer.

## Antagonism?

Through a respectful and cooperative process of rapprochement and understanding, important progress has been made in handling the art treasures that were looted from Nigeria 122 years ago. As a result, a new type of museum is to be created in Nigeria, for which a foundation will be responsible and which will be managed by various national stakeholders. In response to its requests, the Nigerian side will also receive support and guidance from a national and international advisory board. This new museum promises to become a modern, safe and attractive public place in Benin City. It will be the place where Benin's cultural heritage, housed in various institutions around the world, will be made accessible on a rotating basis to the people of Benin City, Edo State and Nigeria. As with culture and art in many African states, it is especially important to the younger participants from Benin City that modern reinterpretations of these objects and items of intangible heritage, in addition to historical cultural and artistic assets, should be given a firmly established and esteemed place in preservation, presentation and performance.

These items of intangible heritage include speech, music and dance, as well as photography and film as New Media. The Arts and Crafts School, founded as early as about 1925 by *Oba* Eweka II, not only ensured preservation of a great heritage, but also promoted its creative development. In addition, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Benin City has been producing confident generations of artists for decades. Conscious of the fact that they are building on the pillars of an important African legacy and cultural heritage that is also respected and appreciated in many non-African museums, these artists are developing their creativity and shaping their identity. In this context, the issue of restitution of material cultural heritage is an important one for Nigeria, as for other countries in Africa. But it is neither the most important nor the only matter of concern, because in the context of newly kindled awareness of cultural heritage and of cultural and artistic creativity, heritage and art combine many ideas and expectations in Africa. In Benin City, Governor Obaseki says, people are conscious that culture is a major economic factor that can make the city more attractive for visitors and investors. Above all, however, it is an important political factor and a highly sensitive domestic policy issue; in case of the bronze masterpieces, for example, they function as cultural 'ambassadors' to the world. In association with the BDG, Nigeria is taking a route that will open new scope and opportunities for dealing with translocal cultural heritage.

Willingness to communicate and to acknowledge diverse backgrounds, as well as the ability to empathize on all sides, are important prerequisites for developing

new ideas and solutions. With this in mind, the BDG has evolved an atmosphere of dialogue which is not characterized by apportionment of blame concerning for difficult history and in which Nigerian representatives have expressed their appreciation for preservation of, research into and admiration for Benin's heritage around the world. Acknowledging that museum collections in Europe have histories of their own and are still bound by legal constraints, despite having changed their attitudes to and understanding of the world, the partners in the BDG have decided to focus on creative and practical solutions that are practicable in the short term. Collection mobility and the long-term project of a 'joint exhibition' will reunite in Benin City itself important parts of the Benin heritage that have hitherto hardly been accessible to its residents. These efforts will also connect people in different parts of the world in a spirit of friendly cooperation, rather than confrontational antagonism. This entails acknowledging injustices committed during the colonial period<sup>6</sup> and mutual assurance that the cultural heritage of all humanity will be treated with respect wherever it happens to be held, as well as promotion of the global exchange of collections and knowledge.

During discussions among the BDG and with many other participants and interested parties, it has become clear that we all bear a shared burden of responsibility. The African side has no intention of releasing Europeans from this responsibility by accepting restitutions as the only feasible solution. As the profound and enjoyable experience of working in the BDG clearly illustrates, it is not a question of conflict between unreconcilable positions. Instead, the situation requires respecting our Nigerian partners and discussing with them, on equal terms, what should happen to Nigeria's translocal cultural heritage. This is the most honest contribution that European museums can make toward decolonization.

By internalizing the idea expressed by historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe (2016: 59-60) that 'outside the exclusive context of western modernity, other formations of universal consciousness are becoming evident', it is important to recall and emphasize that communities or whole societies need emblems – which may take the form of symbolic historical legacies – in order to attain self-assurance, and that this need is all the stronger, the greater the importance to them of recognition of their identity. Without establishing strong, local roots, it is not possible for them to open up to the rest of the world. This is the point at which the knowledge and scope for action provided by museums becomes significant.

<sup>6</sup> Statement by the BDG issued in Benin City, 5 July 2019, see <[https://voelkerkunde-dresden.skd.-museum/fileadmin/userfiles/GRASSI\\_Museum\\_fuer\\_Voelkerkunde\\_zu\\_Leipzig/Bilder/Allgemein/Veranstaltungen/Benin\\_Dialogue\\_Group/Press\\_Statement\\_Benin\\_Dialogue\\_Group\\_2019.pdf](https://voelkerkunde-dresden.skd.-museum/fileadmin/userfiles/GRASSI_Museum_fuer_Voelkerkunde_zu_Leipzig/Bilder/Allgemein/Veranstaltungen/Benin_Dialogue_Group/Press_Statement_Benin_Dialogue_Group_2019.pdf)> (11/04/2019).

At the same time, we remain aware of the delicate balance between particularity and universality. We are also aware of the fact that when either side adopts an absolutist position, there is a risk of provoking radical political tendencies, which often have their roots in historical or emerging societal conflicts. All over the world, we currently see countries and regions placing great emphasis on their own history, culture and values. But what really is one's own? Cultures have always been shaped by countless influences. The task of museums in the future is not to attempt to change the past, but to enable people everywhere to participate in the cultural heritage of humanity, to educate and enlighten. The idea of the museum as a place for preserving, researching and learning about cultures and civilizations should be supported in locations where the necessary conditions do not yet exist. In turn, museums that were created as repositories of the world's cultural heritage should be maintained, opened up and renewed as places where this heritage is appreciated, cultures are brought into contact with one another, and horizons are broadened. For the last word, let us turn again to Achille Mbembe (2017: 330): "This world belongs to us all equally, and we all share in its heritage, even though we live in it in different ways - hence the real diversity of cultures and ways of life."

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## Some Afterthoughts: Where Do We Stand?

*Sarah Fründt\**

I provide the following personal reflection on the current German debate with regards to colonial era provenance research, as it is inspired and prompted by the contributions to this volume. Coincidentally, I started to look into these issues almost 10 years ago, when I worked on my Magister thesis at what is now called the Abteilung für Altamerikanistik (Department for the Anthropology of the Americas) at Bonn University (Fründt 2011). Over the past decade, I have followed the topic in various capacities and research projects, often with a focus not on the Americas, but on New Zealand and Australia. I also actively participated in several provenance research projects in the field of human remains, usually in my capacity as biological anthropologist in cooperation with historian colleagues and collection staff. Since May 2019, I work as a research advisor at the Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste (German Lost Art Foundation), encouraging and advising public institutions how to apply for funding and then conduct provenance research in their collections.

The BASA Museum (Bonner Amerikas-Sammlung, Bonn Collection of the Americas) workshop, organized as part of the nation-wide Day of Provenance Research in 2019, fell into a time of increased activity on the political and academic level. Collection staff, political actors, activists, media representatives and heritage communities alike were asking questions about the provenance of collections, especially those that could be related to implicit or explicit colonial contexts. Obviously, this development has not started in 2019, but had been ongoing for several decades, albeit with varying intensity. Nevertheless, the last two years have witnessed a rapidly unfolding trajectory that catapulted the topic not only into mainstream media and the public, but also led to significant political action.

One of the first indicators for the topic having reached national government levels could be seen in the coalition agreement of the new government of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2018, in which the parties not only stated that remembering and dealing with German colonial history was part of the national democratic consensus,<sup>1</sup> but also more specifically that researching the provenance of cultural heritage from colonial context in museums and collection was to be funded

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via the Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste in the future.<sup>2</sup> The following January, the new Fachbereich Kultur- und Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten (Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts) took up work and a related funding line to support provenance research projects was established (Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste 2020). First applications for long term projects could be handed in by the 1st of June of that same year, and in October 2019 the first projects already started work.

At the time of the workshop discussion in April, the publication of the *Framework Principles for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts*, agreed upon by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Foreign Office Minister of State for International Cultural Policy, the Cultural Affairs Ministers of the Länder and the municipal umbrella organizations (Kultusminister Konferenz, KMK), as a realization of the ideas laid down in the coalition agreement, had just taken place (KMK 2019a). Provenance research was one of the six main areas of activity and objectives identified by the paper.<sup>3</sup> The *Principles* explain that such research was “the foundation for assessing the origins of artefacts and the circumstances of their acquisition [...] [and] should also investigate whether they were acquired violently or without the consent of the rightful owner” (5). They wisely caution that “not every cultural object from colonial contexts was violently seized, and that in many cases the documentation of the actual circumstances surrounding the acquisition of artefacts from colonial contexts is inadequate”, calling for a thorough investigation on a case-by-case basis. “The institutions in Germany which hold artefacts from colonial contexts are called upon to research their collections” (KMK 2019a.).

In October 2019 followed the announcement to establish a German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts (KMK 2019b) as one of the first implementations of the suggestions found in the *Principles*. One of the main tasks of the Contact Point will be to give “individuals and institutions from the countries and societies of origin [...] access to information on collections in Germany from colonial contexts” (1). How the other aims and objectives will be realized remains to be seen.

<sup>1</sup> „Ohne Erinnerung keine Zukunft – zum demokratischen Grundkonsens in Deutschland gehören die Aufarbeitung der NS-Terrorherrschaft und der SED-Diktatur, der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte, aber auch positive Momente unserer Demokratiegeschichte“ (CDU, CSU, und SPD 2018: 167).

<sup>2</sup> „Die Aufarbeitung der Provenienzen von Kulturgut aus kolonialem Erbe in Museen und Sammlungen wollen wir – insbesondere auch über das Deutsche Zentrum Kulturgutverluste und in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Deutschen Museumsbund – mit einem eigenen Schwerpunkt fördern“ (CDU, CSU, und SPD 2018: 169).

<sup>3</sup> The others are ‘transparency and documentation’, ‘presentation and information’, ‘return’, ‘cultural exchange and international cooperation’, and ‘science and research’.

All of these developments have made it much easier for institutions to actively re-search their collections from colonial contexts, but they have at the same time also put reasonable pressure on them to do so. Some critics argue, that while dealing with museum collections might be a good starting point, remembering and dealing with German colonial history was an endeavor that should encircle all parts of society, particularly if this was part of the German democratic consensus as the coalition paper suggested.

For museums and collections, even with all the positive developments in the field, a lot of questions and challenges still remain unanswered, many of which were also present in the workshop participants' discussion back in April 2019. The contributions to this volume thus give an overview of many important aspects, some of which admittedly receive too little attention in the larger debates. Often these points of contention have a much longer history and one must be doubtful they can be resolved in the near future. This should, however, not stop us from pondering about them now and again. They are important elements of the discourse and as such will serve as steppingstones to help guide the following thoughts. Nearly all authors also draw attention to the special circumstances surrounding collections from Latin America, which might or might not pose slightly different challenges than other collections and also seem to be somewhat absent from the more general debate on these issues.

## What Do We Mean when We Speak of Provenance Research in the Field of Social and Cultural Anthropology?

In particular in Germany, the term provenance research, as also some of the authors notice, was for a long time mostly associated with research into the conditions of how cultural collections were seized in the National Socialist era, made prominent by such media-effective events as the discovery of the so called Gurlitt trove in 2012/2013.

When discussions about the colonial contexts of many museum collections become more mainstream, some terms used in the former contexts, such as provenance research, also started influencing the latter. When my colleagues Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser and I organized a conference on postcolonial provenance research in 2018 (*Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen der*

*Kolonialzeit*; published as Förster et al. 2018a), we thus also invited representatives from the field of National Socialist era research, hoping for a fruitful discussion on common elements but also differences between the two fields. We also tried to formulate some ideas and theses, as to what the specific features of this new provenance research, that grew out of the discipline of social/cultural anthropology as opposed to art history, might be.

In preparing the conference, we had observed that while a lot of institutions had conducted research into their collections, many of these studies had been carried out “in response to circumstances”, i.e. “when a problematic accession context was already suspected, was mentioned by a third party, or when objects or groups of objects were earmarked for imminent restoration and/or for exhibitions” (Förster et al. 2018b). The research was often restricted to “individual objects and lots, and to a single institution, ruling out the possibility of making systematic connections with other objects or groups of objects and institutions”. Thirdly, “the problematic and, especially, violence-marred contexts, phases and forms of accession that characterize the colonial era were rarely made a subject of study in their own right”. Fourthly, questions of provenance had only rarely been made the theme of exhibitions and museum education programs, in particular in terms of inclusion into permanent exhibition and the daily museum work. “Thus the opportunity was missed to research structural connections between the colonial project and the emergence of individual ethnographic collections and museums, to bring to light different conditions and effects of collecting depending on the given colonial domination practices, or to clarify questions of accession or legal ownership systematically” (Förster et al. 2018b).

We therefore called for provenance research that addressed these desiderata and lacunae, and was thus necessarily much broader and more systematically framed than earlier approaches geared towards accession history and object biography. We concluded that it “should aim to understand the genesis of the collection, institution and discipline as a whole, with special consideration of its problematic and violence-marred aspects”, and thus start with “proactive, systematic comparative assessment of collection holdings from the colonial era or from formerly colonized territories and an equally systematic clarification of their status and their significance in the context of transnational debates about *indigenous cultural heritage, cultural property, repatriation and shared heritage*” (idem).

Our publication and thus also our definition were clearly geared towards the colonial contexts that had been discussed so widely at the time. This was a deliberate choice in line with political momentum, but it also led to less emphasis on some

of the aspects that two of the contributions in the present volume bring to the fore. Rattunde and Hoffmann both use the BASA Museum and some of its collections to draw attention to the fact that while this was a strategically needed concentration, there is still much value on not reducing discussions on the type of provenance research needed in so-called ethnographic collections to a single aspect.

In the public debate, provenance research is often associated with old collections that are in the institutions since colonial times. Naomi Rattunde's paper draws attention to a much more topical but sometimes also neglected issue, asking what to do with badly provenanced objects that are offered to institutions as donations nowadays, albeit collected much earlier. She concentrates particularly on archaeological objects collected from people working or traveling in South America as a leisure-time activity and thus without clear scientific intent or much systematic knowledge, in the 1960s or 1970s. It should be noted, that at this point in time, international debates on the illicit export of cultural property in the running up to the passing of the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (UNESCO 1970), and its aftermath respectively, were already running high. These debates never seem to have noticeably stopped private collectors though.

This 'donor problem' actually also arises in other institutions and with collections from vastly different backgrounds. Informal conversation on the topic indicates that nearly all ethnographic museums are used to being contacted by collectors themselves or their heirs, wanting to donate objects assuming they belong into museums but actually knowing little to nothing about their background or actual provenance. Some even report finding boxes with actual objects left anonymously at the institution's doorstep. However, caring for objects without context not only poses an ethical or moral challenge, but also makes it difficult to use them in any meaningful academic or instructional way. On the other hand, not taking them in might mean to leave them vulnerable to destruction or at least scattering of complete collections across the art market. This problem is not new, as for example a conference in Chicago on *The Ethics of Acquisition in Ethnography* proofs, that already took place in 1973. The following quote stems from a later report of one of the German participants, Hans Becher, then department head of ethnography at the Landesmuseum Hannover:

The anthropologist wishes to know who made an artifact, using which materials, for what purpose, and how it was used. The art collector often only sees it as beautiful: he is not interested in the associated documentation.  
How should a museum curator react if he is offered an ethnographic artefact? Should he buy it to preserve it for future generations? However, then he encourages the trader or

private collector, who might have acquired it by violent means or through theft, to continue such activities. Or should he reject the purchase and thus risk that a unique example of human behaviour remains on a collector's mantlepiece? The Committee chose the latter alternative, for reasons of ethics as well as diligence. During the discussion it was also pointed out, that the labelling of artefacts should always be combined with their documentation (Becher 1973: 129).<sup>4</sup>

During the conference that took place only shortly after the mentioned UNESCO Convention of 1970 came into force, the participants also formulated some ideas as to proper museum behavior in this regard. It was to be passed on via the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and clearly found its way into the respective documents such as the Code of Ethics (ICOM 1986)<sup>5</sup>, however in its clarity it is well worth quoting the passage in its original state:

5. If a collection has been acquired by a private collector in the field, it is the duty of museums to request precise information about each individual piece. They must insist on receiving detailed documentation. If the acquisition is made, it must be in accordance with the ethical standards of the museum.
6. Each collector in the field is expected to draw up a detailed list of all items acquired and to show it to the appropriate authorities of the host country before exportation.
7. Full scientific documentation of a collection is of particular importance in order to avoid any doubt as to its legal acquisition and export.
8. Under no circumstances should the documentation be separated from the collection.” (Becher 1973: 130).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Translated from German by the author (“Der Ethnologe wünscht zu wissen, wer den Gegenstand anfertigte, wo, aus welchem Material, für welchen Zweck und wie er benutzt wurde. Für den Kunstsammler gilt er meist nur als schön; die damit zusammenhängende Dokumentation interessiert ihn nicht. Wie soll sich ein Kurator (Kustos) eines Museums verhalten, wenn ihm ein ethnographischer Gegenstand angeboten wird? Soll er ihn kaufen, um denselben für künftige Generationen zu bewahren? Doch dadurch ermutigt er den Händler oder einen privaten Sammler, der ihn vielleicht durch Gewalt oder Diebstahl erworben hatte, zu weiterer Aktivität auf diesem Gebiet. Oder soll er den Kauf ablehnen und damit riskieren, daß ein einzigartiges Beispiel des menschlichen Verhaltens auf dem Kaminsims eines Sammlers stehen bleibt? Das Komitee wählte die zweite Alternative, sowohl aus Gründen der Ethik als auch der Gewissenhaftigkeit. In der Diskussion wurde auch darauf hingewiesen, daß die Etikettierung der Gegenstände stets mit einer Dokumentation verbunden sein muß.”)

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 3.2: “A museum should not acquire [...] any object unless the governing body and responsible officer are satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to these specimen or object in question and that in particular it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin and/or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned [...], un violation of that country's laws” (ICOM 1986: 26) and chapter 6.4.: “The proper recording and documentation of both new acquisitions and existing collections [...] is a most important professional responsibility. It is particularly important that such documentation should include details of the source of each object” (ICOM 1986: 31).

<sup>6</sup> Translated from German by the author (“5. Falls eine Sammlung von einem privaten Sammler im Felde erworben wurde, ist es die Pflicht der Museen genaue Auskünfte über jedes einzelne Stück zu verlangen. Sie müssen auf den Erhalt einer ausführlichen Dokumentation bestehen. Falls die Übernahme erfolgt, muss sie dem ethischen Stand des Museums entsprechen. 6. Von jedem Sammler im Felde wird erwartet, daß er eine genaue Liste aller erworbenen Gegenstände anlegt und diese den entsprechenden Autoritäten des Gastlandes vor der Ausfuhr zeigt. 7. Eine volle wissenschaftliche Dokumentation einer Sammlung ist von besonderer Wichtigkeit, um Zweifel an dem legalen Erwerb und dem Export auszuschließen. 8. Unter keinen Umständen darf die Dokumentation von der Sammlung getrennt werden.”)



One deeply wishes, all collectors and institutions had henceforth complied with these guidelines.

Rattunde describes how her institution attempts to meet the challenge by introducing a new registration form, as opposed to past procedures where objects offered were usually taken even when no acquisition information was recorded. However, no registration form can solve the problem of deciding what to take in the first place, or what to do when there is no way to check the information given. Her approach is to both plea for active provenance research during the acquisition of objects for the collection (“now the time may have come to see provenance research itself as collecting”), but also to suggest understanding provenance research as context research that does not need to be centered on the actual objects, but can also concentrate on learning about more general collection practices related to certain temporal and geographical conditions. This is indeed an approach that often also has to be used with regard to collections from formal colonial times. This type of research lends itself to inclusion in teaching and can also meet with interest by the public, be it in exhibitions or other outreaching events or measures. For objects with questionable or doubtful provenance, Rattunde suggests building up long-term co-operations with embassies of the respective countries, and caring for the objects in the collections only while their future is being actively negotiated. Maybe these co-operations could also include shared research initiatives into general collection contexts as suggested?

Sadly, one of the contributions of the discussion in April is missing in this publication, that would have nicely tied in with these thoughts, showing some of the challenges of actual object-related research. In her presentation, Anna-Maria Brandstetter had used an object from the university collection Mainz as an example for the myriad entangled ways but also one-way streets of provenance research. She drew attention to the daily challenges such as following wrong leads, dealing with wrong labels and notes, the destruction of documentation, the market-driven ‘making’ of objects that would draw higher prices and more interest, and in general the problem that more often than not, provenance research deals with probabilities but not certainties.

Both of them show that basic and context research can clearly be one way forward when object-centered approaches fail.

Enlarging the field of study even further, Beatrix Hoffmann pleads for a much broader interest in object biography starting with the creation and production of an object and its use, but also including its (hi)stories after musealization. She argues that this type of knowledge about objects is both the foundation as well as the

ultimate aim of cooperation with source communities, and an important way of making museums socially relevant institutions again, in which “commonalities in cultural diversity are discovered and negotiated”. Provenance research in her reading is a multi-perspective endeavor based on communicative exchange, that looks at interdependencies, and the complex interrelationships of ethnographic objects, whose mere existence is already owing to some form of interaction. Such an approach allows for reading and interpreting the meaning of objects very differently depending on the perspective employed. Hoffmann uses two collections of the collector Manfred Rauschert from northern Brazil/French Guiana to illustrate her thoughts. These can be read – as the collector did – as an attempt to document threatened cultural traditions with the potential to revive them. From a critical anthropological perspective, these objects reflect a contact zone, as many of them were produced as a result of the interaction between collector and seller and thus represent creativity on both sides that influenced each other but also preconceived ideas and economic interests. For the creator communities these objects also represent various ideas: they document the interest of members of their community in their own history and traditions even though they were sometimes firstly awakened by the collector and can thus help to strengthen cultural identity and self-confidence but they might also challenge current understandings of identity, distinction, and cultural systems. The constant ‘becoming of culture’ and its non-static nature pose challenges not only for anthropologists and collectors, but also for cultural practitioners themselves.

These contributions show, that while colonial contexts are certainly among the most important fields of study, the term provenance research can mean other important things. Working with objects is one of the main objectives of a museum or a collection and it can and must entail more than just looking into their acquisition history. However, this history is important, and so the current challenge might be to stay focused on provenance, while at the same time being open for any other avenues or questions that the actual work with the collection might bring. This also ties in with expectations from outside the museum. One aspect of anthropological provenance research we can surely agree on, and which might set us apart from the provenance research done in other fields of study, is that it cannot stop with Western museum perspectives, enshrined in dusty archival records and century old publications, but must include perspectives from outside the museum, from individuals, interest groups, experts and institutions in the countries of origin as well as in the diaspora. We might well find that the questions they bring to the collections differ from those that we might have started with, even when we deal with colonial

contexts. Ballestero aptly summarizes this when he says “the potential of provenance research lies in not attempting to write the final page of an object’s history, but in highlighting its inherent capacity for the creation and articulation of infinite universes of cultural significance, identity and memory”.

However, how to organize such cooperative research in a way that is meaningful to all parties instead of remaining one-dimensional and Eurocentric is an ongoing question. It presents myriad opportunities but also challenges and pitfalls. In a recent blog contribution, Ilja Labischinski (2020) does an excellent job of summarizing most of the issues that he encountered when he both actively started to engage in respective projects, and reflected on them on a theoretical level. Amongst other things, he wonders how research that is truly on an eye-to-eye level can be organized, how cooperation partners could be found and who was allowed to research what. His post ends with an open call for future engagement with the topics raised and I would likewise call upon all of us to actively participate in that discussion. Paths are made by walking.

## Entangled Histories, Shared Responsibilities, Cultural Heritage and Museums

One of the challenges is described by both Silvia Dolz and Carla Jaimes Betancourt in their pieces, when they warn against the power of (Western) discourse to overwhelm or streamline local opinion. Jaimes Betancourt reports on her experience with local Tsimane communities in the Bolivian Amazonas region, which had collected and cared for archaeological objects from their own region. When learning about these during a visit, her first impulse had been to suggest taking them to a museum, although the local community had incorporated the objects into their daily lives, stored them well, and expressed a clear interest in them and the past culture they came from. In her contribution she self-reflects on this impulse and how much it had been informed by her academic upbringing and a certain tradition of dealing with material culture, as well as the dominant ‘state heritage discourse’, which claimed that local communities could not understand the relevance of these objects and leaving them with them would surely lead to their loss or destruction. Consequently, she wonders not only about the relation of local communities to material culture, and the concept of the museum in general, but also on how

decolonized and inclusive archaeology work relevant to local people could look like. Her contribution thus also dares to pose the fundamental question of why there should be a museum in the first place – is it really useful to store cultural objects in a particular centralized location? Useful for who and to what purpose? These are important questions for future collection policies.

One answer, that also forms part of the more general discussions on the topic can be found in the thoughts put forward by Dolz. She follows the argument of the universal museum, which allows visitors to ponder upon the cultural heritage of humankind, the diversity of expression, the many different perspectives on life reflected in the objects, and the contribution that such museums could bring to cultural and international understanding. While this concept has also been criticized as variously ideological, paternalistic, preservationist or even neo-colonial<sup>7</sup>, it has the advantage of drawing attention away from a particular acquisition context and towards stories of mutual influence and cultural exchange that can also be enshrined in both objects and museum collections. Using the history of the so-called *Benin Dialogue Group* and the many precursor co-operations that existed between Nigeria and both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic since the 1980s, Dolz aims to show how the discourse about the so-called Benin Bronzes has never been fixed and static, but has shifted and transformed during these decades. She claims that interest in cooperation and restitution has not always been as strong as in later years, and draws attention to the complexity of the situation in which the Bronzes form part of multiple cultural heritages. She calls for dealing with all aspects of these shared histories and responsibilities without blame or antagonism, especially in light of legal constraints and the reinforcement of nationalist agendas and itineraries.

And indeed, the tension between nationalist and more local or interests is often palpable in debates on return. Examples are not only the debate on the Benin Bronzes, but also the recent return of the Witbooi objects to Namibia, revealing disagreements between the Witbooi family and the national state (Kössler 2019), or the 2002 repatriation of the remains of Sarah Baartman to South Africa, which was incorporated and some might say appropriated into the political movement of forming a rainbow nation after apartheid (Maseko 2002). Obviously, all of these

<sup>7</sup> This argument has famously become public part of the discussion by the so-called Universal Declaration (2004) that was signed in 2002 and later prominently defended by scholars like the American art historian and curator James Cuno (see for example Cuno 2011; 2012). The concept has already been criticized in the follow up to the UNESCO Declaration of 1970 (see for example M'Bow 1978) and continuously since then (see for example Abungu 2004, Opoku 2014). A good summary of the debate can be found in Fiskesjö 2014.

tensions are related to the entire debate on the concept of a world heritage<sup>8</sup> versus national, local or group claims to culture, but they are also a direct consequence of the fact that at the time of the removal of objects or human remains, often no national states were existent, or at least not with the same level of sovereignty or within the same borders as today. Thus, a complete revision of the past translocation of cultural goods can hardly ever be achieved and should also not be the primary aim. Instead, a format has to be found that combines the interests of all stakeholders and thus leads to some form of compromise. Whilst this might often not be the ideal solution, the respective debates often lead to a more general examination of the issues at hand, and are thus ultimately productive far beyond the individual case. Maybe that can also be one of the ultimate aims of returns. Our part as collection managers could be to actively initiate these processes and make sure all stakeholders are actually part of the discussion.

## Restitution, Return and Repatriation<sup>9</sup>

As was already noticeable in the last paragraph, provenance research is often deeply interconnected with questions of repatriation and return, with the underlying assumption that one necessarily leads to the other, and also that a return of the collections in question solves all problems. This is particularly apparent when one follows the public debate.

<sup>8</sup> The term world heritage has first been codified into international law via the *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* in 1954.

<sup>9</sup> In 2009, Martin Skydstrup attempted a definition of the terms: “To sum up, we might distinguish the three R’s in the following way: (1) *restitution* concerns the problem of international contemporary illicit trafficking in antiquities between source nations and market nations and hinges on the provenance (i.e. the ownership history) of the object. Restitution is most often mandated by a strict legal interpretation of ‘cultural property’; (2) *return* concerns the problem of international claims for historically removed material objects and turns on the inalienability of the object from its original context, that is, the provenience (i.e. original context) of the objects. Return is most often based on voluntary action and goodwill underwritten by ethical considerations of what rightfully constitutes a nation’s cultural patrimony; (3) *repatriation* concerns the problem of indigenous claims for human remains and cultural objects within the nation state. Repatriation seems to pivot on the necessity of the object for a minority group’s ceremonial practices, contemporary identity, and ‘cultural survival’ within larger processes of national narratives and reconciliation within settler-colonial national states” (Skydstrup 2009: 57–58, italics in the original). Over the last years it could be noted that the German discourse seemed to loosely follow the distinction between repatriation in the case of human remains (albeit not within the national state), and return in the case of material objects. The term restitution seems to have acquired a double meaning, referring both to illicit trafficking as well as the context of Nazi era looted art, although in both cases it stays within the realm of legal solution. It is interesting to note that more recently, and in particular since the so called “Restitution Report” (Sarr and Savoy 2018), the use of the word seems to increase, also with regard to objects and human remains from colonial contexts.

However, as was also mentioned, a return might not even be the aim of everyone involved in the negotiation. And even in those instances, where it is desired and agreed upon, a number of challenges might arise in the actual process.

How different individual cases can be, even when the objects stem from the same country and were collected by the same person, is exemplified nicely by Verónica Montero Fayad's paper. It focuses on two groups of Columbian objects in Berlin: two Kogui masks, labeled as ethnographic objects, and 21 statues, considered as archaeological in origin. The related debates and also negotiations differ in many important aspects. Whereas the masks were collected taking advantage of local and internal disputes that also comprised the question of ownership, the collection of the archaeological objects seems to have taken place legally, at least according to past standards. The repatriation movement of the ethnographic objects, which have been ascribed ritual and sacred significance, is led by the Kogui and three other groups, also posing questions of collective vs. individual ownership. Indicative of the difficult relationship between state and Indigenous group, the request does not receive any support from the Columbian state. Requests for the return of the archaeological objects on the other hand, are led by local communities but also voiced by different stakeholders on the local, regional, and national level. Both debates provide prime examples of the aforementioned tensions when it comes to cultural heritage<sup>10</sup>, as they show the interrelatedness of return debates with local political issues. They are intricately linked to negotiation processes about who is part of the nation, and what and whose cultural heritage matters on what level. In the case of archaeological objects there is the additional dimension of time, suggesting or negating claims of relationships between present and past populations.

Montero Fayad also shows some of the more technical difficulties that can be encountered when thinking about returns, namely the fragility but also potential toxicity of objects (in her example the Kogui masks). This is a real issue, that so far has gained little attention in the German debate. In the USA, 30 years of implementing the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA) have shown how often objects are contaminated by chemical agents that were used to conserve them, especially during the first half of the 20th century, and how dangerous these can be to people handling them, for example when objects are reintroduced into cultural or spiritual practices (see Simms 2005). When applying for a repatriation grant with National NAGPRA, applicants can now also request funding for contamination removal (National Park Service 2019). Already ten years

<sup>10</sup> The original site has even been declared a World Heritage Site, indicating that these considerations might also play a role.

ago, the California State Parks received a grant to work on the issue and organized a larger workshop.<sup>11</sup> As Montero Fayad also notices, contamination can additionally challenge receiving communities who now have to find transformed or entirely new ways of engaging with the objects that do not put them in imminent danger.

Diego Ballestero's paper deals with the repatriation of human remains, which still forms the largest body of active repatriations within Germany but also internationally. Human remains pose a particular challenge as here the conflict between proper treatment of the dead and the idea of research material in biological anthropology and the natural sciences is gaping widely, and opinion on either side is often more absolute. Concepts such as shared heritage might work in the case of material objects; with the mortal remains of people they do not sit well. However, the same processes of 'decolonizing' museum collections and the same requirements for provenance research<sup>12</sup> and active engagement with source communities and descendants also apply here. The case of the Museo de la Plata is an interesting case study because it shows a process that will hopefully become more normal for institutions in general: with the increasing number of repatriations a human remains policy had to be developed (that also covered exhibitions). Starting with individual cases that still required a lot of negotiation processes a move was seen towards more general policies and a consolidation of procedures.

Martin Künne and Werner Mackenbach present a rather different type of return, namely that of a large and singular body of knowledge and research findings in the field of linguistics. In this case, it took the form of an international editorial project, dedicated to the translation and annotation of linguist Walter Lehmann's records from Central America, collected by him during research trips between 1907 and 1909. Sometimes, such immaterial returns can be a good choice, in particular because they potentially allow access by a much larger group of people than a material return of in this case single documents would provide. Here, the resulting annotated monograph in itself is an academic project which only lies the foundation for further projects that actually make the knowledge contained more accessible to local communities, for example via materials for local teaching and research.

<sup>11</sup> Information about contamination issues can be found on the website of the park service, see <[https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=23183](https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23183)> (04/23/2020). The results of the workshop were also published in a special issue of *Collection Forum* (Vol. 16, No 1-2, Summer 2001).

<sup>12</sup> On a side note: it is interesting to learn that although the collections were underlying the same general process of typologizing and objectifying of remains as in other places, and they likewise struggle with the lack of full and cross-checked inventories, the number of named individuals and thus the potential of individualizing and re-humanizing is much higher than in most German anthropological collections.

It is thus an “intermediate step” to an actual return to the respective communities. However, without this mediating step, the German language copies would never have been usable, and the editors did take special care to include those compilations that generated particular local interest.

These linguistic records serve as an example for many collections stored in German institutions, which have never been adequately investigated or published in any internationally used languages, let alone those used locally in the regions of origin. They show that a discussion that solely focuses on the material objects in museums and collections falls somewhat short at grasping the immense scope of the ‘anthropological project’ which aimed at no less than trying to understand human behavior and societies all across the world and at all times. Consequentially, return initiatives can encompass not only objects or human remains, but also photos, audio recordings, correspondence, maps, notes, and any other form of research data. Huge amounts of such data have always accompanied the material objects collected, but have often also been completely detached from these collections. New data and new collections are continuously produced as we speak, and might become relevant to communities in the near or distant future. But whereas nowadays many codes of ethics guide our behavior as anthropologists, and stipulate that and how we have to ‘give back and share’ the results of our research (see e.g. the current ‘Code of Ethics’ of the American Anthropological Association, particularly section 5), no such system was in place in the past. Immaterial or digital return might be one way of addressing this imbalance from today’s perspective, and one that has certainly gained a lot more potential with the exponentially expanding potentialities of digitalization. However, we should be careful that these forms do not prevent institutions from real returns, be they partial, selective, or complete, and thus become a fig leaf for real engagement with the future of the collections. As anthropologists, we should fight any such attempts.

## How Do Latin American Collections Fit into the General Debates on Provenance Research and Colonial Contexts?

The vast majority of the contributions to the volume deal with collections from Central or South America. cursory inspection shows that these play a minor role in the general debates so far. A couple of reasons might be responsible for this: the



temporal distance, placing the time when these regions were colonized some 300 to 400 years before the processes became prominent in Africa and Oceania. The missing link to Germany which – although there were some smaller German settlements and colonies at the time – does not allow for making the same direct connections and associations as can for instance be witnessed with the former African colonies. And maybe lastly also the fact, that a lot of the collections from South America in German institutions are archaeological in nature, adding an additional layer of temporal distance.

However, the papers present ample evidence that leaving these regions out of the discussions is a major mistake. Montero Fayad and Ballestero aptly demonstrate that thinking about colonial connections should never stop at the borders of the former German colonies. In both cases, German collections profited from extended networks and partnerships in South America that were at the time – under formal considerations – not colonized countries but new independent national states. However, for many Indigenous Peoples<sup>13</sup>, exchanging European dominion against the power structures of the new nation states did not lead to significant changes in terms of internal suppression and still did not guarantee them basic rights as they have later been formulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP; United Nations 2017).

As Ballestero shows, the collections established at the Museo de la Plata served the same underlying purposes as elsewhere: legitimizing the domination of Indigenous Peoples, while at the same time working towards the project of forming an Argentinian nation which actively excluded them. He also illustrates how not only international connections and networks were used in the acquisition and exchange of human remains, but also how organizing principles inspired by German publications and the catalogs of the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) were applied to the collection of the Museo de la Plata as it was curated by a

<sup>13</sup> The term 'indigenous' is still controversial, since it appears as a scientifically veiled new edition of discriminating colonial terms such as aboriginal, native or primitive, following the same line by categorizing people and differentiating them from others on the basis of unclear and imagined characteristics. However, 'indigenous' has also assumed a positive connotation in the meantime: UNDRIP established the term in international law. Indigenous societies are roughly understood here as descendants of the first settlers of a region who were colonized and driven from their ancestral settlement area by other peoples in the course of history and who nowadays are politically, economically and socially marginalized, differing from their surrounding national society in terms of their self-identification and their linguistic, ethnic, cultural, social or economic affiliation. UNDRIP establishes comprehensive rights for these so-called Indigenous Peoples (including the right to the return of human remains). As a result, many individuals and societies identify with the term and use it in political contexts - including the international repatriation movement, in which actors often deliberately position themselves globally as representatives of Indigenous peoples in opposition to the surrounding majority societies and exchange similar experiences. The use of the term 'indigenous' is done in reference to these contexts.

German anthropologist. The Museo de la Plata was but one knot in the international interweb of anthropological collections and as such integral part of the global project to catalog and classify humanity. And even the linguistic project described in Künne's contribution shows the interconnectedness of the anthropological project: it was part of 'rescue linguistics', working in the awareness that many indigenous idioms of the regions could be documented and classified for the last time before their final disappearance. As such it was part of the larger project of 'savage anthropology' which was also at play in all other world regions. There are thus no substantive reasons to exclude collections from South America – neither in the case of human remains nor with regards to any other collection.

## Our Role as Anthropologists

What then, is our role as anthropologists when we think about provenance research, return, and ethnographic collections? How should we use our voice? A lot of respective ideas have already been expressed in the so-called Heidelberger Stellungnahme (Heidelberg Statement 2019) by the directors of the ethnographic museums and collections in the German-speaking countries, a document well-worth revisiting.

To sum my personal thoughts up: There might be a couple of things we can do.

When we work in museums or with collections, we can make systematic provenance research a normal and natural part of museum work, no matter if we deal with colonial contexts or other forms of acquisition. We can thus use the current political momentum to make sure recent developments are sustainable and have a lasting effect. In the end, an increased knowledge about the content of our collections and the history of our individual institutional as well as our discipline's history serves more than one purpose. The same holds true for increasing international cooperation with those regions, groups, and nations, that our collections come from.

At the same time, we can inform the public about this work and make sure that the complexities and particularities of ethnological provenance research become understood and an essential part of the public discourse. Anthropology complicates things in a good way. We can resist easy equations such as "every ethnographic object was stolen and needs to be returned" by providing individual

narratives. And we can make it known that thinking about colonialism cannot be the task of ethnographic museums only, but must be a societal endeavor, as was also stipulated in the coalition agreement. In fact, that might be the societal service the discipline can provide.

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