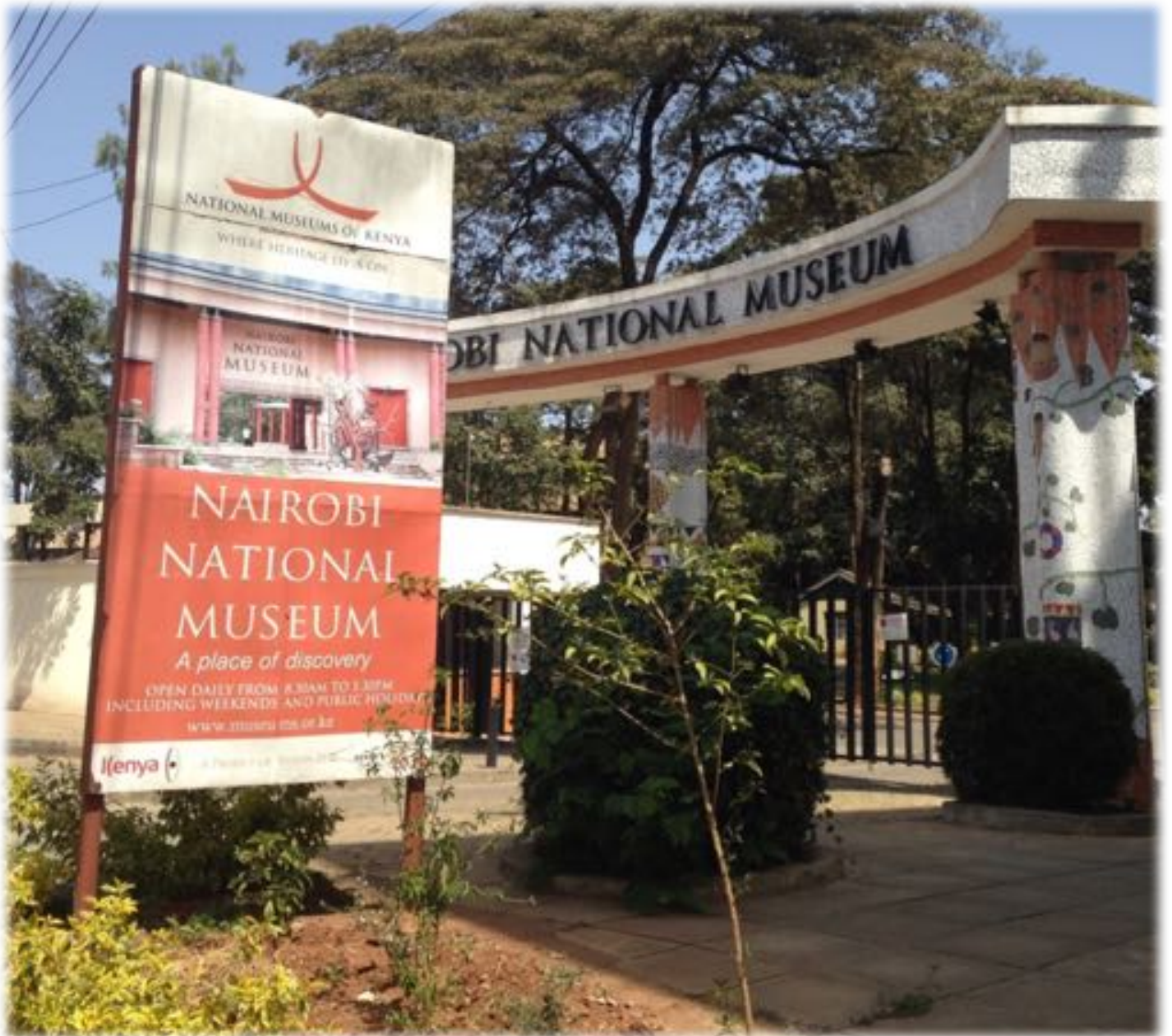# Exhibiting African heritage today

Revisiting Western museum management in and out of Africa

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Master Thesis CAOS

Cover photo: Security entrance, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya (author's collection 2017).

Back cover photo: Front entrance, Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, The Netherlands (author's collection 2016).

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Contents

Acknowledgments

In gratitude to my supervisor Pieter Ter Keurs, who kept an open mind and supported me throughout the writing of this thesis. A project that became an exploration of myself, mining the roots of my identity in the cultural histories of the African continent. Cultural histories that have been strategically undermined, which affected me so deeply at times that I felt defied by them. In these periods of doubt, I saw chances to develop myself anew, and I am grateful for the continuing support of my parents, my partner and many dear friends.

Preface

Before this thesis came about I was set on analyzing the exhibiting of African collections in museums. These aesthetically arranged groups of objects fascinated me from an early age on, and museums in general seemed to me like enchanted guardians of past lives. Yet there was a different atmosphere in ethnological museums than in museums of fine art or of archaeology. It supported the same act of contemplation, but the non-western objects were undeniably silenced, and the feeling of admiration I experienced in museums dedicated to the memorization of western history, which traces its origin in the classical antiquity, was substituted by a hollow, empty feeling. This affected me deeply, unquestionably because I am of Afro-European descent and identified with both western and non-western, primarily African, heritage. Yet I grew up in a westernized Dutch environment, in which I noticed, from an early age on, that I had to adapt and continuously emphasize my Dutch roots.

My parents have always showed an interest in culture, and museum visits have always been encouraged, but my fondness for museums decreased when confronted with large colonial collections of non-western heritage, displayed with audacity. This impact is diminishing with the access to new forms of media that can provide new insights into the cultures of the world lives abroad; however, I wish to underline that museums with ethnological collections are spaces that provide tangible intercultural contact for many people, and especially for children, for the first time in their lives. These museums help to identify the world around us and our place within it. Hence, I emphasize the social importance of museums, and especially of this thesis, which explains the role of African heritage in museums in and out of Africa today.

The thesis's focus on the cultural legacy of Africa has inspired me to incorporate African visions in every level of my research, in my case studies as well as in the literature. This has not been easy, because the literary field is mostly dominated by western grounded authors. I am not minimizing their expertise or their authority, on the contrary, but I feel the need to bring a sense of equality, especially because this thesis's topic concerns and speaks to African peoples as well. The idea of writing a piece about heritage management of African collections from a global perspective originated after my family visit to Kenya in 2012, during which I visited the National Museum of Nairobi and became inspired. However, I continued my master education with an internship at the Dutch Museum Volkenkunde, leaving the Kenyan museum out of my proposal. But the internship did not meet up to my standards at the time, and feeling disappointed with the outcome of my research I continued research in Kenya. The result is an intercultural perspective of African heritage in museums.

Chapter one

Deconstructing African heritage

Introduction

This thesis will be an exploration of the idea of African heritage in today's heritage management and how it has been exhibited in museums. Its discursive history will be looked at and how it has developed and is interpreted today. This is of importance because the focus on exhibiting African heritage has shifted over time. One museum strategy focused primarily at the physicality of things from an artistic point of view, whereas another was more inclined to the (truthful) display of African culture behind the objects, objects as cultural substitutes (Boursiquot 2014, 64). These perspectives, as profound as they may appear, are products of a Western inclination toward Africa. They have been supportive in the development of what we now regard African heritage to be, but in providing a fixed explanation for the concept the author of this paper is puzzled by its different usages. It seems that the concept of African heritage is fragmented in an array of semi-coherent bits and pieces that have become independently reusable in people's daily life. Yet, when it comes to exhibiting, the idea of African heritage is confronted with a particular material realization of that heritage on the spot. The display has not only publicly to conform to the idea of African heritage, but also to appeal to its museum audience. In doing so objects fulfill a vital role in exhibitions, and today's heritage management has become largely dependent on it. Hence, there are cases where the impact of the early displacement of most of the historical objects is overlooked. The change in ownership occurred with little regard for the welfare of the heritage's rightful owners and hints at the fallacy of colonialism, which is regretted as much as it is forgotten. However, the display of African heritage, a combination of valued African objects and a museum narrative, should be understood as a joint product, in which mostly local interests prevail, cutting across global issues and affecting people on a world-wide scale.

In spite of post-colonial and post-modern attempts at raising awareness of colonially biased exhibitions and improving museum management in making fairer representations of African heritage, the part of mutual influence is often overlooked. Here, is especially meant the continuing Western interference in non-Western matters, narrowed down for the purpose of this thesis to the reproduction of ethnic knowledge in museums that is used to explain objects. This historically created intercultural aspect of African heritage is barely recognized or brought to the foreground in museums today. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to historically explore the role of African (material) culture[1] in our Western, modernist-infused society, and how it has been effectively used in

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[1] With using the concept 'Material culture' a reference is made to Ter Keurs' explanation of the concept as follows: 'Material culture is a collective term for a collection of objects used in a certain (sub)culture. All

museums. This in order to understand the current role of African material heritage in museums in and out of Africa, and to which extent the heritage management is comparable. This will be researched in the following two chapters, which provide current examples on how African cultural legacy is commemorated. The first chapter discusses a Dutch exhibition about the African continent at the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden; the second one focuses on an African museum, the National Museum of Nairobi in Kenya, and its ideas about valued cultural and national heritage. The cases both stand on their own, but their findings will be analyzed in the last chapter. This in order to develop a resolution on how to deal with the concept of African heritage on a global level.[2]

The nature of heritage

In discussing the idea of heritage, the interest particularly goes out to how people engage with the idea of having, owning and sharing heritage. Thereby, what does it means to identify with and sensibly own heritage, sharing it with each other. Secondly, who or what is entitled to define cultural expressions as heritage? The margins of heritage have become blurred whilst accounting for its wide use and accumulative capacity, and the concept of heritage today seems to encompass all kinds of cultural (material) manifestations that are therefore venerated and easily dubbed as cultural legacy. The idea of heritage has become an archetypical, mainstream idea used by us all (Harrison 2010, 3). Things are commonly awarded with value out of the ordinary. Yet, this need is questioned by the author of this thesis, not specifically that of joyous memorialization, but the continuing installment of things with added significance. This just to match (existing) criteria of an idea of what constitutes heritage, one that for example enables the display of material culture in museums. Yet, what are these conditions, and when does (material) culture become allegeable to be called heritage? Do they remain the same or do they transform into something else? These all-round questions have guided the thesis's author in her study at understanding the apparent and global necessity to (re)claim African culture as (world)heritage. This apparent advancement remains questionable. What does it imply, and especially in regard to Africans? In other words, is there a bonus in equating culture to heritage?

The idea of heritage is a much-contested topic (Harrison 2013; Smith 2006; Alivizatou 2011; Alivizatou 2014; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006); literature tries to find answers for its supposed authority and biased affiliation with history, questioning its universal application. Its strong reliance

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physical objects made and/or used by human beings in a certain group are part of the material culture of that group' (2006, 6). Central to the concept here is its social aspect and the cultural knowledge, which is interchangeable, as opinions change or objects shift from one group to another.

[2] The use of the concept of global is according to Gilroy not without caution, who links it to the familiar term of globalization and of which he claims that it conveys existential ideas of expansion and universalism that are characteristically linked to western imperialism (2004, xii).

on Western history is often not fully recognized, and the mainstream usage of the term shows an apparent inconsistency in meaning, and/or in fully understanding what it (historically) implies. In spite of the historical leverage, the determination of heritage is always present-centered and, equally confusing, experienced in different ways.

> 'Heritage is a multilayered performance – be this a performance of visiting, managing, interpretation or conversation – that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present' (Smith 2006, 3).

Smith's conception of "heritage making" connects the past and the present in a useful way, determining heritage clearly as an act of 'meaning making' that takes place in the here and now (2006, 2). It is a performance that is constantly in development (ibid.). Heritage is apparently less concerned with the past, and more importantly it shows how the present and the future are regarded today (Harrison 2013, 4). To conclude, heritage is always in the making and should not be considered a self-proclaimed truth, but a (directed) process of negotiation and selection.

The transformation of cultural expressions into the idea of heritage, or alternatively said their withdrawal from ordinary use, appears when people collectively engage in the sharing of memory according to Smith (2006, 2-3). She especially focuses on social interaction and, accordingly, social agreement as the key to transformation and argues for the socially constructive aspect of heritage, defining it as a series of connecting and overlapping thoughts (ibid.). Heritage becomes a process, or a 'multilayered performance' (ibid.). Thereby she adds an intangibility to heritage that makes it fleeting and changeable. The social view of heritage, or preferring here "heritage in the making", contrasts the more popular and established Western idea of heritage that mostly looks at the end product, the object, and neglects its social abilities (Harrison 2010, 9). The more common and globally accepted Western concept of heritage concerns itself with cultural preservation, and in doing so has privileged the material reminders of culture (ibid.; Smith 2006, 3; Harrison 2013, 7). This kind of heritage has been the customary way of dealing with change in material realities and has become the dominant force behind social negotiation in how to deal with past life. This kind of heritage is usually referred to as a strictly material form of heritage, whilst a social aspect is undeniably present. Oppositely, the "true" social perspective at heritage (Smith 2006) focuses solely on heritage as a social thing, which is misguidedly also dubbed heritage in most literature. It precedes cultural definitions such as the former, the material kind of heritage supposedly is. This perspective argues that the conventional idea of heritage should be understood as an ongoing social negotiation that leads to cultural transformation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, 40). According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett all heritage is processual, emphasizing that established heritage itself is constantly in the making (2006, 40). She focuses on the process in which an increasing sense of

cultural self-awareness is established by perceiving scarcity or dissolution of cultural practices (ibid.). In its demise, people are all of a sudden confronted with a loss of cultural relevance in continuing to perform as they did. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to this phase as an altered state of (cultural) reality, which is an alarmingly heightened state of awareness (ibid.). At this point culture is not diminished but a part of it is preserved. The altered state of reality '"preserves" custom without preserving the custom bound self' (ibid.). She describes it as a cultural awakening from an unconscious – taken for granted – mind that allows for the re-use of custom in different circumstances (ibid.).

In regard to the above and in defining what heritage is supposed to be about, discussing the 'nature of heritage' (Smith 2006 2), and adding to Smith and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's ideas about social heritage and cultural transformation, a third perspective is added that looks at the idea of heritage spatially and contextually combined. Here, Harrison digs into the common idea of heritage as an 'omnipresent cultural phenomenon', and questions the extent of its universal application today (2013, 3). He more or less focuses on the spread of the Western idea of heritage, and how the concept has become so easily entwined in our everyday lives that it goes unquestioned (ibid.). At the same time, he questions the rapid use of the term to appoint cultural expressions, stating that 'almost everything can be perceived as heritage' (Harrison 2013, 3). Harrison combines and locates the social aspect of heritage making within the established Western discourse that he argues to be a result of a politically infused, institutional 'industry' that upholds the past in the present (2013, 3,7). He even interprets the stage that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses as an altered state of reality, as one at risk of cultural (material) alienation (2013,7); an immediate reaction that is indefinitely entrenched in our post-modern mind. Heritage mostly triggers feelings of loss and mourning, and the classification of custom as heritage enables the redefinition of culture and the world around us (Harrison 2013, 3; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, 40; Smith 2006, 2). According to Smith it forms a vehicle to transport (suppressed) desires and emotions to the surface (2006, 2). This is more than a nostalgic longing, it is an intangible component to heritage that is often not acknowledged (Smith 2006, 2-3). The social component to heritage, and especially in regard to the combined effort of literature, arguing that heritage is an ongoing process, resists conceptualization of heritage as merely tangible (Smith 2006, 2), indefinitely fixed or permanent. However, the prevalent view of heritage, which is about loss and conservation of these fixed entities, turns heritage into a self-reassuring act (Harrison 2013, 3) and conveniently lessens the need for further analysis.

Moreover, and in regard to Harrison's observation about an institutional industry that surveys the maintenance and the production of heritage, of which UNESCO is an example, people themselves fall victim to the mechanically (re)produced idea of heritage (ibid.).

> 'The mechanisms for the categorization, cataloguing and management of the past have become so sophisticated in their design that we have become largely blinded to this rapid and all-pervasive piling up of the past in our quotidian worlds' (Harrison 2013,3).

The need to legitimize (established) heritage has been translated into documented lists of requirements that are, however, occasionally expanded and renewed (Alivizatou 2014 [2012], 9, Yoshida 2008 5; Harrison 2013, 5[3]), but its documentation only adds to its conception as material. The resulting objectives are materially inscribed and thus verified, but what to do when these legitimized objectives disagree with cultural beliefs (De Jong 2010 [2007], 181; Yoshida 2008, 4). The Western preservationist narrative of heritage is superimposed on a global scale, and encourages its view as a universal set of values amongst localized, non-Western peoples, as De Jong remarks (2010 [2007], 161).

A Western history of heritage

The social aspect of heritage, the "making of", is aligned against the conventional and prioritized Western idea of heritage that sells itself as the recognized form of establishing heritage, and privileges the material world. The latter knows a history in 'European and north-American preservationist ethos' that was driven by nineteenth-century values coming from discourses of art, archaeology, history etc. (Alivizatou 2014 [2012], 9). For long heritage was simultaneously understood alongside tangible sites such as monumental buildings, undisturbed landscapes and archaeological sites that needed preservation (Alivizatou 2014 [2012], 9; Smith 2006, 3). They were treated as relics of an innocent past and therefore cherished, deriving value from objects' age, appearance and aesthetics (ibid.).

> 'The physicality of the Western idea of heritage means that 'heritage' can be mapped, studied, managed, preserved and/or conserved and its protection may be the subject of national legislation and international agreement' (Smith 2006, 3)

The governing aspect of the Western concept of heritage is seen to originate in nineteenth-century Europe as a consolidation of several contemporary beliefs (Smith 2006, 17). It is defined as the 'authorized heritage discourse' (Smith 2006, 4) and finds its formation in what is known as the era's 'preservationist discourse' that spiraled away from the call for modernity (Alivizatou 2014 [2012], 39). The "prosperous" developments leading to industrialization and automatization nurtured feelings of loss of a simple life (Smith 2006, 17-18; Alivizatou 2014 [2012], 14; Bennett 1995, 76; Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007], 17). The dominant idea that modernization equaled progress, a

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[3] Alivizatou (2014 [2012]) and Yoshida (2008) applaud UNESCO's recognition of intangible heritage issued in 2003 to compensate for its increasing focus on (monumental) material heritage.

progress that was received as positive and unstoppable, fed feelings of insecurity about the changes to come in people's lives (Smith 2006, 17-18). It led to an idealization of the past, and of naïve and primitive livelihoods, which was extended upon non-Western people (ibid.). They were used as examples to convince people about Western progress by emphasizing their "simple" lives, subduing them in an excess of the already existent nostalgia that roamed in West European capitals (Harrison 2013,3). An example of this sentimental exploitation is the circulation of numerous colonial images of non-Western colonized people for the Western market (Pinney 2003, 2-3). They provide visual evidence of the Western era's persistent attempts at belittling non-Western peoples. For example, a preferred set-up in images was the depiction of barely dressed people that strengthen prevalent stereotypes and signified to a lack of being civilized (ibid.; Poignant 2003, 80).[4]

The melancholy about past life became intermingled not only with a sense of loss, but with one of pride due to many nationalistic tendencies (Smith 2006, 18). They related historical identity and accomplishment to the soil people lived upon, and created a new idea of a modern, bounded Europe (ibid.) The authentication of the recent past was fed by a political agenda that sought support to maintain the newly formed nation-states and the idea of a united Europe (Smith 2006, 17-18; Bennett 1995, 76). The idea of a common past was used to encourage feelings of nationalism in order for the European public to bond and share feelings of pride. The idea of identity was firmly linked to an idea of place; people's historically owned territory and the ruins of the past are testimony to this civilization (Smith 2006, 18). The material evidence of past existence provides proof of Western accomplishments (ibid.).

> 'to be modern was to be European, and that to be European or to espouse European values
> [...] was to be the pinnacle of cultural achievement and social evolution' (Smith 2006, 18
> [Graham 2000, 17])

The idea of inevitable progress on behalf of Europe legitimized colonial expansion and could only reinforce the claims about cultural and historical identity by adding a racial dialogue, confirming that Western achievement was determined by 'blood' (Smith 2006, 17); an upcoming discourse of the survival of the fittest that had gained popularity because of the radical evolution theory of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) that reformulated human origin and testified against biblical narrative (ibid.). His findings, among others, were happily interpreted to support colonial expansion and to extend the racial view to encompass the development of human races in a hierarchic order (Bennett 1995, 191; Gilroy 2004, 7-8). Especially their lack of civic progress, not been able to achieve a similar level of

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[4] This kind of colonial photographs often concealed an erotic layering allowing for voyeurism on account of the (male) viewer (Wright 2003, 147-148), shielding behind the illusion that underdevelopment people share a low sexual morality (ibid. 151).

civic complexity, was regarded as pitiful and reminded Europeans of early developmental stages they had surpassed, whilst lamenting over the loss of simplicity (Vos 2004, 17; Bennett 1995, 194).

In the following an examination is provided that looks with more detail how the era's visionary ideas about Western human evolution and progress became intertwined in (colonial) propaganda in the form of visual strategies in museums. This colonial museology had a significant and lingering impact on audiences' overall reception of African peoples and their material culture in its early years, at the height of Western imperialism. In addition, it not only provided the ground for how we look at the African heritage today but gave rise to the severity of an African movement that reclaims its heritage, which is discussed further on. In envisaging the history of African heritage the inquiry will limit itself to activities of collecting and exhibiting by Western European governments, such as the UK, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, where there is considerable literature on the topic.[5] These "modern" nation-states all had colonial aspirations and can be held responsible for the (reciprocal) trafficking of African objects, immersing them in Western discourses that sustained their colonial agendas. In the following analyses, the focus will be on similarities between these nations that, in their acts of nation building and colonial exploration, used exhibitionary strategies to influence audiences to think unfavorably of African peoples in the late nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

The fate of non-Western people in museums
One mayor contribution to the modern states' narrative of Western progress and evolution came from biology. Darwin's prominent publication *On the Origin of Species* (1859) caused so much unrest because of its defiance of Christianity and the resulting attack at the prominent position of humanity over animals that is supposedly God-given (Bennett 1995, 190). It pronounced that humans came from animals, which was unthinkable at that time. Therefore, the idea of evolution was grasped to infuse Darwin's theory with a renewed sense of hierarchy, stating that humans had naturally evolved from animals in various stages (ibid. 190). Some stages of human development were allegedly closely related to ape like animals and resembled colonial peoples. A belief that suited nations' colonial campaign (ibid. 190). It provided a renewed idea of station that won over the Church that saw ample opportunity in reassuring their faith (ibid. 190/194). The Darwinian idea of evolution was easily twisted to interpret it hierarchically, making the survival of the fittest and Christian paternalism the main excuses for Western domination (Bennett 1995, 190).

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[5] [5] Even though, the main focus is on common grounds, differences are recognize in colonial conduct as results of different ideological, regional, cultural, political etc. circumstances. For example, the genocide in Namibia, and the racial experiments practiced by Germans during WWII (Olusoga and Erichsen, 2010; Becker 2017), or the manslaughter under the command of King Leopold in Belgian colonies (Gilroy 2004, 52). The circumstances have triggered different post-colonial developments and perspectives on colonial exploitation.

'there were 'certain intrinsic causes which seem to arrest the progress of certain races, even in

most favorable circumstances' [… and] black races as never having progressed beyond

barbarism and – more important to my present concerns – as never likely to do so' (ibid.,191)[6].

The continuing demeaning attitude toward Africans, emphasizing that their development simply

stopped halfway, testifying to their barbarism, deprived them of a leading role in world history

(Coombes 1994,141; Bennett 1995, 190). The idea that peoples from the African continent had

reached the limits of intellectual and physical development, which actually contrasts with the idea of

unimaginable possibility and progress of the era, is in accordance with medieval Cristian thought

(ibid., 194). It sustains the idea of peripheral degeneration, in which atrocious beings lived at the

outskirts of the earth who had fallen out of good grace with God, being deformed (ibid.). The

medieval terminology was eagerly embraced and transformed to fit the nineteenth-century findings

of non-Western people who, accordingly, lived at colonial outskirts, far removed from Europe as the

Western metropolis. In accordance with the Darwinian insights, they 'were moved from the world's

extremities to the initial stages of human history' (Bennett, 1995 194). The dialogue of barbarism had

befallen African peoples and merged with the idea of being primitive, meaning that they were unable

to ever attain European-like civilization (Bennett 1995, 78-79/194). Africans were presented as the

'missing link' of human development, resembling both primordial Europe and Christian ungodliness,

(Bennett 1995, 78). This was all to support the advanced state of civilization in which Europeans

believed to live (Coombes 1994, 120; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007 [2006], 35). The political paradigm

was so relentless that it shaped modern race thinking, and supplemented it with a hierarchical

system that seemed to be natural and thus predictably gave way to racism (Gilroy 2004, 8-9).

'The moment in which Kant compromised himself by associating the figure of the "Negro"

with stupidity and connecting differences in color to differences in mental capacity provides a

useful symbolic marker. From that point one, race has been a cipher for the debasement of

humanism and democracy' (ibid.)

Gilroy's statement explains the ferocity with which any opposition was dismantled and made to seem

absurd and incomprehensible. A good example of this is the story of Rafael Padilla (1865-1917),

publicly known as 'Monsieur Chocolat', who is born into slavery and spent a great deal of his life in

circus performances as a "wild savage". His reputation as a stereotypical "negro" clown derived

immense publicity in France. Yet, when he eventually managed to start a career as an intellectual

performance artist in Parisian theater and performed in his first Shakespearian part he is scorned off

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[6] In addition to Darwinian thought, other evolutionary theories existed that sustained racial hierarchy such as
that of Cuvier, who insisted on an unbridgeable divide between species and their inability of transformation. He
provided substance for theories of polygenetic difference in humans (Bennett 1995, 191).

the stage by a very much confused and appalled public.[7] This shows that Africans were conceptualized as being unsuccessful in attaining that transitional stage in which they become civilized, and in spite of all the altruistic Christian propaganda and missionary activity in the colonies, refinement had been exclusively reserved for Western civilization, (Bennett, 1995 191).

> 'Denied any history of their own, it was the fate of 'primitive peoples' to be dropped out of the bottom of human history in order that they might serve, representationally as it supports -underlining the rhetoric of progress by serving at its counterpoints, representing the point at which human history emerges from nature but has not yet properly begun its course' (Bennett 1995, 78-79).

With the above, the author of this thesis does not intend to victimize African peoples in the course of history, and supports Coombes' argument that colonized peoples often found ways to influence intercultural contact and exchange to work to their advantage (1994, 6). European examples of such individuals were actually Padilla and Josephine Baker (1906-1975), stage dancer of the roaring twenties, that clearly benefitted from the attention. However, the author wants to make clear that they did so whilst performing under unfair and unfavorable circumstances filled with insidious mockery and stereotyping. The effortlessness stupidity of the primitive was a preferred vision throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, being a constituent in Western society (Coombes 1994,43). A ludicrous theme became of force and relates to what Gilroy typifies as the naturalized 'racial common sense' (2004 9-10, 12). It secured racism as a conventionalized Western dialogue up to this day. The continuing consequences of colonial propaganda onto contemporary society in regard to race thinking have not been researched extensively enough or thoroughly acknowledged.

African objects in European museums

The heightened awareness of safeguarding Europeans' past existences and the following attempts at safeguarding Western sites and objects as signs of Western achievements and progress led to the construction of the previously mentioned 'conservation ethic' (Smith 2006, 19). This implied a role for museums to educate the public about their shared national past and their shared 'universal history of civilization', displaying objects of national and historical relevance (Bennett 1995, 76-77). The exhibiting of a shared history needed to encourage patriotism and to influence the public about

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[7] Padilla's story is sublimely narrated in a recently released French cinema production 'Monsieur Chocolat' (2016) in which the leading character Padilla is played by the actor Omar Sy. Even though the cinema production is a twenty-first century reconstruction for entertainment purposes and the level of accuracy is disputable, it provides us with a telling account of public behavior towards African people at the turn of the century. This source is used here because it aids in grasping people's attention at controversial accounts of our shared national history today and enables them to emotionally experience it. (Gérard Noiriel, Chocolat, clown nègre: l'histoire oubliée du premier artiste noir de la scène française, Bayard, 2012).

the benefits of the colonial endeavor (Bennett 1995,77; Smith 2006, 18). In thoroughly convincing people of the inevitable future of the modern state, new ways of classification were sought that had to replace the pre-nineteenth-century displays, which had no clear hierarchy, by displays that clearly arranged objects to indicate a line of progression (Bennett 1995, 77). This exhibiting strategy was implemented in various subdivisions upon which the nation-state relied, for example museums of history and archaeology were soon made to support the idealistic narrative of progress and the rise of Western civilization (ibid., 75/77). In addition, the relatively new museums of science and technology emphasized the inevitability of the European industrial revolution and the benefits of modernization. The concern for public instruction led to what Bennett typifies as the era's 'exhibition complex' (1995, 75-81).

One very influential form of display proved to be world exhibitions or world fairs, which provided replicas of peoples' villages from the colonies, being demonstrative of Western hegemony (Marchart 2014, 264). The fairs' pleasurable connotation as leisure events allowed visitors to shamelessly render non-Western people a spectacle. World fairs presented 'living demonstrations of evolutionary theory by arranging non-white peoples into a 'sliding scale of humanity' from the barbaric to the nearly civilized' (Bennett 1995, 83). Without constraint, non-Western people could be subjected to scrutiny, turning into inhumane objects themselves (Coombes, 1994, 113). In addition, Bennett states that in this transitioning, peoples' bodies became not only object of spectacle but malleable to anyone's desire in the subordination to 'the dominating gaze of the white, bourgeois, and (…) male eye of the metropolitan powers' (1995, 84). The fairs' apparent appeal as an activity of leisure presented audiences with a miniature world in which they had the pleasure of full control in overseeing its development (ibid.). The fair offered the populace for a short moment the 'possibility of possession' as a collective achievement and emphasized the imperial campaign's success (ibid.,113; Coombes 1994, 117). According to Bennett they became the culmination of the era's exhibitionary complex, being a success story in spreading the rhetoric of modernity and progress to the outskirts of the colonized world (1995, 83).

In spite of the world fairs' success, museums were found to offer more permanence (Bennett 1995, 80-81). Their development from private undertakings that collected African 'fetish and curio' to state-led public institutions, dedicated to the ethnological study of scientific specimens such as the Pit Rivers and the Horniman in Britain (Coombes 1994, 129/132), indicates a rigor shift in society. This is largely thanks to the field of anthropology that sought scientific and academic legitimization in aiding the colonial campaign, offering, for example, training to colonial officers (Bennett 1995, 77; Coombes 1994, 127). In addition to these "heroic" efforts, anthropology pursued a role in several fields that all involved the Western acquaintance with non-Western peoples, from setting up public fairs to running museums (ibid., Bennett 1995, 83). In doing so it easily switched between providing

pleasure and edification, undertaking anything to acquire legitimization (ibid.). The field of anthropology was most helpful in supporting the Western claim of superiority due to its acquired, scientific, knowledge about non-Western peoples (ibid.,77). This was in line with the century's new attempts of hierarchical categorization; anthropology borrowed its principles of taxonomy from biology studies to apply it to the study of races (Boursiquot 2014, 67/ Coombes, 1994, 132/117). Anthropologists continued the study of non-Western peoples in the same scientific order, i.e. 'to collect, to classify and to establish natural laws' and applied them in museums (Boursiquot 2014, 67). Anthropology justified the colonial campaign, marketing itself as an indispensable field of science whilst reinforcing the existing analogy between the west and "the other" (ibid., 65/69).

> Anthropology, within the exhibitionary complex '[…] played the crucial role of connecting the histories of Westerns nations and civilizations to those of other people, but only by separating the two in providing for an interrupted continuity in the order of peoples and races – one in which 'primitive peoples' dropped out of history altogether in order to occupy a twilight zone between nature and culture' (Bennett 1995, 77).

The colonial discourse encouraged the viewing of non-Western people as immanently primitive, undeveloped and lesser human beings, underscoring Western supremacy (ibid.). This propaganda was repeatedly advocated for example by the media, the world fairs, and especially by colonial museums. The museums were, with the aid of anthropology, equipped as 'instrument[s] of public instruction' and formed themselves into memorials of imperial achievement, in which non-Western peoples, being objectified, turned into mere embellishments of the imperial state's accomplishments (ibid., 28; Smith 2006,18).

In comparison to the successful world fairs that allowed for pleasurable viewing, (colonial) museums were spaces of state instruction and incited discipline (Bennett 1995,87-9). The nineteenth century witnessed an increase in the use of visual strategies to incite social reform and to gain visual control over audiences (ibid., 83; Smith 2006, 18). For example, Coombes states that museum curators took upon themselves the role of ´benevolent educators´ convinced to help the public with their "self-fashioning", creating visually attractive and instructive displays (1994, 43). The development of visual techniques to control the audience's gaze turned objects into 'vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power' (Bennett, 1994, 59, 61; Coombes 1994, 117).

> 'In the cranial displays emerging out of the evolutionary assumptions of late nineteenth-century craniology, women were assigned a place a few steps behind men, and colonized black peoples a place several leagues behind white Europeans' (Bennett 1995, 190).

Darwin had provided Western society not only with an explanation to our human existence, but also with means to evaluate the development of that existence by comparison of physical body aspects that were eagerly interpreted hierarchically to cater to political gains (Gilroy 2004, 7, 9). Measuring

peoples' physique became anthropology's pre-occupation, and visual data such as mockups, explanatory drawings and accompanying photographs of body parts and facial expressions influenced public memory. The visual data, presented as fixed truths, needed to persuade the public that these were signs of a supposed underdevelopment (Coombes 1994, 133-136).[8] In addition, photographic documentation of facial and bodily features in which 'characteristics of degeneracy and deviancy' could be captured is an example of how photography has been used to facilitate ideology, because of its supposed indexical qualities (Coombes 1994, 134). Following that, to photographic collect empirical data of peoples' physique, people's development could be mapped.

Museums continued with the same form of visual scrutiny, but unlike the world exhibitions, attention was paid to peoples' (suspected) immoral material culture and objects became 'vigorous indicators' of their status and development (Boursiquot 2014, 67). To confirm peoples' evolutionary development by objects, they were subjected to visual classification based on Western ideas about technical and esthetical refinement (Coombes 1994, 146). Accordingly, objects were symmetrically and esthetically arranged, often spread out in a fan shape, to emphasize their 'morphological affinities and resemblances' in which a hierarchy was present, ranging from simple or organic forms to more complexity (ibid., 118). In essence the morphological arrangement, like other measurement tools such as craniology charts, were put into place to visualize human evolution (ibid., 119). By documenting visual signs of enhancement in objects and their design, peoples' pedigree became apparent (Coombes 1994, 146).

Another very influential visual method, mimicking that of the great exhibitions, was an environmental reconstruction in the form of a diorama. It contained mockups/ plaster-casts of people after real life who were usually surrounded by artificial aspects of flora and fauna and inhibited a terrarium. This technique actually combined the popular display of bodies from the world exhibitions with the scientific edification of a museum. The visual strategies offered the public an essentialist and therefore convincing habitual reconstruction of "primitive" culture and people felt enabled to confirm the imperial ideology themselves (Dominy 2000, 5; Coombes 1994, 121). The primitive mind never improved and the representational methods were fashioned only to emphasize and support the Western narrative of evolution, closely following the preferred narrative of the state (Coombes 1994, 4; Bennett 1995, 87).

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[8] Photographic examination of people was an established practice within criminology that relied on the study of physiognomy (Coombes 1994, 138).

Grounding African heritage in art

The collection of African objects and their display was motivated by a multitude of reasons and desires. The main one discussed so far was driven by semi-scientific political motives (Bennett 1995, 77). In addition, the import of African objects suited a particular interest, which was already signaled by the practice of world fairs that condoned pleasurable viewing of the African "other" (ibid.,79). Here the colonial propaganda of barbarism and the idea of being immoral and savage sparked the imagination. Instead of being put off Western audiences were intrigued by it, which nourished an obsession with all things exotic and "out of the ordinary." The novel 'The heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad (Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, 1857-1924), published in 1902, is a good example of this, and metaphorically refers to Africa as an obscure place.[9] It attributes the continent with mythical proportions, being secretly admired and condemned at the same time – a duality that continues to this day when Africa is represented, for example in traveling advertisements. This element of fatal attraction persists in descriptions about Africa that make use of certain terms such as mysterious and magical, both of which were found in the online presentation of the Africa section of the Dutch ethnological museum up to 2018.[10] The feelings of fascination came from an aspired difference and for the purpose of this thesis the focus goes out to material aspects of objects that were found to be abnormal (Vos 2004, 17), for example the representation of human form (anthropomorphic). A specific appeal went out to objects that showed artistic ability and were interpreted alongside Western definitions of art (Coombes 1994, 142). The interest collided with the earlier explained anthropologic tendency to catalogue objects based on aesthetics and the following idea of evolutionary distinction. For example, the Mayer Museum in the UK was among the first to use the concept of art in its description of non-Western objects, as early as in 1901 (ibid.). In addition to colonial museums, private collectors began to exhibit their "primitive" collections to the public and accordingly displayed their semi-scientific knowledge, a mix of their (aesthetic) fantasies and state propaganda (Vos 2004, 18; Alivizatou 2011, 47).

The interest in African artistic abilities marks an important turn in the reception of African culture and influenced the idea of African heritage as it is known today, because it openly allowed for "positive" receptions of African (material) culture and paved the way to an explicitly Western recognition of African art (Coombes 1994,143; Rubin 1984, 1). For example, the Mayer Museum introduced a distinction between objects of culture and those of art in 1901 already attracted the interest of students of local art schools by displaying and describing their objects in 'bald formalism' according to Coombes (1994, 141-142). The artistic interest in African heritage was nurtured from a

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[9] The obscurity is in this case the outcome of surveying the cruelty of the colonial encounter.
[10] Attachment 1 and 2.

realm of Western imagination, fascination and fantasies that copied themselves onto objects (Rubin 1984, 1). They immersed objects in Western dialogues and artistic divisions, such as expressionism, surrealism etc., and they drew inspiration from, what Rubin unfashionably still considers, 'tribal art and culture', submerging African objects and themselves in Western artistic dialogues of primitivism in the (early) twentieth century (Strand 2013,38; 1984, 1).[11] They were intrigued by African sculptures' bald forms which posited to them new resolutions of thinking visually about humans (Strand 2013, 38). For example, expressionists went beyond and tried to get in touch with an imagined pre-rational and instinctive state in which emotions freely lingered that led them be transcribed artistically (Gordon 1984 [1985], 369); a "childish" state, which for example German expressionists (Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde) admired and that was held to be responsible for their bold artistic creativity (ibid.). This longing for again a simple and primitive life reached out to ideas of Europe's past of an uncontrolled nature and reflects the kind of nostalgia previously discussed. It facilitated a view of an African, uncultivated world filled with Western fantasies and desires about what being primitive means.

The artistic view of African material culture prevailed after World War two and de-colonization in most (post-colonial) museums as private and public collections merged into one (Boursiquot 2014, 67). The resulting adoption of the aesthetic approach in the representation of non-Western objects only enhanced African material culture to be seen as African art (Alivizatou 2011, 48; Vos 2004,18). Yet, in cases the long-awaited acknowledgment of art still went together with a notion of humanity's first art, such as the French terms of 'arts premiers' or 'arts primordiaux' give away (Vivan 2014, 197; Price 2007, x). The troublesome adjective of primitive and the relationship to Western primitivism still overshadows African material culture[12] (Rubin 1984, 2-5).[13] In reference to this misleading positive change, Boursiquot argues that the act of "attentive looking", i.e. the scrutiny

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[11] Even though the adoption of non-western "art" by European avant-gardists, who sought artistic inspiration in African objects, seems to imply that they appreciated African culture, and in cases opposed colonialism (Strand 2013, 8), they became amateur ethnologists themselves to some extent, but in doing so they adhered to prevailing and modernistic notions about racial differences and western supremacism (Rubin 1984, 1; Gordon 1984 [1985], 369). One could argue that they did so positively. Expressionists' appreciation extended from esthetic admiration to cultural affiliation, sympathizing with African peoples (ibid.). The difference between them and the public was that they were appreciative towards a supposed "primitive lifestyle". A notion that entails a 'return to nature', and should be explored more extensively in regard to the relationship of expressionists with ideas about 'vitalism' and sexual conduct that is made explicit in sexually bestowed upon representations of people and the role of African art to which Gordon briefly refers (1984 [1985], 370; Rubin 1984, 2).

[12] The word primitive in the arts is known since the nineteenth century, where it was used to refer to arts of the fourteenth and fifteenth century by Flemish and Italian artists that were remembered for their honest simplicity, their retreat into nature and the idea of benevolence in portraying a simple, primitive lifestyle (Rubin 1984, 2).

[13] The decline of colonial power together with the decline of the discipline of anthropology led former colonial museums to seek other means to secure a future existence, ending the so called "Golden age" (Boursiquot 2014, 67). Anthropologists pursued new fields of interest, away from the museums.

African culture was subjected to at the popular colonial fairs and museums, turned into an act of appreciation (2014, 69). The alleged primitive forms could now be artistically valued in their own right. A good example of the turning point is provided by an exhibit catalogue titled 'African art'[14] (1947) of the Dutch Museum Volkenkunde (anon.). It presents an introduction to African art and starts by explaining humans' intrinsic need to artistic expression in primitive societies (ibid., 7). Even though the catalogue acknowledges and admires the artistic complexity in African culture, in several accounts African peoples are noted to be uncivilized, and to only partly have achieved the full extent of what art is considered to be (ibid. 7). It notes that African art techniques lack the expected competence, or figurative ornamentation, or interest in the "natural" shape of the human body (ibid., 11-12). The bias is striking, and the catalogue continuously compares African art and Western art styles, stating that western artists have mastered and even improved comparable ways of making representations (ibid., 11), neglecting aspects of intercultural exchange and the influence of African objects upon them.

In spite of the interesting and overly enthusiastic way in which the catalogue discusses African art, its (underlying) condescending manner, which Gilroy would label as racial common sense (2004, 10), seems to evade at all cost the idea of the arts being called each other's equals. Finally, it comes to an intrinsic difference between Western art and African art found in the latter's lack of individual signature. This fault actually defies the attribution of the status of art to Africa, because an object is only discernable to its "tribe" (Museum Volkenkunde 1947, 8). 'Western culture has appropriated African art and attributed to it meanings that are overwhelmingly Western' (Vogel 1990,192; Coombes 1994, 192). It is clear by now that Western aestheticism has appreciated African objects in disregard of ethnic perspectives, which were often found alienating.[15] Yet, the Western one-sided interest in objects became unattractive and worrying from the eighties onwards as ethnological museums felt irrelevant to society at large (Boursiquot 2014, 63-64). The resulting feelings of insecurity led to a 'crises' among museums and they struggled in redefining their purpose to society, as stated by Boursiquot (2014, 63; Vos 2004, 19).

It has to be clear by now how many museums have been historically imbedded in social-economic and political affairs, but also in the cultural environment in which they are situated (Ter Keurs 2006, 2). This is especially seen in consideration of the benefits that museums received from the colonial conduct, emerging the objects in western culture. It follows that museums can hardly reside in a position of neutrality, because they never had one. Moreover, colonial or ethnological

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[14] Title translated from Dutch: 'Afrikaanse Kunst'.
[15] For example, the detailed description of the collection of Benin in the catalogue reports the discovery of objects 'dripping with blood from human sacrifices' (translated from Dutch: druipten van het bloed der laatste mensenoffers…) (Anon. 1947, 14).

museums' whole existence lies in a field of (colonial) disparity (Alivizatou 2011, 47), and therefore, alike multiple voices in literature (Boursiquot 2014, 63; Vivan 2014, 197; McClellan 2008, 5), this thesis also question their continuing significance in today's multi-ethnic societies. Whose African heritage are we actually discussing when entering a museum of ethnography, in or out of Africa?

African renaissance & the idea of ownership of heritage
Post colonialism's ethnographic museums heralded as places of 'representation, preservation and conservation of the tangible cultural property of the past' seemed trapped in a time capsule (Yoshida 2008, 4; Boursiquot 2014, 63). Their claims of representing non-Western peoples by mostly bygone material collections only resonated Western superiority. The outdated character of museum models became especially striking whilst the spatial distance between the west and the rest of the world is fading, and museums risk of becoming out of touch with reality (Boursiquot 2014, 63-64). Although museums are making progress in de-colonizing exhibits, trying to make amends with indigenous voices that together are labeled and African movement (Yoshida 2008, 1-2). It seeks not only rectification, but tries to make up for the years of colonial oppression and convincingly tries to turn peoples' negative and colonially motivated self-consciousness into a positive cultural self-awareness. It tackles the Western history and definition of colonialism, which is set aside as a misjudgment, a lack of insight into the African character that regretfully resulted in paternalistic activities that eventually enabled economic exploitation (Yoshida 2008, 1-3; Asante 2008 [2007], 11). Yet, colonialism, in the words of Asante, should be understood in terms of a determined attack on peoples' consciousness aimed at 'bankrupting the intellectual and cultural space of the colonized' (ibid.). It has been unacknowledged as warfare to this day, in which the aggressor simply enforced its superiority (ibid.). Therefore, it is naïve to think that, by attaining African independence, colonialization itself stopped in the minds of millions of people, in and out of Africa. The emotional oppression has been an underlying and continuous feature in the lives of many (Asante 2008 [2007], 10). Among the post-colonial feelings of insecurity Yoshida emphasizes the movement as a renewed, overall appreciation of Africa's cultural history, in which the continent has 'thrown off the mantle of the so-called 'primitive'', demanding human rights and acceptance (2008, 1-2). The claim here raises the pressure felt by museums with an ethnographic character that are already struggling to find a purpose in today's societies. This because of their colonial affiliation, and the "out of place" character of their historical collections and institutions in reaching the twenty-first century.

The recovery of an African cultural self-consciousness has developed into a global inspiring movement that interferes in the Western discourse of heritage management (Vivian 2014, 195; Yoshida 2008, 3,4, 155). It inspires the reorganization of renown museums and the establishment of new museums to present African heritage in a dignified way (ibid.). The cultural movement is

occasionally understood in terms of a "renaissance" (Yoshida 2008, 3,8), referring to the appreciative growth of African culture and memorialization of its heritage today. Asante understands this African empowerment as redirecting African heritage away from Eurocentric interests toward African values and motives (2008 [2007],7). In his words Afrocentricity is an 'intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture transcontinentally and trans-generationally' (Asante 2008 [2007], 2).[16] He reacts against the continuing Western interference (neo-colonialism) in African matters (ibid. 7). For example, UNESCO's denial of heritage management in African countries that are often regarded as state-directed nostalgia (Rowlands and De Jong 2010 [2007], 19). The risk of being declined on such grounds in pursuing post-colonial acceptance and restitution, displaces attention from the revolutionary aspect of the African cultural revival.

 In rejoicing in African heritage, safeguarding its cultural continuation is of equal importance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007 [2006], 40). Yet the question is who defines heritage for Africa in the twenty-first century and how should it be managed? An answer might be found in the literature (Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007], Alivizatou 2011; Alivizatou 2014 [2012]; Smith 2006) that increasingly tries to separate heritage users from (institutional) heritage definers. The first case relates to the previously mentioned social idea of heritage, and deals with people whose heritage (whether consciously or not) is part of their daily lives. In contrast, the top-down approach assesses if peoples' heritage should be regarded valuable or not, being institutionalized and invested in Western bureaucracy. It determines criteria regarding how people should engage with their heritage. This approach is the current day successor of what historically has been labeled the "authorized heritage discourse" (Smith 2006, 4). It is currently translated into various policies, such as those issued by UNESCO (Rowlands & De Jong, 2010 [2007], 20), that pursue the safeguarding of our world heritage. As concerned as these institutions pretend to be, they remain a product of Western bureaucracy, and according to literature, the guidelines they present occasionally conflict with indigenous uses. Thus, the right to ownership is challenged. For example, UNESCO, which has tasked itself with safeguarding the world's heritage, issued a treatise in 1972, stating that global advancement endangers the survival of indigenous cultures (De Jong 2010 [2007], 160). It offered a singular, universal format for the protection of culture all over the world that should be sufficient for any highly localized heritage (De Jong 2010 [2007], 161; Yoshida 2008, 3). Although the formal application and following appropriation of peoples' cultural practices as institutional heritage is supposedly meant to protect them, it leads to their preservation (De Jong 2010 [2007], 162). For example, agreeing to UNESCO's care means indirectly agreeing to the intellectual transfer of cultural

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[16] The movement is also partially the result of Afro-American interests of the twentieth century and the demise of white supremacy thinking in the USA. A topic which is not further addressed, but is recurrent in the works of Asante, who is of Afro-American descent himself (2008 [2007], 2).

ownership in accordance to the Western salvaging ethos; an ethos that was mostly directed at safeguarding material reality, and just recently expanded with protecting intangible heritage in 2003. In the convention, the following is stated:

> ´the intangible cultural heritage refers to the ´practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects artifacts and cultural spaces associated there with – that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage' (Yoshida 2008, 4)

The celebrated recognition of intangible heritage de-emphasizes the Western focus on tangible heritage, which has also been UNESCO's (previous) main concern (Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007], 15) and welcomes all aspects of peoples' livelihoods. It acknowledges the immaterial aspects of peoples' customs that in turn support cooperation between (ethnological) museums and the peoples they (materially) represent. Yet the treatise's positive reception cannot prevent critics from being alarmed about UNESCO's immersion of intangible heritage within the existing discourse of preservation. Culture does not profit from any confinement, and critics suggest a reconceptualization of how to protect peoples' custom in a way that secures both their voice and their culture (De Jong 2007, 173). In doing so, cultural change should be accepted as a liable component to peoples' cultural existence and cultural reinvention, even if it challenges UNESCO's idea of safeguarding culture (Yoshida 2008, 5). People's perspectives on their heritage should be considered part of that idea of safeguarding heritage according to Yoshida (ibid.). Put differently, if the conditions for cultural change would be safeguarded, culture itself would be indirectly safeguarded as well.

UNESCO is, to say the least, hesitant in changing its direction, mostly because of its historical grounding in the Western salvaging ethos (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007], Alivizatou (2011)). This is the reason that they prefer a vision of Africa that is "naturally" performative (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007],15). The bold accusation degrades UNESCO's achievements in the field of African heritage, because it reduces its care to safeguarding misguided nostalgia (ibid. 20). It is common knowledge that UNESCO has condemned colonialism, but it is also unaccepting of its results that impacted the formation of African nation-states that mimic the European model (ibid.15-16; Nettleton 2007, 108). It fears developments such as continuing globalization and tourism that could further endanger customary or "traditional" culture (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007], 16). The inconsistency within UNESCO's mission has become an eligible example of today's struggle with the outdated salvaging paradigm, and questions Western initiatives if they continue to be preoccupied with recovering the past, a past that has outlived its purpose.

The accusation of Western-based UNESCO categorizing African culture as performative reacts to the historicizing tendency and the unfair treatment of African cultures and nations that disregard any post-colonial development (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007],16-17). It relates to the idea of

natural authenticity that shows through culture, which has been part of the conservationist discourse, referring to an implicit 'naturalness' in peoples' cultural expressions (Geurts 2012, 140). The nostalgic longing for things to remain uncorrupted had to target the feelings of despair that followed modernity's unforeseeable change, expansion and progress (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007], 17). The idealization of natural ways of living has given way to an account of (bio)diversity in culture and relates to the idea of humanity unspoiled (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007], 16). The positive attitude toward naturalness gives way to mourning over the loss of cultural diversity that has underlined heritage management in museums since the nineteenth century (De Jong & Rowlands 2010 [2007], 17; Geurts 2012, 140). Museums provide spaces for authenticity to rebuild the self and cater to people's desires, visibly documenting their cultural identity (ibid.) Yet, whose interests are served by continuing this kind of natural museology in the twentieth-first century? With today's awareness, views on what is considered authentic or not can change too.

Rethinking African heritage in museums
Up till now African heritage finds itself to various degrees enmeshed in a Western history of cultural appropriation of the African continent, which problematizes its recognition as autonomous and innately African. The ongoing Western entitlement to African (material) culture has resulted in fragmented ownership, and African heritage can be typically referred to as a shared heritage (Legêne 2007, 220). This does not imply any consensus on the heritage being separated, but refers to a heritage to which multiple parties stake a claim, and do so differently. The concept helps us to understand the mutual entitlements made, contradictions established and the multiple emotions expressed in the coming case studies.

In regard to this shared ownership, what does it mean for African heritage to be incorporated into a globally shared perspective of heritage, and one to which non-African people claim having affinity? If African populations are withheld of any agency to govern their heritage abroad, do museum displays of the African continent not become purely decorative? These issues surface when questioning the current management of African collections in the literature (Yoshida 2008; Vivan 2014; Boursiquot 2014; Mack 2008). For example, Vivan acknowledges a need for spaces to reflect and to evaluate heritage collectively, and she does consider museums to be valid places to communicate culture (2014, 195). Yet she concludes that up till now existing museums (of ethnology) have failed to connect to 'their own time' effectively, crippling their authority (2014, 195-196). Museums are now expected to give way to changing times in their displays as people's definitions of heritage change, allowing space for people to re-imagine their culture (Yoshida 2008, 5). In conclusion, a transformation is aspired between ´the objects as museum specimens and as catalysts of narrative, between the museum as bank vault and as contemporary memory site' (Mack 2008, 24).

The longing for historical and cultural rectification on behalf of African parties finds itself opposing an established history, which to them symbolizes ongoing neo-colonialism, but to others a truthful, yet mournful account. Critics like Vivan urge for complete renewal in museum management monitoring African collections, awaiting an ideal type of museum that can be truly labeled post-colonial (2014, 195-196). Museums with ethnological collections are increasingly targeted in attempts at sociocultural reform, because they have become the visible memorials of colonialism. Therefore, the author of this thesis finds it especially important to look at the following case studies of heritage management from both sides, in and out of Africa, and to question whose cultural history is actually on display.

Conclusion

African heritage is firmly entrenched in a Western narrative of history, whilst pursuing a discrete identity of its own. This discrepancy has become visible in the revolt that emerges out of civil unrest, trying to secure African interests in the ongoing Western appropriation of African culture. At first the Western appropriation meant a moral rejection of African peoples in serving colonial interests, to now vouch for safeguarding of the latter. This opposition remains inherent in Western heritage management. Yet in vouching for African heritage, it holds a renewed notion of what proper safeguarding of African culture should be and again asserts (institutional) control, which, in cases, disrupts current cultural development in Africa. The Western appropriation of African culture into the established idea of heritage has resulted in a complexity that has inherited multiple and conflicting desires. These sentiments have transported the cultural legacy of Africa into an imaginary space in which anyone can appropriate it. The shared aspect of this heritage is often ignored and becomes problematical when it is understood that its (Western) definition solely implies culture from the African continent.

Chapter two

Exhibiting Kenyan heritage

Introduction

Defining Africa's cultural heritage now seems to be an increasingly idyllic approach, because as discussed in chapter one, its main notions, such as heritage itself and African art are Western inventions of the twentieth century. Yet the idea of an African heritage is very much alive, befitting a cosmopolitan idea of cultures of the world. The global assertion to African heritage begs the question not only of how the concept is regarded from an African point of view, but also how (material) cultures are regarded in Africa to which the concept stakes claim. Therefore, this chapter assesses how the idea of African heritage works for African museums by analyzing Kenya's cultural and national legacy against a backdrop of colonial interference. Its national history is partly a colonial one, an awareness that is recently surfacing, stimulating a reassessment of heritage, of identity and of cultural belonging that is keenly described by Coombes and Hughes (2014). These issues have become solidified in the nations' National Museum of Nairobi, which represents perspectives of colonial history and the development of the (colonial and post-colonial) nation-state. The museum is of interest here because it has developed from belonging to the colonial settlers to the new nation-state's pride, surpassing (political) stages of cultural and national reform.[17]

Kenya received its independence as late as in 1964, departing from the United Kingdom that for more than a century had overseen its governance. This meant saying goodbye to years of colonial oppression that affected people's mental and physical welfare, according to Asante an unacknowledged warfare, as mentioned earlier (ibid., 2008 [2007], 11). Now that it is out in the open, it definitely relates to the statement by Coombes and Hughes that proclaim Kenya to have been in a state of denial, in which people's restrained emotions were left unattended due to national urgencies to 'forget the past' (2014,3). Yet, the colonial past is the main source of the crises the nation and its colonially assembled peoples experience today, having to share a common national identity and heritage. With this, the following informs the reader of recent developments in African heritage management that aspire both a breakdown and a continuation of the past, challenging Western definitions of African heritage.

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[17] The choice here to investigate Kenya's national museum, a former colonial museum, befits the aim of this thesis. However, there are museums in Africa that are less nationalist driven and operate locally by and for cultural communities. A great example of such developments is the spread of 'community peace museums' (Coombes & Hughes 2014, 8; Karega-Munene 2014, 35) in Kenya.

The National Museum of Nairobi is located at the top of the Museum Hill on the outskirts of the city and situated in walking distance of the infamous (Fairmont) Norfolk hotel built in 1904. The museum is seen as a 'flagship' to the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), which is the principal organization that overlooks the nation's museums and conducts research into Kenyan cultural heritage (Karega-Munene 2014, 18). This is emphasized by a large banner that states 'National Museums of Kenya: where heritage lives on', the thesis' front page cover.[18] The banner is placed in front of the security gate at entering the museum premises and offers a quick overview of the National Museum of Nairobi, calling it a 'place of discovery'.[19]

Plate 1: Inner courtyard, Nairobi National Museum.

Nairobi National Museum

Upon reaching the entrance on top of the hill, the museum presents itself behind a contemporary inspired triumphal arch that welcomes its visitors. At entering the ensuing enclosure, one finds oneself in front of the main entrance and opposite a lunchroom and a shop. From this point one overlooks the museum architecture that is formed out of adjacent buildings, an ensuing garden and a (small) reptile zoo, (Plate 1). The buildings are composed out of several architectural styles that give an idea of their multiple existences throughout time, and their purpose in the passing of regimes. The building in the middle is constructed in a (neo-) classical style together with a grand portal that is preceded by tall Corinthian-inspired columns. It forms an

Plate 2: Main hall, Nairobi National Museum.

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[18] Text on banner [2013]
[19] ibid.

architectural reminder of the museum's colonial history. It is reminiscent of a ruin, of something deeply connected to its landscape as a memorial to a now severe colonial past that is somehow still engaged in the present.[20]

Plate 3: Overview, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

Upon entering the museum's exhibiting area, one starts at the monumental main hall that provides an impressive overview of a clear space, a few cabinets and an installation, exhibiting representative features of Kenya (Plate 2). From the main hall, multiple passageways lead to different areas in the museum, and in several corners there are staircases that connect to exhibits on multiple floors. On the ground floor for example the natural history collection stretches out to the far-right end of the building (seen from the perspective of the photograph, Plate 2) and sides with the contemporary art collection on the left. In the cellar the narrative of mankind is staged, with an accompanying diorama of prehistoric human development and an exhibit about natural evolution. By returning to the main hall and taking the monumental staircase up to the first floor one can enter several exhibition areas, such as the contemporary art exhibit (stretching out over two floors in an adjacent building), Kenya's colonial and post-colonial national history, and an exhibit about cultural life in Kenya. The latter exhibit is called the 'Cycle of Life' (considered the museum's cultural exhibit) and will be the topic of main interest throughout this chapter. In the following the exhibit will be analyzed against the museums' history and its reorganization[21], in order to understand what Kenyan heritage, partaking in the heritage of the African continent, nowadays implies.

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[20] Throughout Kenya architectural structures can be found that form a memorial to the colonial invocation. Especially in cities like Nairobi and Mombasa that contain multiple monumental neo-classical buildings, but also evidence is found in small scale towns. Local buildings that have increasingly changed ownership and function, and in most cases, are found in states of decay (exceptions remain). Especially the latter derives them a memorial status, but in spite of the lack of maintenance and their visual reference to colonialism these buildings have been re-used post-colonially. Their continuing use implies a change in status, which is an interesting point of departure for further research.

[21] In the review of the exhibit a selection is made of subjects and displays to discuss and this is done on account of what is found relevant for the scope of this paper whilst maintaining a representative overview.

African heritage, a Kenyan example: The Cycle of Life

Plate 4: Overview, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

The exhibit focuses upon the idea of going through a cycle of life. It is a theme not uncommon to African communities and is, in this case, customized to exhibit cultural life in Kenya. It emphasizes a continuous cycle of life and refers to an idea of future existence and cultural continuation in Kenya. The exhibit is organized into four galleries that overlook the ground floor's exhibit of natural history, and each of them is placed alongside the corridors of the four-sided room (Plate 3). Each corner contains a passageway and the exhibits' introductory displays are duplicated and placed at both sides near the entrances (Plate 4). Yet, ideally, people would enter through the first opening, after climbing the stairs, and venture from childhood to youth, to adulthood and to ancestor-hood, completing a sequence of life.

> *'Societies all over Africa mark stages of life in different ways. Although the ways in which such stages are marked differ, they form a cyclic rhythm that could generally be divided into childhood, youth adulthood and ancestor stages. Each stage is marked with particular ceremonies and rituals.*
>
> *This exhibition offers insights into the ways in which various Kenyan communities perceived and marked each stage of life. The exhibition relays these messages using an assortment of media such as cultural objects from diverse communities.'* [22]

This message is presented, strategically, in front of the exhibit's four entrances, informing visitors about the motives of the exhibit (Plate 4). It divides life into four nuclear stages that supposedly represent Kenyan communities. In addition, it provides a vision of a united nation, whilst acknowledging cultural differences. The tension already expressed here, between cultural similarity and cultural divergence, will be a focus point in this case study.

Plate 5: Overview at 'Childhood', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

The template's emphasis on a shared Kenyan life frames a sense of

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[22] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].

togetherness in the passing of time and of generations. In the following short summaries will be provided of the categories and some particular accounts will be looked at with more detail.

Childhood

At the childhood part, visitors are made aware of children's nativity and the irresponsibility of their actions. The introductory template argues that childhood is a time for playing games, learning and imitating, indicating that children, prior to adolescence, have yet no specific status and no duties to fulfill (Plate 5). Moreover, in Kenyan communities the birth of a child is understood as a spiritual re-enactment of former life, in which ethnic lineages are sustained by ancestral bonds. 'When a child is born into a community, it is treated as a stranger without any particular identity and has to wait until the naming ceremony begins before the child is fully welcomed into the community'.[23] At birth a child's identity is not yet determined and he or she requires ceremonial validation to become an acknowledged individual. This process is presented in a showcase by a monochrome image, showing a man from the Boran community wearing wristlets (*Saqaa*) (Plate 5). In addition, similar objects (late twentieth century) are displayed from an ethnicity known as the Logoli (*Abaluhya*).[24] Another showcase has a similar theme, displaying a colored image of a young child wearing charms around his neck (Plate 6). It is presented alongside objects, such as a charmed necklace (mid-twentieth century), from an ethnicity known as the Maasai living in Kenya's Rift Valley.[25] Another theme is presented by a colored image of a 'contemporary baptism' showing the christening of a child (Plate 7). This contemporary form of Kenyan initiation is posed alongside a fashionable handbook for name-giving and birthday cards from the museum's contemporary,

Plate 6: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

Plate 7: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

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[23] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].
[24] Ibid.
[25] ibid.

urban collection (Plate 7).[26] The "modern" assemblage is emphasized by festive items, such as a roll of colored ribbon and giftwrapped presents that, perhaps for a self-evidentiary reason, go without explanation.

The adjacent showcase features children's nutrition, showing an image of a mother breastfeeding. Underneath the image is a text giving parental advice (Plate 8). The assemblage of images and text, showing, among other things, the logo of UNICEF, reveals an (politically inclined) educational plan about child rearing. The poster is accompanied by a text stating: 'The nomadic pastoralists offer their children mainly milk and meat. Whilst the farmers add more vegetables and fruits to the children's diet. The process of weaning children from milk again depends on the society in

Plate 8: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

which the child lives. […] In modern times, children's diets are more varied and there is much improved medical support […] so children live longer than in the past'.[27] The text draws a comparison between different lifestyles throughout time. In addition, it refers to perspectives of our "modern times" from which children benefit healthwise. The display gives note of a temporal discrepancy that keeps recurring and is made visible by, for example, a plastic 'baby feeding bottle' from the contemporary collection in conjunction with a customary 'milk gourd - Muko' of the Pokot, a Kenyan ethnicity living in the Rift Valley province (Plate 8-9). It appears however that these customary items (from the ethnographic collection) are ethnically specified while ordinary objects from the contemporary urban collection are not, an observation to which will be returned. The temporal

Plate 9: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

opposition reoccurs in the showcase of child carriers, in which contemporary means of child carrying are addressed (Plate 10). The objects here are all part of the contemporary collection, but they differ culturally. The customary carriers from an ethnicity called the Pokot are paralleled to carriers of the urban collection.[28] In spite of the awareness of change, the display's message emphasizes an idea of continuity in Kenyan practices.

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[26] ibid.
[27] ibid.
[28] Ibid.

Another showcase is dedicated to children's creativity and playtime. The accompanying text states that the kind of (natural) environment is responsible for the kind of toys that can be produced. The making of clay figures has been common to pastoral communities living in rural areas and are (supposedly) dependent upon available materials from their environment. The idea of an environmental dependency can also apply to explain the re-use of waste, such as scrap metal, in the making of toys (Plate 11). The exhibit celebrates the re-use of waste and states the following: "Before the term 'recycling' became an international catch-word for conservation, children in Kenya and other parts of Africa were already engaged in such a

Plate 10: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

process. Children scavenge the rubbish dumps [...] They make toys from discarded items such as tins, bottle tops, wires, old socks, and ropes".[29] The excess of waste is a serious issue, which to the thesis's author's recollections of Kenya's polluted landscape, and has become very visible, and is recognized here as an international problem. Yet, the relationship between children's activities and (grown up's) world issues is surprisingly drawn. The text continues in appraising self-made toys, and the display of a 'Bicycle rim' and a 'toy Volkswagen Beetle', from the contemporary collection support the

Plate 11: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

museum's statement. Furthermore, attention is paid to children's creative capabilities and the objects' acquisition by European museums. The toys made from scrap metal are not culturally specified nor relatable to any producer and find themselves presented next to more customary toys made from clay, such as the animal figures (twenty-first century) from the *Malalulu people* in the coast province

and a stuffed doll (*Gidet,* late twentieth century) from the El Molo people of the eastern province (Plate 12).

> 'Children make toys not because they come from a poor background and cannot afford to
> buy toys, ...but because the experience of making and using one's own toys is a richer
> experience than buying one from the shop. Making toys was therefore an important part of

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[29] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].

the Kenyan childhood and its perpetuation in the contemporary settings is a reflection of children's creative engagement with their surroundings'.[30]

This bold statement valorizes creativity and the "art" of invention whilst reacting fiercely to an imposed image of poverty. The assembly of toys (supposedly) made by children show continuity in cultural or local craftsmanship, but their involvement in global issues, unfortunately, raises to many unanswered questions in this exhibit.

The last display shows an image of an elder and children sitting around a fireplace.[31] The acts of storytelling and transmitting elderly knowledge are juxtaposed by contemporary school uniforms, bags and writing utensils of the contemporary collection (collected in 2008). It presents a juxtaposition between customary teaching practices and institutionalized education in Kenya, and together with the former displays reflects at a wider (post-colonial) change in the transfer of cultural knowledge. Even though the displays emphasize cultural continuation, they also reflect recent influences in children's lives.

Plate 12: Detail of childhood, the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

Youth

The stage of youth follows after childhood and the display's introductory text emphasizes the juvenile state of mind in which teenagers engage in life, whilst being prepared for adulthood. Their mental and physical state is challenged in initiation practices, which are of cultural importance to social transitioning. Therefore, the display holds various objects that have been used for that type of ceremonial purposes and are indicative of a person´s

Plate 13: Detail 'Youth', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

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[30] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].
[31] The piece is called 'Story telling at the fireplace' such is stated in the showcase's template.

Plate 14: Detail 'Youth', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

social status and physical endurance (Plate 13), e.g. items such as a ceremonial head ornament (late twentieth century) of the Nandi people (Rift Valley province), and a warrior's outfit (*Il-maasii)* of the Maasai from the mid-twentieth century, (Plate 13). The objects chosen are meant to materially mediate processes of bodily and cultural transformation that young people have experienced. This is described twofold regarding the expectations of women and of men. Both are supposed to have gone through state of seclusion after which 'young men now spend more time with their fathers or male relatives in order to learn the skills required to manage the main sources of livelihood within their communities […] The young women also spend more time with their female relatives or mothers. They are trained to care for infants, look after the household, and tend to the farms. Nowadays, in the modern economic set-up, this kind of division of labor is not always so strictly defined'.[32] This is displayed by objects that represent the acquisition of new status and particular male vigor and female maturity. Especially the latter is a form of bodily transitioning and keyed as genital circumcision, a radical modification that has been widely applied in initiation practices in parts of Africa and limits women's bodily freedom and ability. By now it is internationally severely criticized and the exhibit takes account of this: ´nowadays alternative rites of passages are used especially by the girls to replace the more outdated circumcision practices´.[33] In addition, the text tries to raise awareness about the replacement of circumcision practices by seeking and encouraging to find alternatives for female ethnic inauguration. This is relevant to the upkeeping of ethnic identity, and in continuation of the temporal division made at childhood, ethnic and customary items are juxtaposed by items from the contemporary collection. For example, a colorful apron, 'girl initiates decoration', of the Nandi people of the Rift Valley province, and a t-shirt with a slogan stating: 'in support of alternative forms of initiation for girls' (Plate 13).[34] This is placed alongside objects of customary dress and practices, such as a pubic apron acquired in 1971 from the Samburu community, but also next to customary utensils of circumcision from various communities (Plate 14). The exhibiting of items that represent practices that are morally and legally rejected is a bold statement and reflects a wider tendency in

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[32] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].
[33] Ibid.
[34] ibid.

museums to both revalue "tradition", but also give space to criticism. In this context the author of this thesis was informed by a museum official that the museum wished to be as neutral as possible regarding female circumcision, and avoided discrediting ethnic communities to safeguard their cultural dignity.[35]

The Kenyan issue of exhibiting female genital mutilation proves to be a liable example of the difficulty museums exhibiting African heritage face today, and is a challenging example of Mack's notice that African museums evade approaching international issues (2008, 16).

Adulthood

Plate 15: Overview 'adulthood', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

The third stage of life follows after marking the end of youth, and centers around the responsibilities of adults and sustaining their livelihoods. The display discusses topics in which social expectations, obligations and privileges are key, and all narrow down to an idea of cultural responsibility that is signified by objects that represent different statuses in and around the household or community. One of them is marital relationships, explained as fortifying 'a union of spouses and their families', in which acts of reciprocity and ceremony are the most important to secure relationships.[36] This is displayed by mostly customary objects that first specify acts of gift giving and festivity, such as a beer

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[35] Interview, museum official remains anonymous (2013).
[36] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].

pot (acquired in 1971) of the Pokot or a honey container (*poleito*, enlisted 1969) of an ethnicity called the Ogiek (*Dorobo*); both societies live in Kenya's Rift Valley provinces. Another type of objects signify status in dress, such as a (contemporary) blue garb (*Dirra*) which is labelled as a 'marriage gift' from the Somali of the North-Eastern Province of Kenya and acquired in 2007 (Plate 15). Another comparable item that refers to women's status in society is a customary skirt (*Kasana*, acquired 1971) from the Tugen, an ethnicity living in the Rift Valley province of Kenya (Plate 15). The dresses refer to women's "traditional" role in marriage, and together with other customary objects that signify household tasks or status, such as a flywhisk and a stool, they portray a visionary idea of past life in Kenya. This becomes apparent in the sum of customary behaviours and traits that men and women had to fulfil that are mentioned in templates about household and leadership. Especially in the latter the idea of a (community) leader is defined as an earned right, and interesting comparisons are drawn between customary forms of leadership and post-colonial ones, in which continuation appears in the use of customary visual signifiers. In addition, the text makes note of (past) leadership among women 'in traditional patrilineal settings, men were the heads of their families. In contemporary society, this has changed because of the recognition of the equality of sexes, especially in the modern, urban contexts'.[37] Even though the statement expresses, undeniably, an ideal situation, the exhibit texts continues in grasping the temporal change. 'In the modern times, the boundaries between various stages of life are more fluid. Adults have new and different responsibilities that may not necessarily fit into customary ways of life'.[38]

Plate 16: Overview 'adulthood', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

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[37] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].
[38] ibid.

The phase of adulthood alerts people about how they experience life against an (ideal) vision on how life was experienced.

The same idea reoccurs in a following showcase of 'looking beautiful' that features an image of a woman seated in a 'hair salon'[39] (Plate 16). The showcase accordingly presents a variety of items that have in common the aspect of bodily embellishment. In the upper part of the case wooden combs are "aesthetically arranged"[40] in a circular, fan-like, shape (Plate 16). The combs, acquired between 1905 and 1971, are from various ethnicities, such as the Turkana from Kenya's Rift Valley, and the Malalulu and Boni from the coast province of Kenya. In their midst, a metal hairclip from the contemporary collection is added to the aesthetically pleasing composition. The accompanying text explains 'The concept of beauty is difficult to define […]. Being beautiful or attractive was a culturally specific and cultivated notion and no national or global standard existed. In contemporary society, there is the tendency to standardize the sense of beauty following the Western forms of grooming'.[41] This text, like the former displays, registers changing circumstances, but it raises awareness of the consequences of such changes and their alleged value. For example, it critically reviews how a Western standardized idea of beauty has replaced local practices of beautification in Kenyan communities.

Another aspect that also deals with change is a display about community protection and recreation. Here the idea of sustainment of livelihoods is key, and customary practices that involve spirituality have been intermingled or partly replaced by contemporary religious and globalized forms.[42] As a result the text states that people have become more individualised than in the past.

Ancestors

Ancestry is the last phase of the sequence to be discussed and focuses mainly on the transition from life to death. It is represented as 'disruptive and mysterious […] In the customary context, the departed are transformed into ancestral spirits who are believed to act as intermediaries between the human and the supernatural worlds'.[43] The spiritual relationship of the world of the living is accordingly displayed by objects that evoke a spiritual connection and allegedly behold unworldly communicative abilities. For example, in a few connected showcases an array of medicinal tools is demonstrated that belonged to a medicine man known as Mzee Mwabu from the Tharaka community (Plate 17). His collection of healing items is displayed to reflect upon customary means of

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[39] ibid.
[40] See chapter one about aesthetic anthropology in museums.
[41] Text from exhibition the 'Cycle of Life' [2013].
[42] ibid.
[43] ibid.

healing. The collection consists of various items, such as a 'sheep horn' filled with medicine to bodily affect people, a 'magic staff' to purify space, and a 'shell' to protect circumcised girls from witchcraft.[44] Even though some information is recovered, other is lost, and the teddy bear is such an example of its meaning and purpose being irretrievable (Plate 17).[45] It was found among the doctor's paraphernalia, and is explained to be a maternity symbol because of it being known as a children's toy.

The display is supported by a brief nod to a present revival of herbalism. 'Although such traditional practices have sometimes been viewed as witchcraft and superstition, recent research and successful use of some traditional medicines to treat illness have encouraged the users and practitioners of traditional medicine'.[46] The text admits to a current concern in safeguarding the continuation of customary practices that were eagerly criticized in the (colonial) past. Yet, the teddy bear clearly questions the value of returning to labels as customary or traditional, because it in itself is the product of a cultural exchange that has exceeded boundaries – a comment to which will be returned later on.

The temporal division also becomes apparent in the following cases of funeral remembrance that display funeral practices. Here attention is placed on the wooden landmarks (*kigango or Koma*) from the Giriama community that mark gravesides and commemorate deceased people (Plate 18). This practice is reflected upon by a display that discusses the influence of world

Plate 18: Detail 'Ancestors', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

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[44] ibid.
[45] Interview, anonymous museum official (2013)
[46] ibid.

religions. It features a color image of a cemetery and a memorial advertisement that combines aspects of Kenya's main religions such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. In addition, a common (Christian) gravestone is placed in the exhibit (Plate 19).

The display about ancestry deals with the change in spirituality and discusses practices that are all related to making a connection to the life hereafter.

Plate 19: Detail 'Ancestors', the 'Cycle of Life' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

The exhibit is an example on how today's culture is rebuilt and made meaningful in coming to understand historical developments and the resulting changes. In the review of the exhibit the 'Cycle of life' the focus is on how change is conceptualized. The many references to the temporal division of the past and the present disturb me because firstly, both ends are constructed from present concerns, and secondly, whose past are we actually dealing with?

The exhibits' narration of culture is presented in an opposition between customary practices and contemporary ones, and they increasingly relate to the distinction between being "traditional" or being "modern". This claim is supported by the use and grouping of (ethnic) objects in displays, such as the showcase of children's nutrition, presenting objects that with their date of manufacture or ethnic affiliation seem to embody the temporal distinction. In other displays, such as the one presenting children carriers, the objects' dates are similar, but still relate to the divisional idea of customary vs contemporary practices that in spite of their temporal category can coexist in the present. This reoccurs in the display of the medicine man with the teddy bear, and the texts about herbalism that express the value of the continuation of customary practices in the here and now. This categorization makes me question the value of labels such as "traditional" and even that of customary.

The divide used in the exhibit looks all too familiar, i.e. the colonial distinction of being "traditional" versus being "modern" in narrating cultural practices and lifestyles. The essential labels ignore any cultural exchange over time between the two. The result is that by using terms such as customary and contemporary in referring to cultural practices, these categories are depicted as timeless modes of existence, in spite of them being understood as (nostalgic) ideal constructions, ranging freely in the present-day mind. The apparent struggle in narrating the past and also in defining the present has led to a perception of reality in opposing terms. The duality in the

presentation of culture in Kenya occasionally overshadows the exhibits' aims at representing a multicultural society and of proving cultural continuity. For example, the items from the contemporary (urban) collection are displayed with minimal additional information. This is perhaps done because they are self-evident[47], but they provide a contrast to the display of customary items that are mostly specified ethnically. The lack of cultural references in displaying contemporary culture only tends to emphasize ethnicity as belonging to the past, which is not quite representative of ethnicity in Kenya.

However, this is not an attempt at minimizing the effects of globalizing tendencies in Africa. Nor is this thesis unwilling to accept that Kenyans needs to move forward and embrace global cultural change, but the author of this thesis is hesitant about the re-appropriation of Western terminology that only encourages cultural division in peoples' identity. If cultural assimilation is the exhibits' goal, then what about the period in between the past and the present, because for now the exhibit leaves a superficial impression. In order to make sense of the exhibit's direction at presenting culture, an examination of the museum's past up to the present is necessary.

Museum history and the development of exhibits

The National Museum of Nairobi was created due to the private interests of a few colonial settlers at the beginning of the last century. They started a foundation called the East Africa Natural History Society (EANHS, 1911) [48] that was especially keen on documenting natural history and safeguarding the remains of antiquity.[49] This changed by 1934 when collections needed further classification and objects of ethnological interest were identified and admitted (Karega-Munene 2014, 21-22). In spite of (scientifically) documented referential entries, ethnological objects were, according to Karega-Munene, merely referred to as curiosities. This belittling persisted in exhibiting when the EANHS openly displayed its collections and findings in the Coryndon Memorial Museum that was specially erected for this purpose in 1930 (2014, 25). In spite of the valued recognition of archaeological monuments and antiquities, the collecting of ethnological material held no importance other than to support the imperial campaign. This is made evident in the phrase 'Coryndon's personal "trophies"', being a title to an exhibit in which the museum celebrated its accomplishments and those of the settlers' communities (Karega-Munene 2014, 20). Up to now, the museum ignored Kenya's indigenous populations and rejected their cultural history, excluding African peoples from the

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[47] One can say that due to the increase of acquaintanceship with western objects and practices, of which their origin and craftsmanship lies elsewhere, any ethnic affiliation is found a triviality to be mentioned.

[48] Being originally constituted in 1909 as East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society.

[49] This was the result of the first legislation on heritage 'The Ancient Monuments Preservation Ordinance' to be passed by the Legislative Council in 1927 (Karega-Munene 2014, 18)

museum up to the 1940s. This only changed with the employment of Louis Leaky[50] who allowed for public visits from the indigenous communities whilst the EANHS transitioned into the Museum Trustees of Kenya (NMK) (Karega-Munene 2014, 25). Their admittance seems a triumph for indigenous acknowledgment, yet the exhibits continued to be made for and by the 'white elite' (Karega-Munene 2014, 20), who continued their racially segregating vocabulary. The colonial authority remained with Kenya's independence in 1962, because the board of the NMK remained largely unaffected and was inhibited by European settlers (Karega-Munene 2014, 26). In spite of the formal termination of colonialism, its rationale continued (Karega-Munene 2014, 33-4; Munjeri 1991, 454). The National Museum of Nairobi, the successor of the Coryndon Memorial Museum from 1964, continued valuing its biological and prehistorical collections over those of ethnography (Karega-Munene 2014, 29). Thereby, Kenyan communities had mostly been barred from the museum, and their indigenous (material) culture, when collected, had been of a secondary priority to the museum and mainly used to confirm the settlers' accomplishments. Even in post-independence Kenya, Louis Leaky's successor Robert Carcasson disliked the presentation of peoples' "tribal" culture in a countries' national museum (ibid.,30). Peoples' heritages had been preserved for all the wrong reasons, befitting colonial propaganda that remained unchallenged. The following, colonially inspired, apprehensive self-awareness was never fully dealt with and submerged in post-independence cultural 'amnesia'.[51] So, it followed that for decades peoples' heritage remained largely unnoticed for proper safeguarding (Karega-Munene 2014,26). In return, the museum was not seen as a valuable space for the transmitting of indigenous knowledge for Kenya's ethnic communities. They felt underprivileged and alienated from their material culture that had been displayed for reasons other than safeguarding cultural continuation (Coombes & Hughes ibid 5). This is a common side effect of Western heritage management in museums, as Karega-Munene verifies (2014, 33-4).

> 'in archives and museums, heritage increasingly becomes frozen as the recording of supposedly 'traditional' performances, or in preservation of old and supposedly 'authentic', artifacts. Frozen heritages prevent living traditions from thriving in the 'gamble' of culture' (Nettleton, 2008, 108).

The idea of frozen culture in the National Museum of Nairobi is best explored in relationship to two other examples that are placed in the museum's history department, and are seen as representatives of Kenyan culture. They are placed in an (archaeologically inspired) pre-colonial overview of Kenya's

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[50] Louis Leaky was an archaeologist that conducted mostly archaeological and paleontological research, finds that have increased today's attention in Kenya to prehistoric heritage (Karega-Munene 2014,25).
[51] The colonial amnesia encouraged by the country's former president Jomo Kenyatta who insisted upon reconciliation between Kenya's indigenous and settler communities, deprived people from expressing their disdain upon the colonial period and their grieve of (cultural) losses (Coombes & Hughes 2014, 3).
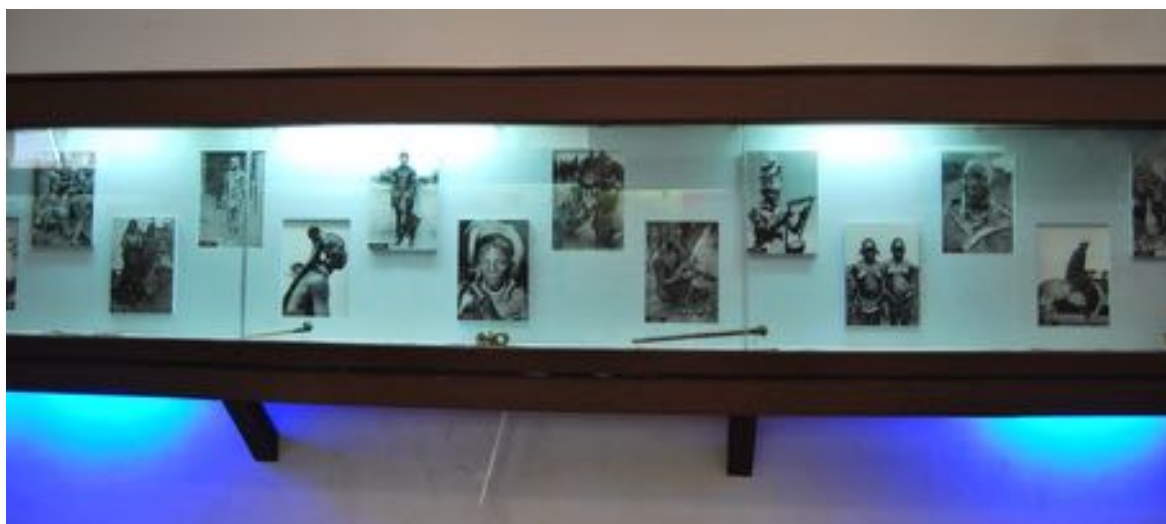
Plate 20: Peoples of Kenya, the 'History of Kenya' exhibition, Nairobi National Museum.

ethnic identities up to, roughly, 1895.[52] First is a photographic series of the peoples of Kenya that are somewhat statically represented in monochrome photographs alongside the wall. There are no references to the people portrayed, to the photographs' date, or to their creator (Plate 20). Instead of publicly announcing this lack of information, the presentation of seemingly colonial and unidentifiable portraits enables a colonially infused, historicized understanding of culture (Hughes 2014, 201).[53] Another (troubling) account of culture is a plaster cast that represents a chief person from the Kuria community inside a glass diorama, see chapter one about representational strategies (Plate 21). The seated figure is colored to resemble skin tone, animated in a specific posture, and dressed in the ethnicity's customary attire. The diorama, which is by now known to be an outdated visual strategy, is not questioned but accepted as a liable presentation of cultural history.[54] If the colonially infused photographs and the diorama are representative of Kenya's idea of culture

Plate 21: Diorama with a model in likeness of a Kuria elder, the 'History of Kenya' exhibition Nairobi National Museum.

and history, then colonialism never left. Whose cultural history is actually presented here?

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[52] Up following is the colonial period and the 'Creation of Modern Kenya' (Hughes, 2014, 205)

[53] The photographs' ill presentation reminds me to a complaint made by Edwards, who states that museums are easily mislead by a photographs' apparent visibility and its truthful character (2010, 27). The monochrome portraits reflect at colonialism's documentation urge and it is easy to read the images as colonial invocations of culture instead of culture itself.

[54] An example is provided by Hughes who witnesses a school group of children accompanied by their teacher, who refers to the model as an example of cultural history (Hughes 2014, 200-201).

The unproblematic re-use of colonially infused representational strategies and terminologies, such as "traditional", continuously echo colonial authority. It does so in prominent institutions such as a country's national museum, reinstating questionable objects such as the model and the photographs as archival material for culture. It follows in the words of Ardouin that museums have produced a Western influenced 'a-historic, if not downright folkloric image of the societies that they represent' (2000, 1). The colonial interference in cultural presentations awards museums such as the National Museum of Nairobi with the status of being outdated, as argued by Coombes and Hughes (2014, 5).[55]

The accusation of being outdated and colonially infused was already confirmed by the Hunting Services in 1999, and the company provided a rough sketch of the museum's state of affairs.[56] This initiative came from the European-funded 'Museum in Change' program that continued between 2002 and 2007 (Hughes 2014, 198). It aspired a global and equal future for all Kenyans and reorganized Kenya's heritage management by starting reforms at the National Museum of Nairobi. A series of (Western) inquiries from consultancy agencies and museum experts followed, and the focus goes more prominently out to processes that concerned the set-up of the exhibit the 'Cycle of Life'.

The program in total provided multiple recommendations that encouraged reassessment of the nation's cultural heritage and the NMK's mission toward future renewal. For example, the Hunting report advises the NMK to be considerate of 'a more dynamic understanding of culture'[57], emphasizing its abilities as 'a process, not a static entity' and of 'continuity and change'. Furthermore, the report encourages the NMK to 'acknowledge the reality and integrity of cultural individuality and diversity, and change [and to] promote intercultural tolerance and respect'.[58] In addition, the report proposes alternative exhibiting narratives such as focusing on 'our country [..., its] landscapes and geology, its wildlife', and on 'our nation [..., its] peoples, cultures, crafts and life'.[59] The advice is summarized by the NMK as follows, for example, the idea of culture now encompasses change as its inner dynamic that secures its continuity. It substitutes the view on culture as "traditional" and static and delivers new exhibiting options such as 'cultural diversity,

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[55] This alike the Tanzania National Museum that Mack refers to it as a place for the keeping of "dead" culture (2008, 14). Or alike the Rhodesia museum in Zimbabwe that struggles with confronting the `white` supremacy in its history and in its representations (Munjeri 1991, 452). Moreover, Nettleton states that 'in south Africa, and probably in Africa in general we must move away from ideas of heritage grounded in the ancient and the antique, from the differentiations on narrow ethnic bounds, to look for commonalities, to move forward, taking the past with us, interpreting it at various points along our journeys into a global future' (2008, 114).
[56] 'Hunting Report Analysis' [2013]
[57] Even though this remark refers to the inclusion of contemporary art it introduces alternative thinking to what the term culture can encompass.
[58] 'Recommendations from Hunting report' [2013]
[59] ibid.

cultural similarity, cultural change and culture as an agent to change'.[60] The Hunting report's advice is seen incorporated in the following document that is titled 'Mission vision & Core Values of the NMK' and includes the concept masterplan for the Nairobian 'Museum of the Nation':

> 'the museum […] wants to be a place for education and entertainment, interpretation and dialogue, presenting the cultural, natural and political history of Kenya, connecting past with present, and nature with culture, in order to promote mutual understanding and respectful behavior toward the nation's heritage'.[61]

The excerpt is a trustworthy reclamation of Kenyan cultural history, providing the public with an exemplary format of how to re-evaluate the nations' (shared) heritage, fostering a collective sense of cultural pride among its ethnic communities. Besides its objectives, the document acknowledges its challenges in securing and safeguarding Kenyan heritage, because cultural heritage in a historical sense is ethnical.[62] 'We are committed to promoting cross-cultural understanding and unity in diversity. […] In these exhibitions, the rich **diversity** will be shown, but at the same time **unity** and interconnections will be stressed'.[63] A distinction appears between a preferred vision of national heritage versus peoples' real-life heritage, and its assimilation appears to be a top-down approach. In promoting national unity, peoples' ethnic identity comes second. This becomes apparent in a section labeled 'cultural diversity' that simply states that (ordinary) people, bureaucrats and politicians alike benefit from becoming 'inter-ethnic' and relate to each other by national identity and not by ethnicity. Yet, it simply reinforces the misapprehension that ethnic identity is not part of the present and the future, making it static.[64] This statement seems to confuse peoples' ethnic identity with cultural egocentrism and understands cultural affiliation to also imply cultural homophobia. This is reinforced in a summary that states that ethnicity leads to favoritism, in which people can 'be manipulated, according to their own and other people's political, economic and social interests and priorities'[65], concluding that ethnic interests can contrast with the nation's interests.[66] Whether these concerns are valid or not, they propagate national unity, which can overrule the ethnic identity that the NMK sets out to protect.

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[60] Culture Exhibitions, literature review of The Hunting Report 1999 [2013]
[61] 'Concept masterplan for the exhibitions of the Nairobi Museum' [2013]
[62] This said with exception to the countries natural history collections which will not be researched here.
[63] 'Concept masterplan for the exhibitions of the Nairobi Museum' date unknown [2013]
[64] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' ('mission vision & Core Values of the NMK') date unknown, document accessed 2013
[65] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' ('mission vision & Core Values of the NMK'), document accessed 2013
[66] Even though the nation is promoted here as a unifying factor in theory, but in practice ethnic interests have been privately communicated on the highest stools of government regulation. The ideal and 'patriotic' vision of a unified Kenya is indeed a remnant of post-independence years that has remained vividly reenacted in educational practices (2014,186).

'[The] NMK has a clear responsibility to promote a positive attitude toward the cultural diversity that characterizes modern Kenya and to present this diversity as an asset rather than a disadvantage'.[67]

The opposition established between cultural unity and cultural diversity and the NMK's choice to preferably focus on 'common cultural characteristics'[68] in the nation's cultural presentation only alienates people from their inherited ethnicity in celebrating the nation. Even though culture and safeguarding its dynamics are repeatedly underscored in papers documenting the exhibiting progress, Kenyan culture is somehow defined separately from ethnicity. This estrangement relates to a current perception of the (fast) change in Kenyan culture. This appears in the following. 'Many people in Kenya equate development with 'modernization' and 'westernization' and regard their inherited cultural traditions as backward'.[69] Yet, what is omitted here is that the colonial idea of modernization has been inherited and motivated alongside Western ideas of post-colonial governing. Even though the NMK hopes for a "detoxing" of colonial ideology by celebrating Kenyan (customary) culture, people's ethnic individuality is not really recognized, despite the positivity that is expressed in relationship to the (hoped for) Kenyan cultural revival.[70]

Foreign aid

In spite of the set goals, the reconstruction of Kenya's cultural history proved a challenge, being the source of conflict between museum officials and the European consultants who accompanied the European Commission's support program, aspiring different solutions (Hughes 2014, p. 198-213). Qualified specialists, such as Paul Faber (affiliated to the Dutch Tropenmuseum, Hassan Arero, and Gonda Geets affiliated to the Belgian Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren), assisted their Kenyan colleagues in the development of displays. The consultants were assigned an area of research, and together with the museum staff had to formulate its margins conceptually. For example, culture was addressed by Hassan Arero, whereas history was assigned to Paul Faber.[71]

Both sections had to be united formally in an introductive exhibit known as an 'intro gallery on culture and history'[72] that would strategically lie between the larger exhibits, because visitors'

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[67] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' ('mission vision & Core Values of The NMK') document accessed 2013

[68] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' 'mission vision & Core Values of The NMK', (2013); It should be noted that the NMK is cautious in representing specific ethnicities opposite to others, because of a grounded fear of being accused of favoritism in their representational activities

[69] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' 'mission vision & Core Values of The NMK' (2013); an attitude the author of this thesis has experienced multiple times whilst visiting Kenya, encountering people to instantly distant themselves from their ancestral "traditional" culture when the topic is mentioned in conversation.

[70] '2.0 Developing a Cultural Vision for the NMK' 'mission vision & Core Values of The NMK' (2013)

[71] Geets 'Master Plan Report' 2006, p. 2 (2013)

[72] (2006) 'Master Plan Report' [2013]

navigation throughout the museum's first floor is difficult to manage. The introductory exhibit was to provide the visitors with background information 'to understand the early influences that shaped what Kenya and Kenyans are today'.[73] The intended exhibit was replaced by the introduction of the history department that partly covers peoples' culture. Culture itself was intended to be separately narrated in a 'Cultural Dynamism/ Human Environments Gallery' exhibit', featuring 'contemporary socio-cultural themes'[74] and an exhibit about past culture. In the documents, the former aims to visualize 'what is so typical[ly] Kenyan nowadays' and to focus on recognizable aspects of 'contemporary Kenyan identity'.[75] The chosen themes were to portray Kenya 'as a melting pot of cultures'.[76] One of its topics was 'Spirit and soul', providing an introduction to Kenya's (universal) religions and discussing their influence. Another was 'Language and Cultural Change', discussing changing identities as a result of the (colonial) appropriation of the national language Kiswahili or because of street language. Another subject was 'Society and Interaction' about cultural exchange and migration, such as the global exchange market.[77] And another idea would be 'Body and Expression', discussing body ornamentation, fashion, status and identity. This topic would discuss ethnic uniformity versus the "freedom of self-expression". The last item was 'urbanization showing urban living space versus rural life'.[78] These very present-day and mostly urban themes needed to emphasize the value attached to "modern" society. Furthermore, the value of contemporary life would be made explicit by the juxta positioning of customary objects of the past and of contemporary ones from our day to day lives.[79] The comparison was to inspire thought about cultural continuity and valorize 'ordinary' objects[80], for example, to show a life-sized matatu (people transport vehicle) or a replica of a village living room to underscore 'typical Kenyan' life.[81] In contrast, the other cultural exhibit was to be concerned with "traditional" culture, having formed 'a basis for contemporary cultural practices'.[82] This exhibit was to introduce the theme of 'Cycle of life a progressive path of life running from birth to death, which, ideally, everyone goes through in full lifetime'.[83] The theme would focus on 'ceremonial rituals and rites' and 'clearly manifest the richness, uniqueness and interrelatedness of the Kenyan cultures'.[84] The exhibit was to support the value of

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[73] ibid.
[74] Geets (2006) 'Master Plan Report': 2 [2013].
[75] Ibid.
[76] ibid.
[77] Arero (2006) 'NMK/SP- Report on Culture Galleries', [2013]
[78] ibid.
[79] Geets (2006) 'Master Plan Report': 2 [2013]
[80] Geets (2006) 'Master Plan Report' [2013]
[81] Mail exchange, contacts remain anonymous [2013]
[82] Geets (2006) 'Master Plan Report': 2 [2013]; Geets (2006) 'Master Plan Report': 2 (2013).
[83] (n. d.) 'I Ceremonies and Cycles of life' [2013]
[84] (n. d.) 'I Ceremonies and Cycles of life' [2013]

ritual and symbolic practices in Kenyan society and encourage the idea of mutual development in a multi-ethnic society, emphasizing cultural similarity.[85] The exhibit was to discuss topics such as ceremonies and 'status and roles' within the themes of childhood, adulthood and ancestry (youth is not yet regarded as a separate category)[86], followed up with the categories of religion and wellbeing and livelihood and trade. The last category to be detailed in the document about 'Cycle of life' is that of 'Makers and Making', referring to the cultural producers in the making of culture. For all of the generalized subthemes, a list was made of eligible ethnicities and their customary objects that would underscore the idea of cultural continuity and form a bridge to the 'Cultural Dynamism' exhibit. The latter would have 'a different, less 'ethnographic feel' than the 'Cycle of Life', and raise attention about the ability of Kenyan peoples in 'adapting to changes from both within and without'.[87] The exhibits put together would have ensured a vision of Kenya 's surviving cultural traditions in the present.

Despite the attempt, the 'Cultural Dynamism' exhibit was not implemented (2017), and the interest of the consultants in displaying typical Kenyan life was not successfully realized in the history and cultural exhibits. This according to personal communication with one of the consultants who welcomed the collaboration with much enthusiasm[88], but eventually experienced the collaboration as troublesome. He found himself at a loss with the (to his opinion) unskilled museum staff and the lack of objects and equipment to set up an exhibit. His struggles are noticeably documented in various notes and mail exchanges, in which he comments upon the program's development.[89]

'think visually […] It is the visual impact that will prove the quality of the exhibit and the attraction to visitors. That is not just the selection of objects […] The role of the designer is quite important. On one hand, it is good to be able to rely on Kenyan design. Still museum design is more and more a specialized art form […] In culture, as well as in history, I would suggest to integrate personal stories […] I have applied this in several exhibitions and it always appeals very much to people: it has to do with identification'.[90]

The consultant's interest in exhibiting Kenya's cultural history to some extent reflects the common preferences in European exhibiting, choosing forms of representation he is accustomed to. There is no disagreement on matters of his expertise, but here is underscored that his teachings are embedded in Western heritage management and the re-integration of the latter in African countries. The resulting difficulty becomes apparent in peoples' understandings of each other, their

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[85] ibid.
[86] (n. d.) 'I Ceremonies and Cycles of life', 27 [2013]
[87] H. Arero (2006) 'NMK/SP- Report on Culture Galleries' [2013]
[88] Consultant remains anonymous
[89] Interview, consultant remains anonymous (2013)
[90] Mail exchange, contacts remain anonymous [2013]

communication. For example, if asking the following question 'if a country's colonial history should be understood as general history or cultural history?', the reply is 'both obviously'.[91] Yet, the consultant's response beholds a boldness that is less likely to be disputed, and the question clarifies the consultant's comment about unskilled museum staff. An argument was even stated by Hughes (2014, 200), but the author is not of opinion that inexperience in museology is the only problem here. The resulting miscommunication lies more in proximity to the knowledge of Western discourses, in this case, of the management of heritage and history, in which oppositional thought most likely does not occur.[92]

Call it, like Gilroy, an account of continuing imperial arrogance (2004, 70) that sustains the Western hegemony in history. This is also salient in Hughes' analysis of the history department, in which she concludes that Kenyans have difficulty in separating history and culture from each other (2014 200/214). Yet, how likely is the separation between culture and history to us all in daily use?

Understanding Kenyan exhibiting from a national perspective

The (colonially enforced) adoption of the Western heritage discourse finds no African equivalent, and the premises of African heritage are entirely Western, because African countries continued to follow the European model (Nettleton 2007, 108; Coombes & Hughes, 2014, 41). It is for this reason that Coombes & Hughes support attempts by civil society, such as Kenyan community museums, that commemorate living culture and mostly rely on the efforts of volunteers (2014, 8-9). Their (open) display of historical objects is to educate people about (intangible) culture and show how culture is put to use by demonstrating material culture. This is impossible at the National Museum of Nairobi where objects are put behind glass, therefore Karega-Munene regards it as 'dead culture' and less representative culturally (2014, 39). Yet, the museum compares itself to and continues to use the same management and display techniques as other international museums. It actually attempts at displaying todays, "modern", culture in the museum, which becomes part of Kenyan cultural heritage. The presentation of items belonging to global culture actually fits well with the critique of Coombes & Hughes (2014) and Karega-Munene (2014) that disapprove the museum's overtly affiliation to the west. Yet, it represents a living concern among people who are willing to participate

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[91] Mail exchange, contacts remain anonymous [2013]
[92] A particular thriving example of the misunderstandings has been the advice to the re-instalment of the 'history of mankind' exhibit in the basement that escalated on the consultant's preferences in displaying prehistorical skeletal objects, on poles/ spines for visual enhancement of display, neglecting its resemblance to stereotypical imaginary of the nineteenth and twentieth century in stories and engravings, recalling these to be the habits of African people's vicious nature. His plan was met with severe resistance. (Researchers' interview with a member of staff); Another example is the adoption of a color scheme alike the British Museum (Arero (2006) 'NMK/SP- Report on Culture Galleries', [2013]), which is usual for museums, displaying ethnographic collections such as, the Quay Branly that chooses a terracotta shade to symbolically refer to African soil. The use and choice of colour is a western preference and prejudice.

in our globalized world culture, and it is too easy to devalue or belittle people's desires or their affinity to these objects.

Here a reflection is provided upon the wishes expressed in the documents regarding the 'Cultural Dynamism' exhibit that should revitalize Kenyan culture, and exhibit contemporary cultural life, sharing contemporary feelings of "Kenyan-ness".[93] The aims of the contemporary cultural exhibit were to exemplify current cultural expressions that signified the current life of Kenyans, by cultural expressions that are typically Kenyan. A good example of this is provided by one of the consultants to the 'Cultural Dynamism' exhibit, vouching for objects such as a life-sized vehicle presenting Kenya's 'movement matatu culture'.[94] Yet, a good deal of the objects from the contemporary/urban collections are profoundly common. Thus, they do not refer to any ethnic group, nor do they display an intrinsic level of Kenyan-ness (immediately) visible to the beholder. Like most of the proposals, the exhibit was not realized, and in addition to the earlier mentioned discrepancy felt between the NMK's museum officials[95] and consultants their collaboration ended sooner than expected.[96]

The difficulty of the Museum-in-Change-Program is even elaborated upon by Hughes (2014), criticizing the reorganization of the museum and its difficulty in separating history from culture. In addition, Hughes regards the whole reorganization as being 'fraught' and turns it in a 'object lesson' on how post-colonial nations make sense of their history and their (cultural) heritage (2014, 198). She argues that the entanglement between culture and history leads to a heraldic fabrication of national history that focuses on people's "traditional" culture in avoidance of discussing the country's troubling (political) history (ibid.185). Instead of focusing on a thorough account of national and political history, the celebration and memorialization of cultural tradition is chosen to define the nation's history (2014, 200/214). Such a choice identifies the past as being overtly ethnic and traditional. The reinstatement of tradition as history, instead of an account of political or national history, not only puts ethnic culture aside as something from the past, but creates an opposition between the past as traditional and the present as modern.[97] These oppositional and strictly defined, bounded spaces, lead to a post-colonial revival of cultural essentialism (Hughes, 2014, 214).

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[93] It strikes me ought that at the end of the reorganisation and the reopening of the museum, in a case known to me, the finalized exhibits were not known to the consultant; (interview, consultant remains anonymous (2013)

[94] A reference to Kenyan public means of transport. The word is commonly used to signify a range of middleweight vehicles for public transportation. The most common one is a car with a cargo department in which people sit sideways exiting via an opening in the back. It is by now banned from Kenyan roads due to safety hazards and replaced by small busses usually referred to by the brand name of Nissan.

[95] Personal communication, consultant remains anonymous (2013).

[96] For example, one of the consultants at the time of interviewing in 2013 had not seen the end results of the exhibits as they were exhibited in Nairobi.

[97] (n.d.) 'Concept masterplan for the exhibitions of the Nairobi Museum' [2013].

The cultural segregation is seen as a result of the nation's aims at cultural unification and ethnic reconciliation (Karega-Munene 2014, 42), aspirations that in their misuse by the state only encourage idealism, on which Kenyan-hood is established. The latter is a 'social-cultural invention' according to Karega-Munene, and she compares it to other countries, such as Canada or the USA, that she apparently considers examples of a multicultural society that can coexist together (ibid, 43). Whether if this is true or false, she emphasizes that the creation of heritage can be a purposeful tool as knowledge is the equivalent of power. 'A nation-state like Kenya can employ its varying heritages for causes accenting national interests like creating nationhood if it so desires' (Karega-Munene 2014, 42).[98]

However, Karega-Munene's statements about Kenya's invention of nationhood perhaps unwillingly seem to support similar prejudices of UNESCO, which eagerly dismisses African state attempts at heritage management, because they seem to glorify state conduct. The accusation of 'mythmaking' targets the monumental aspirations of the state, whilst preferring a vision of an authentically ethnic and performative Africa (Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007],15), which is an idealization as well. UNESCO's reluctance to accept African nationality finds its origin in the salvaging paradigm and is a form of resistance against the overpowering consequences of modernization, as the World Heritage Convention from 1972 confirms (Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007],16; De Jong 2010 [2007],178). Yet in doing so UNESCO continues to survey African nationality as a regretful consequence of colonialism, by which African countries have unsuccessfully adapted to the European model.

The widely felt disregard of national heritage management in African countries seems to me a crucial point to be reconsidered, because it neglects opinions and sentiments of the (rightful) owners and users of heritage based on post-colonial (unattainable) ideals. Put differently, UNESCO'S preference for a pre-colonial performative and ethnic character of African culture is a historically constructed Western vision. A vision that is relentlessly aspired to, but obstructed by reality (Hughes 2014, 187. For example, the ethnic friction and violence prior to presidential elections of 2008 (Karega-Munene 2014, 41). The ethnic unrest runs against the hoped for cultural unification that the museum tries to encourage. It beholds a reminder to post-colonial nation building practiced by the former president Jomo Kenyatta, waving the past away as a 'colonial joke', focusing on a common Kenyan spirit (Hughes 2014, 186; Coombes & Hughes 2014, 3). The togetherness however, has diminished ever since the common enemy, colonialism, departed and is now almost inexistent

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[98] Munene makes this statement in reference to Ashworth's theory of present-centred knowledge.

according to Hughes (2014, 187).[99] The impact of civil unrest led to national attempts of ethnic reconciliation, of which the efforts of the NMK are a part[100]. Exhibiting is seen here as a means to foster feelings of cultural unity and solidarity, and in consideration of the threat of ethnic unrest it is an ample pursuit to fortify these longings, turning cultural heritage in a political tool in securing 'nationhood' (Karega-Munene 2014, 38- 41). Although Coombes & Hughes recognize the importance given to cultural reconciliation from the Kenyan state, they continue to deny the state's attempts in foregrounding a national culture and neglecting people's perspectives about ethnicity (2014, 5). They fear that with the nation's emphasis on contemporary and global/ "modern" culture, indigenous cultures become less relevant and increasingly "traditionalized". This is a genuine fear as the review of the exhibit the 'Cycle of Life' proves, and Coombes & Hughes foresee a continuation in current heritage practices of the NMK that makes ethnic culture 'alienating and irrelevant (2014, 5).

The exhibit, 'Cycle of Life', could be judged similarly, and reject its cultural uniformity and its assentation to global culture in accordance with the pre-existing criteria found in literature, but the author of this thesis recalls the genuine pride of NMK museum officials in showing her what the museum and the exhibit achieved. She strongly vouches for attempts at making today's Kenyan (cultural) life comprehensible in consideration of its colonial past and the fast changes that followed. The presentation of recently manufactured (imported) objects opens up a new section of research into understanding how new cultural (tangible) expressions can become people's heritage.

In spite of her understanding, the problems that occur out of the exhibiting of Kenyan culture are many and she agrees with Hughes that the Nairobi National Museum has given very little space to the documentation of people's cultural development, relapsing into temporal oppositions and ethnic generalizations that continue to see ethnic identity as a belonging to the past. The museum's fear of favoring ethnic communities over others and of (resulting) political instability has kept the NMK from making equalized representations of Kenya's heritage.[101] However, truth can never be obtained, being a matter of opinion. Yet like Karega-Munene, who sees future possibilities for the Nairobi National Museum in Kenyan society, a national identity that protects and embraces people's ethnicity should be given a chance, locating it within a broader frame of a national narrative and feelings of togetherness (2014, 42).

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[99] In spite of the little interest in the rhetoric of unification in Kenyan civil society, it is still firmly embedded in the nation's educational propaganda (Hughes 2014, 187).
[100] A reference is made to lingering fears in society of a repetition of violence in the elections of 2017.
[101] Personal communication (2013)

Plate 22: self-made toy, museum object?

Conclusion

The exhibition process of the National Museum of Nairobi and the museum's attempts at redefining cultural heritage is an example on how post-colonial countries deal with their past, finding ways to manage its impact on today's life. This chapter wanted to positively emphasize Kenya's self-management and resilience after years of disparaging colonialism. Moreover, it wished to remind people of the inability to change the (colonial) past and so too the inability to change the Western premises of (state) governing that these African countries have inherited. The denial of a cultural change that went along with Western aspirations for Kenya, affecting the country's heritage management leads to a renewed kind of pressure, a form of neo-colonialism, that sets out to restore and protect what colonialism initially aimed to destroy.

The exhibit is an example of current (national) interests and whilst it is accused of making cultural representations in an essential manner and fails to provide a Kenyan identity that equally welcomes people's ethnicity and nationality, the exhibit 'Cycle of Life' attempts to inspire a re-evaluation of Kenya's culture, and tries to confront and resolve the rapid changes that people have experienced culturally.

Chapter three

Dutch exhibition of African heritage

Introduction

All over the world, museums with ethnographic collections are challenged in reconsidering their representational activities concerning Africa, feeling pressure from internationally operating governmental or civil rights movements that seek historical justification of African heritage and its representation (Yoshida 2008, 3). The proud re-discovery of (pre-colonial) African culture and history has inspired its cultural appreciation and re-appropriation by people of African descent, of which the Kenyan case is an example. The celebration of African heritage nurtures people's cultural self-awareness and targets ill-conceived (Eurocentric) representations of the African continent and its cultural histories (Yoshida 2008, 155).

In response to Boursiquot's argument (2014, 63-64), about European display of African peoples whose descendants have become European citizens, should museums not become more considerate? And as regards the African cultural revival, demanding ownership of the African heritage, (Yoshida, 2008, 1), what verifies these rights and how consistent are they if claims made refer to legally "outdated" colonial conduct? Yet, the humanitarian concern that lies at their core calls for post-colonial reasoning based on integrity, questioning museums' entitlement to peoples' heritages and re-presentation. Hence, should the peoples in question not be invited to participate in rethinking their own (historical) representation in exhibitions? Their criticism should be welcomed for improving exhibitions instead of being labeled as faulty. The problems posed here question the supposed authority of museums, being (former) pedagogic institutes of imperialism/ colonialism and as state-owned institutions needing to inform, instruct and persuade the public as desired. Their authority was never expected to be diminished or to be informed the other way around. The resulting crisis that ethnographic museums endure is undeniably the result of changing world discourses and the accompanying post-colonial critique (Boursiquot 2014, 63). This in spite of late attempts at bettering or even "de-colonializing" exhibits or the physical structure of the museum itself (Vivan 2014, 194; Yoshida 2008,1; ibid.,164; Petersen 2014,135;). Therefore, this chapter deals with African heritage in a "Western" context in the Netherlands and specifically with the management of an infamous African heritage in the Museum Volkenkunde. In the following the museum's exhibits will be briefly introduced, together with an analysis of the development of a provisional adjustment to the display of the Kingdom of Benin.

The late struggle of museums in redefining their institution, purpose to society and to themselves is visible in many examples, such as the Belgium Koninklijke Museum voor Midden-Afrika

(The Royal Museum for Central Africa) in Tervuren, which has been repeatedly targeted by (descendants of) former colonized peoples who feel themselves ill-represented. This is due to the museum's colonially infused character and its outdated cultural representation in the twenty-first century.[102]

The example shows that it has become almost unavoidable for ethnographical museums to be labeled as neo-colonial. This is proven in another short example of the research done at the Dutch Tropenmuseum (Tropical museum) in Amsterdam, where the author of this paper witnessed (2013) some adolescents laughing at a tall statue of a "black" man with exposed genitals[103]. The caricature, despite its cultural relevance and usage, reminds me of the colonial era's racial exposure and its uncensored Western gaze (Bennett 1995, 81). It reverberates Gilroy's argument of a continuing existence of 'restless imperial fantasies' obscured behind naturalized race thinking (2004, 8, 10). The statue's out of context reading reminds me of issues of Western pre-occupation with African sexuality and its stereotypical insinuations (in popular culture). In witnessing the amusement of the youth, the need of these archaic repositories, filled with historical and contemporary curiosities, that seem to entertain more than they instruct became questionable (like to Boursiquot 2014, 63; Vivan 2014, 197; McClellan 2008, 5).

African exhibition

Museum Volkenkunde is a European example of heritage management in the twenty-first century.[104] It contains mostly historical collections that have contributed to the international reputation of the museum, determining its standing among ethnological museums in the world. This is partially established by the assumed, historical character of its collections, which have been deemed of world value internationally. One of these is the material culture of the Kingdom of Benin from today's Nigeria that is permanently on display in the African department. The 'Benin Bronzes', as they have been historically referred to, and the controversies in which they are involved soon consumed the thesis's author's entire interest.

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[102] This led to the museums' (physical) reorganization in 2013 (http://www.africamuseum.be/renovation/renovate).

[103] This particular museum is now part of a Dutch joint corporation called 'National Museum van Wereldculturen', consisting of 'Museum Volkenkunde', the 'Tropenmuseum' in Amsterdam, and the 'Afrika Museum' in Berg en Dall since 2014. It has gone through changes that effected its exhibitions since the autor visited it.

[104] It is important to note here that this particular museum is now part of a Dutch joint corporation called 'National Museum van Wereldculturen', consisting of 'Museum Volkenkunde', the 'Tropenmuseum' in Amsterdam, and the 'Afrika Museum' in Berg en Dall since 2014.

The museum of ethnology has been housed in the grounds and buildings of a former university hospital since 1925, and underwent reorganization in the late nineties to maintain its valuable position in an increasingly, multi-ethnic, Dutch society (Engelsman 2004, 2). The museum's Western embeddedness is reflected in its

Plate 23: Overview, Africa department, Museum Volkenkunde.

neo-classical build of which the interior has been severely decomposed, reflecting post-modern, twenty-first century preferences in exhibiting non-Western culture. In addition, its use of contemporary cultural props and modern art in and outside of the museum signifies its adaption to twenty-first century and its multi-ethnic relationships in time and space (ibid.3).[105]

From the outside and walking past the museum's research center, which is situated separately, the main building appears at the end of an enclosure. Upon entering, its main hall is a tall and open space that is characterized by a darkened, undefinable atmosphere that is lit from above. At its sides, entrances to exhibition spaces appear. On the top floor, from left to right (facing the reception desk) is the department of Middle America and South America, followed by the North Pole and North America, Japan and Korea, China and Oceania. On the ground floor are the departments of Africa and Asia, and opposite the main hall the department of Indonesia and a space for temporary exhibits. Of concern here is the permanent exhibit of Africa, and one finds itself immediately consumed by an audiovisual wall, showing colorful images of peoples living in the highland regions of West Africa (Plate 23). One of the main ethnicities to be discussed here is the Dogon (fourteenth century – current) and its predecessors the Tellem (eleventh to sixteen century) of Mali. The exhibit's introductory template about Africa informs the visitors about Africa's glorious past of legendary kingdoms and the Dutch engagement with the continent for purposes of trade. In addition, it provides a contemporary notion about Africa, referring to its multi-ethnic character and its colonial inheritance of state borders. After surpassing the introductory note and taking a right turn at the entrance, a second part appears that deals with the Kingdom of Benin (Nigeria) and a third section deals with the kingdom of Kongo (Congo and Angola), followed by South-Africa as a former Dutch

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[105] The inclusion of modern art has been a governmental request, but its execution was, in cases, denied by appointed artists and critics who decline these activities as "neo-colonial" ventures (Engelsman 2004, 2). For further information see 'Images of ethnologies' by Engelsman (2004).

settlement (seventeenth to nineteenth century) is represented, and at the end of the room the kingdom of Asante (Ghana fifteenth century). In addition, some displays draw attention to cultural exchange by, for example, forms of trade, military or religious activity. A side effect of these kind of exchanges is the establishment of African collections that museums, finally, acquired, and the Museum Volkenkunde includes these settlers' perspectives in its exhibits.

Plate 24: Overview of Kingdom of Benin exhibition, Africa department, Museum Volkenkunde.

The main focus is directed at the Kingdom of Benin that is featured in the small corridor and features a main showcase of glass that fully covers the left wall. The opposite wall only has tempered windows and a full-length bench to which a screen is attached to be viewed privately by one or two people. The main display narrates the story of the Kingdom of Benin and is divided into three parts (Plate 24 shows the second and third part). From left to right, the first part refers briefly to the Kingdom of Benin today, presented by a few items from later decennia.[106] Secondly, the kingdom's extended history is introduced, beginning in the thirteenth century, elaborating on intercultural trade with the Portuguese and the Dutch between the fifteenth and seventeenth century. This is made evident by, for example, the display of an ivory container for salt decorated according to European taste and crafted in Benin

Plate 25: Detail of Kingdom of Benin exhibition, Africa department, Museum Volkenkunde.

(Plate 24). The third narrative occupies half of the entire display and is dedicated to explaining Benin's culture up to the colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century. The objects displayed here are mainly commemorative statues and figures that are known as the 'Benin bronzes'. They are mainly cast in brass, and in cases have been supplied with additional materials, such as an elephant's tusk (Plates 24 and 25). This display needed revision according to Annette Schmidt, the curator of the African department, and she wished to undo their static appearance and revive the material culture on display. The offered solution was an audiovisual reconstruction of the objects' customary setting

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[106] For example, a piece of decorated cloth (Kanga) is displayed.

(in situ). The material would be immediately projected on the display's surface instead of relying on the available touchscreen device that up to now has been the main source of retrieving information for audiences. This indirect form of access to the museum's conceptual framework is seen as a tool for additional information, whereas the proposed audiovisual installation would provide contextual information directly, projected in close proximity to the objects, and increase people's interactivity with the material culture on display.

Museum guidelines

The museum's appeal to audiences should all be about engagement, in order for them to sympathize with the heritage on display and this has been a continuous issue since its reorganization in 1996/1997.[107] The document, 'Advies Voorlopig Ontwerp nieuwe inrichting RMV' that discusses the museum's the new concept, states that care should be spent on developing exhibits that bring more liveliness to the display of culture, especially in coming up with a provisional design for exhibits, there should be exciting content mixed with drama and a captivating atmosphere.[108] The following emphasis on suspense comes from the museum's new ambition to present culture by means of storytelling, which should persuade audiences into more engagement with the narratives told. However, and importantly, the stories are centered on (Eurocentric) perspectives of traveling. This can be opposed to narrating people's local perceptions. The travel accounts should be presented as a dialogue, inciting the traveler's passion and drive. They are representatives of the efforts of (museum) researchers and collectors conveying their enthusiasm as if they are telling "their" story.[109]

In the case of Africa, a historical narrative of several regions of the African continent is aspired and another document 'Storyline, indeling per cultuurgebied' admits to its inability to represent Africa in its totality.[110] The chosen historical view is argued to be best eligible, because of the historical character of the collections and because other subject topics, such as humanitarian disasters (drought, illness and famine) are already overtly represented in the media (ibid). Remarkably, topics that are not confined to climatological hardships, such as political history, cultural change and contemporary cultural life, are not discussed.

In the case of the Kingdom of Benin, themes such as art, religion and trade are chosen because of their crucial imprint on African history and their support of the royal dynasty, a lineage of 'warrior kings'.[111] Accordingly, mention is made that the exhibit should provide an overview from the

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[107] 'Advies Voorlopig Ontwerp nieuwe inrichting RMV (2003)' [2013]
[108] ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] 'Storyline, indeling per cultuurgebied, Afrika, Benin (2003)' [2013].
[111] Translated from the Dutch word: 'Krijgsheren' found in 'storyline, indeling per cultuur gebied, Africa, Benin' [2013]

fifteenth century up until the present and should pay attention to ancestral worship, ceremonies, current status of the Kingdom, and the British colonial involvement.

The proposed story line about Benin's court culture would continue the already present historical narrative in its reconstruction of a pre-colonial context, and (preferably) consult early sources, such as travelers' accounts. These prerequisites, among others, have narrowed down the content in three storylines, encompassing the most of the objects that are already on display and sustaining a shared cultural significance among them. The first category envisions the use of ancestral shrines, semicircular clay platforms, which were located in the palace courtyards and would explain most of the (brass) objects. It explains the practices of family shrines and ancestral worshiping among the Edo community (Nigerian ethnicity), and elaborates on the privileges of the royal family in using brass alloys in memorialization of royalty (Plankensteiner 2010, 42). For example, these include commemorative sculptures, which in most cases are idealized funeral portraits of a former king (Oba) or his mother (Lyoba) or (zoomorphic) figures that form attributes to the deceased in his transition into the spiritual world (Plate 26, middle and lower section). The material's sustainability refers symbolically to the wish for 'longevity of the kingdom' (ibid, 43). The statuettes were considered to be important 'spiritual anchors' in mediation with the spiritual world (ibid). The second theme narrates the museum's collection of brass plagues that figuratively present, in relief, accounts of Benin court life around the sixteenth to seventeenth century (Plate 26, upper row). The objects are considered to have been a sort of memorialization of historical events. They supposedly decorated wooden columns in the (open) galleries of the palace courtyards, according to a few European traveler accounts (Plankensteiner 2010, 26-27). However, their use became out of fashion as they apparently had been stored prior to their (Western) discovery. Their early geneses, their allegorical images and their eventual inutility sparked the early interest of Western art historians in the recovery of European influences (ibid. 27). The third category was found to include the remaining objects that in one way or another are connected by practices of ritual and ceremony, for example objects meant for ceremonial attire such as jewelry. The last narrative would primarily focus on Benin's exercise of rituals and ceremonial court performances, encompassing all the remaining objects of the Benin collection.

Power of visual material

The next step would be to transform the information from the three categories into an audiovisual format that would depict the Kingdom of Benin. This idea of using audiovisual material to suitably represent culture is already mentioned in the previously discussed museum's guidelines, and is emphasized as the best approach to suggest a cultural atmosphere devoid of representational bias or subjective interference.[112] In addition, the use of audiovisual material would fulfill the audience's sense of adventure and increase people's interactivity with the objects displayed.[113]

The preferred type of interactive display is by pre-selecting objects on a digital portal that would enable a film projection on top of the glass surface, highlighting particular objects and visually responding to them. This representational strategy would enable pleasurable learning. Yet, the only audiovisual tool that is found to be creditable is an early ethnographic film, which is treated as a profound source of information. The documentary (1962) which is titled 'Benin Kingship Rituals' and is made by Speed and Bradbury presents a visual, monochrome, account of valuable culture in the sixties.[114] The footage displays Benin's court culture and features glimpses of palace courtyards, brass objects, ancestral altars and exercise of rituals. Regrettably,

Plate 26: Detail of Kingdom of Benin exhibition, Africa department, Museum Volkenkunde.

the recordings are spoiled by the quality of contemporaneous film making, which obstructs not only a thorough understanding, but also increases the old-fashioned feel. These qualities alone are enough to question the film's effectiveness in exhibiting, especially when considering that the documentary is not explained in the exhibit, despite it being known as the earliest recording of Edo

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[112] This is repeatedly mentioned, being the most respectful way in displaying culture (personal communication 2013); 'Hoofdstructuur'/'Advies Voorlopig Ontwerp nieuwe inrichting RMV' [2013]; For an example on colonial bias in Dutch heritage management and stereotypically depicting of African peoples consult *Afrikaanse kunst in Nederland, tentoonstelling Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden* 1947, Eduard Ijdo N.V, Leiden14-15.
[113] Personal communication (2013); 'Hoofdstructuur'/'Advies Voorlopig Ontwerp nieuwe inrichting RMV' [2013]
[114] A version of the film in color actually exists, see: https://search.alexanderstreet.com/preview/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C1871083?ssotoken =anonymous

culture, which increases its representational value for the museum.[115] It provides an authentic experience, a sense of decorum for the material culture on display, but its historicizing tendency cannot be ignored. Particularly so as numerous visual recordings are available on the internet that allow for a glance into today's cultural life in Nigeria.

Another important visual record is two photographs attached to the exhibit's display about the brass objects. Together they refer to the pivotal moment of British invasion and confiscation of the palace grounds. The first image details the imprisoning of the Edo people's spiritual and cultural leader, Plate 27 (Oba Ovonramwen) (Plankensteiner 2010, 22). The second image focuses on the British mercenaries and "their" collection of spoils of war, Plate 27. This is a cropped reproduction of the original photograph that shows an overview of a courtyard with a monumental architectural structure at the back, foregrounded by a group of British mercenaries and an array of collected objects. It clearly signifies the foreign confiscation. Although the image is one of the earliest photographic records of the objects. For example, on top of the structure, which is identified as the Oba's Palaver house[116], a brass decoration of a snake is depicted spiraling down from the top of the roof (Plankensteiner 2010, 25). The picture now helps to identify the function of several objects that together formed a snake remaining body segmen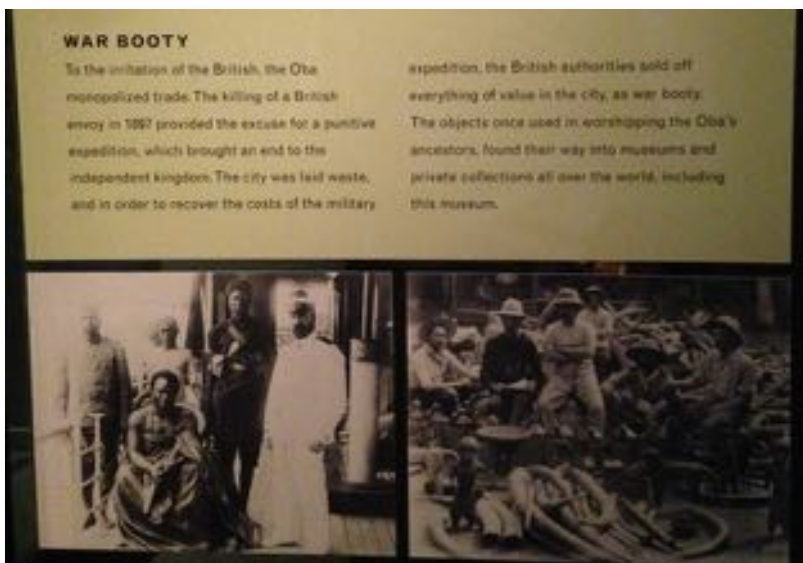ts that can be found in ethnological museums in Europe (ibid). Altogether, the image is considered valuable as a first-rate evidence of the architecture in Benin.[117]

Plate 27: Detail of Kingdom of Benin exhibition, Africa department, Museum Volkenkunde.

The cropped reproduction of the photograph is still an explicit reference to the museum's (colonial) history of collecting and explains the museum's sole focus on Benin's court life and its

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[115] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)
[116] Reception area
[117] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)

display of (monetary) valuable objects (Plate 27). [118] The objects were sold to museums, as is stated in the caption, to fund the military campaign of Britain and its colonial expansion (Plankensteiner 2010, 22). The aims for their collection and displacement were entirely economic and fueled by political injustice, changing Benin court life abruptly.

Even though the photographs provide a telling account of the Kingdom of Benin, they do so historically. No visual reference is found to today's perception of material culture, cultural life or (cultural) history. In addition, a disturbing claim is made that the cultural knowledge has regressed among the people of Edo and the royal family since colonization, and that consulting people or local records is insufficient to retrace "authentic" culture[119], a very much Western concern that in turn preferably relies on Western accounts of history. One of these is the colonial history itself, and upon returning to the two images previously discussed, they discern a partiality in the account of history. For example, the images were used repeatedly in British colonial propaganda, becoming representative of British supremacy (Coombes 1997,8-9). They circulated in different printed media accompanied by persuasive texts, arousing sympathy for the hardships of British soldiers fighting for their country (ibid.). In addition, at seeing the images the violence of the attack was marginalized and justified because of the supposed lack in morality of Africans, and the photographs aroused sympathy on account of the British.[120] The images had a history of their own, and are as much objects as they are historic documents. In their re-use (colonial) subjectivity should also be accounted for.[121] Despite the photographs' ability to visually reconstruct a material moment in time being of value to some, their ability to confirm colonial hardships as a reminder of despair and destruction is of value to others. The images form a permanent reminder of a sinister colonial history that is only partly narrated in the exhibit. This shared past was conceptualized differently in Nigeria, a nation-state since 1963, which laments the deprivation of its cultural heritage and till now has unsuccessfully requested the return of the exhibit (Opoku 2013).

Issues of restitution

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[118] Exhibit text [2018]

[119] Personal communication (2013)

[120] The advancement of the British Empire alongside the coast of the Niger river and rivaling ethnicities at Benin's borders had isolated the Kingdom, making it rely most heavily on the hoped interference of the supernatural world. The increase in ritualized human sacrifices in the nineteenth century induced British propaganda labeling the people of Edo as barbaric and inhumane and thereby validating the punitive mission even more (Plankensteiner 2010, 19-20). For more information on the subject see Plankensteiner (2010).

[121] The reassurance that is felt by viewing photographs has become an invisible hazard to exhibiting as Edwards states (2010, 21,24-27). In addition, photographs' 'discursive regime' obstructs their perception as contemporaneous objects produced by that history they themselves seem to reproduce individually (ibid.). According to her, museum audiences should be encouraged to look beyond the obviousness of the visual imagery and be made aware of its complexity.

The friction revealed itself during the research in the Museum Volkenkunde, when curator Schmidt was invited to Nigeria to represent the Museum Volkenkunde (and indirectly the Dutch government) in 2013. She partook in a conference (Feb-March 2013) that was titled 'Benin Plan of Action on Restitution' (Opoku 2013, [2]) that she mistook for a cooperative dialogue on the future of safeguarding Benin heritage. In the resulting discussion, the return of Nigerian heritage was, to her distress, demanded from European museums, which were accused of withholding heritage and history from the Nigerian people. The accusation was further elaborated as the willful obstruction of the return of material heritage to its rightful owners by declining repatriation. What followed was a planned distortion of facts about European museums, perceiving them as unwilling and insensitive to peoples' rights and moral grounds.[122] The punitive tone of the debate baffled Schmidt, who recalled the Nigerian confrontation as a verbal "assault" directed at herself, being the affiliate of the museum.[123]

Nigeria validates its claim of entitlement on moral rights, which it finds sufficient considering that its material culture has been robbed, a colonial injustice that has never been legally acknowledged and rectified. Although colonial endeavors have been formally rejected on a world-wide scale, colonialism is dismissed as an unfortunate period in history covered by its altruistic acts of paternalism, which weakens the severity and gravity of claims made against colonial assaults today (Opoku 2013, [3]). The question posed at what seemed, at that time, righteousness or not overthrows post-colonial claims. For example, an ongoing case is the request of restitution of the Parthenon Marbles of the temple of Athena on mount Acropolis in Athens, Greece, held the British Museum in London. They were appropriated by the British with the consent of the Ottoman Empire. They were "lawfully" purchased by the British Museum in 1816, and supposedly safeguarded from deterioration (Harrison 2010, 175). They were not returned, in spite of Greek demands of restitution on explicit moral grounds, and Greece being admitted to the European Union has not stimulated any progress on the matter. Here an African claim is considered that in spite of its different content is directed at the British Museum that in time "lawfully" purchased the objects from the British military and regards its actions historically outdated to be held accountable for. Both examples show that currently post-colonial claims are declined, and museums are likely to forswear any responsibility for their past conduct, having acted "lawfully" ever since (Harrison 2010, 188). In any case, if legal accountability is not an option and museums are willing to make efforts in providing some form of restitution, they do so on moral grounds too. In any case, it is the museum that is in control and estimates the consequences of its losses, which, as Harrison states 'resembles an exploitation of

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[122] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)
[123] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)

unequal colonial power relationships from the past' (2010, 190). The resulting inequality and museums' (post-colonial) authority suggests they can be seen as neo-colonial (Opoku 2013, [7]) and the question is how (ethnological) museums can remain unaffected by this.

The idea of morality that lies behind the reclamation of ownership to people's heritage seems reasonable to Harrison (2010,188), being the right thing to do. He values the idea that cultural objects are naturally befitting the original owners and should be left in their care (ibid.). In addition, Opoku argues that people should be the beneficiaries of their own heritage, because its loss endangers their cultural continuity (2013, [7]). His argument relates to often heard critique in which museums are held accountable for the alienation of material culture from the communities of origin (Harrison 2010, 179, Vivan 2014, 198). In this regard Opoku draws upon declarations of human rights, making access to one's culture a basic necessity (2013, [7]). He fortifies his claim by recalling treatises of, for example, The United Nations General Assembly that issued restitution of stolen material property in 2006, UNESCO's international conference in 2008 that encourages dialogues to the repatriation of cultural heritage, and the ICOM code of ethics (2006) that ascribes a moral responsibility to museums to return illegally obtained objects (Opoku 2013, [7-8]). Opoku regrets that ethnological museums have remained largely unaffected by these negotiations.

'In any case, Africans were not considered to be part of European International Law and any rules and practices developed in this respect clearly did not apply to Benin's cultural objects' (Opoku, 2013 [11]).

The issue of raising awareness and speaking of a post-colonial global morality is a difficult one, because one can give recognition to what is thought to be best, but one does not have to comply by it.[124] In addition, post-colonial global morality can be interpreted differently regarding heritage, such as in the case of Museum Volkenkunde. It emphasizes the continuing importance of educating the visiting public, local and global community, with its non-Western collections.[125] This case clearly forms an example to the idea of shared heritage, as discussed in chapter one.

Another often heard claim is the assumption that museums in Africa lack optimal conditions in material preservation.[126] It provides a closing argument that relies solely on pre-determined Western standards concerning material conservation and the fear of present-day robbery and embezzlement, excluding African countries from a chance at exhibiting their heritage. Yet, the

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[124] For example, is the case described by Opoku about the denial of the German government, stating that it never officially received requests of restitution from Nigerian in 2013 (2013 [2]). He counterattacks the statement by underscoring the attendance and participation of German associates of the Museum für Völkerkunde and the ethnology museum of Berlin in the Nigerian conference in 2013 (ibid.).
[125] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)
[126] Museological issues such as climate control or security that museums in Africa are unable to take care of, lacking the necessary resources or funds.

emphasis on proper safeguarding material culture is in favor of Western ethnological museums that thus avoid having to repatriate objects. Another striking argument, made in consideration to the Nigerian request of restitution, is that Africans' entitlement to their heritage is a plain matter of principle in which the ownership of objects is used as political leverage in gaining control.[127] The conclusion aligns itself with the former concern about material conservation. The argument, in spite of its prejudice, implicates that culture above all has become subjected to (international) politics, and that the game of people's "treasured" heritage is being played, metaphorically speaking, above their heads in a gamble for power and resources. In spite of questioning the liability of the assumptions, the Western museums' (post-colonial) authority and entitlement to African heritage has resulted in an uneven distribution of resources, in which European, ethnological museums and their communities continue to derive (monetary) benefit from colonial collections (Harrison 2010, 27).

Dutch exhibiting of Africa

The allegations at museum conduct inspired me to compare the findings at the Museum Volkenkunde to two other ethnological museums with African collections, trying to find convincing alternatives in exhibiting African heritage in the Netherlands. One of them is the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, an ethnological museum that wants to reconnect people from various backgrounds.[128] The African exhibit is located in a half open, bright corridor, enabling a view of the museum's historical staircase and enclosure on the ground floor. Some displays here are particularly attractive and have the ability to fascinate people. For example, alongside the corridor a few platforms display recent acquisitions in the open, such as dresses that are "traditionally" inspired and a costume for festivity purposes, which are accompanied by an audiovisual production presenting their story. The following prominent display is a closed-off space that holds several African masks, of which each can be electronically selected to launch a contemporary film on top of the display. The display was an inspiration to the Museum Volkenkunde's renewal of the display of the Kingdom of Benin with similar audiovisual means.[129] Another audiovisual installation acquaints visitors with popular African music, which provides an image of an Africa that is very much contemporary and alive. This, together with the "feeling" of excitement about Africa, has been the leading aim of the (former) curator and art historian Paul Faber, who hoped to share his enthusiasm with the audience.[130] In our personal communication, he explicitly wanted me to understand that perceptions of Africa have changed over time and that it would be incredibly foolish to think that Africa as a "whole" could be rendered to an

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[127] Schmidt, personal communication (2013)
[128] https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/nl/over-tropenmuseum (2018); The museum is now part of a joint cooperation that connects it to the Museum Volkenkunde.
[129] Personal communication 2013
[130] Personal communication 2013

easy fit and timeless museum model.[131] He discussed the different strategies he implemented in exhibiting in the past decades, from an environmental reconstruction, such as contemporary market places that informed people about Africa's livelihoods, to voicing hardships, such as drought and starvation or the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa. He vouched for raising social awareness under his curatorship, incorporating the museum collections in a contemporary envisioning of culture.[132] Faber states that a contemporary view of Africa is needed and that audiences at an ethnological museum are in need of a unique experience. A contemporary take on material culture would aid in reconnecting people in Europe with African life.

> 'What I actually meant to say that if people journey through the exhibit they are
> constantly inspired to review their image of Africa that leaves them, ideally, in a state
> of bewilderment. People would be receiving a surplus of impulses that makes it
> impossible to resolve in viewing Africa one-dimensionally'.[133]

Another Dutch museum that is totally dedicated to the African continent is the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal.[134] This museum is renowned for its expertise and replicas of African village life outdoors, but of interest here is the semi-permanent exhibit that opened in 2014.

Remarkably, this exhibit begins with a historical reflection on the museum itself and on how Europeans have perceived Africa and its inhabitants. In the entrance hall, one is immediately confronted with several templates discussing the history of the museum and its affiliation with missionary activities in the nineteenth century. The Africa museum provides an explanation to their acquisition of African objects in the past, and why it feels obliged to provide a historical reflection of the museum itself and its conduct. One example is the questioning of Western stereotypes of Africans in the main hall by examining their depiction in comic books, films, and ordinary objects. The targeting of historically established visual tropes signifies the museum's role in the deconstruction of colonialism. In addition, the museum is proud to mention that despite the historical character of the permanent exhibit about Africa, it wishes to develop itself toward an institution that equally voices contemporary concerns from Africa and the African diaspora.[135]

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[131] Personal communication 2013

[132] An assumption that is commonly held is that the Tropenmuseum is focusing on contemporary African culture out of necessity, because it sold its African historical collections to the Museum Volkenkunde (consultant remains anonymous 2013)

[133] Interview (2013), translated from spoken Dutch; At the time of this interview Faber mentioned his forced departure from the Tropenmuseum institute, because of the museum's collateral fusion with the Museum Volkenkunde and the Afrika Museum. His office was found unnecessary and would be replaced by the curator Annette Schmidt.

[134] The museum is now part of a joint corporation between the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, joining its African collections.

[135] This is achieved by displaying contemporary art from the African diaspora to counterbalance the museum's historical collection.

Ethnographic fragment

The Dutch museums in the previous paragraphs and their different, yet contemporary aims at cultural presentation of Africa confronts the Museum Volkenkunde's chosen historical focus in exhibiting Africa and especially the Kingdom of Benin. The museum seems so blind-sighted by its historical collection and its supposed authenticity that it restricts the possibilities of display (Vos 2004, 21).[136] It limits curatorial decision-making and idealizes essentiality in culture, neglecting other perspectives at material culture (Vos 2004, 21). In addition, the chosen frame of the museum can be understood as an imaginary construction ('in situ') which consumes objects to mirror ('metonymy') and authenticate the chosen history (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991 [1990], 388). In turn, the object becomes a right in itself and verifies its existence and enables and justifies its environmental reconstruction (ibid.). The given value to objects as historical markers of time provides them with a sense of embodied power they do not possess. It is attachable to any scenario we see fit, and therefore Kirshenblatt-Gimblett labels an object as an 'ethnographic fragment', as it aids us in remembering the past, however the memories it evokes are not essential to the object but to ourselves (1991 [1990], 388).

With the ideas of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in mind and in regard to Museum Volkenkunde, objects are too often subjected to Eurocentric discourses, such as aesthetics (Vos 2005, 19), and histories, such as the history of collecting.[137] Even though Western internalization of non-Western material culture might be unavoidable, providing awareness of this is an achievable remedy. This is attempted in the Swedish ethnographical museum (Ethnografiska Museet) in Stockholm, exhibiting a similar collection of the Kingdom of Benin. It purposely reinstalled its exhibit about the Benin Bronzes (which was previously similar to that of the Museum Volkenkunde) in a new and contemplative way in 2010. It finally acknowledges the complexity in legitimately estimating ownership regarding colonial heritage. In addition to a historical reflection, attention is spent on covering the different readings of the Benin Bronzes in time (Bodenstein & Pagani 2014, 40). The exhibit tries to attain a "glocal" perspective in representing heritage, assimilating both Eurocentric and African perspectives (ibid.). An example is the excerpt of the Oba (king) Erediauwa in the exhibit's catalogue (2007), proclaiming his ethnic affinity with the material culture on display and alluding to the continuing request for repatriation.[138] In response, the museum publicly admits its (economic) dependency on the material culture of others. Although the museum is not willing to repatriate the objects,

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[136] Document: ´indeling per cultuur gebied´; personal communication Schmidt 2013
[137] Document: ´indeling per cultuur gebied´
[138] The excerpt is taken from to the catalogues of a previous exhibit: Benin: five Centuries of Royal Art from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria.

Bodenstein & Pagani applaud its level of transparency and its respect for the original owners (2014, 39-41). The given respect can be understood, at least, as a form of intellectual restitution. The Swedish case, which is an example of how indigenous claims can be acknowledged and incorporated into exhibiting, is perceived by Bodenstein and Pagani as an attempt at de-colonialization in museums (2014,39). It appropriates an open attitude in the representation of non-Western heritage and demonstrates how museums can transform into places of cultural reconciliation and historical rectification.

A comparison between the exhibit of the Ethnografiska Museet and the exhibit of the Kingdom of Benin in Museum Volkenkunde discloses the historic and essentializing focus of the latter to be a plain choice rather than a necessity. Its approach at targeting static representation is solely motivated by improving its esthetic, audiovisual arrangement instead of changing the exhibit's storyline. When comparing the exhibit with that of the Swedish ethnographical museum, cultural reflexivity in this case is missing. The museum, in this case, has made itself reliant on a pre-determined script, and Vos states that ethnological museums, in consideration of fulfilling public expectations, often let themselves be blinded by existing discourses, especially when it comes to their display of so-called 'masterpieces' (2004, 21).[139] For example, the Musée du Quay Branly (2015) has adopted a similar exhibiting strategy that mainly foregrounds the objects on the spot, emphasizing esthetics and limiting the access to knowledge.[140]

> 'Technological forests darken Nouvel's windows, suggesting mysterious undertones.
> Artifacts are exhibited as exotic and remote belonging to an indistinct otherness. There is no
> sign of postcolonial renewal' (Vivan 2014,198).

Vivan's conclusion here does not comply with the museums' aspirations in encouraging cultural reconciliation and fostering an intercultural dialogue (Boursiquot 2008, 68). Should this problem be present in the Museum Volkenkunde too? For example, in front of the museum's entrance an old lorry is parked, which is transformed into a 'festive expedition truck', a visual attraction (Plate 28). The lorry is supposedly packed with provisions for travel to far off destinations and to explore and observe the peoples of the world. It signifies the museum's efforts of making contact, but what about these peoples' perception of the explorers, of us? The improvised lorry is perceived by Geurds as an attempt of the museum to authenticate itself and its collecting history (2012, 2-3). This is also the case in the online introduction of the Africa exhibit that, ignorantly, seems to have encouraged

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[139] The author of this thesis was informed about the continuing display of prominent objects over items that are historically and monetarily considered less valuable and remain in the museums depot, concealing alternative areas of interest such as women's arts and crafts (Schmidt, personal communication 2013).

[140] This in consideration to the available portable audio tour which is provided at the entrance, but only enables a visitor to consult a small selection of objects by number.

mythmaking up to 2018[141]. In the end, these (visual) tropes or messages rather destabilize than construct, referring to Coombes (1997 [1994],1). Yet, it is important to note here that ethnological museums are not urged to cease their existence, but to change willingly into cultural brokers, sharing African heritage and not holding on to it. In addition, Yoshida states that 'the collection of a museum does not belong solely to the museum, but is still in a way in the hands of the original owners' and that museums should be willing to co-operate with them in making justified representations (2008,162). In addition, Vivan provides museums with solutions to do justice to African culture and shows how to re-define cultural exhibits, 'breaking colonial stereotypes and creating new spaces for dialogue, insight and interaction' (2014, 194). She stresses the continuing need for a space of cultural discussion in society, awaiting the ideal form of post-colonial exhibiting. Finally, the demise of the ethnographic museums' authority should not be commiserated but celebrated and people's invoice be welcomed.

Plate 28: Expedition truck, entrance Museum Volkenkunde.

Conclusion

The case of the Kingdom of Benin at the Museum Volkenkunde is a good example of present-day challenges in the Dutch exhibition of African heritage, questioning the museums' authority. The Museum Volkenkunde's attempt of reviving the displayed heritage only meant an increased visualization of an already existent and particularly Western-centered historical narrative. Audiovisual installations have become the substitute answer to reduce the static feel to exhibiting culture, in spite of altering the perspective from which culture is regarded. The preferred view

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[141] Attachments 1 & 2.

historizes culture and provides it with an authentic feeling, denying perception of Benin court culture as culturally adaptive and present-centered. The historicizing tendency is what, to the paper's author's opinion, caused the exhibit's static feel.

The chapter has been an example of a clash of preferences and interests that occurs in the management of peoples' shared heritage. A heritage that evokes sentiment, but implicates different understandings, feelings and memories to different people. The museum's reliance on a historical narrative does not fit well with the more pressing, and recent circumstances that relate to the African movement and presented themselves whilst improving the exhibit. Whilst the museum attempts to regain liveliness in exhibiting the pre-colonial heritage of the Kingdom of Benin, the Nigerian government aims at restitution of that colonial past. In spite of the museum's willing attempts to reorganize the heritage on display, it remains subjected to a historicizing tendency that unfortunately affiliates to the Eurocentric salvaging paradigm that has pre-determined value to lie in the past. It completely neglects providing a present-day view of the heritage on display. The following discrepancy in comparing the Museum Volkenkunde to alternative examples of heritage management that do give a present view on matters, such as the Swedish museum and the Nigerian government, reveal the Museum Volkenkunde's decision as a subjective account, a mere matter of choice. This awareness has actually altered this paper's author's view of current ethnological museums; she believes them to be struggling with the demise of colonial authority and to themselves have become victimized, in the same way as the peoples and heritages they present, by Western (imperial) arrogance.

Chapter four

Understanding African heritage differently

Introduction

So far museums' commitment to African heritage has resulted in a promise to safeguard and to respectfully present peoples' culture. It has been a process in which the meaning and the purpose of heritage is constantly negotiated, challenging and revisiting existing beliefs. The idea of heritage is divided between a social account of things in assessing what is valuable or not, being an intangible process, and how it materially manifests itself. In the latter case, it is inseparable from existing notions about heritage that were discussed in chapter one such as the Authorized Heritage Discourse, an overtly Western, cultural medium that has become firmly entrenched in the minds of people to process and to re-define our universal material reality.

Heritage resolutions are profoundly enmeshed in an idea of preservation, whilst relying upon the present to generate criteria of value for the past. For example, one has to do with the idea of authenticity and the other with the determination of scarcity. The decision-making that assesses value in cultural expressions is always done from a present perspective. This is simply because we live in the present, and the focus on history or on actuality is a matter of choice. Differently said, heritage is not intrinsic to, nor inhibited by our material surroundings, and objects are not heritage by definition (to us all). This is the reason for further research on African heritage, because its definition and its use (in and out of Africa) is very much Eurocentric. Yet, this conclusion should not be used to dismantle (African) heritage management of African collections, only because Western heritage management has become the globally supported and applied mode in cultural exhibiting. The author of this thesis argues for simple acknowledgment of the facts. For example, the case discussed in chapter two, in which the Kenyan museum had no other choice than to continue in the already reinstated heritage management as installed by the colonial government. This is remarkably to the dislike of institutions like UNESCO, which apparently decline state conduct based on reducing further distortion of African culture (Rowlands & De Jong 2010 [2007],15). Perhaps UNESCO's battle can be considered an act of post-colonial remorse, minimizing the cultural change Europe has inflicted. Yet, the interference is perceived as continuing Eurocentrism, and the accusation of neo-colonialism reflects that.

The Western nosiness in all matters non-Western is a constitute of the present, whilst the distance between the two is, in some sense, actually fading, which only results in a fortification of the salvaging paradigm of non-Western heritage. The distinction between westerners and non-westerners is kept as much intact as it has dissolved. This understanding is crucial for the following

comparisons between African and European-centered heritage management, in which the focus lies on how and when cultural expressions are valued, out of the ordinary, to be acclaimed as heritage. In the case studies a shared goal was to restore African heritage and enhance its value to society, revisiting both cultural and colonial history. The latter is under increasing scrutiny in consideration of the continuing effects of colonial propaganda on our lives and on the public conceptualization of people of African descent up to this day. A material example is the silent incorporation of imperial features in every day life, such as references to colonialism in (museum) architecture.[142] These materials are easily targeted due to their visible colonial affiliation, but beliefs that are quietly passed on from one generation to the next, being culturally inherited, are not. Differently said, the present still reflects colonialism and its accompanying egocentrism. It is this form of Western arrogance, that, when spoken out loud, has preceded any accusation of neo-colonialism. In contrast, the following allegation can be understood as a form of resistance to "ethic"[143] influence, attempting to effect African peoples' lives or to archive their history in museums.

Museums' affinity to colonialism is seen to overshadow even the sincerest aims at exhibiting Africa truthfully, crippling their current authority. This is occasionally difficult to comprehend by museum officials who are passionate about Africa themselves. Therefore, this last chapter will analyze, with the knowledge of the previously examined case studies, the cultural difficulties in the museums' approaches to African heritage. In addition, the interest particularly goes out to bridging a gap between African and Western accounts of heritage management. Even though the fieldwork is mainly centered on heritage management in the Netherlands and in Kenya, hoping to expand it in the future, additional support is found in the literature (Boursiquot 2014; Coombes 1994; McClellan 2008; Bennett 1995; Price 2007; Vivan 2014, Yoshida 2008) to stake overarching claims.[144]

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[142] A good example is the French museum Palais de la porte Dorée, in Paris that was installed as an exhibition hall to *l´Exposition Coloniale* in 1931. Lavishly decorated with goods from the colonies and accompanying representational depictions, it forms a memorial to the colonial success (Price 2007,100-101). It has become a permanent reminder of historical inequality, and these buildings cannot do without any form of explanation or rectification.

[143] The word etic is preferably used to underscore that here is considered an intrusive outsider's perspective. This avoids the more common opposition of western versus non-western, because it has become less applicable in time. As is proven in chapter two that the idea of being western or modern, or partaking in a global community is of significance to African countries, calling them not western, or opposite to the west, is troublesome.

[144] In using the opposition of "western" versus "African" heritage management the thesis's author is aware that she is making use of existing stereotyping common in public speech. She acknowledge the fact that what can be considered African and western heritage management actually overlaps, knowing that the majority of legislation in African countries is founded on western premises in governing. In addition, what we call western and African culture is strongly segregated/ disseminated. Yet, the opposing terminology is chosen to make the reader aware of a distinction between European, classical-inspired principles in heritage management that naturally favor an egocentric account, and the possibility of a non-western methodology. The latter is submerged beneath a western-chosen terminology of Africa that struggles with its geographic determination

Revising case studies

What unites the attempts at heritage management in the Kenyan and the Dutch cases is their genuine objective of presenting a justified account of African heritage, and especially of material culture. In both examples museums went through reorganization, developing new goals by which African heritage would be presented in a dignified way. In both, historical justification is aspired by the safeguarding of ethnological collections for future purposes.

The Dutch case

This thesis has focused on the Museum Volkenkunde's management of its collection of objects from the Kingdom of Benin. It aims at safeguarding its African collection by aiming at cultural and historical justification and tries to provide a truthful account of the objects' past use. It focuses on the objects' cultural origin, vividly re- instating its local environment. The portrayal of culture as dynamic and thriving has become an important motivator in exhibiting culture in the examined Dutch museums, yet the implementation of this approach differs. For example, the Museum Volkenkunde idealizes a historical narrative of the Kingdom of Benin and wishes to visually revive the material culture on display, but like in pre-modern times. The longing for historical re-enactment salvages the objects nostalgically. Even though an audiovisual installation would add vivacity to the display, it would only heighten the awareness of a preferably pre-modern lifestyle. This contradicts the notion that AV helps to envision peoples' lives more accurately or without bias. One example that more representative of the latter is the use of AV displays mentioned earlier in the Tropenmuseum, with contemporary footage and recently made objects, whilst the Museum Volkenkunde seeks justification of its heritage management in the bygone nature of its collections to justify its historic representation. In this case, the museum regrettable pays little attention to the present role of material culture in Nigeria and entirely evades the Nigerian plea for material restitution. The Nigerian present-day value of material heritage is thereby made entirely subordinate to the Museum Volkenkunde's chosen historical narrative.[145] The example here reveals the inability of the museum to thoroughly de-colonize its display in line with the contemplative exhibit of the Swedish

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and only recently indicates what individual epistemology should look like. For example, the readings of Yoshida (2008) and Asante (2008 [2007]) provide food for thought on these concepts.

[145] Underscoring here that the historical view of the Museum Volkenkunde or of any other institution is always present centered, reflecting sentiments of, in this case, Dutch society, as the two are co-dependent on each other. Therefore, it is not surprising that the exhibit about the Kingdom of Benin centers on Dutch influences on the West African shores and prefers historical analyses in valuing things. Apparently where we come from has historically been more attractive than where we are now.

Ethnografiska Museet, or reveals its unwillingness to do so whilst claiming to be supportive of the peoples it represents.

In addition, the resulting historicizing of material culture inevitably leads to an authentication of the objects on display and the culture they represent, proclaiming its importance to lie in the past. The case study provided a clear example of the difference in how the value of heritage is interpreted and accordingly represented.

The Kenyan case

The re-envisioning of history was also a prime motivator behind the 'Cycles of Life' exhibit at the National Museum of Nairobi, being increasingly tied to the museum's reorganization and efforts of de-colonialization. The exhibit tries to motivate interest and acceptance of peoples' (historical) cultural ethnicity and does so by emphasizing cultural continuity, grounding peoples' self-consciousness into an enriched narrative of African heritage. This is supposed to bridge the culturally felt gap between "tradition" and "modernity", the spiteful inheritance of colonialism that disparaged African lifestyles. The museum's attempt at cultural justification by revaluing historical, customary life and stressing that it provided the building blocks to the current generation is to reunite Kenyans positively with their "historical" culture. A way of life that, as the exhibit proclaims, was increasingly determined by one's ethnicity, but despite its wishful approach, it localizes the value of peoples' ethnicity in the past. This is done in favor of a culturally unified, global vision for Kenya that, (un)willingly, synchronizes with the colonial promise of modernity; a westernization that, from a Eurocentric perspective, endangers peoples' ethnic identity.

In understanding the latter and the aims of exhibiting Kenyan culture, a fundamental difference in opinion was left unaddressed between the European consultants and the Kenyan museum officials. In spite of agreeing to the same exhibiting objectives of safeguarding and celebrating Kenyan heritage, their methods differed. Whilst Kenyans vouched for ethnic reconciliation and promoted cultural unification in terms of globalization, the consultants preferred a vision of Kenyan culture as culturally exclusive. To them, the idea of Kenyan heritage implicates cultural expressions that are typically Kenyan and at least African. They revert to assessing a uniqueness in culture, such as the "matatu" culture that is not experienced as exceptional by Kenyans themselves. The kind of the aid provided by the European consultants is, to the opinion of the author of this thesis, still enmeshed in Eurocentrism as much as Africans are still entangled in the colonial deprivation and prophecy of modernity.

Different views on heritage

In coming to terms with both of the case studies and in retrospect to the statement of resistance against ethic interference in the introduction to this chapter, there is a profound difference in heritage management of African collections that has to do with ideas of ownership. For example, in the Nigerian and Kenyan case "their" heritage is what ultimately defines them culturally. It is part of and responsible for their cultural being. The claim upon cultural ingenuity[146] (Opoku 2013, [7]), in demanding ownership of heritage, is used to ensure rights to their own cultural representation. Moreover, as the heritage is agreed to be originally theirs, it should be morally reasonable to claim that the heritage should be theirs.[147] In addition to cultural ingenuity, another argument is made about the value of access (ibid.) to heritage to secure cultural continuity. An example of this is the Nigerian claim of feeling disabled in cultural performances and in the continuation of their culture, because of the inaccessibility to their heritage. In the "African" vision (material) heritage is something that is not necessarily tied to its original context in the past but is also understood to be a part of the present. The idea of cultural continuation is emphasized, including today's cultural values and (in)tangible expressions. An example is the incorporation of contemporary objects such as birthday cards, decorative ribbons and children's school uniforms in the ethnographic (urban) collection of the National Museum of Nairobi. It is presented as a contemporary heritage that might not signify Kenyan-ness immediately to every beholder, but is valued because of its current significance to Kenyans. The acceptance of today's or recently acquired elements of culture increasingly allows for a dynamic understanding of (African) heritage. In the exhibit the 'Cycles of Life', the objects materialize a cultural change that people have encountered that perhaps regrettably has been essentially conceptualized in polarizing terms such as "traditional" versus "modern", the stereotypes of public culture. Yet, and in spite of the exhibits' failure in dismantling the colonial tropes, it allows for new insights into dealing with culture and heritage. It reminds me of the ongoing discussion between (ethnological) museums and the peoples they represent, and of Yoshida's argument, in which he vouches for protection of especially this dynamism in the production of (intangible) cultural heritage (2008, 5).

　　　Cultural acceptance of new heritage poses a dilemma to ethnological museums, because it challenges the validity of existing representations of ethnicities. In addition, it questions whether museums should not reflect what Africans culturally experience today[148], especially when considering

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[146] By cultural ingenuity this paper's author simultaneously refers to the origin of cultural expressions and the accompanying creativity of the people that led to their making.

[147] Referring here to Harrison's emphatic argument of global morality (2010,188).

[148] In doing so museums would actually reconnect with their prior function of storing contemporary (material) culture (Vos 2004, 21). This is easily stated in fleeting disregard to the colonial agenda of collecting objects from

(material) culture that, like the Kenyan 'Cycles of Life' exhibit, contains no explicit ethnic nor culturally unique references. In stating this the author of this thesis is not supporting a demise in ethnic identity, nor does she fails to acknowledge the importance of such ethnic representations for peoples and their cultural continuation in the future, but she emphasizes the existence of alternative and current observations of heritage. This opens up the opportunity for people to culturally express themselves without having to conform to existing theory that defines what heritage is. Ethnological museums are severely grounded in Western discourse, and not only because of claims of neo-colonial egocentrism, but because they rightfully serve the public interests of (foremostly European) local communities. Even though Western museums genuinely try to provide the visiting public with examples of African present-day cultural life, such as the Tropen Museum, and of historical reflection and rectification, such as the Africa museum, they offer a cultural compromise. Here is meant that in addition to the Western rootedness of ethnological museums, they have to secure the attention of their visiting public, a public that is still too often of European descent and takes an interest in Africa because of its aspired "Africa-ness".[149] As an example, some replicas of African ethnic homesteads are built on the premises of the Afrika Museum. The living spaces bear numerous references to today's African environments, presenting universally known aspects such as a television and kitchen utensils that go together with an African style of home decoration. The living spaces are actually universally relatable, but still provide a unique vision on African life. It may be valuable, and perhaps admirable, for a Western public, but does not mean the same to elderly people such as the thesis's author's own Kenyan grandmother who lives in a similar homestead. The issue is that in the ongoing post-colonial appropriation of non-Western culture, museums feel entitled to be opinionated about the African continent. Emphasizing signs of ethnicity or African authenticity makes up for the feeling of African-ness, which is reasonably speaking the main draw for museums of ethnology outside of Africa, whilst museums in Africa that usually aspire to inform or even marvel local or global audiences do not have to abundantly point out to their Africa-ness. They rather choose to emphasize, as the case study of the Nairobi National Museum shows, a Western or global affinity as much as to celebrate where they have come from, (regrettably) framing ethnic culture as a past thing.

The Western fascination with Africa is itself centered on the premises of cultural essentialism, hence what is expected to be African and what is expected to be European or Western has been firmly outlined, and especially since the imperialism of the nineteenth century, the two

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the colonies, but tries to show that ethnological museums have not always been dedicated to the overt historicism they now cling to.

[149] What one experience as intrinsic African might not be as evidential to us all and this consideration is especially important if museums seek to attract a wider, multi-cultural public.

have been desired to deviate from each other to ensure colonial territory. The preference incited most firmly during the birth of the European nation-states and their colonial aspirations that encouraged visible distinctions in human evolution left a lasting mark on public perception (Bennett 1995, 77). In the times that followed museums have imagined the African continent distinctive to that of our (European) own, and provided its visitors with a definition of continental exclusivity. The continuing search for unique-ness in African culture has resulted, in addition to the earlier discussed concepts of historicism and the salvaging paradigm, in a Eurocentric celebration of African authenticity. Even though museums nowadays do allow for contemporaneous cultural insights, they value ethnic and cultural diversity, which is not a problem to be solved but just a fact to be acknowledged.

However, the Western liking of matters of uniqueness and authenticity has resulted in a counter approach from "African" perspectives at heritage, of which the African movement (Yoshida 2008, 3) is an example. Its principles are actually traceable within the Western heritage discourse and similarly appropriate the definitions to estimate what valued heritage is. It lets itself be persuaded by Eurocentric criteria of uniqueness and authenticity and thus demands entitlement to their heritage, because Western art history and museums continue to value it as such. This interplay, which is actually a result of the desperately longed for cultural acknowledgment, reveals the struggle caused by the immersion of African culture in the Western discourse of heritage. The following recognition is a Western peace offering, an intangible form of colonial restitution, and African peoples are finally rewarded with the place in the heritage of mankind, human equality, that they have historically struggled for so much (De Jong 2010 [2007], 162, Boursiquot 2014, 69; Yoshida 2008, 2). A befitting example is the faulty relabeling of non-Western (material) culture as 'art premier', a term preferred by art collectors and gloriously envisaged by Chirac and Kerchache in the specially installed French Musée du quai Branly (Vivan 2008, 197; Price 2007, x, VII-VIII, VX-X; 154).[150] Their choice of worlds did not criticize the negatively bestowed connotation of being primitive, but transformed it to be ultimately positive, in continuation of the already existing salvaging paradigm that European museums of ethnology retook after colonialism, and artistically infused to restore African heritage (unspoiled). Yet the Western proclamation of African heritage to material culture from the African continent has accredited it with universal capacities that undermine the African entitlement. Museums now salvage a globally shared heritage and are thereby able to bypass indigenous claims on terms that supposedly benefit us all.

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[150] The management of heritage went together with ideas of safeguarding it for the future, awarding France with an important role. It is entwined in a tradition of history making in which the nation has strengthen its political position by the use of culture (Butler, 2007 40).

Re-colonizing museums, how to go from here

The persistent Western benevolence seems to be a kindness that is difficult to defy, but in neglect of its Eurocentric intentions it progresses with a similar strain upon people like the colonial propaganda of the previous century. The latter has negatively influenced the access to and interaction with African peoples' heritage, which is visible in both case studies. Kenyans and Nigerians experience a lack of autonomy in discussions concerning their own cultural heritage. This is in spite of the growing post-modern consciousness that supposedly bends toward ethics and moral considerations to which museums feel obliged. Yet, the author of this thesis asserts to a clear misconception on behalf of museums and their conduct if they claim that they are representing peoples' dignified cultural perspectives, whilst those peoples in question disagree.

The persuasiveness of Western doctrines makes its mark upon the contemporary exhibition of African heritage. For example, the preference of a historicizing narrative of the Museum Volkenkunde, the contrasting categorization between the past and the present and "traditional" and "modern" in the Nairobian museum, and the idea of authenticity of the European consultants during the Museum-in-Change-Program. It should be clear by now that museums do not faithfully foreground African heritage and the communities to which the cultural heritage belongs, they foreground their distinguished beliefs about them. There should be no mistake about this. As intentionally goodhearted as the decisions may be, they remain within the confinements of what the museum regards as best. It might not come as a surprise, and is reminiscent of past incidents in which museums have overestimated themselves in exhibiting and attempted a truthful restoration of peoples' culture. For example, the Musée du Quay Branly presented itself as a place for cultural reconciliation and attempted an uplifting cultural dialogue, but according to many has failed in doing so (Boursiquot, 2014 68; Price 2007 176-178).

It should be clear by now that ethnological museums have occasionally nurtured unfulfilled hopes and dreams[151] and that the resulting unease lies at the root of the museum crisis that literature asserts to exist (Boursiquot 2014, 63; Vos 2004, 19; Coombes and Hughes 2014, 1). In spite of de-colonializing attempts at museums, (neo) colonialism is entirely inherent to ethnographic or national museums' structure. In today's representation of non-Western peoples, a colonial association is continuously present, for example in the (historical) collections, the museum's architecture, its motivation, its history etc. Thus, colonialism in museums should not be avoided or kept hidden but publicly dealt with. A few museums, such as the Dutch Afrika Museum and the Swedish Ethnografiska Museet have demonstrated how the workings of colonialism can be openly acknowledged and still remain part of the museum. The outspoken attempts outrun the more

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[151] An example is the speech by Jacques Girac at the opening of the Musée Quay Branly (Alivizatou 2011, 48).

common approaches of de-colonization that in most cases only neutralize museums' activities concerning cultural representation and only reduce the visibility of colonial impact. Even though de-colonial approaches have been most welcome in the exposure of bias in displays since the seventies and eighties (Petersen 2014, 125), colonialism should now visibly re-enter the museum. This not as a prevailing discourse, but as a concept willing to be dissected, making it comprehensible for discussion. For example, the Koninklijke Museum voor Midden-Africa in Tervuren (The Royal Museum for Central Africa) in Belgium initiated its long-awaited reorganization in 2013 [2001], and will prove if it has been able to de-construct its colonial history in an accessible way (Bodenstein & Pagani 2014, 43). With these new efforts, the hope remains that museums can transform to those long-awaited spaces of cultural contemplation and cultural reconciliation (Vivan 2014, 205; Boursiquot 2014,63). Yet, cultural reconciliation can only be acquired if our (colonial) history is made publicly accessible to be discussed and not simply confirmed.

Hereby Vivan's argument is recalled for the establishment of a truly post-colonial museum that respectfully treats African heritage (2014, 205). In spite of the wishful aim, and to complicate things further, what is discovered during research is that in all circumstances people feel, in all sincerity, righteous in their approach to African heritage. Museum representatives try to gain an equal and as much justified representation of the African continent as they, considering their local training and rootedness, see fit. Yet, in regard to the claim of Western egocentrism in heritage management, and bidding its acknowledgment, the author of this thesis came to the belief that museum principles are mere beliefs too and that variety in the exhibiting of Africa should be welcomed. She would rather safeguard and encourage plurality of meaning in order to continue the intercultural discussion about our "shared" African heritage, than aspire for another uniform bound, post-colonial ideal resolution in representing it.

Conclusion

The idea of African heritage is a combined product of Western cultural invention and inference and exploitation of African culture. Its supposed Africa-ness is widely established and marketed to reconfirm itself alongside its (African) cultural producers. Museums aid this process, and this thesis was all about understanding cultural differences and targeting the resulting ignorance in exhibitions in and out of Africa that have to do with different perceptions of cultural ownership. The difference in value of exhibiting heritage has led to mutual confusion, in which African heritage, on account of Africans, should be supportive of their (historical) identity. If this is (universally) misrepresented, so too is their character. If this is withheld from them, so too is their self-identification made inaccessible. Yet, opposed to the African revival that nowadays celebrates its post-colonial cultural re-appropriation, the continuing Western interference in valuing African heritage, even in Africa,

romanticizes a supposed African authenticity. This historicism has made the heritage of particular interest to westerners, who continue to be fascinated by retracing (their) human origin.

The continuing Western entitlement to the conceptualization of Africa and its cultural production has ultimately problematized the idea of rightful ownership. Its incorporation into mainstream dialogues of art and heritage has enabled African heritage to become part of Western culture and vice versa. This union resonates the idea of shared heritage to the fullest. The "adoption" of the heritage within a Western esthetic and historical canon has accredited it with an accompanying value of universality, one that is mistaken by the African revival as a form of colonial restitution. It obstructively exceeds African desires, repositioning African heritage most firmly within the grip of the prevailing heritage discourse. In return, the acceptance of this inclusion implies a transfer of elusive ownership from the original owners to our global community.

In hindsight, African material culture has been repeatedly interpreted anew, from fetish curiosities, colonial war booty and objects of scientific study to studies of modern art. Western authority has been a continuous force in the production of meaning about African culture. And Western egocentrism, as benevolent as it can present itself, has been the continuing force behind the terms and conditions of display of peoples' heritage in and out of Africa. Its exposure as such, being an act of neo-colonialism and a following acceptance instead of provocation and denial, can actually create new possibilities for exhibiting. It can nurture historical reflection in presentations and contribute to a changing and dynamic understanding of culture in exhibiting peoples' heritage. In particular, the agreement to safeguarding dynamism in the perceptions of African culture is valuable, because it secures cultural exchange.

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Attachments

Attachment 1 (<https://volkenkunde.nl/nl/tentoonstelling/afrika> [2018])

Op expeditie door Afrika ontdek je de geheimen van dit magische continent. Hier begeef je je in de wereld van de Dogon met hun indrukwekkende bouwwerken en maskers; sta je oog in oog met indrukwekkende krachtbeelden uit Congo; kom je langs metersgrote bewerkte slagtanden en maak je kennis met vorsten uit Benin.

Wil je zelf door de online collectie Afrika struinen, klik dan hier (http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/Default.aspx?collectionid=42312)

BESTEL HIER JE ONLINE TICKETS

(https://tickets.volkenkunde.nl)

Vaste tentoonstellingen

In acht prachtige zalen staan 4000 unieke objecten opgesteld. Hieronder bevinden zich de topstukken van onze volkenkundige schatkamer: de iconen van Museum Volkenkunde.

Ga op ontdekkingsreis en maak kennis met de verschillende culturen van onze wereld. Ontdek, leer en ervaar. Maar bovenal, geniet!

Afrika

(https://volkenkunde.nl/nl/tentoonstelling/afrika)

Maskers van de dogon, bronzen afgietselen van oude koningen uit Benin en mysterieuze krachtbeelden nemen je mee naar mysterieus Afrika.

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