

Workshop

From Contested Ownership to (In)Voluntary Returns: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Postcolonial Fight for Restitution and Repatriation

Erfurt, October 24-25, 2024

Collaborative Research Center TRR 294 “Structural Change of Property” (Universities Erfurt and Jena) and DFG-Research Unit FOR 2983 “Voluntariness” (Universities of Erfurt, Jena and Oldenburg).

Organizers: PD Dr. Silvan Niedermeier (University of Erfurt) and Dr. Sahra Rausch (Coordination Office “Thuringia’s Colonial Legacy”, University of Jena)

Starting in the early 1970s, activists all over the world embarked on a decades-long fight for the return of Ancestral Remains and looted colonial artefacts from European and North American museums and collections back to their countries and societies of origin. They achieved substantive successes in their efforts, even though their struggle is far from over. The interdisciplinary workshop aims to reassess the fight for repatriation and restitution by bringing together questions of ownership and voluntariness that are addressed in the Collaborative Research Center “Structural Change of Property” (Universities Erfurt and Jena) and the DFG-Research Unit on “Voluntariness” (Universities of Erfurt, Jena and Oldenburg). Focusing on questions of ownership, the workshop will examine how activists have tried to contest Western notions of ownership in the debates on repatriation and restitution and how Western museums and collection have reacted towards these efforts. Moreover, the workshop will discuss how notions of voluntariness shaped and continue to shape repatriation and restitution efforts due to the lack of a legal footing of restitution and repatriation requests in most countries of the world. Specifically, it will ask to what extent the resulting practices of and emphasis on voluntary returns shape the power relations between claimants and Western museums and collections.

Revisiting the fight for repatriation, the workshop will examine how activists over the past five decades have challenged institutional and scientific claims over their Ancestors. Moreover, it will ask to what extent voluntary returns of Ancestral Remains perpetuate colonial power relations between Western institutions and claimants and if legally mandated forms of return establish a more equitable approach to repatriation.

Regarding the fight for the restitution of looted colonial artifacts, the workshop will assess the strategies by which non-Western claimants have tried to destabilize Western claims of legal ownership and cultural guardianship in the last decades. In addition, it will examine how Western institutions resisted and circumvented these contestations of ownership. It will also address the question if the lack of a legal basis for restitution claims and the resulting practice of selective voluntary returns continues to uphold colonial power relations between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized.

Venue: Research building „Weltbeziehungen“ (C19), campus, University of Erfurt, Nordhäuser Str. 63, 99089 Erfurt.

Please register via email until October 18, 2024: karoline.hohmann@uni-erfurt.de

Schedule:

Thursday, October 24

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| 1-1:20 pm | Welcome and introduction
Silvan Niedermeier (University of Erfurt) and Sahra Rausch (University of Jena) |
| 1:20-4:20 pm | Forum I (Chair: Jürgen Martschukat, University of Erfurt) |
| 1:20-2 pm | Albert Gouaffo (Université de Dschang): Anwesenheit des kamerunischen Kulturerbes in Deutschland und seine Abwesenheit in Kamerun: Zu einer neuen Beziehungsethik |
| 2-2:40 pm | Flower Manase (National Museum and House of Culture in Dar es Salam): Restitution and the Question of “Cultural Belongings/Properties Ownership” in Tanzania |
| 2:40-3 pm | Coffee break |
| 3-3:40 pm | Damiana Oțoiu (University of Bucharest) “This Issue is at the Mercy of any Further Deterioration in Relations Between the Two Countries.” |

The (Non)Restitution of Congolese Artefacts from the Tervuren
Museum in Belgium (1970s–today)

3:40-4:20 pm General discussion

4:20-6 pm Break (and change of venue)

6-7:30 pm

Panel discussion

“Verstecken? Ausstellen? Zurückgeben? Die Restitutionsdebatte und
das Erfurter koloniale Erbe“

Venue: Franz Mehlhose, Löberstraße 12, 99084 Erfurt

Further information: <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/universitaet/aktuelles/veranstaltungskalender/eventdetail/verstecken-ausstellen-zurueckgeben-die-restitutionsdebatte-und-das-erfurter-koloniale-erbe>

8 pm Dinner

Friday, October 25

9:30-12:30 pm Forum II (Chair: Elena Kiesel, University of Erfurt)

9:30-10:10 am Mikael Assilkinga (Linden-Museum Stuttgart): The Restitution of
Immaterial Power

10:10-10:50 am Isabelle Reimann (HU Berlin): Proactive Longings and Reactive
Realities: Revisiting the 2021 Report on the Presence of Ancestral
Remains from Colonial Contexts in Berlin

10:50-11:10 am Coffee break

11:10-11:50 am Alma Simba (University of Dar es Salaam): White Boxes: German
Colonial Science, Punished Resistance and Ancestral Human Remains
from Tanganyika in Museums and University Collections

11:50-12:30 pm General discussion

1 pm Lunch