

Reckoning with History: Colonial Pasts, Museum Futures and Doing Justice in the Present

30 November - 1 December, 2017

Research Center for Material Culture, National Museum of World Cultures, Leiden

“What is this specific moment? What is the conjuncture? What is at stake now that makes it possible to speak about these changes? What is the specific moment that makes thinking about the colonial possible?”—Wayne Modest

“People narrated their biographies into the museum experience and the museum experience into their biographies”—Dr. Larissa Förster

“The colonial archive is an assemblage of tactics, an archive of war, and requires a new thinking, a rethinking”—Premesh Lalu

“Amnesia is the true history of the new world”—Christine Chivallon

“The ethnographic museum as a congregation, as a bringing together, under circumstances of violence, might allow us to give credence to the multiplicity of different ways of being in the world. The ethnographic collections might be the place where we really give into the idea that we are multiple, that we are not the only ones who know, who have laws.”—Wayne Modest

“The project of reconciliation should not be understood as the same as the project of justice”—Catherine Lu

“The task isn’t always what we think it is, it isn’t always heroic, it isn’t always photographic. It could be helping someone to make a bed”—Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie

“What is the work of recovery? What is the work of recuperation? What does it mean to live with extermination?”—Rajkamal Kahlon

30 November 2017

Wayne Modest, the Head of the Research Center for Material Culture, began the conference by stating that it is not an exaggeration that we live in troubled times, in the world and in Europe. Within this political moment, and from within the museum, what does it mean to engage with the ongoing (post-) colonial project? He reiterated the value of the merger of Amsterdam’s Tropenmuseum, the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde in Leiden, and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal into the National Museum of World Cultures; adding that this year they are working in close collaboration with the World Museum in Rotterdam, which is also facing difficult times and can benefit from a collaboration with other institutions. Before it was seen as an irritation to talk about the colonial, and now the majority of museums are dealing with this issue and the role the colonial plays in relation to the museum and the ethnographic collection. Wayne raised a number of questions to frame the discussion: “What is this specific moment? What is the conjuncture? What is at stake now that makes it possible to speak about these changes? What is the specific moment that makes thinking about the colonial possible?” This conference, by creating a place where people feel comfortable asking and answering uncomfortable questions, opened up conversations of how we structure the present and the future in the wake of the colonial and has continued to critically interrogate and ask urgent questions about the future of the ethnographic museum. Following last year’s conference on ‘Museums, Citizenship and Belonging in a Changing Europe’, this year the two-day conference brought together museum scholars and directors, curators and artists to think critically about the role of the (ethnographic) museum in the afterlife (or ‘afterlives’) of the colonial, with even more time dedicated to discussion and question and answer periods with the audience following the panel presentations.

Panel 1. On Being Attendant: Curating Colonial Histories in the Museum

This panel addressed the growing effort to make colonial histories more present in ethnographic museums— particularly through the curation of exhibitions that lay bare colonial genealogies—and the complex questions that form around these re-presentations, their possibilities, and their limits. The panel was chaired by **Chiara de Cesari** (Assistant Professor of European Studies and Cultural Studies, University of Amsterdam) and began with a presentation by **Louise Sebro** (Senior Research/Curators, National Museum of Denmark) who was the curator of the ‘Voices from the Colonies’ exhibition in the National Museum of Denmark. The National Museum of Denmark has recently opened a gallery to deal with its colonial history, as well as a ‘historical exhibition’ told through the voices of individual people about Denmark’s colonial history, as that knowledge is scarce. The curators’ goal was to have the audience reflect on how colonialism has influenced people’s lives in different ways (i.e. how the Inuit of Greenland were used to maximise profits for Danish companies) and explore the structures that guided people’s lives. They focused on the space evolving between the non-European and European, including the narration of a story from multiple perspectives and argumentation. The strength of the exhibition was the detachment from the traditional thinking of the museum by presenting the intermingling of objects from the ‘Danish’ and the ‘ethnographic’ collection—breaking down the idea of ethnographic objects representing the role of the ‘other’. Louise ended by enquiring about ways to get the audience to engage with racism and whether they should lead the audience to these understandings.

The second panel presentation was by **Heike Hartmann** (Curator, Deutsches Historisches Museum) and **Dr. Larissa Förster** (Postdoctoral Researcher, Humboldt University) who presented a double-paper focused on two perspectives of the visitorship to the exhibition ‘German Colonialism: fragments past and present’. Hartmann, who developed the concept and curated the exhibition, spoke about the only object in the exhibition that she did not know before: the visitor book. She was attracted to the strong reactions in the visitor book and her understanding of the visitor book as a site where the contested memory of German colonialism is performed. The exhibition, which looked at violence and ideology, and the violence of the colonial encounter, had objects from the collection as well as the linguistic audio archive. Hartmann noted that visitor reactions manifest themselves independently of any curatorial agenda and engagement with the book marked a moment of closure. Through the analysis of the book, she saw that the exhibition was received more as a political signal, and less as a historical overview. German memory is marked by the world wars, the division of Germany, and the Holocaust and the comments signalled a tiredness and resistance against another chapter of German troubled history. The visitor book is a counter-part which stands for the museum and the invisibility of a post-colonial perspective manifests itself in the book. Dr. Förster, who researches the history and memory of German colonialism, especially in the media, was on the advisory board for Hartmann’s exhibition. She was interested in who the visitors were and what brought them to the exhibition. Through her research of 31 visitors she found that they appreciated the museum’s effort to talk about the exhibition in a critical voice, were committed readers, and stayed for long periods of time in the exhibition; they came to gain more knowledge about German colonialism, had explicit interest in colonial issues, and had familial ties or could identify with the topic. Visitors used the exhibition to think through their positionality in that world, linking themselves to the question of how we live in the presence of the colonial—as Dr. Förster noted, “people narrated their biographies into the museum experience and the museum experience into their biographies”.

The third presentation on this panel was by **Claudia Augustat** (Curator, Weltmuseum Wien, Austria) who spoke about her museum’s gallery on colonialism, which is a permanent gallery that has reopened after 14 years, with a focus on the colonial history of their museum and their institution. The gallery examines what present curation looks like in relation to the history of colonialism (decolonising the museum practice) and why the ethnographic museum is a good place to talk about what colonialism is today. The public thinks that colonialism has nothing to do with Austria, so the gallery shows the connections that Austria has to colonialism as well as how objects came to the museum (exchanged, presented, looted, robbed, stolen, etc.) and the complexities of these exchanges and acquisitions of objects. The gallery also focused on how they are dealing with sacred objects which are often not allowed to be shown to the public (sacred objects are in the museum, but they are covered), prompting visitors to accept the borders of other cultures and what is refused from view. Augustat concluded by stating that we need to go deeper into the structures of the ethnographic museums, such as the databases and language of cataloguing, as well as the economic and knowledge distribution flow (i.e.

resources for curators travelling around the world, but almost no resources to bring people from around the world to the museum).

The fourth presentation in this panel was from **Rossana di Lella** (Curator, Museo delle Civiltà, Pigorini, Italy), who investigated the Italian colonial legacy in regard to her museum's collection and was responsible for the remaking of the colonial museum. She gave insight into the difficult process of reckoning with colonial legacy and spoke about her work on the collection of the Colonial Museum of Rome (which is being integrated into a larger museum, the Museum of Civilisation), which has only recently started to be investigated as a whole. di Lella outlined the history of the Colonial Museum of Rome which, since its founding, has been periodically opened and closed, changed names, increased and reduced collections, and been run by different institutions. There is a strict relationship affecting the changes in the museum and the history of Italian colonialism. The life of the museum after the end of WWII is fascinating, since they chose to reopen the museum after its fascist past as a way to emphasise their distance from the fascist regime without coming to terms with its legacies of colonialism. In order to reconstruct the colonial legacy and memory that is linked to the Italian regime she plans to create a critical framework incorporated into the history of the museum and its objects, show the corpus of these museum objects in Italy that are scattered at different museums, and accept the challenge of reconstructing the problematic biography of these objects.

The first panel was concluded with a general discussion and question and answer period. The general discussion began with a short statement by **Martin Berger** (Curator, Tropen Museum) about their current exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' about the presence of Dutch transatlantic slavery in the present moment. The exhibition attempted to tell the story from the point of view of the enslaved, from the colonised, instead of the coloniser. Berger emphasised the importance of inserting complexity into these narratives, to decenter the authority of the ethnographic museum with visitor participation, and to show how the museum is enmeshed in these histories, how it is the guardian of these "guilty objects". The Q&A period brought up a number of interesting questions: about the relationship between the debates within the museum and the debates within the public sphere; how much the audience needs to be led and guided through the stories and connections that the museum is trying to tell; internal disagreements and conflict within museum staff and boards about whether to show the complicity of the museum itself in the colonial project; the different pressure groups from the public that shape the working process of the museum; and how we can use mistakes and irritations (misclassified objects, the changing map in Claudia's exhibition, the covering of the word 'black' with a piece of gum by a visitor) to decenter the museum. Audience comments noted how the ethnographic sometimes becomes an alibi for violent histories, the possibilities to denationalise and deterritorialize the history/idea of colonialism in the museum, and if an object can ever be separated from its colonial history. Wayne wanted to open up a bigger discussion on why the question of history and artistry doesn't get burdened, but the question of ethnography gets burdened with the colonial. He also noted the kind of emotional geography that one has to engage with, or not, in order to be able to curate this as a subject who sees this as a part of their own history, not a distant scientist—the curator is positioned in this contested history of which they are also a subject. To conclude, Chiara pointed to the impossibility of curating the colonial, the discomfort that I, we, you, inhabit in the museums; the spectral presence of the colonial.

Panel 2. Collections Under Duress: Shifting Concepts

This panel, which was chaired by **Wayne Modest**, focused on the complicated colonial histories that might be revealed if we dealt with the journeys, and not just the endpoints, of ethnographic objects. Museums have been engaged with the colonial, with provenance research, and if they are involved in the colonial, then there are conceptual challenges that they must deal with. There is a messiness in the notion of power and our understanding of it—these conceptual categories are something that museums struggle with when writing restitution policies and dealing with restitution requests. The panel began with a presentation by **Premesh Lalu** on 'Revisiting the Deaths of Hintsa'. In this presentation he returned to a text he wrote in 1996—on the killing of the Xhosa king, Hintsa, apartheid, and the return of the skull—in order to step out of the shadows of the colonial archive not by disavowing it, but by facing it head on. He explored how the critique of race (its problematisation) did not allow us to think outside of the limits of the colonial archive and he is interested in the failure of the critical encounter with colonialism, as well as apartheid and post-apartheid, and why it failed in its promise. He sees the colonial

archive not as an epistemic library but rather as an archive of the tactics of war; it functions as a mode of evidence, completely beholden to the subjectivities to which it responds, and part of the project is not to give up on unsettling or breaking up the colonial archive, but to rethink it. He concluded that perhaps a return to the museum might not be a bad thing—the ethnographic museum is not a derivative discourse, it holds the object that can help us to reorient our relationship to the subject.

The second speaker of the panel **Philipp Schorch**, titled his talk ‘Reckoning with history and refocusing the ethnographic by zooming in on the muliwai’. Ethnographic histories complicate or undermine our relations and interactions with the colonial but Schorch’s intention is not to deny the ethnographic, rather try to refocus with a new lens (an oceanic lens) in order to create a dialogue between the Pacific and Europe, and not just between objects but between different relations to objects and different epistemologies. He focused on his work with the muliwai and when human remains were returned from Germany back to the people of Hawaii (iwikupana). The debate around restitution is often seen as an individual and final act, as an end in itself, but he wants us to reconsider restitution as anthropological work, a dimension of the museum as process. What new things can we study and understand through systems of restitution, of rewriting the ongoing relationship between ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘us’ and ‘them’? How can we create or co-create knowledge across epistemological boundaries as a way to multiply our world, rather than explaining the role of the other. Anthropological knowledge production has never been a linear affair—there has been co-production since the moment of first encounter—and his goal is to reshape collecting, exhibiting, fieldwork, and research, conducting it in partnership with nearby communities and lifting collaborative work all the way to co-interpretation and co-representation through writing.

The third speaker on the panel, **Mirjam Shatanawi**, presented on ‘The Netherlands and Islam: on the in-betweenness of collections’. She was looking at the ideology of museum categories as a discursive chain and a process through which Western and non-western objects were separated in the 19th century—for example, when the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities’ collection was divided between two museums in 1883, objects that were related to comparative applied arts went to the Rijks and ‘use value’ objects went to the museum of ethnology. This discursive chain continues into Islamic art which was considered related to European history, but not part of it, which is why it was placed in the ethnographic section of the museum. As Edward Said said, the Middle East is Europe’s closest ‘other’ and Islamic art was often used to display a colonial trope of a once civilised population that went into decline and had to be rescued. In museums we approach decolonisation in relation to the object or a collection of objects, however many have argued this puts the West as a central point—deconstruction and critique needs to follow up with reconstruction. If we look at the division of the disciplines, and separation from the west as a kind of colonial violence that lives in the present, what options do we have for repair?

The fourth panel speaker was **Christine Chivallon**, whose talk was titled ‘Archives, traces and memory. Living memory of slavery in Martinique’. Her talk was about the colonial archives that the museum belongs to, using the term ‘archive’ as a general category that includes museums and their collections. She wanted to focus on how events leave traces and can be traced to documents that are part of archives, as well as the constitution of alternative documents as the traces of the historical condition. Amnesia is the true history of the new world and the archive is a tool to produce sameness and to make disappear the history of the world. She referenced Édouard Glissant who deconstructs the concept of history as a pure invasion of the West. Because historical memory was so often erased he has to dig into the traces of the past. The traces are not located in the archive because archives act not as a piece of data, but as a status; a status that makes it possible to classify the structure of the world. The final destination of the archive is always situated outside of its own materiality because of the stories that it makes possible. As Paul Ricoeur said, history is “an enigma of the present representation of the absent past” and so what can be found in the archive is the limit of historical knowledge and history itself.

The discussion following this panel began with Wayne outlining the productive overlaps he saw in the papers: Where the dominant narrative is Europe about others, what are the other epistemes that we can use to think through the world? Perhaps we can think through the category of the ethnographic differently when we see it as something that is in-between, that is incomprehensible? How do the categories that we create map onto the museum? And what might it mean to inhabit the archive as a struggle, as war, as different categories, and as method? A question was asked about how we can shift the power

dynamics in the museum differently, beyond cooperation with the source community and Philip responded that when he talks about collaboration he means collaboration lifted to the level of ‘co-thinking’ and constant engagement across difference. Discussions were raised about what we have to do to transform the museum since to analyse and deconstruct is easier than to practice; whether we can turn the museum into the anti-museum; what the role could be of an international contemporary art practice in dealing with these questions; the emergence of the role of the migrant and how we might learn from the migrant; the post-stewardship possibilities of the museum; what it could mean to care not about the object, but about the lives that are animated around that object; and whether we can engage with objects within the context of their own epistemological frameworks. Artist Lina Issa, who had presented her work in last year’s conference, asked about the physical presence of the objects, how this presence is shifting what we are doing in the museum, and whether an equal encounter can happen between two unequal elements. Final conversations arose about whether the opening of the Louvre in Dubai signals an important shift; the value of the Mathaf Modern Art Museum in Doha for Islamic Art; whether we can get out of the bigger structure of the Foucaultian, of the governance, and get back to the simple aspect of meandering and collecting; and if museums should be safeguarding contemporary objects disappearing in conflict zones. Wayne concluded that perhaps the ethnographic museum as a congregation, as a bringing together, under circumstances of violence, might allow us to give credence to the multiplicity of different ways of being in the world. The ethnographic collections might be the place where we really give into the idea that we are multiple, that we are not the only ones who know, who have laws—that we can look into the archive for all those moments of refusal, for being otherwise.

Adriaan Gerbrands Lecture by Tony Bennett:

Re-collecting Ourselves: Indigenous Time, Culture and Museums

Wayne introduced the lecture by talking about the serious responsibility they are taking with their collection—to critically engage with it and with what it means to care for these objects, not just through preservation but by acknowledging that these objects carry larger global questions about heritage and belonging. Every year they work with junior scholars and ask artists and others to rethink their collections, in order to make them uncomfortable, and open up conversations about what it means to be a museum. The introduction was followed by the announcement of the RCMC-FEL Junior Scholars and Fellows by Wayne Modest. This was followed by an introduction by **Peter Pels** (Professor in the Anthropology and Sociology of Africa, Leiden University), who spoke about the Foundation for Ethnology in Leiden and how it brings together film, ethnography, and material and culture studies, as well as expanding to include the full scope of heritage museums in the Netherlands. He introduced **Tony Bennett** (research professor in Social and Cultural Theory, Institute for Culture and Society in Western Sydney University), who began his talk by stating that he found himself in a context in which the terms of reference, such as ‘ethnographic museum’ and ‘colonialism’ are different for him as those terms hold different meaning in Australia. His lecture referenced his latest book, ‘Collecting, Ordering, Governing’, which looks at what was collected, how it made its way to museums, and how systems of government formed the colonial. He referenced a series of three maps to outline his talk: a map of the Plains Indians created by Clark Wissler; Norman Tindale’s map of Aboriginal tribes (languages and culture); and the AIATSIS map of cultural areas of Aboriginal Australia from David Horton. In the broader context of the production of an Indigenous deep time (now extended to 80,000 years), the claim that Indigenous Australian’s make up the longest human species on earth tended to divert away from the distinction/differentiation of the different groups of Aborigines. Indigenous peoples were not determined within territorially marked ways of life and so this grounding of objects in specific territories is constructed. For example, different elements ranging in complexity were combined to show evolutionary displays, like an exhibition from 1901 which showed a construction of the evolution of the boomerang that was created from different parts of the country. The central question in the book is how we got from the evolutionary set of boomerangs to the map of David Horton. The evolution in mapping is complex since maps helped to assist the state in its governance of Aborigines but also interacted with Indigenous led projects of mapping for other purposes. Bennett focused on an exhibition called ‘Encounters’, which included the temporary return of artefacts from the British collection and had the Gweagal Shield as its central point. He is interested in the new encounters these objects entered into, the encounters between the different knowledges that have informed the transit of materials to and from centres of collection, and the role of the objects and the encounters they are entangled in. The shield carries two perspectives:

it represents all Aboriginal people and resistance and it represents the encounter between Cook and the Gweagal warriors. The hole in the shield (either caused by a bullet or a spear) also carries these two narratives—if it is tied to colonial violence then it resonates that it is a bullet, if the hole had been made by a spear then it resonates with a ritual performance of first encounter. This exhibition faced criticism because the objects didn't make a full return and they were shown without a history, without a story. Parallel to the 'Encounters' exhibition was the exhibition 'Unsettled: Stories Within', where a group of five artists interacted with the objects from the British museum. He concluded that in 'Encounters', he wants to echo some of the ways in which the museum rattles itself, which is one of the best things a museum can seek to do.

During the Q&A period, Peter Pels began by noting that he was struck by the symbol of the 'Encounters' exhibition on the one hand and on the other hand an exhibition called 'Unsettled'—evoking a rattling of spears, shaking something loose and making it change. Discussion was raised about Indigenous input, the very invention of cultural areas, and mapping, and that these transactional realities are the interfaces through which relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups are enacted and often provide the basis upon which many forms of land claims are advanced. More elaboration was given on the criticisms of the 'Unsettled' exhibition, which included tension between the researchers and processes through which the exhibitions had been mounted, difficulties on how you include representatives of the Indigenous communities, and the fact that the artists in the second exhibition had not been included in the conference that opened up the two exhibitions. The shield and the focus on who made the hole was also brought up, noting that how the hole was made is not the central question, what is valuable is the whole system of histories around it. It was noted that the 'Encounters' exhibition was first at the British Museum and was called "Enduring Civilisation", only when those objects came home to Australia did it get the name 'Encounters'. It was also brought up that this idea of rattling the museum is very significant and path breaking—especially coming from a society marked by multiple colonialisms like South Africa. A question was raised about whether Bennett had any advice or ideas about how this process that Australia and Indigenous communities have been struggling with can be transferred to the European context and the response was to look at the role of Indigenous people in positions of curation and power in the structure of the museum. Wayne concluded that one of the hopeful things that their museum is trying to do is to rattle the inside of the museum and rattle the system outside of the museum—"we sit in a global practice, not a national practice, so we have to be able to respond to this global element, that we form the centre of this decentralising force".

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Panel 3. Beyond Legal Limits – Law, Ethics and Responsibilities

Today, when it comes to questions of return, we face a question of the law. What does it mean to bring together property of people that were colonised? If we hold to the idea of law and repair, then what might it mean to think beyond the law as a possibility for thinking through the repairing of colonial wrongs? This panel, chaired by Wayne Modest, brought together legal scholars and professors to discuss the complexities surrounding provenance, return, sharing, and responsibility. The first speaker of the panel was **Ana Vrdoljak** (Professor, University of Technology Sydney) whose talk was titled 'The Stories We Tell Ourselves: Revisiting International Law and Museum Collections'. The very statement of "it was the law at the time" inevitably asks "whose law?". International Law and museum collections have many parallels and mutually reinforce one another: they are both structured through processes of selection, preservation, and presentation; they are potent, mutually reinforcing vessels, and exemplars of the narratives that we tell ourselves; and they are undergoing processes of restructuring themselves around histories of complicity. First, she addressed that collecting and making collections within the larger museums fuelled and was fuelled by the law of nations, universalisation, and standardisation (International Law textbooks began to cover all people and all territories and put them all within their purview—the civilising mission to reinforce the logic, objectivity, and inevitability of the coloniser). Second, she focused on recent exhibitions at the British Museum and the Museum in Australia. Indigenous people are agitating for their rights (right to recognition, self-determination, and right to land) and these legal milestones for human rights spilled over into material culture which continued to be held

in the hands of colonial powers. Vrdoljak emphasised our “ethical obligation to remember”, challenging us to think about our ethical duty to remember, our commitment to remember what has occurred—concluding that it is our responsibility to be conscious of our relationships, whether presence on the land of Indigenous people, or caretakers/custodians of their objects/cultures.

The second speaker of the panel was **Catherine Lu** (Professor, McGill University) whose talk was about ‘Decolonization, Decentering, and Disalienation: Strategies of Redressing Structural Injustice’. She focused on her book ‘Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics’, whose title responds to the debate that often conflates Justice and Reconciliation, arguing that we should separate these two elements. She outlined ‘interactional justice’ which is focused on agent-centric wrongdoing and victimhood with accountability and reparation for wrongful interactions between agents, adding that there are limits of the law in terms of rectifying colonialism. Her central argument is that colonial injustice needs to be seen as a structural injustice. She defined ‘structural injustices’ as those which occur “as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional and accepted norms”—in this definition, the baseline itself, the ‘norm’, is flawed and unjust. Reconciliation, as opposed to Justice, is a response to alienation as a particular form of the loss of freedom when we are inhibited from this appropriative agency, of dealing with the world in a way that is valuable for us. She outlined three forms of reconciliation—interactional reconciliation (repairing damaged relationships between agents), structural reconciliation (agents’ mutual affirmation of the social/political order), and existential reconciliation (agents’ non-alienated being in the social world). Lu argues for a more political sense of reconciliation—moving beyond legal liability for wrongdoing and towards moral and political responsibility for overcoming structural injustice and alienation; beyond nationalist and statist frameworks of redress and towards structural dignity and non-alienation for the formerly colonised.

The third speaker on the panel was **Wouter Veraart** (Professor, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and his talk was titled ‘Moving beyond legal limits: A reflection on law’s absence in current debates on the future of colonial cultural objects’. He wanted to speak to the problematic statements of “it is unfortunate but it has been legal at the time” because injustice was often legally constructed—colonial legal regimes did not recognise the ‘colonised’ or ‘conquered’ people as fully or equally human, and histories of resistance, internal and external contestations, have been largely unnoticed. Referencing back to Wayne’s quote about ‘the afterlives of the colonial’, Veraart noted that we are still in the colonial, dealing with remnants of colonial injustice. Legal principles are often invoked to ignore or reject demands for return, and so proponents of reparations, like museums, often look for extralegal solutions, like ethical considerations. Veraart advocates for a value based legal approach; a rule-of-law system based on fundamental values of legal equality and human dignity. Using his example of the Benin bronzes, Veraart quotes professor Florin Shyllon who said that “the refusal to return such cultural objects is tantamount to keeping a people’s history and heritage in captivity. And there is no doubt that the colonial powers knew the import and the devastating effect of the removal of irreplaceable cultural heritage”. What’s striking about these royal objects is that by having these heads in captivity, you still deprive in the present time the dignity of the people in Benin city. He concluded that dignity restoration can happen in two steps: recognition as free and equal persons with legal-political representation and voice, and recognition of the legal injustice in the past and its (partial) undoing (redress), apology, and process of legal redress.

The fourth speaker on the panel was **Dr. Charlotte Joy** (Goldsmiths University of London) whose talk was titled ‘Heritage justice: confronting the present in the past’. She began with a case study looking at how UNESCO’s heritage designative played out in Mali. UNESCO’s educational projects did not take off, but what took off were their World Heritage Sites, which have been critiqued for being very euro-centric, male, privileging built heritage, and part of the project of global, rational, scientific, thinking. In 2012 in Mali there was a coup and the case was referred to the International Criminal Court in 2013, who conflated the destruction of people with the destruction of things, raising questions of whether the destruction of objects is a crime against humanity, a war crime. Cultural heritage is always about the future and the president of Mali also conflated the loss of artefacts with the loss of people. We now find objects from Mali in museums and on Sotheby’s while the museum in Djenne is still completely empty, emptied out of its own history. What is problematic is that economic value increases for a museum in relation to cultural loss and economic value is created by museums and creates a demand from private collectors. She concluded by showing a demonstration by undocumented migrants at the Musée des

Colonies in 2011, noting that the museum of the colonies has inadvertently become the 'museum of migration' against its will.

To begin the Q&A period, Wayne highlighted a few phrases from the panel session: the 'defective baseline' that Catherine spoke about, a baseline that we refer back to that has itself created the defect; disgorgement and thinking about responsibility; and the idea that "it was a long time ago" because when we go back to the defect of the law at the time, then we are also reproducing that defect. Discussion was raised about whether institutions, museums, and libraries have a role to pave the way for law to follow; the role museums have to push for legal, as well as ethical, changes; and the problem of museum officials focusing on restitution and the return of objects and not on the possibilities of creating dialogue and a new relationship with these communities. Catherine added that legal structures and norms grow out of political conditions and legal institutions are like other human institutions—how they realise their purposes depends a lot on the conditions that they exist in. Questions were raised about what ways museums constitute the alienation that is a part of legal injustice; why there is such a big divide between the way we treat the crimes of the second world war and the colonial abuses; and the potential of the 'legal imagination' to do something beyond legal limits and make ordinary rules much more flexible. Discussion also began about the blurred distinction between objects and persons and whether objects can have legal personhood if they have it in their original culture. In conclusion, the museum should offer us the possibility of decentering, to push the law, and challenge the ideas that people cannot care for their own objects.

Panel 4. Reckoning with the colonial: Thinking through concepts of debt, responsibility, blame and justice.

This panel was chaired by **Henrietta Lidchi** (Chief Curator, National Museum for World Cultures) whose research focused on how museums have collected. For this panel, the notion of the dutiful object is a concept that came into her head, that objects are well behaved but lately have all been a little badly behaved. She showed a print that said "RESIST/PROTECT/LOVE/REPEAT" and that the repeat is the important part, that we need to repeat these processes and ideas, time and time again. The first speaker of the panel was **Margaret Urban Walker** (Professor, Marquette University) whose talk was titled 'Injustice Past, Justice Present in the Post-Colonial Ethnographic Museum'. She stated that the ethnographic museum is a site for redress and repair for injustices, both historical and continuing. She wanted to begin by speaking about the International Framework for Reparation which includes accountability and reciprocity, practices that can address not only the material plunder but the moral aspects as well. She outlined the UN guidelines on basic principles and practices for reparation and noted the five categories of reparations measures/guidelines: restitution; compensation; rehabilitation; public disclosure of truth, assistance in finding human remains, affirm dignity of victims; and guarantees of non-repetition/preventive measures. Each of these five categories can apply to the situation of the museum's relationship to its source. Repatriation of an object can give the receiving people cultural self determination, vitality, and pride, although the dominance of reparation issues can obscure larger processes of accountability. One of the wrong doings of colonialism is that it "denies equal and reciprocal terms of engagement" and forms of reciprocity can include loaning of materials for ceremonial purposes, paying for the making of replicas of objects, giving power of naming for museum exhibitions to the Indigenous people, and indigenous staffing at non-Native museums. She concludes that these measures of reciprocity should be distinctly framed within their context of reparation, of righting the wrongs of the past; these measures should be imagined, negotiated, and put in play.

The second speaker in the panel, **Ann Rigney** (Professor, University of Utrecht), presented on 'Apology and Doing Justice'. As a literary scholar, Rigney deals with words, discourses, and how meaning is made. The question of apology in the first place is the question of words. An apology is based on an embodied and mediated performance. For her case study she used Justin Trudeau's apology to the Canadian Indigenous people for the residential schools, which he framed as a "long overdue apology". The idea of 'reconciliation as script' points to the emergence of strategies that seem to be productive in terms of negotiating social relations. If conditions are right, apologies can perform a change by changing the relation between perpetrators and victims. Reconciliation is used "not to change the past but to change the way groups and their members stand in relation to it". We can also critique apology as only

changing the structures of remorse, while still keeping the injustices from the past intact—structural asymmetry of apology. David Garneau, pointing out that in the Cree language there is no word such as ‘apology’, suggests the word ‘conciliation’, which allows one to become part of a conversation but to be aware that you are not in on the conversation. Garneau proposes small acts of repair that engage individuals in engagement with other people and with artworks, rather than these grand narratives of reconciliation and repair. Rigney concluded with three final points: she argues for thinking about words and practices that are engaging in context, but in a context that is constantly shifting; integrating our reflection on different practices (legal, curatorial, etc) so that they are part of the same space; and seeing these practices as conciliation rather than as reconciliation.

The third speaker on the panel was **Ciraj Rassool** (University of the Western Cape) whose talk was titled ‘Anthropology, African history and decoloniality’. He began by stating that he has become obsessed with human remains and questions of repatriation, especially the implications of this for the processes of the museum. He wants to think about the meaning of the return of stolen colonial bodies, alongside other processes of settling the dead of apartheid in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. He is trying to think about the colonial as epistemic and disciplinary (in terms of disciplines) and this comes out of work around the South African empire—that it is not just a single history, that you get marked by multiple colonialities, both colonial victim and coloniser. In the main national museum in South Africa there is an ethnographic struggle (struggle of thinking about the aftermath of anthropology, thinking about the person and the artefact outside of the terms of conquest). What is the meaning and the configuration of African histories? Is African studies in Africa the same as African History in Germany? His aim is to challenge the presumed hierarchies of expertise and claim the space of the African museum professional as an intellectual and a scholar. The decline of African museums was related to the creation of the British partnership project to do museum development on the African continent, but they didn’t see the African museum professionals as something beyond technicians or carers. What is vital is for them not to just be scholars/experts on their own society but to become experts about European museums and societies in order “to assist you in your debates to decolonize yourselves”.

The Q&A period brought up questions about what all of these words, gestures, actions mean in terms of what the museum collects now and what they will collect in the future. Questions were raised about how Ciraj, coming from South Africa, would be viewed talking to a European audience in light of societal developments; how German museums are constructing and opening up public discussions about coloniality; the need to be wary of the reification of certain words that signal a kind of achievement; and the importance of taking ourselves outside of the academy and into the public space with a language that is accessible and politically relevant. Further discussion came up about how to rectify the injustice of the physical display of human beings; ways to leave not only the physical walls of the museum as an institution, but also the epistemic walls, in order to rectify, redress, and give voice; and that accountability means answering for having done such things and reciprocity is having to listen to the people that they have wronged and a reconstruction of their own experience. Ciraj added that in our discussions in refashioning and remaking the museum, they have become better at recognising epistemic violence: the relationship between the administration of artefacts and the administration of people. Peter concluded that if you juxtapose ‘accountability’ (accounting) and ‘reciprocity’ (gifting) you reproduce a classical anthropological distinction, and so if we look at these ways of thinking perhaps then we can see a West that is already fractured.

The closing keynote for the panel was delivered by **Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie** (professor of Native American Studies at the University of California Davis and director of the C.N. Gorman Museum) and was entitled ‘Visualizing Resilience’. She spoke about the multiplicity of perspectives that different groups can have and the need to gain perspective in relation to images that we post, images of the sun, images of deceased bodies; to understand the perspective of others. In her current work she is documenting protests and she noted that as an indigenous community they don’t have a singular perspective of what they lost: “sometimes when we think we’re in unity in thought, when we think we’re in unity in colonising, we still have to remember the people in our community who are still trying to understand sovereignty—when you look at the community you have to understand the different levels of knowledge and different levels of acceptance”. She gave examples of two projects, including ‘Scaffold’ by Sam Durant at the Walker Art Center, which was commissioned without thinking about the effect on

the Indigenous communities (the project was related to a mass hanging of Indigenous peoples in 1862). Following the creation of the work, which was done without the consultation of the community, the Indigenous community responded and they ended up dismantling and burying the work. She also spoke about her exhibition, *Protest & Prayer*, which presented the work of artists who were at Standing Rock. She presented her images from Standing Rock and the direct principles they had to follow while there. She concluded by mentioning that students from UCLA helped the hotel maid service make the beds for the rest of the community to sleep: “the alliance was there, but the task had changed, the task isn’t always what we think it is, it isn’t always heroic, it isn’t always photographic, it could be helping someone to make a bed”.

Closing Discussion (with General Audience): What Next?

To close off the conference there was a panel discussion, chaired by Wayne Modest, that including writers, researchers, activists, and a director. Wayne introduced the panel by stating that he wanted the panelists to provoke us and to look at what we should probe more forcefully. The first speaker was **Jos van Burden** (Associated Researcher, VU Amsterdam) who studies the illicit trade of art and antiquities, with a focus on colonial objects and restitution issues. He sees a shifting debate in Europe—due to changing power relations, new ethics, and the presence of migrants, that which European colonial powers once considered as a major gain, is now a burden for museums and collectors. He referenced Macron’s recent speech on the return of colonial objects back to Africa and noted that return is a healing process, a means to undo justice. No two return-processes are identical, require time and research, and have to be dealt with between two states, between non-state actors or a mixture of both. In the present transitional phase, we can find more common ground if a set of principles is developed at the European level, which can guide us in investigating our own collections and dealing with claims from former colonies. He presented a relational (translational) system between principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art to objects of cultural or historical importance, taken without just compensation or involuntarily lost in the European colonial era. The second speaker was **Marens Engelhard** (Director, National Archives of the Netherlands) who began by stating that archives are always dealing with power because they are the remains of power structures and archivists are the curators of this power—although archivists are often invisible, they are not neutral. If we think about decolonising the archive we have to think about provenance (the place of origin, the descriptions, and the original order should be kept intact). Earlier this year they returned a number of artefacts to Surinam, but they put a lot of conditions on them (a new archival building, digitisation of the artefacts, training in archiving). In addition, they have educational programs to teach source groups to search out their own history and they interact with other communities in the Netherlands to guide the archive in moving forward. The third speaker was the artist **Rajkamal Kahlon** who began by noting that you cannot talk about the fraying of colonialism without also talking about trauma, and you cannot talk about trauma without talking about the body. She was part of the SWITCH project and had a lot of misgivings about what it meant to work in an ethnographic museum because artists of colour are often invited to lessen white institutional guilt. She referred back to an earlier panel referencing the presentation of a trophy skull and said that she was not okay with it being presented. In relation to the skulls she asked: “What is the work of recovery? What is the work of recuperation? What does it mean to live with extermination?” And she answers, referencing Donna Haraway, that we need to “stay with the trouble”. She presented her work and an exhibition she worked on, the centre of which was a German book called *De Volker Der Erde*. The fourth speaker was writer and researcher **Sumaya Kassim**, who reflected on the article she wrote, ‘The museum will not be decolonized’, based on her experiences at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, where she was invited to co-curate a decolonising project. She noted that museums are resistant to change and don’t want to critique their own protection of whiteness. The museum was not prepared for the curators in practice, although they thought they were mentally prepared for them. The main battle between the invited curators and the museum was about interpretation and the process was museum centred and focused on them teaching and training the museum. She is worried that the desire to collect decoloniality comes from the same place as the collection of black bodies and she doesn’t want decolonisation to become another curio, another object. The museum shouldn’t just present and collect another perspective, but rather alter its own structure and critique its colonial history. Wayne questioned “how do you work with activism and activists, without also asking them to soften themselves, soften the politics”. The final speaker was **Simone Zeefuik**, who is part of the Decolonize the Museum initiative. She reflected on her own work in relation to the museum, asking what it means to ask the question of how we prevent

polarisation, rather than asking what it means to ask for humanity. In relation to people being hired to lessen decolonial guilt, she asks what it means when inviting the decolonial artists becomes performative? What happens when the doors close?

Following the panel presentations, there was time for responses and audience questions. A question was raised about Rajkamal's discomfort with the exhibition of the skull, especially since there had been consultations between the museums and the community. Rajkamal responded that even with this added knowledge of the community consent, it doesn't change her discomfort as a person of colour coming into the space; she's not taking anyone's agency away when she says that she's uncomfortable that a skull taken from communities in South America is exhibited in a rich Austrian museum. A discussion began about whether the end of decolonisation is that these museums would come to an end because these structures will no longer be useful and the response was that it's important not to abolish but to jump into the centre of this contradiction, to understand that we are all embedded in this violence; it's about implicating all of ourselves and creating a new meaning from that space. The topic was raised about art and the slight anxiety that art is a way of not having certain conversations, but Sumaya noted that she doesn't see a difference between being an artist and being a curator as this positions the artist as both lesser than and something that is above you. Sumaya spoke more about her experience with the museum following the publication of her article, and that for her challenge is the process but the museum does not accept this; she sees herself as an irritation, as a body of colour in the space of the museum—although the museum wanted them to come and do the work, they were not able to deal with the irritation and the pain of the process. Peter wanted to return back to the point of diversity with a reminder of the genealogy of the notion of diversity (corporate and racial context) and Simone responded that diversity makes her skin crawl, that when you present diversity as a commodity then you look at the sales person and not at the product. Wayne concluded the conversation by stating that he is not invested in 'diversity' as a concept, but he is afraid that we are afraid or unable to deal with what these concepts bring forward, so that we keep slipping through language. Diversity can allow for the multiplicity within the organisation. If diversity can mean a multiplicity of different irritations, that we can feel that, and allow for the possibility of it. His investment is to try to understand the museums that call for this multiplicity. It is with the process of 'staying with the trouble' that this institution can bring forth another structure that can reimagine equality.

Report by Margarita Osipian