

Abstracts

Colonial collections and restitution - The international, the national, and the local

Dr. Jos van Beurden

The discussion on the restitution of looted objects and ancestral remains from colonial territories has gained momentum both in the former colonies and in Portugal and elsewhere in Europe. Several notable restitutions have taken place, the most notable of which is that of Benin objects to Nigeria by some European countries. More than in the past, these restitutions are motivated by the need to redress past injustices, heal wounds inflicted in the colonial period and shift agency to the countries of origin. But returning colonial spoils is much more than a bilateral affair between two countries. There are stakeholders at various levels: local, national and international. They have different connections to and interests in the collections at stake. This contribution maps these connections and interests. Which collections are in the spotlight, and which are not? Who benefits most from the current restitutions? How do stakeholders in the Global South view developments in Europe? **With case-studies from four continents.**

Revisiting Portugal's colonial period of Sri Lanka

Dilip Tambyrajah (Netherlands – Sri Lanka Foundation)

The eastwards travels of the famous Vasco da Gama also resulted in 'Portuguese' arriving in Sri Lanka, it is claimed more by an accident, in 1505. It has been suggested that the key motives of Portugal were different than the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The VOC was also in Sri Lanka for more than 150 years. However the entanglement of Portugal from 1506 to 1658 has resulted in a heritage in Sri Lanka that has been researched by many with varying assessments and viewpoints. Some more critical than others. Given the current debates and activities related to cultural objects in European museums, originating in occupied countries such as Sri Lanka, revisiting the Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka could provide a new impulse to this important topic both in Portugal and Sri Lanka alike. A policy related overview would be presented regarding the restitution/return of objects with a colonial context in the relations between the Netherlands and Sri Lanka. Also the return of the 6 objects to Sri Lanka from the Netherlands and the follow-up could assist in stimulating reflections at the

event. This could possibly inspire further conversations and inform policy making in Portugal in matters concerning the relation with Sri Lanka.

Confronting Colonial Legacies in Museums – Transdisciplinary Methodologies

Elisabete Pereira

The persistence of colonial legacies in European museums presents significant challenges to curatorial practice, heritage interpretation and civic engagement. This talk reflects on the work carried out within TRANSMAT, a research and development project which critically examined the circulation of objects, knowledge and practices in colonial contexts, as well as their legacy in current collections. The project adopted a transdisciplinary approach, combining provenance research, object biography reconstruction, and a collaborative methodologies. By intertwining critical historiography, archival research, and creative intervention, the project developed new modes of knowledge production and participatory practices for museums with histories of violence, dispossession, and asymmetrical exchange associated with their collections. TRANSMAT created an international dialogue platform on decolonial methodologies, and the exhibition 'Facing Colonial Legacies in the Museum' at the Santos Rocha Municipal Museum in Portugal translated the research results into a space for public reflection, promoting intercultural dialogue and new forms of collective memory. This contribution argues that such transdisciplinary methodologies are necessary to deconstruct institutional narratives and rethink cultural heritage as a living field of negotiation, responsibility and transformation. The TRANSMAT experience demonstrates the potential of collaborative models to address the past while designing sustainable futures for museums in postcolonial societies.

Biography Dilip Tambyrajah

Dilip (1953) was born in Sri Lanka; lives and works in the Netherlands since 1977. Dilip is a board member of the Netherlands – Sri Lanka Foundation, based in the Netherlands. The foundation, established some 40 years ago, was instrumental in setting-up the Dutch (Period) Museum in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is actively involved with this museum, which is a testimony to the more than 150 years VOC presence in Sri Lanka.

Since 2015 Dilip has been actively involved with the topic of restitution of objects originating from Sri Lanka and now in Dutch museums, that lead to the restitution of 6

objects from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam to the National Museum, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The 6 objects returned to Sri Lanka in December 2023.

Dilip is currently participating in a University of Colombo, Sri Lanka led project titled: 'Whose Law? - Addressing injustice in the entangled histories of Sri Lanka- the Netherlands and advancing the practices of provenance research', funded by the Dutch Research Council (in Dutch NWO). In relation to heritage he is interested in topics such as colonial history (from 1400 to present, which includes the Portuguese period of Sri Lanka!), colonial collections, commodities and livelihood development, slavery etc. and their impact on current affairs.

Dilip has more than 40 years of international industrial and business experience in energy systems, biobased materials, and sustainable development (which amongst other aspects is about intergenerational justice). He contributes to policy development and leads international working groups of the intergovernmental group on natural fibers of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Dilip studied Environmental Engineering and Business Administration in the U.K.

Biography Jos van Beurden

Dr. Jos van Beurden has been researching colonial collections and restitution issues since the 1990s. Open access publications such as Treasures in Trusted Hands, Inconvenient Heritage and The Empty Showcase Syndrome have put the topic on the political agenda. He is the founder of RM* [restitution matters], www.restitutionmatters.org, that disseminates news on the topic.

Biography Elisabete Pereira

Elisabete J. Santos Pereira is a Portuguese historian and museologist specializing in the history of science, museums, and collections. She holds a PhD in History and Philosophy of Science with a specialization in Museology and is a lead researcher at the Instituto de História Contemporânea (IHC), affiliated with both the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and the University of Évora. Pereira's research explores transnational and cultural histories of museums, object biographies, and decolonizing approaches in museology. She leads the FCT-funded project TRANSMAT and was awarded a DAAD scholarship for

international research on future museums between Africa and Europe. Widely published, she has received recognition for developing pedagogical strategies—such as using object biographies to connect diverse histories—and has contributed to reference works like the “Dicionário Quem é Quem na Museologia Portuguesa”.