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Chapter 31

Coloniality and Decoloniality of Heritage Institutions in West Africa

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COLONIALITY AND DECOLONIALITY OF HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

J. Kelechi Ugwuanyi

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw from Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015) decolonial discourse on the 'coloniality of power', 'coloniality of knowledge', and 'coloniality of being' to examine the coloniality of heritage and heritage institutions in West Africa and attempts at decolonisation. Coloniality and decoloniality represent two sides of a coin, each carrying different inscriptions. The concept of coloniality emanated from a Latin American sociologist, Anibal Quijano (2000), who used the term to define how colonial legacies of power have continued to shape cultural and social systems and knowledge productions in today's modern world. The idea was later expanded by an Argentinian scholar, Walter D. Mignolo (2000, 2011), who suggested that coloniality is the 'darker side of modernity'. Explaining this 'darker side', he argued that Western modernity is structured by control, domination, and exploitation disguised as ways to save, progress, and develop supposedly uncivilised and underdeveloped *others* (Mignolo, 2005). Coloniality is applied today to most commonly refer to the way that colonial values and practices have persisted despite post-colonial independence (Mthembu, 2021). Coloniality is 'a long-standing pattern of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration' (Quijano, 2001 cited in Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243). Coloniality is understood to have shaped the modern societies we experience today, which are stratified according to the patterns of power relations defined by the West. Clarifying how coloniality is experienced in the lives of formerly colonised peoples, Maldonado-Torres (2007) highlights that such long-standing patterns of power exist in books, systems of knowledge production or criteria for academic performance, cultural patterns, common sense, the self-image of people, and in their aspirations of self. For the purposes of heritage, these long-standing patterns of power exist in the ways that heritage is conceived, studied, acquired, conserved, and managed (Smith, 2006). The principles that drive these processes can be traced to those imposed during the European colonial era, which have survived in former colonies as modern ways of conserving and managing heritage. I apply coloniality here to examine how heritage institutions are implicated in constructing current global, geocultural, and social identities in West Africa through a racially hierarchised, Western-centric, asymmetrical power structure.

On the other side of the coin is decoloniality, a response to the inequities and injustices of coloniality. It preaches a move away from Western-centric epistemologies to seek alternative ways of knowing and doing things (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Quijano (1993) in Mignolo (2011: 52) insists that the mission of decoloniality is 'necessary to extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people'. Holding a similar view, Maldonado-Torres (2011: 117) sees decoloniality as a process that involves the 'dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expressions in the modern/colonial world'. It aims to shift the geography of reason from the West-centric knowledge as the traditional centre from where the world is interpreted to other territories as new epistemic sites for seeking knowledge about modern world realities (see Mignolo, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). It is the desire to undo and 'pluriversalise' interpretative principles formulated by the dominating Euro-American epistemologies (Ugwuanyi, 2021). A central idea to all these definitions is the idea of 'free decisions made by free people'. Here, it raises questions about the freedom we have in making meaning out of human existence, especially from different views across the world. Now, how can we apply decoloniality in the official field of heritage considering that it is founded on colonial practices and continues to be informed by those practices today?

Adopting decoloniality as an option for the future of African development, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) insists that decoloniality is democratisation and de-hegemonisation of knowledge. To achieve decoloniality, Mignolo (2007: 453) suggests 'delinking', which, in his proposition, is a 'move toward a geo- and body politics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geopolitics), that is, Europe'. According to Mignolo (2007), this is to be understood as a decolonial epistemic shift leading to other universality, a position that also agrees with Escobar's (2020) decolonial thesis on 'pluriversal politics'. Delinking is dislodging knowledge production from Eurocentrism to recognise other knowledge epistemologies. To consider how Indigenous knowledge systems in West Africa can be harnessed to dislodge Western-centric approaches to heritage, we first need to contextualise the problem. It is at this point that Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015) decolonial analytical tools of 'coloniality of power', 'coloniality of being', and 'coloniality of knowledge' become useful.

In summary, the coloniality of power encourages us to enquire into how the modern global political order is configured into racial hierarchies of power; while the coloniality of being is a lens through which we can examine the making of modern subjectivities and ontologies; and finally, the coloniality of knowledge exposes the politics of knowledge production by asking the questions, who produces what knowledge, for whom, and for what? Consequently, I begin in the following sections by unpacking the European coloniality of power, knowledge, and the dehumanisation of African peoples and cultures while setting up what would later become African national heritage and identities. I then conclude by examining how African heritage and heritage institutions may be delinked from coloniality. To engage in this discussion, I draw examples mainly from the Nigerian heritage historiography that have implications for other West African nations that were colonised by Britain, such as Ghana and Sierra Leone, which went through similar heritage-making processes (see Basu, 2012; Basu and Damodaran, 2015).

Coloniality of Power and Being: Shaming People and Making Heritage

Coloniality of power and being reflects the way that the West categorised human societies into 'racial' classes using human anatomy and physical features, particularly colour (Mignolo, 2005;

Quijano, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Quijano (2007) describes how this process produced the social identities of ‘white’, ‘black’, ‘Indian’, and ‘negro’, setting the background for the eventual geocultural identities of ‘European’, ‘American’, ‘African’, ‘Asian’, and later ‘Oceanian’. Elsewhere, I have explored the impacts of this on ‘time-space politics and heritagisation’ in Africa (Ugwuanyi, 2021). My concern here is to understand how the coloniality of power also manifested in founding heritage institutions in West Africa during colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

An early example of the coloniality of power is the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which commodified and commercialised Africans. A later example is the Berlin conference of 1884/85, where new boundaries were created across Africa. These boundaries separated families, relatives, and trading communities, placing them in different territories of modern states and, in so doing, creating new identities and national heritage. The example of Nigeria has been used elsewhere to explore the transfer of Western epistemologies to modern states in Africa and how such impositions continue to cause ontological disorder and disconnect people from heritage-making processes (e.g., Ugwuanyi et al., 2021). That work also interrogated colonial heritage management institutions and how those institutions carry the signature of colonialism up to this moment. Here, I want to align myself with decolonial scholars to refer to those surviving vestiges of colonialism in heritage management in Nigeria as a ‘coloniality of power’.

The British annexure of the territory at the 1884/5 Berlin conference and the amalgamation of southern and northern parts of the areas of the river Niger in 1914 were important events in this narrative. Chance ‘discoveries’ made by colonial administrators, archaeological excavations, and surveys contributed to the eventual formation of the Nigerian Antiquities Service in 1943 and the enactment of the Antiquities Ordinance 17 in 1953. Ordinance 17 established the Federal Department of Antiquities responsible for researching, acquiring, and publicising Nigeria’s cultural treasures to constitute the national heritage and identity of the new colonial state. The law was adopted at independence in 1960 but transmitted to Decree 77 during the military regime to establish the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in 1979.

NCMM was founded with more mandates and administrative structures capable of managing and promoting Nigeria’s national heritage to the large population of Nigerians and the global world than were in place during the colonial rule. However, the colonial approaches to learning, conceptualising, managing, and conserving heritage it adopted never changed. Twenty years later, when Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, Decree 77 was changed to the NCMM Act without proper review. The institution continued to survive based on British and Western-centric ideologies rooted in the colonial history of geopolitics. It has maintained a link with the global power asymmetry that set it up and has refused to unlearn or decolonise. Interestingly, the same founding processes of national heritage institutions were replicated by the same colonial actors in British West African countries, especially in Ghana and Sierra Leone (see Basu, 2012; Hellman, 2014; Basu and Damodaran, 2015; see also Giblin this volume for similar history in eastern Africa and chapters by Ndokuyakhe and Lupuwana for southern Africa). Africans trained within the same Western frameworks of knowledge retained those colonial approaches after independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Up to now, the activities of these institutions have been regarded by heritage experts as modern ways of heritage making, management, and conservation, but more recently have been identified as continuing the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being.

Currently, NCMM manages 52 national museums and 65 national monuments across Nigeria. These monuments and the collections in the museums are interpreted in ways that either denigrate the sensibility of the owners or use a reductionist approach to present materials that have complex cultural meanings using colonial and/or Christian religious perspectives. For instance, in the



Figure 31.1 ‘Divination’ materials and their conceptualisation in the National Museum of Unity, Enugu, Nigeria

NCMM museum in Enugu, inappropriate concepts like ritual staff, ritual pots, ancestral worship, and masquerade are used to describe more culturally complex materials. In one of the reductionist descriptions, material evidence of indigenous ways of seeking knowledge and making enquiries collected among different ethnic groups in Nigeria was displayed with the title ‘divination’. The museum’s definition is that ‘divination is communication with the supernatural forces in an attempt to uncover the unknown and foretell the future’ (Figure 31.1). Reducing the sources of knowledge sought through divination to ‘supernatural forces’ problematically focuses only on ‘pagan religious’ meanings and disregards the cultural, knowledge, and research-based context of divination in African culture (see Shelton, 1965; Umeh, 1999). In addition, materials in the museums are alienated from living communities that continue to use similar objects. For example, palm oil and palm wine production materials are displayed to demonstrate production processes (Figure 31.2), a practice that is very common and ongoing in almost all communities in eastern Nigeria. One may wonder what values such permanent exhibitions in the museum will present to Nigerians who would experience the active processes in their own or a nearby community. Such museum collections are supposed to be linked with communities where the objects are utilised to give life and contextual meaning to the static/inactive materials. Also, many secret/sacred objects are presented in artistic and profane states that deny them value, context, and meaning. In this manner, the narrowed Western-centric approaches to interpretation and display have disempowered and dehumanised members of the communities that own those objects. Yet, this approach is still being applied in cultural heritage management and conservation in Nigeria to date.

Mignolo (2011) describes how the persistence of colonial matrices of power is a major failure of the postcolonial movement and is driving current demands for decoloniality. However, the



Figure 31.2 Palm oil production materials exhibited to demonstrate the processes in the National Museum of Unity, Enugu, Nigeria

idea of unlearning or decolonising threatens the established and accepted legacies of coloniality, such as the postcolonial state. One would ask, how can NCMM engage with the heritage of Nigerian peoples based on precolonial geographies of power, time, and Indigenous territorial ontologies without conflicting with the monolithic Nigerian state whose ‘national’ heritage and identity NCMM was established to promote? Let us look at the foundations of this hegemony and how decolonising an institution like NCMM and its activities would be a difficult task.

Critical heritage scholars have argued that authorised discourses of heritage in the West distanced the ‘past’ from the ‘present’ (Smith, 2006) as ‘a foreign country’ (Lowenthal, 1985). The separation of the past from the present contributed towards the racial stratification of societies as being at different stages of human evolution, locked in different relative stages of the human past (Fabian, 1983; Lane, 2005; Mignolo, 2011). One of the early world maps, the T-in-O map, divided the planet into three continents, whose populations were racially attributed to the three sons of the biblical Noah: Asia for Shem, Africa for Ham, and Japheth for Europe (Mignolo, 2011). The T-in-O map was the first to categorise the world into regions characterised by human colour and anatomy. It encouraged the travels of explorers and later scientific expeditions and tourism (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Hom (2010) has described how the discovery of new technologies like ships, rail, and telegraphs helped universalise time and territorial activities. He argues that ‘it made possible a cartographic comprehension of the world and thus underpinned the “geographic imagination” necessary for intercontinental territorial sovereign delineation’ (Hom, 2010: 1161; see also Harvey, 1990); spaces which later became the focal point for heritage discourse.

The International Meridian Conference (IMC) was held in 1884 to establish a universal temporality through common-time observance (Landes, 1983). It resulted in the creation of a time zone

system covering the entire earth beginning from the prime meridian marked by the Greenwich Observatory in London. It is important to note that 1884 was also the same year African territories were divided and distributed among European nations as protectorates, colonies, and free-trade areas (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2016). Poulantzas (1978) cited in Alonso (1994) argued that this arbitrary division of territories enclosed the cultural practices and experiences of formerly open but homogeneous societies into strict heterogeneous spaces separated in time and history. Alonso (1988) found that pasts that couldn't be incorporated were privatised and particularised, consigned to the nation's margins and denied a fully public voice. The implication is that there is an unworthy past on the periphery contrasted with the valued past of the modern state at the centre.

In addition, social evolutionary models were applied to archaeological remains:

Archaeologists excavating Palaeolithic sites in Europe often turned to ethnographic literature on African hunter-gatherers for 'parallels' This form of analogical modelling is rooted in the deep-seated Western belief that hunter-gatherers represent the timeless and essential qualities of humans as *biological beings*. As such, they are thought to live lives closely resembling those of ancient humans.

(Lane, 2005: 25)

In this construction, European societies were modern and civilised at the top of a social evolutionary ladder whereas African societies were backwards and timeless, stuck in the ancient past and in need of European civilisation and modernisation. Fabian (1983: 27) highlighted this Western sensibility that the Africans were assumed by early anthropologists to live 'in another Time', a time in the past that now needs to be upgraded to meet the current 'civilisation' of Western modernity. This thinking marginalised Indigenous cyclical time and relational ontologies that allowed freer inter-cultural relationships founded on what Nyamnjoh (2007) calls 'flexible indigeneity'. Writing on categories of time, Schaepe et al. (2017: 509) define cyclical time as 'a coherence in the world that one experiences, knowing how one fits in the cosmos ... one has a "sense of place", knowing their history and traditions that connect where they currently find themselves with the past, not only in time (cosmos) but space (place)'. They argue that cyclical time also means 'being', 'the notion of an individual having a more lasting sense of existence than the present moment, having connections beyond oneself as an isolated individual'. This is different from linear historical time which means 'becoming', 'the succession of changes, whereby one moment changes into or becomes the next, each often experienced as unconnected from the others' (Schaepe et al., 2017: 510).

The complete removal of Nigerian peoples from their familiar cosmos of 'being' to a strange cosmos of 'becoming' distorted local epistemologies. African history became divided into categories such as antiquity, ethnography, and contemporary art. In so doing, the management of heritage was removed from the people and shifted to distanced bodies at the state level. These Nigerian national institutions were based on templates derived from institutions in Britain, such as the British Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum (Hellman, 2014). This is an example of the coloniality of power manifesting in the process of heritage-making in Nigeria, which is sustained through the coloniality of knowledge.

Discourse and the Coloniality of Heritage Knowledge

So far, we have examined the processes that established the Nigerian state and its colonial heritage institutions. We have seen how local boundaries were adjusted to suit colonial interests in a manner that removed territorial control from Indigenous communities in Africa. This coloniality of power

birthed the coloniality of knowledge, which according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) has structured epistemological issues and the politics of knowledge production (see also Quijano, 2007). In this section, I am concerned with who defines what is heritage, for what purpose, and for whom? In the current system, materials, places, and practices are identified as heritage based on the interpretative powers of mainstream expertise, and consequently, many cultural things that Nigerians are attached to in their various communities are not formally recognised as part of the state (or mainstream) heritage. To be identified as state heritage, it seems, something must be ‘discovered’, and the narrative formulated by a heritage expert as though it was not known of before. In this official sense, heritage can only be identified by heritage experts. But local heritage does not require this form of state ‘legitimation’ to be valued as heritage by members of a local community.

Michael Foucault’s (1969/1972) study of discourse and the power of knowledge production is useful here. When something is said, we need to understand not simply what is said but also who is saying it, what language was used, and on whose authority was it said. The essence of these questions is to ascertain if what was told derives from a body of knowledge that he called ‘Discursive Formation’, or several statements working together (see Hall, 1992). According to Hall (1992), discourse means a group of statements that provide a language for representing a particular kind of knowledge about a topic or a thing. He further identified three features in Foucault’s discourse: (1) discourse could be produced by many individuals in different institutional settings, (2) discourse is not a closed system, and (3) the statements within a discursive formation need not all be the same. Even when there is the possibility of establishing a particular discourse at any place by any person, there is always a point of departure; such points of departure are power-driven. Fairclough (1993) argued that discursive statements made by a person are traceable to the person’s institution and position. According to Bove (1992) in Smith (2004), discourse, representations, and constructions of knowledge reveal forms of power that have effects on the actions of others. Speaking in an unauthorised language and position is in this sense irrational. It alters the epistemology of knowledge construction and practice, the power-knowledge relations underlying forms of expertise, and the relations of power underpinning dominant discourses (Smith, 2006). Although the power embedded in discourse is open to contestation, which provides a means for a possible decolonial approach, opinions revolve around established discursive formation – a point of departure. Such opinions add to, reduce, or strengthen the formation; it explains the authoritative nature of discourse, and how the coloniality of knowledge is sustained.

How are heritage institutions implicated in discourse? Laurajane Smith’s (2006) *Uses of Heritage* presents some explanations on discourse and heritage. Smith’s (2006) treatise on Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) defines a type of discourse in which a particular kind of past is engaged: pasts belonging to dominant society or pasts represented by privileged ‘professionals’ or ‘experts’. This discourse privileges Western ontologies and epistemologies of heritage conservation, which got transported to other parts of the world through colonialism, and provides the basis for the continued control of heritage by nationally sanctioned heritage experts. In summary, the AHD excludes Indigenous peoples from heritage management in three different ways. First, it separates heritage from original owners by making them ‘national’ properties. Second, it removes moveable heritage from living communities and places them in controlled spaces where access is limited, such as museums. Thirdly, it imposes externally derived management structures that are not aligned with local philosophies related to heritage management. This is one way in which heritage has been colonised and has led to the coloniality of heritage today.

Wiseman (2005: 2) highlighted the implications of a discourse like AHD by pointing out that ‘archaeological and historical data are not merely neutral pieces of information; they are fundamentally fouled with political and neocolonial views and ideas’. Foucault (1969/1972: 48) argued

that discourse is not a ‘mere intersection of words and things’. Representing a population’s past and way of life is an expression of expertise and a source of power (Bond and Gilliam, 1994). In an introduction to a special issue of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (vol. 18), Luis Silva and Santos (2012) assert that power is generic to heritage because to be identified, interpreted, valued, preserved, and used as heritage requires a sense of authorisation, which is achieved through heritage discourses (Wu and Hou, 2015). Smith (2006) identified two related categories of official heritage discourse, that which focuses on the management and conservation of heritage sites, places, and objects and that which is concerned with tourism and leisure. What is particularly important to us here is the first category. In the discourse of management and conservation of heritage, concepts of ‘abandonment’, ‘discovery’, and ‘interpretation’ are manifested. To archaeologists and more recently heritage experts, ‘abandonment’ means abandoning, detachment, or leaving behind a site, monument, cultural material, or practice (cf. Lamoureux-St-Hilaire and Macrae, 2020). ‘Discovery’, on the other hand, is a term used by archaeologists and heritage experts to depict the revelation of an abandoned or ‘unknown’ heritage site, place, or object; it also includes the revelation of abandoned or ‘unknown’ heritage knowledge (see Surovel et al., 2017). The discovered thing is interpreted – the discursive power – and the narratives are embodied by the materials as they become a heritage and identity of the people.

The discursive idea of discovery can be traced back to the ‘Age of Discovery’ when European explorers supposedly discovered Africa and the Americas as if there were no people already there (Washburn, 1962; Edwards, 1985). The coast of West Africa, for example, was first ‘discovered’ by Portuguese sailors. As a result, they came to ‘see’, ‘name’, and ‘know’ Indigenous communities through Western constructs (Smith, 2012). This sense of discovery has been so pervasive that primary school students in Nigeria are still taught that Mungo Park, a Scottish explorer, discovered the river Niger despite it having been fished and culturally valued by many communities for centuries before his arrival in 1796. Indeed, the coloniality of knowledge in the context of discovery, history, and heritage is so deep that my Nigerian teachers taught me the same history in social studies in 1993/94. This approach to teaching history to Africans tends to continuously reiterate the position that Europe was the centre of the universe and Africa was discovered by Europe (Zachernuk, 1998; cf. Mangan, 1993).

Colonial discoveries did not only encompass tangible features, as argued by Goonatilake (1982). Indigenous peoples’ knowledge, technology, and codes of social life were also recorded and regarded as discoveries. Furthermore, colonial archaeologists applied the discourse of discovery when they found sites and objects, taking ownership of supposedly abandoned heritage things. Such ownership extends to the construction and ownership of heritage narratives based on Western ways of seeing and knowing, many of which have today become national heritage and national identities. Indigenous heritage scholars and practitioners inherited this power of owning heritage knowledge through discovery, research, and interpretation and it is reflected in the ways that objects are conserved and exhibited in Nigerian museums. A more recent example is the discourses around the return of ‘Benin Bronzes’. However, are ‘Benin Bronzes’ the only cultural materials stolen or looted through the many punitive expeditions and anthropological, archaeological, and art-historical expeditions in the territory of Nigeria? Why aren’t other stolen or looted objects being discussed? The focus on Benin is a demonstration of how Western heritage principles, adopted within Africa, place more interest in elite, highly artistic works. Again, many of these bronzes are sacred and/or secret objects but they are now being handled as profane and artistic materials and their return has become politicised between the Oba, ‘Benin Bronze’ casters, and NCMM. Besides, these materials left Benin long before the Nigerian state was created in 1914. Even though the former president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, recently rendered control and ownership

of the returned materials to the Oba, many of them were collected from shrines and houses of different Enogie who managed the cultural affairs of their quarters in locations outside the Benin palace. Of course, the president's decision is a good step towards decolonising the objects, but further steps are needed to engage other communities in Benin whose ancestors also owned many of the objects. Following the Western monolithic or nationalistic reasoning, which informs the way NCMM functions, these Benin objects must either belong to the Nigerian state or to the Benin palace – the political head of the ancient state of Benin. This thinking highlights the prevalence of time-space politics that makes a distinction between the past and the present.

The Western separation of the past into 'prehistory' and 'history', defined by the absence or presence of writing, suggested that much of the African past had no history and that the African present remained in a prehistoric state. Even when early archaeologies explicitly sought to provide evidence of the deep history of African societies, it was often done in a racist, paternalistic tone that suggested Africans were dangerously unaware of their past. This is evidenced in the letter written by A. J. Arkell (1944) to his British archaeological colleagues on a colonial mission in West Africa. He encouraged them to ensure that they achieved knowledge dominance through archaeological research. Explaining to them the urgency of doing the research then, he wrote:

The political-minded African, with the mental instability of adolescence, is often dangerously impatient to try to attain in his own lifetime a utopia where freed from foreign restraint, he can enjoy unlimited power and wealth. The revelation that his land had a long time history, that it has in the past perhaps more than once been in the mainstream of civilisation before falling into the backwater in which it finds itself today, can undoubtedly give an educated African a sense of practical short-term standards – the main justification for facilitating archaeological research in Africa in these difficult days. I would indeed go further and say that it is a reason why such research *must* be carried out and its finding interpreted to the educated African before it is late. If it is delayed too long there is a danger of the African intelligentsia becoming irrevocably alienated from us, their foster-parents, whose duty it is to help them fit into that community of nations which alone offers hope for the future of civilisation.

(Arkell, 1944: 149)

Arkell's appeal is for archaeological evidence to stop Africans from becoming 'irrevocably alienated' from a Western sense of 'civilisation'. In this way, it is comparable to other colonial initiatives by missionaries and others who sought to save Africa from itself by converting it to Western modernity and is comparable in tone to the work of other colonial anthropologists and archaeologists in West Africa (see Murray, 1939, 1942, 1943; Jones, 1974). The activities of these early archaeologists who worked as 'heritage experts' are important because it is their collections and interpretations that helped to create the first sets of museums in West Africa. Consequently, the foundations of modern heritage institutions are built on Western epistemologies and ontologies, which were constructed to support the colonial state. Situating his question in the African context, Shaw (1989) asked, to what extent should persons from one part of the world study the problems of another part of the world and prescribe their solutions? In addition, I ask, for how long shall the methodologies and theoretical positions of persons from one part of the world continue to explain and prescribe solutions to other people's problems in another part go unquestioned?

Authorised heritage discourses in Africa are underpinned by discursive formations established by their 'foster-parents' – the West. This conjecture silenced the views and voices, as well as ignoring the needs and aspirations of Nigerian Indigenous peoples. This silencing, according to

Schmidt (2009), is often observed when scholars offer views that fall outside mainstream Western scholarship or when scholars challenge well-established paradigms, for example, those that took root during the colonial era. Ucko (1990) also identified another type of silencing in Africa, which happened in structuring curricula used for teaching college and university students (see also Andah, 1997; Chikwendu, 1997). Curricula ignored local knowledge systems and were developed according to Western epistemologies that limited heritage management and conservation ideas to ‘pastness and endangerment’ (see May, 2020), which is usually promoted by the sense of ‘loss aversion’ (see Holtorf, 2015). It can be argued that most of the archaeology and heritage-making conducted in Africa occurs within a discursive formation legitimised by the colonial paradigm (Pikirayi and Schmidt, 2016). But discourse is an open system that allows contestation. Although ‘discovery’ still appears in archaeology or heritage discourses, contestations by Indigenous scholars and some Western colleagues have weakened colonial heritage discourses. The postcolonial turn that made great use of ethnography, ethnoarchaeology, ethnohistory, ethno-linguistic, ethno-science, and so on are ways through which such past discoveries and the meaning they conveyed began to take another discursive space. For instance, the methodological applications of these ‘ethnos’ changed the classical approach that viewed sites and cultural materials only from a ‘scientific’ (or scholarly) interpretative position which ignored Indigenous narratives and principles. The introduction of methods that considered local knowledge systems in the study and interpretation of heritage was the beginning of decoloniality in heritage and museums in Africa.

One concern highlighted in this chapter is how the new discursive formations by Indigenous and non-Indigenous African scholars of heritage are taking place within the context of the coloniality of being in which the personality and capabilities of African peoples and cultures still suffer dehumanisation and are continually objectified. For example, the remains of African ancestors and many of their secret/sacred materials continue to be contained in museums within and outside Africa. Dehumanisation occurs through museum heritage narratives. An example is the changing and dehumanising narratives woven by archaeologists and museums around human remains of black descent exposed during archaeological excavations in Britain (see Montgomery-Ramirez, 2021). At the Jovik Viking Centre in York, England, there is an attempt to remove the black presence from medieval England through the changing narrative of the black skeleton found in a medieval cemetery in the city of York, which has been interpreted and variously exhibited as ‘Skeleton 3379, the African, and the Arab’, and during a study in 2015–19, it was considered as ‘the Black Viking by interviewed visitors’ (Montgomery-Ramirez, 2021: 938). The author stressed that the osteological analysis of the skeleton proves it is a black person (cf. Keefe and Holst, 2015). Materials and activities associated with this medieval cemetery are dated to a deep time past when it was not expected that any black human would have arrived in England for any positive or objective purpose. It, therefore, sparked all kinds of dehumanising and negative stories against the personality of the black being in the same way that the presence of black women in medieval cemeteries at Norfolk and Fairford was interpreted to be enslaved people (Montgomery-Ramirez, 2021). Such representations reduce the potential for African presence and agency in European history.

Decolonising West African Heritage and Heritage Institutions

So, how can we decolonise heritage and heritage institutions in West Africa? First, we need to research and share the depth and breadth of African histories, countering the colonial narrative that African history begins with the arrival of Europeans and can only be defined by its relationship to Europe. Secondly, we need to rethink heritage management and conservation principles to reflect local agencies. Thirdly, the utilitarian values of heritage are to be put in perspective. Rather than

handling African heritage from only the ‘pastness’ or ‘endangerment’ views of Western epistemic, it’s important to encourage communities that have continued to use them within cultural spaces to carry on as a way of preservation. I will expatiate on these three points.

In many of Nigeria’s colonial anthropological, archaeological, historical, and art history studies, the people are regarded as backward, their cultural practices as fetish and pagan, and their histories as myths and legends that lack empirical substance (see Afigbo, 1993). This stereotype was complicated by the teachings of Islamic and Christian missionaries (later led by Africans), who demonised indigenous heritage things. This framing informed how Nigerians were presented in school curricula and consequently how indigenous Nigerian culture was perceived by Nigerians themselves. Ugwuanyi et al. (2021) have established that such disorder created ontological insecurity by instilling in Africans the disbelief in the usefulness of their culture and knowledge. And because Africans apparently had no written historical tradition, schools in Nigeria taught European histories and African histories from European perspectives. Following this dehumanisation, Jones (1974) describes how cultural materials were collected and stored in museums to document the last phase of the uncivilised people of Africa as part of a European civilising mission (see also Falser, 2015).

Within Africa, we need to reverse the processes that establish museums and heritage sites, especially those aspects that were based on missionary and colonial values. We need to re-read and re-write the stories and narratives accompanying cultural materials, which are currently removed from their utilitarian contexts, a practice that denies them agency and dignity. The goal is to correct the dehumanising and misrepresentations of Africans and African history that continue to be presented to audiences today. Consequently, collaborations between African and Euro-American museums and originating communities are urgently required to re-write colonised interpretations and presentations. Western museums should re-read, unlearn, re-learn, and contextualise their collections appropriately to reverse the dehumanised images of African beings embedded in the negative and/or incomplete narratives of their collections. These two phases of dehumanisation are still happening within and outside Africa. Where requested, museums in Europe and America should return cultural belongings and where they are not requested for repatriation, they should involve originating communities in the reinterpretation and redisplay of their cultural materials in a dignified way that reflects their narratives and civilisation that produced and used the objects.

On the second point, heritage needs to be reimagined from Indigenous peoples’ perspectives and their expertise and to be delinked from Western heritage thinking. I have consistently argued that heritage has utilitarian values within a ‘living community’ in which human and nonhuman beings participate in the process of shaping cultures and identities (Ugwuanyi, 2020). Results from Nigeria show that these utilitarian values are more important to most people in local communities, especially in Africa (Ugwuanyi, 2018, 2021, 2019; see also Ugwuanyi et al., 2021; Onyemehalu and Ugwuanyi, 2022). Even though a heritage may look abandoned (the Western condition of endangerment), in African time and space, the heritage utility follows a repetitive rhythm or cyclical cosmos that makes them become useful or active on an annual or seasonal basis (Ugwuanyi and Schofield, 2018). This rhythm is at the heart of every living community of humans and nonhumans. A living community is defined by the people’s relationship to the territoriality where their ancestors lived and passed land ownership and the pieces of knowledge acquired therein over many years of dwelling in the space from generation to generation. For many such communities in Nigeria, heritage is attractive if it carries this ancestral signature in ways that cyclically reflect living practices, what Ingold (1993) referred to as ‘dwelling perspective’, which critical heritage scholars have called ‘relational ontologies’ (Harrison, 2015). Doing decoloniality to manage heritage from the people’s perspectives in this case means adopting ‘delinking’ and approaching

heritage-making and management processes from local people's 'locus of enunciation' in which views are to be derived from different positions of knowledge production in West Africa (on locus of enunciation, see Mignolo, 1995). Of course, we cannot deny that communities in West Africa did not also encounter comparable Western hegemonic asymmetries in their heritagisation, but it is important that we rejig the status quo to return agency to the local people.

Thirdly, we must invest in communities to continue to use their heritage, to keep it alive, so that it remains 'in use' (see Ugwuanyi, 2019). The in-use method involves identifying the 'birthing or production mission' of heritage and working to keep it alive in living communities to serve their utility. It is a democratic process that binds modern principles into local heritage management and conservation approaches that combine national and local structures. The birthing mission of heritage is the original purpose of their creation/conception. In the in-use model, a national catalogue of heritage should be maintained in the museums as a directory of the heritages in the living communities. Practices and materials should only form part of the contents of museums where these are under serious threat of extinction after every effort towards surviving/reviving the utilities in their living communities has failed. It should tap into local people's awareness of the relationship between (culture) heritage, power, and governance that connect members of communities into a shared history, experience, and engagement. In the in-use model, every pre-colonial independent community (like the ones identified by Ugwuanyi and Schofield, 2018) is to be identified, and a national heritage committee constituted by representatives of the people from local, state, and federal levels is to be established. The committee members are to serve as mediators and a link between the national heritage authority and local community authorities, ensuring the representation and coverage of communities in the affairs of the national heritage authority. In this integration, care must be taken to recognise that the project belongs to local communities and that they are the major stakeholders rather than the heritage professionals.

Conclusion

In a way of conclusion, decolonising heritage and heritage institutions in the modern/colonial states in West Africa means we must begin to decentralise heritage narratives and the institutions that manage them. While this approach is ongoing, the process of re-reading, re-learning, unlearning, and decolonising heritage in African and Western museums must also begin (for example, see Basu, 2015, 2021). The outcome of the affordances of re-engaging museum and archival materials in African and Western museums should be used to re-articulate the narratives of museum collections to give contextual meaning to their narratives in relation to their origin, uses, and territorial relationality. The process will also return the histories and knowledge embedded in those collections to the descendants of the original owners to help us understand their affordances and changing significance at present. Additionally, heritage experts/professionals must also begin to unlearn and re-learn local heritage ontologies and epistemologies to help decolonise their minds from colonial or Western-centric approaches in which they were 'raised' and trained.

Again, where an actual request is made by members of the descendant communities of heritage in African or Western museums to be returned to the people, efforts are to be made to ensure that they are returned to the community of origin. The discussions that preceded the actual return must be inclusive in ways that involve members of the local public and not just with the elites and perceived community leaders alone. To be able to identify appropriate stakeholders requires that the first approach would be to understand the loci of enunciation of heritage and the territorial connections that explain their relationality. In this way, it ensures that the process is democratic and inclusive. Of course, leaders of the modern states formed by the imperial powers will rise against

this approach. But it is the responsibility of the [decolonised] heritage professionals/experts to educate politicians on the importance of this decolonial movement. By [decolonised] heritage professionals/experts, I mean those trained within the modern global knowledge asymmetry, who have unlearned and re-learned what they know about heritage and are open-minded to embrace other forms of epistemologies.

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