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The less considered part: Contextualizing immaterial heritage from German colonial contexts in the restitution debate

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Abstract

Since the publication of the “restitution report” by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy in November 2018, the debate around the restitution of African artifacts inherited from German colonialism in German museums has become increasingly intense. While the restitution debate in Germany is generally focused on “material cultural heritage” and human remains, this reflection attempts to contextualize the “immaterial heritage” (museum collections inventory data, photographs, movies, sound recordings, and digital archive documents) from German colonialism and plead for its consideration in this debate. It claims that the first step of restitution consists of German ethnological museums being transparent about their possessions of artifacts from colonial contexts, which means providing all available information about museum collections from colonial contexts and making them easily accessible to the people from the former German colonies.

Keywords: restitution; immaterial heritage; inventories; German colonialism; sensible objects; phonographic recordings

Introduction

On 28 November 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron announced his will to restitute African cultural patrimony from colonial contexts held by French national museums to African countries. After this announcement, he commissioned the Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr and the French art expert Bénédicte Savoy to make proposals on how the restitution should be done. Sarr and Savoy submitted their proposal with recommendations in November 2018.¹ This decision from the French president made the discussions on the colonial origin of artifacts in European ethnological museums a much timelier issue even beyond France. Since the publication of the restitution report by Sarr and Savoy, the debate around the restitution of African artifacts inherited from German colonialism and held by German museums has become increasingly intense. The Humboldt Forum project, which aims to incorporate the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art and permanently exhibit more than 500,000 artifacts from around the world, is being criticized because of the colonial and imperial origin of most of these objects.

While the restitution debate in Germany has generally focused on material cultural heritage and human remains, this article attempts to contextualize the immaterial heritage from German colonialism and plead for its consideration in this debate as well. Because of

¹ Sarr and Savoy 2018.

the fact that thousands of immaterial objects also became the property of German ethnological museums through colonial violations, thinking about how to deal with these objects in this restitution debate is particularly necessary. This contribution also highlights some of the recommendations suggested by Sarr and Savoy's restitution report that are applicable to these immaterial objects.

Immaterial heritage as a result of colonial violations? The complexity of the question

What is immaterial heritage?

Cultural heritage includes not only monuments and collections of objects but also traditions or living expressions such as oral traditions, rituals, performing arts, festive events, social practices, and so on.² Among these categories are tangible heritage (physical objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science, or technology of a specific culture) and intangible heritage. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), intangible heritage is the attribute of a group or society that comprises nonphysical intellectual property such as folklore, customs, beliefs, traditions, knowledge, language, and so on.³

In the colonial context, many artifacts were used in Europe to spread or represent the intellectual and cultural properties of the colonized people. Among these artifacts were audiovisual objects, and many of them are digitalized today. Although some of these audiovisual artifacts could be considered to be part of the intangible cultural heritage due to their contents, I will be using the term "immaterial" instead of "intangible" (while using "material" as a synonym of "tangible"). In fact, intangible heritage is community based, and UNESCO considers that it "can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it—without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage."⁴ But people from the former German colonies (especially African communities) whose cultures happen to be represented in these objects—at least through their contents—are mostly not aware of the presence of this memory from their colonized ancestors in European museums. Since they are not known, they are not recognized as heritage by their cultures of origin.

In addition, these objects and the social practices that they contain are generally not used by the European societies today. So, neither should they be considered to be the intangible heritage of their holders (the former colonial countries of Europe). Most of these objects are just saved in museums or archives and periodically used for exhibitions. Given that this is the situation, considering them to be intangible heritage may be wrong because one would have to answer the question: whose intangible heritage? Therefore, the term "immaterial" is more suitable in this article because immaterial defines the "realm of the physically imperceptible; it can either be used to describe elements that need to go through different processes in order to be perceived or to shift the focus from the object to the process of creation and the ideas behind it."⁵ In this article, "immaterial heritage" refers not only to digital shareable objects (movies, photographs, sound and music recordings) about the culture of people from former German colonies but also to digital archived documents,

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003> (accessed 20 August 2019).

³ UNESCO, "Tangible Cultural Heritage," <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/culture/tangible-cultural-heritage/> (accessed 20 August 2019).

⁴ UNESCO, "Tangible Cultural Heritage."

⁵ Christina Grammatikopoulou, "Shades of the Immaterial: Different Approaches to the 'Non-Object,'" <https://interactive.org/2012/02/shades-of-the-immaterial> (accessed 20 August 2019).

inventory data, and museums catalogues (not in their form as books or papers but, rather, the contained information itself as a sharable object or information).

Since these objects have been digitalized, they are nonphysical and can only take a physical form through different processes. In comparison to material objects (such as ethnographic cultural artifacts, architecture, fossils, and so on), which cannot be duplicated without losing their original aura, immaterial heritage is digitalized or digitizable and can be shared through different processes: universal serial bus (USB) sticks, memory cards, compact discs, emails, and so on. One can touch these compact discs or USB sticks, but they only remain a physical support to contain the digital artifact. The content of the artifact is only perceptible by two senses: sight and/or hearing. In this article, the term “immaterial” simply refers to the intangible aspect of these artifacts, which can be supported by different material objects.

For instance, the wax cylinders of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv currently constitute, due to their digitalization, a kind of hybrid object of physical and intangible attributes. However, in comparison to physical (tangible) artifacts such as ethnographic cultural objects, from which any reproduction misses the aura of the original, digitalized recordings can take other physical forms that differ from the original without losing any sense of their content. Wax cylinder recordings may be intangible according to their content, but they can only be considered as intangible heritage after much scientific study on their origin, their authenticity, and the confirmation and recognition that they are such by their cultures of origin (from where they were recorded). For all these mentioned reasons, the term “immaterial heritage” (from colonial contexts) will be used instead of “intangible heritage” (of former colonized people). Using the term “immaterial,” I will point out that these objects are not well known by the former colonized communities today and also not used as part of their cultural heritage by the people in former colonial countries. Furthermore, since they are considered to be immaterial and digital, these objects are easier to contextualize in the restitution debate and easier to be restituted.

Immaterial heritage from colonial contexts

African collections in German ethnological museums (the Ethnological Museum Berlin, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Köln, and so on) comprise physical material as well as immaterial artifacts from German colonial contexts. When analyzing immaterial artifacts like photographs, movies, and sound recordings acquired during German colonialism (1884–1918), a question concerning the condition of their production is essential: can these objects be considered to be a result of colonial violations—as looted objects—despite their immateriality? To answer this question, the situation surrounding the origin of these objects as well as the way in which they have been used in colonial Germany should be considered. These audiovisual artifacts have been recorded in German colonial areas by ethnologists, linguists, missionaries, colonial officers, and so on, mostly under contract to ethnological museums in Germany. However, how and under which conditions they were purchased is rarely mentioned. Once in Germany, they have been used for exhibitions to educate the German public about the life and culture of the colonized people.⁶ It was not questioned whether the contents of these photographs, films, and sounds corresponded to the reality of the colonized people. In this respect, it is difficult to answer questions about the condition of the acquisition of most of these immaterial objects with certitude. But if we consider the power relations between the colonial administration and the colonized people, the violent origin of these objects appears to provide a shred of evidence.

Even without defining the ownership of museum collections based on European ownership and copyright understanding, many of the immaterial objects from colonial contexts

⁶ Voges 2003, 306.

such as photographs, films, and sound recordings could be considered as stolen objects. Indeed, their historical backgrounds as objects from colonial relations make them worthy as historical and culturally sensible objects.⁷ Considering their origin, the right question should not be about whom the objects belong to but, rather, about how the actual owner became their legal owner. For instance, the questions should not be whether the portrayed people on colonial photographs agreed to be pictured but, instead, whether they were allowed not to agree with the photographer? One can ask: what was the reason for the sadness of the portrayed faces on some colonial photographs? Are smiling faces on colonial photographs natural or fake smiles? Were naked portrayed bodies naturally naked or was it the wish of the photographer and for which purpose have such pictures been taken? A critical analysis of German colonial photographs by Joachim Zeller shows that these pictures had political and ideological dimensions and have been used to legitimate the colonialism and produce representations of the other, the colonized people.⁸

The main reason why we could consider immaterial objects as a result of colonial violations is the lack of freedom for the portrayed actors. Were colonized people free to refuse to sing for the phonograph or to pose undressed for the shooting? In most of the German colonies, the colonized native people did not have the right to protest against the colonial order and decisions. Even in the case of immaterial objects acquired by missionaries, linguists, and ethnologists, the role of the colonial power in their acquisition should not be neglected. Being protected by the colonial military power, the collectors were much freer to collect artifacts or to take them by force when the local population refused to sell them or to offer them.⁹ Furthermore, the same rules of acquisition may have been applied while collecting immaterial objects. One can never return to the past and ask people about their feelings. So, it is almost impossible to guess with certitude how those actors felt when they became objects themselves for immaterial caption (movies, photos, sounds) and had to sing for the phonograph or to pose for pictures and movies.

However, in the colonial context, consenting never meant explicitly agreeing. At this point, the psychological violence of colonialism should not be neglected. In fact, witnessing the violence in which the colonies have been conquered and extended, witnessing the brutality experienced by people who refused to collaborate, was a psychological trauma that was one of the reasons why some people just collaborated during the collecting process of immaterial objects. Smiling in a picture as well as singing happily in movies and phonographic recordings should not be considered as an agreement, but it could have been a scenario imposed by the collector (sometimes in his position as a colonial officer). For these reasons, one can conclude that the acquisition methods of immaterial objects in German colonies may not have been different from the acquisition methods of material objects. They can be seen as stolen objects as well if we consider the power relationship between the collectors and the local people. Also, considering these immaterial objects as potential results of colonial power relationships should even be the first step that could lead to restitution today.

Restitution of immaterial heritage as the first step of restitution

For years, African communities have been claiming the restitution of their ritual objects spoiled during German colonialism and held today by German ethnological museums.

⁷ Sensible due to the controversial conditions and period of their acquisition. See Lange 2011; German Museum Association 2019, 17.

⁸ Zeller 2008, 2010.

⁹ In a letter to Felix von Luschan in 1897, the doctor and collector Richard Kandt even mentioned that it was impossible to get any object without exerting violence. He therefore concluded that he thought that the half of the Luschan Museum (the Ethnological Museum of Berlin) had been stolen. See Sarreiter 2012, 57.

However, many people from the former German colonies, especially young people, obviously still do not know about the presence of the material and immaterial objects from colonial contexts in European museums.¹⁰ In some areas, people do not even know that some objects ever existed. Furthermore, the youngest people will not be able to identify some important cultural objects from their culture; since these objects were rare or unique and were sent to Europe during colonialism, younger generations have never had the chance to see them. There is also a lack of interest by some institutions that are normally supposed to take the floor on the question of restitution. While the debate is getting intense in Europe on the political, cultural, and academic front, the topic of restitution does not seem to be well known and well considered in Africa. Even African politicians seem to have other priorities. Felwine Sarr mentioned in his keynote during the conference *Museum Collections in Motions*, which was held in Cologne 2019, that when he visited the African Union in May 2019 to talk about the restitution, he was disappointed to know that even the social department, which is charged with the cultural activities of the African Union still did not know about the restitution report that he had published, together with Bénédicte Savoy, in November 2018.¹¹

But, at the same time, these communities in former European colonies are still experiencing issues concerning the missing cultural objects. Of course, it is not the task of European museums to raise the awareness for people from former German colonies to claim their right to patrimony. Besides, African foundations such as *AfriAvenir* in Cameroon and the *Zinzou* foundation in Benin have been conducting awareness-raising campaigns for young people on the restitution question for years. But many communities still do not know about the presence of their objects in German museums. The question of restitution seems to be much more a matter for scholars, who generally discover these objects when they come to Germany. This situation is due to the fact that the doors of European museums are closed. How many African scholars are coming to Germany, and how many of them have access to the museums' data and collections in depots? As recommended by Sarr and Savoy, European museums should open the doors by making information about their collections from colonial contexts easily available not only for scholars but also for any other people who would like to know about these collections.¹² For these catalogues, inventories, and archive documents are part of the immaterial heritage from the shared colonial history between Germany and its former colonies.

Since Sarr and Savoy published their report, not only did the debates become more intense in Germany, but actions have also been taken to reconsider the question of restitution. An example is the *Museum Collections in Motion* conference in July 2019 where museum specialists from all over the world met to exchange on their experiences in dealing with historically and culturally sensitive objects in museums. Although such actions are to be encouraged, they remain insufficient and, in my consideration, also inefficient if we consider them as the first step of restitution. German ethnological museums are holding thousands of ethnographic objects brought to Europe during German colonialism, but even though these objects are mostly catalogued—such as the collections of the *Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum*—their inventories are generally not available for people from outside of the museum, even less for people from the former German colonies. Therefore, the first action to be taken should be to inform those people concerned about the particular museum collections and to reconstitute the immaterial heritage that is sharable. Providing information about museum collections means, as recommended by Sarr and Savoy, establishing a clear inventory of these collections and making it freely accessible for people and communities

¹⁰ Sarr and Savoy 2018, 39.

¹¹ Sarr 2019.

¹² Sarr and Savoy 2018, 74.

from the former German colonies—for example, through online platforms.¹³ These communities should be informed about the collections, where they come from, when and by whom they have been purchased, and so on. If there is a real will to resituate the immaterial heritage, including digital catalogues, object inventories by country and year of purchase, as well as museum archives about these artifacts, collections of sound recordings and other kinds of audiovisual contents should be accessible to anyone in the former German colonies without much effort. For not only is material heritage a witness of colonialism but also immaterial heritage.

An advantage of immaterial heritage in the first step of restitution is the fact that ethnological museums are not losing anything when they share it. Since most of these pieces are digital, they are copiable and shareable. Making them available for anyone would even increase the interest of scholars from the former German colonies to do research on their origin, content, meaning, and actual usability in their cultures of origin; it would make the provenience research easier. To make effective restitution possible, ethnological museums should start working with universities, archives, and political and cultural institutions from these countries to resituate, and, better said, to share, immaterial cultural heritage. Immaterial heritage is mostly digitized or digitizable (the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv, the Colonial Picture Archive in Frankfurt) so that it can just be copied and shared without any loss from the side of the museums and without insurance or transportation costs.

To sum up, the first step of restitution consists, for German ethnological museums, in providing all available information about museum collections from colonial contexts, granting full access of this information to the public from the former German colonies, and sharing all shareable contents of the immaterial heritage from German colonialism with the people from these countries. The list of museum artifacts from colonial contexts should not be kept a secret if there is a real will for restitution. Restitution starts with transparency.

A case study of immaterial heritage: the acoustic heritage from German colonial contexts as the “colonial ear”

An example of immaterial artifacts from colonial contexts is acoustic heritage. When Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, a new type of museum object occurred in museum collections—sound. Thereafter, it was possible not only to exhibit objects from non-European “exoticized” people but also to listen to their voices in Europe. The sound became an object, and this was the beginning of comparative musicology (also called ethnomusicology) in Germany. The Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv holds about 16,800 wax cylinder sound recordings recorded between 1893 and 1954 from all over the world, and most of them were recorded during German colonialism in the German colonies (1900–14). As in the case of ethnographic objects, these sound recordings were made by missionaries, ethnologists, colonial officers, and so on for the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv, which worked together with the Ethnological Museum of Berlin at that time.¹⁴ Today, the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv is contained within the musicological department of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin.

Although most of these sound recordings were made during the German colonialism, it might be anachronistic to consider them all to be a result of colonialism. Some of them were made outside of the German colonies and were also made by collectors with different social statuses and usually with different motivations. What I explicitly mean by acoustic heritage from German colonialism is the sound recordings made by German colonial officers during

¹³ Sarr and Savoy 2018, 57.

¹⁴ Ziegler 2006.

their professional occupation in the colonies. The collections entitled Börnstein Bismarck-archipel, Dempwolf Ostafrika (I, II, and Südsee), Mannsfeld Kamerun, Paasche Ostafrika, Smend Togo (I and II), Solf Samoa, and Waldow Kamerun from the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv are some examples of this heritage.¹⁵ The collections were named after their collectors who were all colonial officers in this case. These collections contain some cultural attributes of the colonized people such as music, traditional songs, proverbs, and so on.

The known motivation for the collecting of phonographic recording in colonial areas was the same as for material ethnographic objects. German ethnologist Carl Stumpf, the father of German comparative musicology, argued that collecting music from native colonial people meant saving them and their culture from extinction: “We must quickly collect all we can collect in exotic music. The extinction of the primitive people, as well as the cultural penetration of European culture, oblige us to hurry up.”¹⁶ Moreover, acoustic heritage was combined with the exhibition of material cultural artifacts in museums. Nevertheless, the real motivation was not always to save these so-called primitive people. Moreover, it has to be considered in the logic of colonial knowledge production, which also aimed to educate the German public about these people. For Felix von Luschan, the former director of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, it was the right of the museum visitors to know the language and the music of the people whose instruments, arms, and clothes they could see in the museum.¹⁷ Sound recordings were used during German colonialism as a source of production of knowledge about the colonized people. Carl Stumpf wrote in 1908: “However, such a collection [collection of phonographic recordings] should not serve only for research ... but also for demonstration and lesson for the visitors of the museums. In some museums, e.g. in the young Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne, phonographic demonstrations are offered from a certain time of visit.”¹⁸

Phonographic collections have been studied and analyzed generally by the same scholars who studied and analyzed material cultural artifacts (Felix von Luschan, Erich Hornbostel, Otto Abraham, and so on). Linguists and music ethnologists studied, analyzed, and compared these so-called primitive people through their music and languages, which were recorded on wax cylinders. Based on the (mostly skewed) results of their analysis, they made conclusions about the cultural and racial abilities of those people, while these levels of ability were set by European ethnologists themselves based on the theory of evolution. Otto Abraham and Erich Hornbostel explained in 1904:

After all, we have sufficient induction material for Europe to be able to approach the delicate question of cultural and psychological racial characteristics in the field of musicology. A sufficient collection of exotic music would not only allow us to infer the temperament of people. For as the cultivation of music is also functionally dependent on economic conditions like every artistic statement, the manner of making music, and in particular the spread and height of musical dilettantism, could also be used to infer people’s cultural level.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ziegler 2006.

¹⁶ The original quotation is: “Was an exotischer Musik noch zu sammeln ist, muss schleunigst gesammelt werden. Das Aussterben der Naturvölker ebenso wie das Eindringen europäischer Kultur zwingen zur Eile.” Stumpf 1908, 243–44.

¹⁷ Luschan 1904, 202.

¹⁸ The original quotation is: “Eine solche Sammlung [phonographische Sammlung] soll aber nicht bloß zur Forschung dienen ... sondern auch zur Demonstration und zur Belehrung für die Besucher der Museen. In manchen Museen, z.B. in dem jungen Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cöln sind denn auch bereits für bestimmte Besuchsstunden phonographische Vorführungen angeordnet.” Stumpf 1908, 228.

¹⁹ The original quotation is: “Immerhin besitzen wir für Europa ein genügendes Induktionsmaterial, um der heiklen Frage nach den kulturellen und psychologischen Rassenmerkmalen auch auf Musikwissenschaftlichem

One of the main purposes for all of these efforts was to legitimate colonialism by producing discourses and constructing knowledge about colonized people that allowed the colonial power to better know the people and, therefore, to exploit them better. In his call for donations for the survival of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv in 1908, Stumpf clearly defined the colonial intentions of the phonographic collections:

The new empire prides itself on the colonies and seeks to exploit them materially to the best of its ability. But it is obligatory to combine material exploitation with the scientific one. ... [W]herever in a scientific work the culture of the natives is to be described completely and scientifically exactly, phonographic recordings cannot be missing. ... So our colonial aspirations, understood in a higher sense, must necessarily have such an institution.²⁰

But how authentic are these sound recordings? Are they really representing the cultural attributes of the people from the German colonies? Before going to the colonial areas to create their recording, the collectors received from the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv a so-called journal, which included a great deal of data such as the name of the singers or speakers, the language, the meaning, the transcription and translations of the songs, and so on. These journals were given back to the archive together with the recorded sounds on wax cylinders and are also available today in the archive. But when I analyzed the Smend collection in 2019, I discovered through an interview with people from the regions where these recordings were made between 1905 and 1906 that the transcriptions and translations did not always match the spoken or sung lyrics.²¹ The collector Julius Smend himself has admitted in one of his articles that sometimes his translations and conclusions were just the results of his own interpretations.²²

Phonographic collections are also the result of colonial violence in the same way that material artifacts are. Indeed, colonial law did not allow Native people to protest against the colonial officers, so singing or speaking in the funnel axis of the phonograph was directly or indirectly imposed on the colonized people. But the recording situation is rarely mentioned. However, to analyze these recordings today, one should start from the evidence that the actors speaking, playing instruments, or singing were not doing it freely or in full agreement. A report from Karl Weule, a geographer and also the former director of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, shows that the recording situation was not always a friendly one and that the Native people were brought forcefully to sing for the phonographic recordings:

Phonographic recordings are not easy even with sighted Negroes. The singer was put in front of the set-up, we made it clear to him how he had to hold his head and that he

Gebiet näher treten zu können. Ein hinreichendes Material an exotischer Musik würde uns aber nicht nur einen Rückschluss auf das Temperament eines Volkes gestatten; denn da die Musikpflege wie jede künstlerische Äußerung, auch zu den wirtschaftlichen Verhältnissen in funktionaler Abhängigkeit steht, könnte aus der Art des Musizierens sowie namentlich aus der Ausbreitung und Höhe des musikalischen Dilettantismus auch auf die Kulturstufe eines Volkes geschlossen werden." Abraham and Hornostel 1904, 222–23.

²⁰ The original quotation is: "Das neue Reich rühmt sich der Kolonien und sucht sie nach Kräften materiell auszubeuten. Es ist aber Pflicht, die wissenschaftliche Ausbeutung ... damit zu verbinden. ... wo immer in einem gelehrten Werke die Kultur der Eingeborenen vollständig und wissenschaftlich exakt beschrieben werden soll, da können phonographische Aufnahmen nicht fehlen. ... Also haben auch unsere kolonialen Bestrebungen, in höherem Sinn aufgefasst, eine solche Einrichtung zur notwendigen Folge." Stumpf 1908, 244–25.

²¹ Kalibani 2019.

²² Smend 1907, 245.

always had to sing exactly into the funnel axis. ... It is much worse with Sulila; even standing in front of the funnel he cannot leave his darned habit of constant head-turning. ... With the rapid impulsiveness which distinguishes me from so many people, ... I now grab the blind singer by the neck as soon as he gets his lion's voice sound. Then I hold the woolly head in a vice-like grip until the bard has finished roaring his heroic song. I did not care whether he flutters and tugs and still tries to turn his head so energetically—I just continue holding it.²³

This statement is an illustration of the physical violence used during the acquisition of phonographic collections from colonial contexts. And it is this violence that inspired me to introduce, in a previous work, the term “colonial ear.”²⁴ The “colonial ear” is used analogously with the term “colonial eye,” which was coined by Ludger Derenthal, Raffael Dedo Gadebusch, and Katrin Specht to refer to the colonizer's image of the colonized Indian people in photography.²⁵ The colonial ear represents the acoustic heritage from German colonialism and refers to collectors, who were mostly colonial officers in their position of power as colonizers, during the recording as well as to the public in colonial Germany, which had been educated about the Native people from the colonies through these sound recordings. The colonial ear means the acoustic representation and construction of colonized native people by the colonizers.

The early wax cylinder recordings of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv (including the colonial ear) were added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 1999, which recognizes the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) as the legal owner of these recordings.²⁶ But who do they really belong to? That is another question that has led to a long debate on cultural property resulting from colonial contexts. Today, the phonographic collections of the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv are to be moved to the controversial Humboldt Forum. The case of acoustic heritage from German colonialism shows that even immaterial heritage has not always been acquired without violations in the colonial context.

Concluding remarks: Why and how should something be given back even if it has not been physically taken away?

From the analysis of what I call the colonial ear, two major assessments are to be considered when it comes to immaterial objects from colonial contexts. The first point relates to the immateriality of the object. The fact that an object is from the past but not material suggests that it has not been taken away, which theoretically means that its role in its original society (as a reserve of energy, a creative resource, a deposit of potential, a force of generation of figures and an alternative form of reality, and a power of germination) has not been missed,

²³ The original quotation is: “Phonographische Aufnahmen sind schon bei sehenden Negern nicht leicht. Man hat den Sänger vor den aufgebauten Apparat gestellt, hat ihm klagemacht, wie er den Kopf halten muss, und dass er stets genau in die Trichterachse hinein zu singen hat. ... Viel schlimmer ist es mit Sulila; seine verflixte Gewohnheit des ständigen Kopfdrehens kann er auch vor dem Trichter nicht lassen. ... Mit der raschen Impulsivität ... fasse ich neuerdings den blinden Sänger einfach am Kragen, sobald er seine Löwenstimme erschallen lässt. Dann halte ich das wollige Haupt wie in einem Schraubstock fest, bis der Barde sein Heldenlied zu Ende gebrüllt hat. Ob er zuckt und zerrt und den Kopf noch so energisch zu wenden versucht – ich halte ihn.” Weule 1908, 215–16.

²⁴ Kalibani 2019.

²⁵ Derenthal, Gadebusch, and Sprecht 2012.

²⁶ UNESCO, “Germany: The Oldest Sound Documents (Edison-cylinders) of Traditional Music of the World from 1893 to 1952,” http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/Early%20cylinder%20recordings%20of%20the%20world%20s%20musical%20traditions%201893%201952%20in%20the%20Berlin%20Phonogramm%20Archiv%20%20Nomination%20Form.pdf (accessed 2 August 2020).

as it is the case, according to the restitution report, with material objects from the European former colonies.²⁷ The process of the production of immaterial objects is in a certain way similar to a copy-paste-share process. Although German colonizers and colonial scholars took ownership of this immaterial cultural heritage, the colonized people from the German colonies have not lost it because of its immateriality. It is similar to taking someone's idea and making it one's own. Thus, a question occurs: why should it be returned if it has not been taken away—if it has just been copied and not cut?

The second assessment concerns the authenticity of the immaterial heritage. As already mentioned, some of the contents of the immaterial objects like sound recordings are clearly identified as not being authentic when confronted with their culture of origin today. But one should pay attention to them. Today, the contents of the immaterial heritage from German colonialism is being compared with the actual state of the culture of these former German colonies to find out whether this contents is authentic or just a construction and whether the transcriptions and translations as well as the available information about these objects in the archives are real or not. However, I believe this approach can be misleading; naturally, culture is permanently changing. Thus, it can be misleading to make a judgment on the authenticity of a cultural practice that existed in 1904 by comparing this practice to the cultural practice from the same culture in 2019. So, what purpose should these immaterial cultural objects serve today if we cannot be sure that their contents are really authentic to the cultures to which they are to be returned?

A combined answer of these two questions consists of highlighting the usability of these objects in the former German colonies, especially in Africa. In the ethno-colonial context, the actor on the ethnographic (material and immaterial) object was himself the object to be studied. The actors to be listened to in various sound recordings from colonial contexts, as well as the people in pictures, are to be regarded as captured spirits.²⁸ For young people and artists from the former German colonies, the photographed and phonographed actors in sound recordings and colonial photographs can be inspirational for art, music, or fashion—for example, through their voices, the way in which they played music instruments, their clothes in different photographs, and so on. As Sarr and Savoy suggest, even if the content and the original use of the artifacts from colonial contexts is long gone, the objects should not be only available for European people since these objects are the source of knowledge and creativity.²⁹ The youth from former European colonies should have access to them. For this reason, European ethnological museums should also share the immaterial heritage from colonial contexts, and this should be the first step of restitution because of the simplicity of doing so. If the museums are ready for this step, then it would be easier to deal with the legal issues, which are usually said to make the restitution impossible.

Another reason why immaterial heritage should be shared regardless of the content's authenticity is its character as an archive document and as a source of knowledge about the past. Considered as archive document(s), immaterial heritage is proof of the common colonial history. Dealing with immaterial heritage, looking for answers through its contents and history, and including it in research as a historical source could help to better understand some aspects of this shared colonial history. On the other hand, dealing with immaterial heritage allows us to reconstitute the history and to re-question oneself on some issues, and this can lead to better relational ethics between Europe and its former colonies.³⁰ Moreover, dealing with the shared colonial history should be done by the people from the former colonial countries as well as people from the former colonies, and, for this reason,

²⁷ Sarr and Savoy 2018, 34.

²⁸ I use the term of "captured spirits" in analogy to Britta Lange's (2020) concept of "captured voices."

²⁹ Sarr and Savoy 2018, 3.

³⁰ Sarr, and Savoy 2018.

immaterial heritage including information in museum and archive documents and catalogues should be shared with the former European colonies. Furthermore, the restitution of immaterial heritage constitutes a symbolic attempt to remake justice (even though the damage from colonial crimes can never be repaired) and a first step in a symbolic attempt to restore a little bit of their stolen humanity to the formerly colonized communities, which can only represent one form of reparation in a long list of past wrongs.³¹

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³¹ Mbembe 2013, 261.

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