Repatriation of Historical Artifacts

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Abstract

Artifact repatriation is the process of returning artifacts to their countries of origin. In this paper, I argue that museums should return artifacts to their countries of origin. I support my position with three arguments. First, I argue that repatriation is a moral act that should be used as a method of corrective justice. Second, repatriation is a solution that stops the growth of artifact trafficking networks. Lastly, repatriation can be a connecting bridge between repatriating museums and host countries, encouraging collaboration. While some people argue that original countries are incapable of protecting their artifacts, I show that most countries demanding repatriation are capable of artifact protection. Whereas some may argue that artifacts do not belong to original countries because of ethnic discontinuity, I show that these countries have a right to ask for repatriation. I conclude my paper by recommending the use of 3D replicas in host museums.

Keywords: repatriation, artifact restitution, cultural objects, museums, cultural heritage

Repatriation of Historical Artifacts

Museums like the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art attract a large number of eager tourists every year, who visit to learn about world art and cultures. The encyclopedic displays of art have successfully gathered aesthetes from around the world to study and marvel at the beautiful and diverse collections of artifacts. A simple trip through the exhibitions can take a visitor from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Greece, and finally to the Kingdom of Benin in Nigeria. Many wander through these exhibitions, pondering at historical objects without being aware of the journeys they have crossed to reach their displays. These objects have had lives that are more complicated than what meets the eye. Some of the artifacts have gone through complicated looting networks to reach the museums that host them today. Other artifacts have had authority over them granted to their donors by colonizing powers. Finally, other artifacts have been stolen and distributed as spoils of war during times of conflict. In this paper, I argue that museums should repatriate illicitly acquired artifacts in their possession to their countries of origin. I use the definition of cultural objects provided by Roodt's (2013), which are "works of art that are historically, ethnically, or religiously important to a certain group of people" (p.291) to define artifacts. Additionally, I deploy Roodt's definition of a country of origin as "the country that designates the object as part of its cultural heritage, or that classifies it as national treasure" (p.290).

I support my position on artifact repatriation with the three following arguments. First, the artifacts may have been taken from their countries in what can be considered today as ethically debated methods. In such cases, repatriation can be used as a method of corrective justice to correct the wrongs of the past (Björnberg, 2015). Second, I argue that repatriation can be used as a method of stopping the growth of artifact looting networks, which is a growing problem that is threatening world heritage sites today (Gruber, 2014). Trafficking networks have been the reason behind the forever loss of important historical information on world ancient cultures (Roodt, 2013). Finally, I argue that repatriation can be

used as a method of improving diplomatic relations between repatriating countries and countries of origin. The improvement of relations helps promote cultural collaboration and exchange between the two countries (Green, 2017).

I also consider alternative positions towards artifact repatriation. Critics of repatriation may argue museums should not return artifacts as that would discourage people from learning about cultures outside that of the host country (Cuno, 2014). I refute this argument by showing how repatriation efforts between the US and Turkey have resulted in the improvement of connections and indefinite loan agreements between the two countries (Green, 2017), leading to more cultural exchange. Critics may also argue that some of the source countries may not be able to provide the care the artifacts require (Merryman, 1986). I refute this argument by presenting the example of the Greek Elgin marbles. The marbles have had a museum created to protect them when they are returned. The last argument is that the inhabitants of the countries whose artifacts were taken are not ethnically the same as those who created the artifacts, nor do they come from the same geopolitically defined country. As a result, they cannot present themselves as the original owners. I refute this argument by showcasing that we can create a link between the last owners of the artifacts and today's inhabitants and can therefore, transfer ownership (Björnberg, 2015).

This paper is important because it brings awareness to the potential harm that museums may be causing by keeping illicitly acquired artifacts in their encyclopedic collections. This paper highlights the importance of these illicitly acquired artifacts to their original people, by the artifacts being culturally, historically, and in some cases, religiously significant to their people. It also brings light to the methods of artifact acquisition that can cause decontextualization of artifacts. As history and culture enthusiasts, we care to have as much information as possible on historical artifacts. However, with illicit acquisition, we lose the context and history behind the artifacts. Repatriation helps discourage illicit networks from forming and growing and therefore, protects artifacts from decontextualization by enforces moral standards on the artifacts museums can keep. I conclude my paper by

suggesting the use of 3D copies of artifacts in the current host countries and returning the originals to their countries of origin.

Artifacts and Repatriation

We have reached a time where anything can be easily recreated, mass produced, and sold to the public, whether necessities or art, we have access to much more and beyond. However, an old pot, some decaying columns, and a collection of bronze statues can be esteemed and treasured dearly by the public and called “artifacts” regardless of how replicable they can be. Clearly the value of such objects (artifacts) lies beyond their usefulness or artistry. Artifacts are important because they teach us about the past of different societies. Through artifacts we can understand how people lived, what they valued, and what beliefs they held (Chung, 2009). Artifacts are also valuable because they play a role in identity building of communities. As humans, we have a need for belonging, for a clear identity, and for purpose. Therefore, we feel an attachment to artifacts as they provide us with a story, a past we can belong to, and a definition of who we are in this world. Artifacts also provide us with a community we can identify and fit in with based on our cultural identity (Merryman, 1989; Roodt, 2013).

The importance of artifacts raises the need for preserving and protecting them from harm’s way. As a result, modern museums were created as shelters that encompass objects of historical, artistic, and scientific importance to humanity. They are places where history is preserved and shared with the public, whether local history or world history ("Museum," n.d.). Museums are where miracles happen, cultures intermingle under one roof, from the world’s far east to its far west. This intermingling is seen in the displays of museums, especially encyclopedic museums, where one can find artifacts from all around the world.

An Introduction to Illicit Acquisition

Looking at artifacts while journeying through encyclopedic museums, we cannot help but wonder what events paved the way for their exhibitions, away from their place of origin.

While many artifacts have been acquired legally, some artifacts have made their way to museums through illegal or ethically ambiguous acquisitions. Today, with the greater awareness of the public, we are seeing more discussion surrounding museums. We are also hearing about more cases where the ethicality of acquisition methods of certain artifacts is disputed. Some examples of famous cases that have raised legal action include, the Benin Bronzes of Nigeria, the Parthenon Marbles of Greece, and the Bust of Nefertiti of Egypt.

These three cases have long been at the forefront of the illicit artifact acquisition problem. However, they are not the only cases in which backlash against museums ensued. Museums have been receiving backlash for keeping artifacts termed as "orphaned artifacts" in their collections. Orphaned artifacts, as described by Daniels and Leventhal (2013) are "antiquities that lack information about their findspot" (p. 342). The authors also define findspot as "the precise location where an object was unearthed, and, when taken together with data about the other objects found with it and its three-dimensional position, permits archaeologists to create a context and to interpret its use in antiquity" (p. 342). Usually, as described by the authors, these orphaned artifacts make their way to museums illegally through artifact trafficking networks.

The cases of illicit artifact acquisition that have been raised in the recent years follow a general pattern in terms of acquisition methods. The first method is acquiring artifacts through artifact smuggling networks. These networks are complicated networks that start from poor local excavators who enter the business to sustain a living, and end with auction houses and lastly artifact collectors (Al Quntar, 2017). Highlighted by Brodie (2017) is the example of the Euphronios Krater, which is a famous artifact that was the victim of such networks. The krater, which served the function of a bowl for mixing of wine and water, was illegally excavated, and removed from the Etruscan cemetery of Cerveteri and then entered the art trafficking network. The Italian-Greek Krater had travelled all the way to the United

States and had ended up in the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in 1972. In 2006, the Krater was finally returned to Italy.

The second method of artifact acquisition, as described by Bjonberg (2015), is acquisition of artifacts under the permission of non-owners. This method of acquiring artifacts has taken place during colonial times, where permissions to excavate and/or remove artifacts were given by colonizers instead of the people of the country. One well-known example for such a case are the Parthenon Marbles of Greece. The author explains that the Parthenon Marbles were taken by Lord Elgin from Greece to England under the permission of the Turks who are not the legitimate owners of the Parthenon marbles and instead just had control over Athens at the time. Believing that the marbles were acquired illegally, Greeks today are still demanding the return of their marbles.

The last type of artifact acquisition is the clearest in terms of lack of morals and ethics, which is as plunders of war. This acquisition happens when the country that wins a battle on foreign land, loots artifacts as spoils of war. One example is the Benin Bronzes of Nigeria. The British troops seized the bronzes from the palace of the Kingdom of Benin in 1897 during their punitive expedition of Benin (Osadolor & Otoide, 2008). The expedition brought back around 2000 Bronzes to Britain with the troops (Herman, 2018). Today, most of the Benin Bronzes can still be found in Western museums (Brown, 2018). All three types of illicit acquisition mentioned above have sparked a demand for one thing, repatriation.

What is Repatriation?

Repatriation is defined as “the return of stolen or looted cultural materials to their countries of origin” (German, 2020, para. 1). In recent years, we have started to hear about the outcry and demands of multiple countries for the repatriation of illicitly acquired cultural artifacts from museums around the world. Along with the increase in demand for repatriation, we are also seeing an increase in the return of artifacts to their countries of origin. For instance, according to Holland (2021), more than 17,000 cultural artifacts were returned by

the United States to Iraq in just the year of 2021. We are also seeing more countries starting to plan the return of illicitly acquired artifacts to their countries of origin as is the case of Germany with the Nigerian Benin Bronzes they hold. According to a BBC article, Germany's Culture Minister Monika Gruetters has announced that repatriation of Benin Bronzes will start in the year of 2022 ("Benin Bronzes: Germany to return looted artefacts to Nigeria", 2021).

We are clearly witnessing a growth in the trend of artifact repatriation and restitution. This trend growth is mainly the consequence of three important reasons. The first is the global move towards decolonization of countries, which has pushed countries to recognize past wrongs and start looking for fixes. In the case of artifacts, many countries are considering repatriation as a method of corrective justice, where repatriation is seen as the moral and ethical move to take (Bjornberg, 2015). The second reason is because repatriation is being used as a bridge to form diplomatic relations between source countries and repatriating countries (Green, 2017). Many countries are realizing the importance of repatriation in strengthening international ties and increasing cultural exchange between them and the source countries. Lastly, repatriation is being used as a method to slow down and even put a stop to the formation and growth of international artifact looting networks, which are affecting cultural heritage sites around the world (Gruber, 2014). This slowing down happens because of the decrease in demand on artifacts with unknown histories that could later be subjected to repatriation cases and therefore, returned. These very reasons should encourage more countries to repatriate any illicitly acquired artifacts in their possession.

Repatriation as a Method of Corrective Justice

Repatriation can be used as a method of corrective justice. According to Bjornberg (2015), corrective justice is a principle, which holds "that where the removal of a cultural object was morally illegitimate or unjust, repatriation should be used as a means of remedying or compensating for that injustice" (p. 461). For many repatriation cases, the

artifacts have been removed in ways that some may argue are considered harmful, unjustifiable, and even illicit. Therefore, to address the harm that may have been inflicted and aid the communities in their recovery, many countries are considering repatriating colonial artifacts in their possession, working towards achieving a form of corrective justice.

According to Simpson (2009), for many communities, repatriation is regarded as a method that can aid their recovery from post-colonial trauma. Such communities have faced long-term effects from the plundering and pillaging of their cultural sites and materials during colonial rule. The author explains the importance of repatriation to these communities by describing the perspective of Indigenous Australians and Canadians who have suffered through decades of discrimination and cultural suppression. Simpson highlights the example of the members Haida First Nation who have had over 466 of their ancestral remains illegally excavated from their graves and have had to request the repatriation of the remains from multiple museums across the US and Canada. The repatriation process of their ancestral remains has helped the community through their journey of colonial trauma recovery and has revived ancient cultural burial ceremonies.

Another example is that of the Apache Tribe in Arizona. According to Fletcher (2008) the people of the tribe have for the longest time been requesting the return of human remains and important sacred objects from museums around the US. These sacred objects included ceremonial headdresses and masks that represented Apache spirits. The author explains that the human remains, and objects had ended up in US museums after the relocation of Native Americans to reservations when many sacred objects were left behind in their previous land. Many excavators at the time took advantage of the relocation and collected the left-behind artifacts, which had inevitably led to their transfer to museums. Recently, more museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian’s collection, have been accepting repatriation requests from the Apache tribe and working with them to return and even honor the sacred objects and human remains by holding spiritual ceremonies. The repatriation of

such objects, as explained by Fletcher, is very important to communities like the Apache tribe because of the spiritual significance that these objects hold where spiritual harm was caused by keeping them in museums.

Repatriation is a moral act that helps stop the transfer of harm from one generation of people to another. The principle behind it is simple: Those who have plundered artifacts cannot be rightful owners of their plunder and therefore are under moral obligation to return the artifacts (Bjornberg, 2015). In cases like those mentioned above, host countries repatriate the cultural artifacts within their possession to compensate for the harm that they may have caused in the past to the owners of the artifacts and stop its continuance.

Repatriation as a Way for Stopping the Growth of Trafficking Networks

Artifact trafficking networks have long been a problem for countries around the world. These networks have been responsible for the cultural depletion and impoverishment of many important historical sites (Gruber, 2014). This cultural depletion is a great loss for the communities of the source countries who consider these artifacts as part of their identity and building blocks of their being. Usually when discussing artifact trafficking networks, the focus is kept on the effect of trafficking networks on the communities of source countries; however, they are not the only victims: trafficking networks affect humanity. The reason lies in the methods of excavation used by the looters who lack the knowledge on how to properly excavate artifacts, and in the lack of documentation of the looted artifacts (Borodkin, 1995; La Follette, 1970). Artifacts are valued mostly for the information that they reveal to us about humanity and past civilizations. This information is usually unsheathed by the careful study of the artifacts, the place and context they are found in, and the surroundings of the artifacts (Daniels & Leventhal, 2013). When illegal excavators dig in historical sites, they obviously do not document their crime. Therefore, we lose out on valuable information that we will never be able to recover (Roodt, 2013). This loss of information is a problem for everyone and not just local communities and the best way to stop it is by decreasing the demand on

cultural objects with unknown histories from the consumer side. The consumers in this case are museums and collectors who some may argue are the main reason for why these artifact trafficking networks are still alive today.

Museums have a big role to fulfill to help in stopping the growth of trafficking networks. This role entails repatriating cultural artifacts in their collections that have been acquired illicitly and conducting research on the history of orphaned artifacts in their possession. Museums must also conduct extensive research on donated artifacts before accepting them into their collections. If museums start to apply higher standards to the types of artifacts they accept into their collections, and repatriate artifacts that have ended up in their museums because of illicit acquisition, a reduction in the demand on artifacts will ensue. As a result, there will be less supply of illicitly acquired artifacts. We can consider artifact repatriation to be the best solution for trafficking networks as it is the only solution that breaks down the problem to its fundamentals (supply and demand) and deals with it directly from its root.

Repatriation as a Method of Improving International Relations

Artifact repatriation cases are a golden opportunity for the repatriating countries to build and strengthen international relations and start projects between them and the source countries. This building of relations is the result of the trust that would be gained by the repatriating countries after repatriating cultural objects. There have been plenty of examples where repatriation of artifacts has resulted in long term artifact loan agreements, reversed exhibitions, and cultural projects. For example, as discussed by Green (2017), the return of ancient gold jewelry from the city of Troy to Turkey by the University of Pennsylvania, has granted the University of Pennsylvania a permission to continue their long-going excavation project at Gordion. Turkey also provided the museum of Pennsylvania with 120 cultural artifacts to display in their Golden Age of Midas exhibit. This deal that was created by Turkey is one that provides the museum of Pennsylvania with more Turkish cultural artifacts

than they can wish for. Similarly, according to Falkoff (2008), the Boston Museum of Fine Arts returned 13 Greek and Roman artifacts to Italy in April of 2006. Grateful, the Italian government lent the museum important artifacts to display for two exhibitions.

Artifacts Should Not Be Repatriated

The issue of repatriation is a very convoluted one. Its complexity has provided a way for opposing views to gain popularity within the public domain. It has also given governments and museums valid ground for arguing against repatriation requests of cultural objects within their possession. The presence of opposing views is highly expected given the importance of artifacts to the two involved parties, host museums and countries of origin. There are three main arguments used against repatriation. First, the original countries may not have the ability to properly take care of the artifacts that they are requesting back. Indeed, with increasing globalization, artifacts have become important to humanity, and not solely the original countries. This importance brings about the issue of artifact protection, based upon which many governments refuse artifact repatriation requests.

Second, continuing with the topic of globalization, returning artifacts to their original countries takes away from many people worldwide the ability to view and appreciate these artifacts. In fact, many of these artifacts with repatriation claims are placed in well-known and highly visited museums like the British Museum. Returning these artifacts would not only prevent many from seeing them but would also make people within the host country oblivious of world cultures.

Lastly, many of the repatriation requesting governments do so with the argument of rightful ownership of the artifacts, (which best reflects the complexity of the issue of repatriation). However, because of the changes that countries overgo, be it ethnic or geopolitical, many requesting governments do not have valid grounds for their repatriation claims. Although the discussed arguments have merit, there are too many cases of

repatriation requests that challenge them. These cases will be discussed through-out the section below.

Risking the Safety of Historical Artifacts

During the Syrian Revolution and Civil War, while the country was battling a humanitarian crisis, a new risk emerged onto the field. That risk was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) gaining control in Syria and threatening disruption using terrorism. The terrorist group entered the ancient city of Palmyra and destroyed countless of cultural and historic artifacts. These artifacts include the Lion of Al-lāt in May of 2015, and the Temple of Baalshamin and the Temple of Bel in August of 2015 ("Benin Bronzes," n.d.). Countless more important artifacts and historical sites did not escape the brutal hands of ISIL and are now beyond restoration. With the loss of these artifacts and sites, we have unfortunately lost an important part of human history. The videos and pictures of Palmyra's destruction were proudly shared by ISIL members on Twitter and other social media platforms and have gone viral, reaching all ends of the world. Clearly, the loss in Palmyra was one that was felt by everyone around the globe. This collective feeling demonstrates the importance of historic artifacts to humanity rather than solely to the country from which the artifacts originate.

The story of Palmyra sets the stage for the argument that original countries are not capable of protecting and caring for their artifacts. Merryman (1986) discusses the risk humanity takes in repatriating artifacts when their original countries are incapable of protecting them. The author brings up the example of Peru, who has come to be known for its poor care for artifacts within its possession. Merryman argues that it would be better to move important Peruvian artifacts to where they can be better cared for so as to not lose them. To further drive Merryman's point, Borodkin (1995) highlights how poor the infrastructure for the museums that house national Peruvian ceramic pottery are. The museums have collapsing ceilings that risk the safety of these artifacts. Borodkin also brings attention to the amount of art theft that takes place in source nations, with an example of a stolen 2000-year-old

Peruvian mantle in 1992 and a stolen Mayan burial mask in Mexico 1985. Both artifacts were secured in a museum in their respective source countries where they were supposed to be safe. When regarding artifacts as part of mankind's cultural heritage, meaning belonging to the world rather than belonging to a certain people, protecting them from any form of damage becomes everyone's concern. These damages could include ill-care, war, or natural disaster. Merryman terms this view on cultural objects as "cultural internationalism." Following this logic, many believe that repatriation of artifacts to their source countries from the safe haven of what is most likely a Western country, is willingly endangering these pieces of human achievement.

While it is true that repatriation of artifacts to source countries sometimes is the equivalent of ensuring their destruction, these cases are limited to war-torn countries. With war-torn countries repatriation would inevitably lead to either the loss of important artifacts or the entry of artifacts into the black market through looting networks. In such cases, artifact repatriation should be halted until the source countries reach stability. However, we must make sure we do not have internal biases when dealing with the argument of safety. Usually, we view museums in Western countries as inherently safe and the source countries as unsafe. According to Al Quntar (2017), Europe, usually a receiver of repatriation requests, has not had much time since WWII, when it lost much of its important cultural artifacts. The author points out that during 1943, the museum of Tell Halaf in Berlin was bombed by the British. The bombing resulted in the destruction of a collection of Syrian artifacts from Tell Halaf, whereas the same type of artifacts from Tell Halaf that were stored in a museum in Aleppo, Syria, were safe. Al Quntar adds that recently terrorist attacks have become a global threat, where neither Western countries nor source countries are safe. Therefore, we cannot argue for the keeping of artifacts in Western countries based on safety. To add, in recent years there have been many natural disasters that have caused irreparable damage to art in Western countries. For instance, according to Falkenstein (2015), Hurricane Sandy in 2012 alone

caused a loss estimated to be around $200 million to $300 million in art. Similarly, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 caused irreversible damage to historical sites and art museums (Pyle, 2005).

Aside from art damage potentially happening anywhere, most countries requesting repatriation today do not have instability problems and are ready for the safekeeping of their artifacts. For instance, in the case of the Elgin marbles, the Acropolis Museum in Greece was built in 2009 with one of its main goals being housing the Parthenon Marbles (Björnberg, 2015). In addition, in the case of the Benin Bronzes, a museum in Benin named the Edo Museum of West African Art is set to open in 2025 (Greenberger, 2021), awaiting to house the Benin Bronzes from the 160 or so museums that currently hold them across the Western World ("Benin Bronzes Are Scattered," 2021). Many source countries in Africa and South America have also improved in their care for artifacts (Goepfert, 2003, as cited in Björnberg, 2015).

No Valid Case for Repatriation

Some people oppose repatriation because they believe that requesting countries do not have legitimate ownership over the artifacts they are asking for. This belief stems from observing the change in the geopolitical map of the source countries as well as observing the ethnic change of the people of these countries over the years. Opponents argue that the people of the source country today do not have the same ethnic makeup, nor do they live in a country defined by the same borders as in the past. As a result, they do not have the right to request the repatriation of cultural artifacts that stemmed from their area. For instance, the ancient Roman empire's borders included many of today's modern countries, including, but not limited to, Italy, Switzerland, Armenia, Tunisia, and Iraq (German, 2020; "What Countries Were in the Roman Empire", 2020). In this case, which country gets to keep artifacts from the times of the empire? Since none of the countries have greater right to ownership over the others, opponents argue that the artifacts belong to everyone, or in other words, to humanity. Therefore, they should not be repatriated to anyone and instead kept in

the encyclopedic museum that currently houses them. As for the ethnic purity argument, examples include today's Turks not being the rightful owners of ancient Hittite artifacts because Turks are not pure ancestors of the Hittites. Similarly, Egyptians are considered by these critics to not have rightful ownership over ancient Egyptian artifacts because of weak cultural ties to ancient Egypt (Björnberg, 2015).

In response to the argument, Björnberg (2015) posits that for many repatriation cases of ancient cultural objects, the objects have been removed from their respective original countries in more recent times. The recent removal is enough to establish a connection between the people of the original country and the artifacts, granting them rightful ownership of said artifacts. To further explain the argument, the author points to the case of Nefertiti's Bust. Since the bust was removed in 20th century Egypt, we can create a direct link between 20th century Egyptians and Egyptians today and justify a transfer of ownership of the bust. Similarly, the Elgin Marbles have been taken away from 19th century Greeks (Irving, 2013), granting today's Greeks rightful ownership as well.

Repatriation Discourages Learning About Other Cultures

Some critics may argue that artifact repatriation deprives the people of the host countries of cultural material from around the world. This deprivation causes the people of the host country to be ignorant of world cultures. Cuno (2014) argues that repatriation fundamentally opposes the principle of encyclopedic museums. Cuno describes encyclopedic museums as museums where world cultures are represented, and people gain a wider, more multicultural worldview by opening themselves up to cultures different than theirs. Repatriation as seen by Cuno, enforces the people of the host countries to restrict themselves to a more boxed-up sectarianist, smaller worldview. Cuno believes that artifacts and art should instead be used to bring different world cultures together and encourage a more universal worldview in the light of today's globalization. Cuno's beliefs are based on an opposition of the concept of "cultural nationalism" and support of "cultural internationalism"

both introduced by Dr. Merryman. Merryman (1986) bases the concept of cultural nationalism on the "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property", which took place on November 14th, 1970(termed as UNESCO 1970 in Merryman's work). UNESCO 1970 gives source countries the right to hold on to and ask for the repatriation of their cultural property. In brief, the belief that "… art objects can act as cultural ambassadors, overcoming prejudices and national parochialism" (Borodkin, 1995, p.408) has been the main reason for believing that artifacts should not be repatriated and instead kept in their host museums.

Although repatriation will cause some museums to lose many of the artifacts they are hosting, it will not cause the museums to be depleted of cultural material from around the world. There is enough cultural material that has been acquired legally to ensure that the people of the host countries do not grow ignorant of other cultures. In addition, when it comes to the argument of education, we must consider the other side as well. In many cases, the people of the source countries do not have access to their own cultural artifacts. For instance, most Benin artifacts are found outside in Western countries with around 50 bronzes currently in Nigeria ("Benin Bronzes," n.d.). To see their own artifacts, many Nigerians do not have the choice other than to travel all the way to countries like England and Germany. To add, most of the artifact source countries are poor and their people find greater difficulty to obtain a visa to Western countries because of restrictive laws than the reverse. This difficulty in obtaining a visa means that many people from artifact source countries, as is the case with Nigerians who go through life having never seen their own cultural artifacts (Vox, 2020).

Repatriating artifacts, as discussed previously, also helps build international bonds and relations between the host and source countries. Clearly, repatriation has resulted in the exchange of artifacts and long-term loan agreements. One example is the Italy-MET agreement in which the MET museum agreed to repatriate 20 Italian artifacts for the

exchange of 40 years' worth of 4-year long loans (Bauer, 2015). Therefore, repatriation is not a loss for the repatriating countries, on the contrary, the repatriating countries would gain access to more artifacts and different types as well. This gain results in educating the host country's people about other cultures rather than culturally depriving them.

Out of all the concerns mentioned above, countries considering repatriation are most worried about the emptying of their museums and the cultural deprivation of their people. This concern often pushes countries away from the moral act of returning cultural objects to their people of origin. However, with the recent advancement in 3D technologies, this concern can be mitigated. Today, we can reproduce highly accurate and precise 3D replicas of objects that can be mistaken for their real equivalents. With 3D replicas, museums can create a more vivid experience for the visitors, where visitors can interact directly with the replicas by touch. Cultural artifacts, on the other hand, are usually preserved in museums under constrictive conditions in well-sealed cabinets, where visitors can only view them from afar. This attribute of 3D replicas can make them preferrable over the original artifacts and address the concern of cultural deprivation.

Conclusion

With the world's recent collective move towards the decolonization of countries, many important topics have surfaced. The general public can no longer tolerate relics of colonization and has developed a keen eye for spotting inequalities. This shift in behavior has paved the way for the increase of the public's interest in the topic of artifact repatriation and restitution. It has also led to the topic taking centre stage and being actively discussed under discussions of decolonization.

In this paper, I argued that museums should return illicitly acquired artifacts to their countries of origin. There are many reasons for holding this position. First, repatriation is an opportunity for the repatriating museums to build good relations with the original countries and gain their trust. These relations can potentially result in long-term artifact loan

agreements or artifact excavation permissions being given to the repatriating museums. As institutions to which the sharing world knowledge and culture is the main objective, these results are promising. Second, repatriation is an effective way to stop the growth of artifact trafficking networks. These networks have caused a great loss of information about humanity's past and continue to do so today. By reducing the demand for artifacts and increasing the return of illicitly acquired artifacts, we can slow the growth of trafficking networks thrive or feed off high demands. Lastly, museums should repatriate illicitly acquired artifacts under the principle of corrective justice. By keeping these artifacts in the host museums, museums are actively promoting the unfortunate events that have led to these artifacts being displayed away from their countries of origin.

Some people argue against the repatriation of artifacts. Their argument is centred around the inability of the countries of origin to take care of the artifacts. In contrast, most of the original countries today have enough capabilities and knowledge to maintain of their artifacts. In many of the repatriation cases we see today, the countries demanding repatriation already have museums that are set up to take care of the artifacts as they await their return. However, the argument against repatriation is valid in unsafe countries undergoing major instability, such as Syria. Others argue against repatriation because it empties museums from world artifacts and therefore discourages the people of the original countries from learning about other cultures. Nevertheless, artifact repatriation cases have resulted in the loaning of many artifacts and cultural material to the host countries. This loaning exposes the people of the host countries to more artifacts and encourages learning about different cultures.

This paper is important because it brings awareness to the issue of repatriation and illicit acquisition of artifacts. Many are unaware of how illicit acquisition is more than just an issue of unfairness. It is an issue of loss of information about humanity's past. This paper brings light to how repatriation can help put a stop to such a loss. If more people are aware and start to actively push museums to repatriate illicitly acquired artifacts, we can effectively

stop this depletion of information about our past as well as stop the injustices committed against the people of the original countries.

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Benin Bronzes are scattered all over the world. We asked museums that hold them where they stand on restitution (2021, May 18), *Artnet News*. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/benin-bronzes-in-museums-1967773

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