“Inheriting a colonial past”

My experience of inheriting colonial objects from my granddad.

Minor Powerplay | Major Advertising | Mauk van Emmerik | 0936109

Abstract

This project concentrates on inherited colonial objects. It departs from my experience of inheriting objects from the colonial past. From the personal I move to a larger current discussion surrounding calls for museums to repatriate looted objects.

The Council of Culture (of The Netherlands) has published an advisory document, in which they also acknowledge the wrongdoing of our country in colonial times. In it they encourage the minister of culture (Ingrid van Engelshoven) to show an unconditional willingness to repatriate all looted objects from the colonial period.

Through the perspective of a grandson inheriting colonial objects from his grandfather, I will document my personal experience in dealing with my colonial inheritance. In doing so I ask, how can giving back looted objects of art contribute to the process of healing colonial wounds?

This documentation is the result of learning to listen to cultural objects and their stories, to exploring what I can do to right possible wrongs, and perhaps aid in the process of healing colonial wounds.

From the research and the documentation of my own process, I will make an archival book, which will impact the way we think of our personal cultural heritage.

This project will highlight the importance of caring for our inherited colonial history, doing so, to show that this means caring for our future as well.

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Introduction

This project started with the unfortunate passing of my grandfather. Who passed away three weeks into the minor course. This left me to be emotionally occupied and academically unavailable. I worked hard on processing his death in order to return to my classes as soon as possible. However, as I've experienced before, you cannot rush grief. Or at least I can't. His death had an impact on me as this meant my last grandparent had now passed away. And it startled me, knowing that my own parents would be 'next in line'. The reality of their mortality, and even my own, became clear once more.

Since this was my last grandparent, his belongings became available for inheriting. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this process was that much more complicated. It was the cause of a weird situation where my grandfather had only passed minutes ago and my niece had already set her eyes on one of his mementos. And with her gaze, the inheritance process had begun. As our parents and aunts encouraged us to find something we'd like to have. I can tell you, it is a very unnatural feeling, taking items from someone you love who only died moments before. It felt like graverobbing in that sense and it made me highly uncomfortable. On the contrary, there also was the desire to keep something of his as a way of reminiscing. So we had to move through our discomfort since due to Covid-19, there was not going to be another moment where all of us would be together to divide granddad's items between us.

Despite an awkward ambiance in the room, we were able to divide the inheritance between us effortlessly. There was one display cabinet that he had filled with all these cultural objects he had collected over the years, through the many travels he had done. It became the centerpiece of his inheritance since we all realized that those objects were a translation of his boundless cultural explorations. It was his pride and he experienced joy from viewing his 'treasures'.

After the funeral, I felt like I could start to focus on the minor again. But unfortunately, only days after the funeral I had developed most Covid-19 symptoms and felt horribly sick. There were boxes filled with my granddad's stuff piled up in my room. There was quite a lot to go through, so while I was in quarantine and waiting to get tested, I figured I didn't have anything better to do but to go through those boxes. I was amazed by the history of his objects and I started to research some of the items, as a way to process the passing of my grandfather. It was after I found out that I wasn't infected with Covid-19 that I asked for some guidance from the tutor team as I felt that I'd gotten behind on what we were doing in class. Later I would come to the realization that the act of inheriting cultural- and even colonial objects, and learning how to handle them could be a very interesting project orientation. And so I present to you, from my heart to my head, to you, The stories that died with granddad.

3. **4.**

Literature review

Uzma Z. Rizvi, an associate professor of Anthropology and an archaeologist at Pratt Institute, has a chapter in the book "Slow Reader: A Resource for Design Thinking and Practice" called "Decolonisation As Care" (85). In it she writes about how identity is carried through materials. (91) "They have their own potential and kinetic energy, their own texture, their own feel; there is so much to them that goes beyond what we ascribe to them. Not recognizing these things as having their own vibrancy and vitality is indicative of being a part of a system in which objectivity requires us to remove subjectivity from material things."

As an archaeologist she works with materials from the distant past, which often raises questions about the culture of the ancient civilization in question, Rizvi applies decolonial listening in order for her not to bring about her own narrative of what these objects might mean. Removing herself and her ego from the narrative and truly look at the material and its surroundings. This allows her to reconstruct a scenario based on evidence rather than speculation.

The depth with which she describes her relationship to materials is similar to the way Carlos Edmunds, President of the Council of Elders of Easter Island, describes Easter Island's stolen heritage, Hoa Hakananai'a, in an interview with the Guardian, published 4th of June 2019; "This is no rock. It embodies the spirit of an ancestor, almost like a grandfather. This is what we want to be returned to our island – not just a statue."
https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jun/04/easter-islanders-call-for-return-of-statue-from-british-museum

Edmunds reinforces the notion that materials carry energies with them and are more than their material capacities. Simon Thurley, an architectural historicus and Chief Executive of English Heritage, captures the essence of heritage well in his "Heritage Cycle" (2005); "By understanding, they will value it. By valuing, they will want to care for it. By caring, it will help people enjoy it. From enjoying it, comes a thirst to understand."

It is then worth pointing out that Simon Thurley is of English descent and has the possibility to care for his heritage. Something not to be taken for granted as professor Chika Okeke-Agulu, Igbo-Nigerian artist, art historian, art curator, and professor at Princeton University, doesn't have this privilege.

Since Nigeria has been looted of many of its cultural heritage through the 1897 British led punitive expedition, Nigerian artworks have been displaced for more than a hundred years. Professor Okeke-Agulu states in an interview with Vox, August 5th 2020; "1995 in London, was my first time of seeing an original ancient Benin artwork (The Benin Bronzes), and it was at the British Museum. Being in the presence of these magnificent objects and knowing that I had to travel all the way from Nigeria to see these objects for the first time, I felt a mixture of pride in the achievement of these ancient artists and anger mixed with a sense of loss at what could have been if I only had to travel a few hundred miles. At this point, you're limited to those privileged, like me, who could get a visa to travel all the way from Nigeria to England to encounter these objects. Most Nigerians will never see them."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoTxiRWrvp8

Professor Okeke-Agulu continues to push for the restitution of Nigerian artworks and in his work focuses on educating others on the colonial histories that still affect former colonized African countries.

Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You, a human rights lawyer, activist, and president of the Council for Culture of the Netherlands writes in her advisory document for the government, "Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht" that formerly colonized countries want to tell their tale of history, and how it is important for them to be able to tell those stories backed up by the historical artifacts that currently reside in the Netherlands. (54)

She advises the Minister of Culture, Ingrid van Engelshoven, to repatriate all unlawfully acquired colonial objects unconditionally (69).

Professor Wayne Modest, head of the Research Center of Material Culture and professor of Material Culture and Critical Heritage Studies in the faculty of humanities at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, views these issues from the perspective of the museum. He explores the possibilities of what decolonization means beyond the repatriation of stolen colonial artifacts, in his lecture 'Words Matter' (ADESTE+, 2019). He describes how the wording of a particular sentence can have profound effects on how inclusive an institution can be. He gives an example of the museum's closing message stating: "Ladies and gentlemen please leave the museum." by that definition, it would make it so that any non-binary individual would be allowed to stay beyond the closing of the museum.
But wording can curate the way we think of a particular era as well, he mentions in his lecture how the term 'Golden Age' hides the fact that the wellbeing of the Dutch population at the time was very much intertwined with the suppression of African, Indonesian and Surinam enslaved people. This shows that the term Golden Age cannot act as a neutral way of describing the events of that time. For enslaved people, it certainly wasn't

a golden age. Modest explains that wording plays a big part in how he does his best to decolonize his museums through the Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC) (Het Wereldmuseum, Tropenmuseum, Afrika Museum, and Museum Volkenkunde).

Professor Modest argues that the entire museum experience is more than the presentation of objects, it is the way we display histories and artifacts that curates what we think of as truth. Decolonizing the museum-sphere will allow for a broader range of individuals to feel included and represented, in his lecture he mentions that normalization is the culprit of suppression (think golden age), normalization does not allow for decolonial listening as it merges the experiences of one dominant group of people into a 'norm'. Therefore excluding many minorities resulting in the failure of representing them.

Margareta von Oswald, a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage has a chapter in the book "Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial" called "Troubling Colonial
Epistemologies in Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum: Provenance Research and the Humboldt Forum" (107), in which she gives another example of how materials can be the embodiment of culture. (109). "For the Luba and their related peoples, the objects(stools) were regarded as the most important objectivization of the power of kings and chiefs, embody[ing] the ancestors and the royalty represented by them." She also describes how objects change once they enter a museum, by entering the object into the museums' database the cultural pieces irrevocably change from cultural objects into museum objects. This causes the entire history of an object to be compressed to allow for the neat presentation into the museum as part of a collection. (110-111) Hereby removing it of its individualism and treating it more as a piece of a puzzle rather than a stand-alone artifact, which then causes the suppression of some of its histories.

This is a subject that Reni Eddo-Lodge treats in her book "Why I No Longer Talk To White People About Race" (2017) In her book she writes about her experience of growing up as a black woman in London, finding it difficult to learn about her own heritage, she describes that after university she had trouble finding the history of black people in the UK (7) she says "This information was not easily accessible. This was history only available for those who cared, only knowable through a hefty amount of self-directed study. This feeds back into what Margareta von Oswald wrote on the continuity of colonial discrimination in which she describes how certain histories remain untold and are covered up by other, more western events.

(110 of Troubling Colonial Epistemologies in Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum: Provenance Research and the Humboldt Forum)

Eddo-Lodge wonders about why she felt underrepresented in her home country, she wrote "What history had I inherited that left me alien in my place of birth?" (9) The answer to that question came from Ambalavanar Sivanandan, director of the Institute of Race Relations. In his lecture on November 1st, 2008 at the 50th anniversary of the institute he told the audience "We (bipoc) are here because you (white people) were there" Which is a reference to European colonizers and slave traders.

Jaya Saxena, author of an article in The New York Times called: "Why you should dig up your family's history, and how to do it" (February 3rd, 2019) In it she wrote: "Learning your history is forced reckoning, asking yourself to consider whose stories you carry with you and which ones you want to carry forward.".
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/03/smarter-living/why-you-should-dig-up-your-familys-history-and-how-to-do-it.html

Taking into account how objects can can embody stories and histories as stated by Margareta von Oswald, it would then be in line with what Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You wrote in her advisory document on cultural heritage objects, and how those objects tell stories of its cultural histories, and that they should be at the disposal of the lineage of those who created them. (54).

Tiffany Jenkins critiques the process of repatriation in her chapter; "From objects of enlightenment to objects of apology: why you can't make amends for the past by plundering the present" of the book; "Dethroning historical reputations: universities, museums and the commemoration of benefactors" In this chapter, she claims to be for the repatriation of looted artifacts, on the condition that Western institutions don't benefit from it in any way and that looted countries aren't victimized (88). Arguing that disputed ownership creates two groups (or countries) that will 'play a game' of who is more piteous in order to achieve the successful repatriation of a looted artifact. ''Because the process relies on supplication, with the victim asking the historical victor for a hand-out or a statement of recognition, power relations are not transformed, but reinforced." (90-91). It would then be less harmful for all cultural institutions to repatriate looted artifacts unconditionally, in order to prevent an expression of dominance. Which is again, what Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You advices Ingrid van Engelshoven.

I believe that it's a good thing that these conversations are taking place,

recently they've become more public and are starting to appear in mainstream media as well. As professor Chika Okeke-Agulu says at the end of his interview with Vox (August 5th, 2020), that he fears that this is a long-term project, (the reconstitution of colonial artifacts) and that it may even last beyond his own life but he eagerly states that even though it might be a huge undertaking it is now to start the process.

In my own practice, I apply decolonial listening, much like Uzma Z. Rizvi, in order to unearth the lost stories of my grandfather's inheritance. In doing that I aim to create a better understanding of what it is that I've inherited and understand the historical context in which these objects were acquired. By doing this I aim to expose any potential wrongdoings so I can work on their healing.

This results in an archival book with all the information I was able to acquire on my inheritance. In it, I take the reader on a personal journey of what it means to inherit.
By approaching this in a personal way the book creates a safe space in which readers won't feel judged on the histories they've inherited. This potentially gives the reader the courage to examine their own heritage and possibly gain new insights as to what they want to carry forward with them, and what they would like to leave a future generation. With this book, I hope to inform the reader that you may have inherited certain histories, but that it doesn't mean you have to carry them forward. Almost like a guide to decolonizing inheritance.

Methodology
For this project, I've done research in order to define the current media landscape surrounding the decolonization of European museums. To form a representative image of the progress being made regarding the repatriation of looted colonial artifacts. The methodologies that I've applied to form a conclusion on this subject are based on a variety of sources. I've used both academic sources and popular sources, as well as consulting various cultural anthropologist enthusiasts through different forums.

Looking at these different sources I've found there's a common theme surrounding the repatriation of looted artifacts in museums. Mostly I see a willingness of Dutch museums to give back what was once stolen. I sense that this willingness might be rooted in shame of their predecessors' actions and that repatriation is the one thing institutions can do to right their precursor's wrongs, even if it is well overdue.

However, in other countries such as the United Kingdom, there's another trend that is a direct opposite of what we experience here in The Netherlands. Museums like the British Museum have stated that they're not willing to repatriate any objects but will lend art to other institutions.
The British museum is restricted by a government act (1963 chapter 24) that prevents it from giving back objects, even if they're stolen. They state that they cannot "alter the composition of the Trustees of the British Museum, to provide for the separation from the British Museum"

The British museum also stated in an interview with Vox, August 2020:
"We don't restitute but we are absolutely committed to lending as widely as possible. The Museum's foundational value resides in its breadth, scale, complexity, and unity and as such is a true library of the world."

By saying this they continue to act as a colonial power placing themselves above countries that they've stolen artifacts from, and directly prevent those countries from benefiting from their own cultural heritage. In a financial way, but certainly also a cultural way. Because the reality is, not everyone is able to visit the U.K. to view objects that should not be there, to begin with.
This shows clearly that the British Museum is hardly a 'true library of the world' but rather a library for everyone privileged enough to be able to finance their visit.

This again is in stark contrast to France's policy of restituting looted objects. (stated in November 2017). For them, there is perhaps another reason to do so because during the second world war the Louvre was looted of many of its artifacts by the Nazis. Perhaps the French know a lot better than the British what it's like to be stolen from and are more able to view this issue

from the perspective of the ‘looted country’. But unfortunately little has happened despite Emmanuel Macron, France’s president, stating: “The return of African artifacts is a top priority” Mwazulu Diyabanza, showcased his discontent with the pace of these restitutions by trying to take a 19th-century wooden funerary post from the Quai Branly Museum, in Paris. He did not end up taking it out of the museum as he was arrested. He defended his action by saying this was a recovery operation and a protest against coloniality. By taking this action he demanded attention towards the reality that France houses approximately 90.000 African artifacts.

Diyabanza explained his reasoning in an interview with the New York Times: “The fact that I had to pay my own money to see what had been taken by force, this heritage that belonged back home where I come from—that’s when the decision was made to take action”

He did not end up going to jail but was fined a €1000,- sum for his action, which he has appealed against. One thing is certain, Diyabanza has put France’s colonial history on trial with him.

The French national collections alone have 90,000 African objects, 70,000 of which are to be found in the Quai Branly Museum. Despite Emmanuel Macron’s willingness to return a large portion of these objects, the process has been slow, and only 26 objects have been returned to their respective countries of origin so far.

After the Dutch Council of Culture released their advisory document which promotes the repatriation of stolen artifacts, the Rijksmuseum has announced that they’re actively going to search for original owners of looted artifacts. The Rijksmuseum has published a list of items that will be repatriated, including the diamond of Banjarmasin and the canon of King Kandy. Their policy of actively searching for the rightful owner of looted items is especially considerate in contrast to the Leidse museum and the Tropenmuseum who take a more passive stance on repatriation. Only providing the option of repatriation if a country lays claim on a certain item and only then the research process begins.

But just as with France’s unassertive approach to repatriation after their claim of it being a top priority, we will have to see how fast The Netherlands makes good on their promises and move from this advisory document to creating actual progressive policies.

Arguments made against the repatriation of stolen artifacts, mostly mentioned by colonial museums who are afraid of losing their inventory, consist of statements like;

• Respective countries do not have the appropriate resources to house their own cultural heritage.
• Looted artifacts could act as an advertisement in museums for tourists to visit the country of origin.
• and as Dr. Senta German puts it:
“The ancient or historical kingdoms from which many objects originally came no longer exist or are spread across many contemporary national borders, such as those of the ancient Roman empire. Therefore, it’s not clear to where exactly objects should be repatriated.”

The beliefs mentioned above reflect nothing but an unwillingness to reckon with the colonial past. And are therefore harmful to reinforce. However, it is hopeful that some museums are starting to see the harm they’ve enacted on former colonies and are looking for ways to make up for their historical wrongdoing. It seems that restoring cultural heritage by the restitution of looted artifacts is a starting point for mending unbalanced relationships between former colonial powers and their colonized countries.
These measures could act as an exemplary action for other European former colonial powers to finally contribute to the process of healing colonial wounds.

Body:

For this project, I've formulated my research question by analyzing the term 'decolonial listening'. I was unfamiliar with the concept behind it so I set out to familiarize myself with it. I asked myself, "What is my archive?" "What can I bring to the table?" "Who do I listen to?"

After having found my archive through my grandfather's inheritance, and finding a few coins from the Dutch East Indies colony dating back to 1858 the question became; "How do I deal with my literal colonial inheritance" However, there was no decolonial listening involved with that research question. I began to look at decolonization in Dutch society where I was met with dismantling 'Zwarte Piet' as a prime example of Dutch decolonization.

Through that research, I was starting to become aware of the fact that my knowledge of the wrongdoings of western European countries during colonial times was anything but sufficient. I educated myself through books (Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race) and podcasts (The History of American Slavery) on what slavery looked like and how the power structures were established. Through this research, I developed a deeper understanding of how wrongdoings that happened hundreds of years ago still impact our current society. It was then that I realized that the coin I'd inherited was stamped while slavery was still a legal concept in the colony that it was from. Knowing that I owned a coin which in theory could've been used to buy slaves was a horrifying realization. Owning another human just seemed too absurd of a concept to be true and I was confronted with the thought that my predecessors could have even been involved in such appalling practices.

I wanted nothing more than to exclude my family and myself from this dark narrative but at the same time, I knew that looking the other way would not contribute to the dismantling of these ideologies that continue to live forward in different forms. I started to wonder if I could find out if my family had been involved in slavery practices. However, unfortunately, these questions have become increasingly difficult to answer and I felt I could spend my time more wisely. The inheritance of the colonial coin has made me critical of the other items I'd inherited so I've decided to start figuring out what their stories are and apply decolonial listening to my inheritance.

Around this time I started looking at official institutions that house colonial objects and the discussions formed around them.

It became apparent that there's a large desire from former colonies that these items be returned to the rightful owners.
With all these factors combined my research question was born and I wanted to answer the following: "How can giving back looted objects of art contribute to the process of healing colonial wounds?"

A problem emerged when I decided I wanted to work from my personal experience of inheriting these cultural- and colonial objects, whose stories had died along with my grandfather.

How could I find out the origin of the inherited objects?

The reason it was so important for me to find out what the stories of these objects are is that I don't want to participate in maintaining modern-day colonialism. Should any of the objects I had inherited have a colonial past I'd like to work on the repatriation of those items. In other words, I can only accept this inheritance if it turns out to be ethically obtained.

The problem here was that I could not ask my family for clarification, I'd have to find out on my own. So how do you listen to objects?

The methods I've deployed to find an answer to the research problem consist of qualitative data. I wanted to ask a number of questions, I wanted to know the origin of the object, what it represented, and what material it was made out of. To answer those questions I had to find a primary source, and so I set out to photograph my inheritance, piece by piece so I could start to disperse those photos to try and collect as much information as I could.

In order to gain a better insight into the characteristics of these objects, I shared these photos online through Reddit and Quora, which allowed me to find people with a background in cultural anthropology, to ask if they could decipher any of the attributes of this vase. I was skeptical at first on trusting these internet sources as they could say anything but I was able to verify their statements by independent research and using this source as a starting point for further research, rather than a final verdict.

15. **16.**

As Uzma Z. Rizvi states in “Decolonization as Care” writing from an archeologist’s perspective, materials can be a lot more than just physical objects. As an archeologist she understands that certain objects can be more than their physical body, certain objects can even transcend materiality and be a cultural symbol. And it’s these cultural symbols that western museums have taken such an interest in. While denying the country of origin their own heritage. Resulting in acts of desperation, as mentioned earlier, by for instance Mwazulu Diyabanza.

I think then that part of the responsibility to decolonize the museum sphere now lays with all of us. And we should take responsibility for the actions of our precursors if we find that there are wrongdoings. Of course, this means that sometimes we have to take a deep dive into our own personal family heritage to find answers to any unknown variables. In my own practice, I start to decode the mysteries housed in my inheritance in order to provide for the potential reconstitution of any unethically obtained materials.

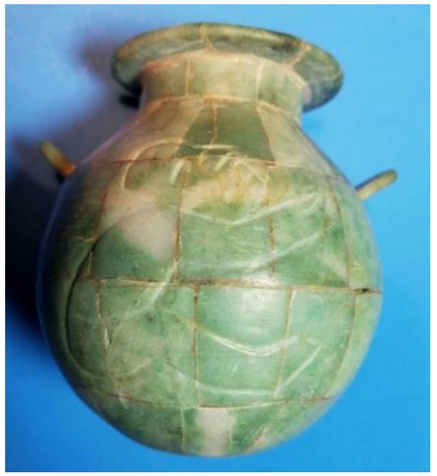
Just like Dr. Adrian Mark Walker did when he inherited two Benin bronzes of his grandfather, who was Captain Herbert Sutherland Walker, a British armed force, who had been part of the army that invaded Benin back in 1897 to steal Benin’s treasures. They were finally returned to the Benin royal family in 2014, 117 years after they were stolen. Through the return of two of the Benin bronzes, Dr. Adrian Mark Walker showcased that he also understood there to be larger value to these items than their material capacities. Just like Uzma Z. Rizvi described. There’s a history to these items and although they’ve been on a detour for more than a hundred years they should be returned. Walker said: “They should just go back. It’s the right thing to do.”

To understand the key concepts of reconstitution and repatriation you have to rely on your moral compass as well, I can’t explain to you why it is the right thing to do beyond the facts that are present around any stolen object. If the history of the object that is stolen doesn’t convince you to be in favor of returning it, I think nothing else will. Therefore we need to apply decolonial listening to ourselves and our personal heritage in order to provide for the return of stolen artifacts through inheritances. Rather than rely on the morality of museums like The British Museum.

Research Process
Throughout my research process, I’ve encountered obstacles that I’ve had to resolve before I could continue. The most prevalent one being my lack of knowledge on the history of coloniality. Because how can you write about decoloniality if you lack knowledge on how coloniality even came to be. It became necessary to brush up on these topics and I achieved this by using my free time to watch Steve McQueens’ “Twelve Years a Slave” based on the story of Solomon Northup, listened to podcasts as mentioned previously and I’ve read books on European colonial history as well. (KETENS EN BANDEN, by Eveline Sint Nicolaas and Rijksmuseum).

Practice Project
For the research I’ve done in regards to unearthing the lost stories of my inheritance I was faced with different issues. I’ve wanted to do field research and visit museums such as the Tropenmuseum and the Rijksmuseum but due to Covid-19 I felt unsafe to do so and at one point all museums were even closed during this project. I resorted to emailing the Rijksmuseum but was met with no response. This is when I took my research online and started to research the characteristics of my cultural objects. It has helped me a lot to start excluding possibilities as I went and found more information. I started with the materials of the objects, then shape, and potential use. That only helped me with finding out what some objects were, i.e. Ganesha the Hindu God with the elephant head. For the remaining objects I resorted to posting my photographs online on Reddit and Quora to find cultural anthropologists who could point me in the right direction. For most of the objects that was enough, take for instance this comment left by reddit user Jessica-Swanlake on a jade vase:

“I’m actually thinking it’s a (probably replica) Mesoamerican jade vessel.
The handles and the shape of it matches some of the pots from a variety of different cultures (the handles specifically don’t match Chinese jade vessels and those are usually carved out of a solid piece of jade.)
The face carved into it gives me vaguely Olmec “were-jaguar” vibes, but as far as I know the Olmec jades were also typically single pieces and had more detailed carving and polish. The Maya do have examples of tiled jade like this, but not any vessels as far as I can find and it’s a bit different than their pottery styles. This leads me to think that this is a replica (also the odds of having an intact vessel from either group at this point is very low)
As far as what they were originally used for, we don’t really know. Most jade objects were found as grave goods (probably because unlike earthenware they are less easily destroyed) and there is some evidence they were used in rituals.”



This seemed like a promising starting point and I continued my search until I found the image above on an American antique's website:

The similarities between these two objects made it hard to dismiss, that these objects were mere souvenirs. Although they might still have some financial value, they're not of any significant cultural value to the country of origin, which turns out to be Mexico.

It is actually a great example of a country benefiting from their cultural heritage by making souvenirs for tourists and stimulate economic growth through their ancestor's art.

Conclusion

How then does my practice project relate back to the theoretical research question of "How can giving back looted objects of art contribute to the process of healing colonial wounds?"

For me, the process of finding an answer to this question began with the acceptance of the possibility that my personal heritage might involve colonial wrongdoings. I've had to acknowledge that the country that I grew up in has done evil things during the long period of colonial occupation of other countries. It is through my inheritance that I start the process of decolonial listening to ensure any wrongdoings in my family are exposed and allow me to handle them with care, consideration and contribute to the decolonization of my own heritage.

The process of repatriation of looted artifacts contributes to the richness of a countries cultural heritage. It is through heritage that norms and values are passed on from generation to generation. So by returning what was once stolen you contribute to the restoration of their heritage and allow them to benefit from their ancestry. Whether it is culturally benefitting or financially.

My practice project is an archive, used as a conversation piece by which readers get the opportunity to take a critical look at their own heritage. It can be seen as a tool to provide new insights to help and decolonize themselves, and their heritages.

But from all the research I've done, I see now that even my research question is formed from the perspective of a western person, and has a form of colonial thinking engraved in it.

It shows that it is the choice of the former colonizer to give back looted artifacts or not, this should not even be an option and former colonizers should return what they had stolen immediately. It is truly appalling that these countries still get away with the continuation of holding these items against the will of the colonized country, and it is only through decolonial thinking that we can continue the process of dismantling the remainders of these colonial structures.

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