THE UNESCO
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50 YEARS of the FIGHT
Against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Goods

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THE UNESCO Courier

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Editorial

In spring 2020, the health crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic brought the whole world to a standstill. But the illicit trafficking of cultural property has not stopped. On the contrary. Traffickers of cultural goods have taken advantage of reduced security at archaeological sites and museums to engage in illegal excavations and thefts, with impunity.

The figures prove it: the attraction for mosaics, funerary urns, sculptures, statuettes, or ancient manuscripts has never been greater. The pressure of this demand has helped fuel the illegal market in artworks and antiquities, which now operates largely online – via platforms that often pay scant attention to the original provenance of the objects.

Criminal and terrorist organizations have rushed to take advantage of this breach, using the illicit trade to finance their activities or launder their revenues. Since 2014, ISIS has organized a massive and methodical looting of archaeological sites and museums in the parts of Syria and Iraq under its control.

The illicit flow of cultural goods is now believed to be the third-largest in terms of volume, after drugs and arms. A cultural issue, this shady business that thrives in conflict-ridden areas, has also become a threat to international peace and security.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, is more crucial than ever in this fight.

In half a century, much has been achieved to develop preventive laws, train professionals, strengthen international co-operation, and encourage the return of stolen or illegally exported works. An increased awareness of the cultural, moral and material damage caused by this illicit traffic, now recognized as a war crime by the United Nations, is proof of this. The decision taken by UNESCO Member States to celebrate the International Day against Illicit Traffic in Cultural Property on 14 November every year also demonstrates this.

However, the difficulty of curbing online trafficking, the weak penalties for perpetrators, and the vulnerability of the areas affected, necessitate a new level of international mobilization today.

Ernesto Ottone Ramírez
Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO

WIDE ANGLE

Greek Euphronios crater, circa 515 BC. Illegally excavated in Italy in 1971, and bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1972, it was restituted to Italy in 2008.

50 YEARS of the FIGHT Against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Goods

Half a century after its adoption, the UNESCO 1970 Convention against the illicit trafficking of cultural property is still a major instrument to stem this scourge. Over the last fifty years, the fight against this underground trade has intensified, and awareness of the moral damage caused by the plunder has grown. But the craze for these objects, the prices of which have skyrocketed; the leniency of sanctions, and the vulnerability of sites in conflict zones are all challenges that need to be addressed to curb the trafficking of what some call "blood antiquities".

Agnès Bardon

UNESCO

In autumn 2019, coins from different periods, historical weapons, ceramics, fossils, and paintings were seized during an international operation spanning over a hundred countries. The Afghan Customs at Kabul airport alone intercepted 971 national heritage objects. And in Madrid, rare pre-Columbian objects – among them a unique gold Tumaco mask – were recovered.

In total, more than 19,000 archaeological artefacts and other artworks were intercepted, and several international trafficking networks dismantled in two simultaneous crackdowns – one led by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the other co-ordinated by EUROPOL and the Spanish Civil Guard.

The record seizures give an idea of the magnitude of illicit trafficking in cultural goods in recent decades, but also of the scale of police response at the international level. The 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property remains central to the fight against this underground trade.

In the fifty years of the existence of this Convention, UNESCO has contributed to raising public awareness of the stakes of illicit trafficking. It has also helped the signatory countries – which now number 140 – to draw up laws and preventive measures, and encouraged the restitution of illegally displaced property.

However, while legislation has become stricter, public awareness has increased, and systems for monitoring, tracing and authenticating works have improved, the number of traffickers has also multiplied – as has their efficiency and skill.

Investigators, customs officers and experts face numerous obstacles to curbing this trafficking, which is now globalized – starting with the current demand for such works of art and antiquities. The trade in cultural goods is not a new phenomenon, but it has never been so prosperous. Driven by the enthusiasm of collectors, galleries and museums, there has been a surge in the value of art and antiquities. In 2019, global art sales were estimated at over $64 billion, according to *The Art Market Report 2020*.

A shadowy trade

Particularly lucrative, the art market attracts investors looking for investment opportunities – but also unscrupulous actors. Increasingly, the mafia and terrorist organizations are involved in the illicit trafficking trade to launder money or finance their activities.

The extent of trafficking – which is clandestine by definition – is all the more difficult to assess, as the few statistics that exist are incomplete. Less than half of the Interpol member states provide data on the theft of cultural property committed on their soil. In spite of the lack of precise figures, it is generally estimated that the illegal trade in cultural goods is the third-largest international criminal activity – after drugs and arms trafficking.

While they are spectacular and newsworthy, the thefts of paintings – such as Edvard Munch's *The Scream* in 2004 in Norway, or more recently (in March 2020), Vincent Van Gogh's *The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring* in the Netherlands – are only the tip of the iceberg. Most of this commerce takes place in the shadows, noiselessly, along circuitous paths that often originate in religious institutions, museums and archaeological sites in countries undergoing difficult conditions.

After transiting through intermediate countries, stolen or looted objects often find their way to the collections of private individuals or merchants established in Western capitals. They are accompanied by an export certificate drawn up at the place of transit, and not in the country of origin – which is very rarely required by the legislation of the destination countries.

Illegal excavations

Unlike other criminal activities, which are totally prohibited, the trade in cultural goods is partly street-based. Very often, stolen or illegally acquired statuettes, friezes or ancient ceramics are introduced directly onto the legal art market. Moreover, most objects that are plundered during illegal excavations are not listed on any inventory. Consequently, they are not covered by the 1970 Convention, and the countries of origin cannot establish their provenance.

It was in response to this concern, and to the extent of the looting by ISIS and other armed groups in Iraq and Syria, that the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2199 in 2015. It was intended to prevent the illicit trafficking in antiquities from these two war-torn countries by imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions on countries and individuals profiting from the illicit trade.

> “Most objects plundered during illegal excavations are not listed on any inventory”

Stricter legislation and sanctions have been all the more necessary, since the growth of the online trade has been a boon for traffickers during the past fifteen years. With one click, buyers from anywhere in the world can acquire pre-Columbian figurines or ancient ceramics in complete anonymity. In 2005, bricks from a temple in the ancient city of Larsa – dating from the time of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar – were looted in Iraq in 2003, and put on sale on eBay in 2005. By the time the Interpol operation took place in autumn 2019, almost thirty per cent of the items seized were already being offered for sale online.

Aggravated by the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this phenomenon. During the lockdown, the Antiquities Trafficking and Heritage Anthropology Research (ATHAR) Project, a team of anthropologists and heritage experts specializing in digital networks for art trafficking, observed a resurgence in the sale of stolen objects on social networks – particularly from the Middle East and North Africa. The investigative study by this UNESCO partner led Facebook to ban the trade of historic cultural objects on its online platform.

© UN Photo / Amanda Voisard

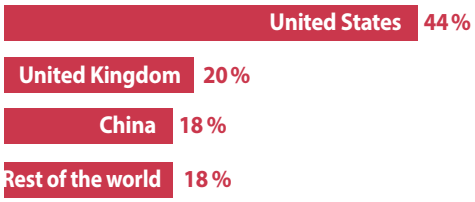
Close-up of an artefact displayed at an exhibition to mark the “Protecting Cultural Heritage – An Imperative for Humanity” global initiative, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2015.

Cultural goods: A thriving global market

Global legal sales of art and antiques, 2019

$64.1 billion

The three major art hubs, the United States, the United Kingdom and China accounted for **82%** of global art sales in 2019



Source: *The Art Market 2020*

Estimated value of major private art collections, 2018

$1,742 billion

Source: The Deloitte and ArtTactic *Art & Finance Report 2019*

Freeports: the largest art collection in the world

Interest in the profitability of works of art continues to grow. Numerous pieces are kept in several dozen freeports around the world. In these warehouses, exempt from taxes and customs duties, they can be resold anonymously, without leaving the premises after the transaction. Several recent investigations have shown that these free zones can be used to store works of art acquired illegally.

The increase in demand encourages illicit trafficking

Unofficial excavations have multiplied in countries in conflict

Country of origin
Illicit excavations are conducted by organized criminal groups, but also by local residents, who are often poor.

Intermediate countries
Antiquities transit through intermediate countries, where they are often provided with false certificates.

Destination country
With the complicity of some players in the sector, most of the looted objects end up in the collections of private individuals or Western and Asian art dealers.

For the last ten years or so, traffickers have been using social networks to make a large part of their sales.

In June 2020, Facebook banned all trade of historical artefacts on its platform.

120 groups selling antiquities on **Facebook**, with **hundreds of thousands** of collective members in September 2020

Source: ATHAR

Pictograms: © andromina / Horon / VoodooDot / LovArt / Shutterstock

This is only the first step. In June 2020, as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1970 Convention, UNESCO organized an online meeting of world experts in the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural property, to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the problem, and to consider responses to deal with the upsurge in trafficking.

The experts recommended the creation of police units specialized in the monitoring of online platforms, to boost active co-operation in dismantling illegal sales. They also called for a more systematic use of the tools created by UNESCO and its partners – including the UNESCO List of National Cultural Heritage Laws, the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) Red Lists Database of cultural goods at risk, and Interpol's Stolen Works of Art Database.

The stakes are high. Tracing the origin of a stolen work of art or antiquity not only makes it possible to apprehend traffickers and bring them to justice, it also paves the way for the objects to be returned to their countries of origin. Argentina, for example, has recently restituted to its neighbours a significant number of cultural objects seized on its soil.

More delicate is the question of restituting objects looted during the colonial period. This remains a source of tension between countries with rich museum collections and those that demand the return of objects that contribute to their identity. Supported by a growing number of countries, this demand is increasingly echoed today by the general public.

In *Black Panther*, the 2018 film produced by Marvel Studios that was a worldwide success, the son of Prince N'Jobu, Black Panther's sworn enemy, invades a London museum to recover a legendary Wakandan weapon. Wakanda may be an imaginary African country, but the debate over the restitution of artefacts remains very real.

> "With one click, buyers from anywhere in the world can acquire pre-Columbian figurines in complete anonymity"

A pioneering Convention

In the 1950s, voices were raised to condemn the upsurge in the looting of archaeological sites, and the dismantling of ancient monuments. The subject had already been discussed in the 1930s, and had even resulted in a draft international treaty by the League of Nations.

But it was only in the aftermath of the Second World War, in a context marked by independence movements, that the issue of illicit trafficking in cultural property gained momentum. The young states emerging from these movements – anxious to recover the elements of their cultural heritage preserved in the museums of former colonizing countries – agitated for an international treaty that would put an end to the plundering.

In April 1964, UNESCO appointed a committee of experts to draw up recommendations for a future convention. Six years later, the 1970 Convention was born. The Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property – the first international legal instrument for the protection of cultural property in peacetime – was adopted at the UNESCO General Conference in 1970. It entered into force on 24 April 1972, after being ratified by three countries: Bulgaria, Ecuador and Nigeria.

The signatory States undertook to adopt protective measures within their territories (including the creation of national inventories and specialized police units), to control the circulation of cultural goods – their illicit import, in particular – and to return stolen cultural property.

In 1978, the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP) was established. The Committee deals specifically with the return or restitution of lost or looted cultural property, particularly for cases that occurred before the 1970 Convention – which has no retroactive effect – came into force.

The arsenal of legal measures against the trafficking of cultural goods was completed in 1995, with the adoption of the UNIDROIT (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects. It covers all stolen cultural property – including items that have not been inventoried and declared – and stipulates that all stolen goods must be returned. In 1999, UNESCO published the International Code of Ethics for Dealers in Cultural Property, which has become a reference for art and antiques dealers.

The Convention now has 140 States Parties. In the fifty years of the instrument's existence, UNESCO, through the Convention, has conducted campaigns to raise awareness of the issue; helped many countries develop national laws and preventive measures, and encouraged the restitution of cultural property illegally removed from their territories.

Many museums around the world – like the British Museum in London and the Getty Museum in Los Angeles – have adopted 1970, the date of the Convention, as the year from which the provenance of objects must be questioned. This makes it more difficult to circulate objects that have recently been trafficked.

The 1970 Convention:
Cultural diversity
before the letter of the law

Adopted in 1970, the UNESCO Convention is a prominent legal instrument in the fight against looting and illicit trafficking. By laying down the principles of shared responsibility and cultural equity, it has also opened the way to the right of peoples to enjoy their own cultural heritage.

Vincent Négri

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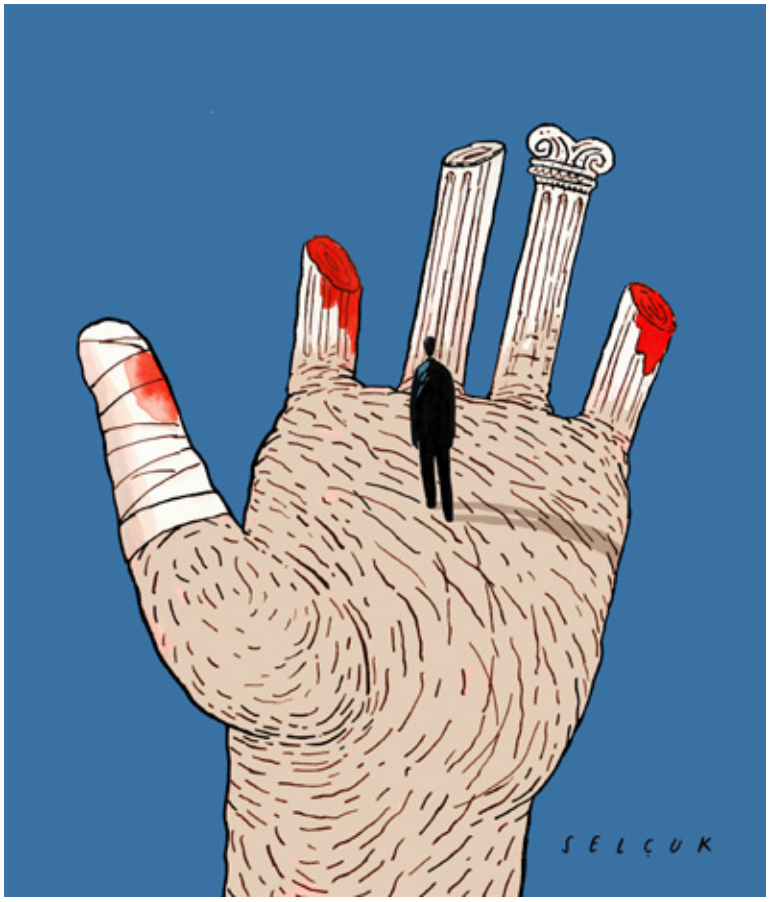

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Some ideologues, advocates of unbridled liberalism, have seen the affirmation of a form of cultural nationalism in the provisions of the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Its limitations have also been emphasized. It is true that the Convention struggles to produce a balanced system guaranteeing the return of cultural property that has been illegally exported. Since it has no direct effect on the domestic laws of States, it is weakened by the territoriality principle of laws – or *lex rei sitae* [the law where the property is situated].

Under this principle, the judge takes into consideration the law of the State where the cultural object is located at the time of the claim, to the detriment of more favourable legislation in the State of origin of the property. One might be tempted to conclude that this text is therefore impotent, of which the adoption of the UNIDROIT Convention in 1995 – which deals specifically with the restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects – would be a symptom.

But it would be a mistake to limit the 1970 Convention to a strictly legal and mechanistic interpretation of its provisions. The theoretical contribution of this Convention goes beyond its mechanical inadequacies. As a pillar of an international cultural order that is continually being consolidated, it effectively lays the foundations for the principles of solidarity and collective responsibility to protect the heritage of peoples. Article 9 of the Convention lays down the conditions for the prevention of irremediable injury to cultural heritage endangered by the pillaging of archaeological or ethnological materials.

It is these principles of shared responsibility and cultural equity that mark the international instrument's contribution to the right of peoples to enjoy their own culture. The Convention has established itself as a matrix, based on the principles on which it is founded. Among these principles is the idea, set out in the preamble, that "cultural property constitutes one of the basic elements of civilization and national culture, and that its true value can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding its origin, history and traditional setting".

A new international cultural order

The Convention has thus produced a doctrine for the return of cultural property to its country of origin. As a consequence, a joint declaration signed by Italy and Libya in 1998 put an end to the dispute over cultural property taken from Libyan soil during the Italian colonial adventure in Tripolitania at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was done by placing the return of these cultural objects to Libya under the auspices of the 1970 Convention – even though it could not be applied, since it is not retroactive.

In this particular case, it is not the legal and institutional mechanisms of the Convention that are referred to, but the doctrine on the legitimacy of the return of cultural property that the Convention has gradually imposed. In this respect, the adoption of the Convention in 1970 – ten years after the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly – marked a turning point. It ushered in an international cultural order, from which a right to cultural sovereignty was derived.

The premises of this were set out in Article 2 of the 1960 Declaration, which affirms that "All peoples have the right to [...] freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

In this construction of a new international cultural order, the 1970 Convention is the lock, or mechanism, that provides a basis for controlling the circulation of cultural objects, and entrenches the principle of their return to the country of origin. The art market – which until then had been largely free of ethical obligations – has since been subject to stricter regulations on the provenance of cultural property.

As for museums, the Ethics of Acquisitions, published by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), recalled as early as 1970 that "there must be a full, clear and satisfactory documentation in relation to the origin of any object to be acquired. This is quite as important for an object generally classified in the category of art as for an object of archaeology, of ethnology, or of national and natural history."

This is endorsed in the Guidelines of the American Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), which articulates the intensity of the obligation of due diligence for verifying the provenance of cultural property – based on the 1970 fulcrum.

The right of cultures to be different

Today, the 1970 Convention is reinforced by the concept of cultural diversity put forward by the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in 2005. The concept of diversity extends the right to be different, which is the corollary of the right to heritage.

In the field of cultural rights, this means that States recognize their capacity to assert their own identity within the framework of sovereign competences. These are founded on equal universal rights and, for communities or social groups, the granting of differentiated rights – to compensate for a traumatic history, resulting from the asymmetry of the colonial relationship, for example.

In this context, let us recall the words of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, who wrote in 1940: "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it is transmitted from one owner to another." The principles of shared responsibility and cultural equity established by the 1970 Convention also play a role in this recognition of cultures – in their historicity, differences, and values.

A respect for singularities

Far from being an instrument of cultural nationalism – as some narrow-minded people would like to suggest – the Convention establishes the universality and diversity of cultures. This is even more so since, over the past twenty years, there has been a shift in the centre of gravity of international cultural law, by enhancing the role and function of communities. This development goes hand in hand with the idea that each person can only accept and recognize the paradigm of universality if they are recognized in their own identity, based on their culture and heritage – an identity that both differentiates them from the other, and links them to universality.

Cultural diversity thus guarantees a pluralism of singular affiliations and respect for these singularities. It is a source of adherence to particularities and the acceptance of differences – the focus of the "mutual respect and appreciation among nations" mentioned in the preamble to the 1970 Convention.

The same preamble emphasizes the deepening of knowledge of human civilization, the enrichment of the cultural life of all peoples, and a sense of mutual respect and esteem. It is also the path towards this universality – based on the recognition of the diversity of cultures, initiated by the UNESCO Convention, adopted on 14 November 1970.

> "The Convention lays the foundations for the principles of solidarity and collective responsibility for the protection of the heritage of peoples"

The art market: A victim of its own success

The very lucrative black market in works of art and antiques has flourished thanks to the keen interest of buyers, shortcomings in legislation, the complicity of those in the sector, an increase in looting in countries in conflict situations, and the development of online sales platforms.

© UNESCO / Christelle ALIX

Leda and the Swan, *a painting by the sixteenth-century Italian artist Lelio Orsi, displayed at UNESCO headquarters in October 2019, as part of an event to commend efforts by the Italian Carabinieri to recover stolen treasures.*

Marc-André Renold

Professor of art and cultural heritage law and Director of the Art-Law Centre of the University of Geneva, and UNESCO chair in the international law of the protection of cultural heritage.

A staggering $64 billion – that's how much the international art and cultural property market generated in 2019, according to the global *Art Market Report 2020*. This figure reflects a craze for art and antiques that has been growing steadily in recent years.

The lucrative black market in works of art and antiquities has flourished thanks to the enthusiasm of buyers, the lack of legislation, the complicity of actors in the sector, the increase in looting in countries in conflict situations, and the development of online sales platforms.

Paradoxically, this interest also represents a threat to the integrity of cultural properties. This is because the increase in demand does not lead only to the development of a legitimate art market. It also encourages thefts from museums, private collections and religious buildings – or even the irremediable destruction of archaeological sites and the looting of ancient buildings and monuments.

In the absence of statistics, it is difficult to precisely measure the scale of the illicit market. Recent record police seizures in Europe, however, give some idea of its extent. Two recent examples: in October 2019, Operation Medicus, targeting Bulgaria, enabled Europol to seize 4,600 objects and arrest eight people. A month later, 10,000 art items were seized and twenty-three people arrested in another operation, focusing this time on Italy.

Laundering stolen art

The involvement of actors in the sector – dealers, auctioneers, museum curators and individual buyers – whether or not in good faith, plays a key role in this trade in stolen goods. The complicity of those who provide false papers and certificates of provenance is an essential element in strategies to launder objects, as is the lack of specific regulations and adequate means to enforce the law.

Once they have been introduced into the legal art market by galleries and auction houses, works of art and cultural property that have been looted are difficult to identify. Objects of dubious provenance can gain visibility by being sold in galleries or exhibited in museums.

The multiplication of conflicts in recent years has further amplified this phenomenon. The Arab Spring of 2011 and the civil wars that followed, have acted as catalysts for the systematic theft of antiquities, committed by impoverished inhabitants or organized criminal groups.

The museums, archaeological sites and monuments that made up the unique cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq have been ravaged by looters in these regions. In its Resolution 2347 of March 2017, the United Nations Security Council expressed its concern and noted that the trafficking of antiques appears to be one of the sources of funding for ISIS in Iraq and in Syria. The resolution also highlights the increasing use of the internet to dispose of these goods.

The development of online sales platforms and social networks has considerably facilitated the sale of illegally removed cultural property. Technological advances, such as sonar detection and underwater robots, have also made it possible to speed up illegal excavations – including in places that are hard to reach – making it easier for looters.

> “Those who have discovered objects often prefer to destroy them or put them on the black market”

Sanctions that don’t deter

Faced with this increase in illicit traffic, states have reacted by adopting regulations that are often directly inspired by UNESCO’s international conventions. But their actions have come up against several obstacles, starting with export regulations. These are often too strict, and therefore difficult to enforce. In addition, penal measures, when they do exist, are generally accompanied by penalties that are not dissuasive enough.

Another problem is that compliance with existing legislation is generally not adequately rewarded. Many artefacts are discovered by accident, as a result of farming activities or construction work. However, in the absence of compensation for the disruption of economic activity caused by the excavations, those who have discovered objects often prefer to destroy them or put them on the black market. Finally, the legal and regulatory measures put in place by states are often ineffective when it comes to controlling and regulating the activity of actors in the art market.

Without an effort by states to remedy these legal loopholes and greater mobilization of the international community, there is a risk that trafficking in cultural property will continue to flourish.

UNESCO-European Union: Joining forces to combat trafficking

One of the top players in the global market for art and antiquities, the European Union (EU) has set strict standards for its Member States to regulate the illicit trafficking of cultural property. Based on the UNESCO 1970 Convention, relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, and its own legal framework concerning the export, import and return of cultural objects, the EU has joined hands with UNESCO – investing over €1.2 million to support the implementation of these regulatory instruments through concrete activities.

Since 2017, over 600 professionals from the public and private sectors have participated in workshops and conferences to raise awareness of, and discuss means to fight illicit trafficking. The importance of reinforcing due diligence conduct in the European art trade is a key element of this fight. UNESCO’s collaboration with the trading bloc was reinforced in March 2018, at a capacity-building conference on *Engaging the European Art Market in the Fight Against the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property,* held at the Headquarters in Paris.

The joint project has also produced practical tools such as *Fighting the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property,* a toolkit to help European judiciary; a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) and e-learning modules. Sensitizing the general public in EU market countries – including through videos – is a crucial element of the fight, as are synergies among authorities of destination, transit and source countries.

The ongoing EU-UNESCO “Inter-regional and cross-cutting action” initiative targets a range of key professionals – cultural and museum authorities, civil servants, judiciary and law enforcement officials – by widening the scope beyond EU Member States, to include the Western Balkans and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) South partner countries.

"We must punish the looters, but also the buyers"

The trafficking in antiquities from war zones in the Middle East has grown steadily over the past two decades. While there is international consensus on condemning this illicit trade, it remains difficult to combat it in practice. One way to stop it is to increase sanctions on buyers, says Amr Al-Azm, an archaeologist and professor of Middle East history and anthropology at Shawnee State University in Ohio, United States.

Interview by Laetitia Kaci

UNESCO

● ***To what extent are museums and archaeological sites in conflict zones exposed to looting?***

During an armed conflict, the state loses control over parts of its territory. Its institutions become degraded, and it is no longer able to protect its population and its land. Archaeological sites and museums are also deprived of protection, opening the way for theft or illegal excavations. In fact, most looting is carried out by locals in the area who have lost their livelihoods because of these conflicts, and turn to looting to survive. Terrorist groups are only one element of the different entities that exploit these ongoing conflicts.

The looting of cultural heritage sites is not new – it goes back a long time. In the Middle East, art trafficking networks existed long before the region was hit by decades of conflict. The looters were often in collusion with corrupt officials or the military. The looters remain the same when there are geopolitical changes – they just change masters depending on who's in charge. If terrorist groups are at the helm in some regions, traffickers adapt to collaborate with them.

Clay manuscripts and ancient pottery found at the University of Mosul in Iraq, April 2017. Local security officers speculated that they were hidden there after being stolen from the Mosul Museum by ISIS.

● ***Why do armed terrorist groups attack cultural heritage? Is it only to finance their activities?***

Trafficking in works of art is indeed a source of funding, just like trafficking in natural resources, or the extortion of illegal taxes from civilian populations. But this is not the only reason they are motivated.

Terrorist groups are aware of the importance of heritage. Many of the attacks on these sites are opportunistic, but some are also targeted with the specific intention to cause maximum harm. Political destabilization creates a major threat for cultural heritage.

For example, ISIS attacked and destroyed major monuments like the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, and the contents of the museum in Mosul, Iraq, as part of a concerted propaganda campaign to demonstrate their power to act with impunity – and the impotence of the local authorities and the international community to stop them.

Cultural heritage sites also become strategic locations for armed groups like ISIS. They recognize the international importance of these sites and use them for their own benefit – as bases, training camps, or as ammunition dumps. They knew that they were less likely to be targeted by coalition air strikes when they occupied the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra in 2015, for example – and took full advantage of the fact that it was a UNESCO World Heritage site.

In 2015, in response to the growth of trafficking in the region, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 – which prohibits cross-border trade in cultural property from conflict zones – was unanimously adopted. However, objects from countries at war continue to flow into the art market. Why is this happening?

In the majority of countries where the art market is legally regulated, the destruction and theft of works of art are criminally prosecuted. However, this is not the case for the possession of stolen cultural property.

Today, an auction house, museum or collector accused of possessing an object from a war zone can certainly be prosecuted. But the outcome of the case will depend on the civil jurisdiction of the buyer's country. The heaviest penalty incurred, if the institution or antique dealer is found guilty, is that they have to give the object back. You may be required to pay a fine, apologize, and return the object – that's the worst that can happen.

Tens of thousands of looted works of art are now circulating illegally around the world. For a buyer or seller, the prospect of having to return one or two such items a year is not much of a risk to take.

> "We need to crack down on both the supply and demand sides"

Though Resolution 2199 was unanimously passed, some countries where the legal trade in antiquities is permitted have not followed up by introducing legal instruments. For things to really change, these states must be prepared to do their part to criminalize the trade. Serious penalties must be imposed in order to be a real deterrent.

A change of attitude towards art trafficking is also needed. In 2019, for example, there was a huge outcry when Christie's put up a head of Tutankhamun for sale. Dated to about 1333 BC to 1323 BC by the international auction house, there seemed to be no doubt that the quartzite sculpture was looted from Egypt. Yet, the entire discussion in the public sphere was whether the piece had been removed from Egypt before or after 1970 – the year that UNESCO introduced the 1970 Convention to protect cultural property. People didn't seem to care that the sculpture was stolen, an act that is punishable under criminal law. They were more concerned about when it was stolen – which would establish whether or not it had entered the art market legally.

As long as there are no fundamental changes in our society, looted antiquities, whether from war-torn countries or elsewhere, will continue to feed the art market.

Cultural heritage objects: A stake in armed conflicts

Coins, statues, manuscripts, ancient inscriptions. Since 2011, about a hundred objects looted in Yemen have been sold in auction houses in Europe and the United States for an estimated $1 million. The Museum of Raqqa – one of the first Syrian cities to fall into the hands of ISIS in 2014 – was stripped of several hundred major pieces. The following year, nearly 10,000 valuable artefacts were stolen from the Idlib Museum.

In both Iraq and Syria, the terrorist organization, knowing the market value of these objects, engaged in the methodical and massive looting of museums and archaeological sites in the areas it controlled. It even introduced a tax on the value of the looted items. In a November 2015 *Report on the protection of heritage in situations of armed conflict*, Jean-Luc Martinez, president and director of the Louvre Museum in Paris, notes that "blood antiquities" may have represented "up to fifteen to twenty per cent of ISIS's revenue sources". This makes the trafficking of cultural goods one of the most important means of financing terrorism, along with the trafficking of oil resources.

In recent decades, from Afghanistan to Mali, through Yemen or Iraq, cultural heritage and goods have been at the forefront of armed conflicts. Direct targets of deliberate destruction, collateral damage of conflicts, coveted objects for organizations that see them as sources of profit, cultural goods are at the heart of criminal networks and contemporary security issues.

By undermining the identity of populations, looting and illicit trafficking contribute to the profound destabilization of conflict-torn regions. As a source of financing for terrorism, they fuel the spiral of violence, and mortgage the future of these regions. "Illicit trafficking, destruction of sites, extremist propaganda and the denial of history are all elements of a global strategy, and to respond to them, the community of nations must address them in a holistic manner," UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said at a United Nations Security Council meeting on the protection of cultural property on 30 November 2017.

An awareness of the extent of this traffic and the damage it causes, has led to a series of recent initiatives. These have given new impetus to international co-operation, fifty years after the adoption of the UNESCO Convention against Illicit Trafficking.

In 2015, Resolution 2199 was adopted, prohibiting the trade in cultural property from Iraq and Syria. Two years later, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2347, which for the first time made the protection of cultural heritage a security imperative and condemned the deliberate destruction of cultural property as a war crime.

In the wake of this UN resolution, a legal response began to be organized at the national level. The Council of Europe adopted a Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property in 2017. In the same year, Uruguay announced the creation of a national committee against illicit trafficking.

Following the example of the United States, which passed a new law in 2016 controlling imports of cultural goods from Syria, several countries have restricted "blood antiquities" in their markets. Sweden, on its part, has set up a specialized unit within its police services to deal with the problem.

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Looters, aided by stone-cutters, stole parts of a frieze from the site of the ancient city of Hatra, Iraq, in 2010.

● ***To what extent are auction houses, museums and collectors responsible for illicit trafficking?***

Basically, I believe trafficking is like a bridge with two ends – there is supply and demand. On the supply end are the looters on the ground, who feed the network. On the other side are the buyers, both legitimate and illegitimate, who create the demand. We need to crack down on both sides to seriously tackle this problem. If only one side is addressed, the authorities will fail. A multitude of strategies to deal with different types of looting must be put in place by governments.

I believe one of the best ways to do this is to prosecute anyone who is proven to have knowingly looted or trafficked in antiquities from a conflict zone under terrorism laws – not just under civil suits which allow perpetrators to get away with crimes with just a slap on the wrist.

● ***Can parallels be drawn between antiquities trafficking and the arms and drug trafficking that are also rampant in the Middle East?***

Trafficking in art and antiquities usually starts with clandestine excavations. The loot is taken out of the site, sold, and taken across borders to art markets, where it is sold again, and ends up in an art gallery or private collection. This whole process requires extensive networks, which are often vast and well-established. It is well-known that these networks – dealing in weapons, drugs, antiquities, and even humans – are all connected.

The looting in war zones continues unabated – there is no significant shift. I prefer the term "conflicted antiquities" to refer to this illicit trade, rather than "blood antiquities", which was coined to describe the illegal diamond trade. The trafficking in antiquities and arms usually go hand in hand. It is not uncommon for law enforcement authorities to find arms and antiques stored in the same place during crackdowns.

The networks are closely linked, and the trade is too lucrative to stop. The only difference between the trafficking of drugs and antiquities is that if you're caught with a kilo of heroin, you go to jail for a very long time. If you're caught with a stolen antiquity, you don't go to jail at all.

● ***Will we ever see the end of the illicit antiquities trade?***

It is very unlikely, because the lure of finding buried hidden treasure is just too great. However, many states are taking action at the national level. In the Middle East, for example, trade in antiquities is now banned in the vast majority of countries. Therefore, if an item from Libya, Syria, Turkey or Lebanon shows up on the art market, we can be sure that it was looted.

At the international level, organizations assist national law enforcement agencies in dismantling trafficking. UNESCO, for example, maintains a List of National Cultural Heritage Laws. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has a Red Lists Database, which serves to illustrate the categories of cultural goods most vulnerable to illicit traffic. And Interpol has a Stolen Works of Art Database which is regularly updated.

But efforts must be made at the local level. Communities are too often sidelined by large international institutions that tend to work directly at the governmental level in the fight against illicit trafficking.

Especially while conflicts are raging, and when government institutions are not in control, it is the local communities, the local stakeholders and the local NGOs that are on the front line.

In January 2018, the Ma'arrat al-Numan Museum in Syria was hit by two missiles during an airstrike, causing extensive damage to the north-west corner of the building. With the help of the local community, the museum director, and a team of experts including myself, we were able to visit the site to assess the damage. We sent the assessment to UNESCO, which provided financial assistance and structural expertise to help stabilize the building and prevent it from collapsing. This successful collaboration saved the museum and prevented the catastrophic loss of one of the most important collections of Roman and Byzantine mosaics in Syria.

We need to find new ways to address the new challenges and situations we face today. The collaboration of different stakeholders and actors at the international, national and local levels is imperative, if we want to put an end to trafficking which has gone on for thousands of years.

■

> "The heaviest penalty incurred is that the stolen object has to be returned"

India: Heritage theft remains a challenge

Faced with an increasing demand for its art objects in the global antiquities market, India has introduced strict laws to curb the illicit export of its archaeological and cultural heritage. However, the implementation of these laws remains a major challenge, due to the poverty that fuels looting, and the lack of adequate security to protect historical monuments.

Samayita Banerjee

A research scholar at Ashoka University, India, with an interest in archaeology, heritage and conservation, she was a recipient of the Sahapedia-UNESCO fellowship in 2018.

Tucked away near Berachampa, a small village in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal about thirty kilometres from Kolkata, is one of the most important early historic urban coastal sites of eastern India.

Today, there is no trace of the former grandeur of this site dating back to the second century BC. A glaring example of institutional negligence, inadequate research, and poor conservation measures, Chandraketugarh is emblematic of the problems that undermine India's archaeological heritage today. Numerous artefacts plundered from the site have been scattered worldwide, and are now housed in top museums and private collections.

Mechanisms to protect this rich heritage do exist, however. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (amended in 1976) banned the export of any sort of archaeological objects and imposed stricter vigilance on individual ownership. All archaeological objects and sites were granted state ownership. Since then, there has also been a concentrated effort to retrieve stolen Indian antiquities.

Yet, just years after the Antiquities Act, nearly 3,000 thefts of antiquities were reported between 1977 and 1979. More than 50,000 art objects have been smuggled out of India till 1989, according to an estimate by UNESCO. But officials agree that an exact count remains impossible.

Narrative and social scenes depicted on terracotta plaques from Chandraketugarh, displayed at the State Archaeological Museum in Kolkata.

Plundering has a long history

The looting of antiquities in India has a much longer history. While today looting is considered an activity motivated by economic gain, it was once a legitimate act – carried out by colonial rulers of the subcontinent as a consequence of victory over the native population.

The establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) – founded during British rule in 1861, and now attached to the Ministry of Culture – was an attempt to protect the cultural heritage of the nation, maintain ancient monuments, and research and monitor archaeological sites.

The ASI has taken the responsibility of protecting and preserving 3,650 monuments, from different periods ranging from prehistoric times to the colonial period. The lack of enforcement of the laws remains a major concern – largely due to inadequate staff to ensure the safeguarding of historic monuments and sites.

There have been some particularly brazen thefts of Indian treasures, from temples and archaeological sites. Over a hundred erotic stone sculptures were stolen between 1965 and 1970 from the Khajuraho temples (built by the Chandella dynasty between 950 and 1050, and inscribed on the World Heritage list since 1986) in Madhya Pradesh. Even museums, which should be heavily guarded, are not spared. In 1968, 125 pieces of antique jewellery and thirty-two rare gold coins went missing from the National Museum in New Delhi.

Remains of the Khana Mihirer Dhipi site, neighbouring Chandraketugarh, both part of an archaeological settlement dating back to the second century BC.

> "Why would people protect something if they don't know what they are protecting?"

Accidental discoveries

Most of the smuggled art is sold in the West, and a lot of pieces end up in museums. Often accompanied by false documents, the objects are shipped primarily by sea to avoid more stringent detection at airports.

Many of these sites remain at the mercy of local antiquarians and collectors who have taken up the roles of being archaeologists themselves. There are dozens of such sites in and around the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, in lower West Bengal. While a large number of these have been destroyed by the constant movements of the region's complex and erratic rivers, many of them have also been excavated by the State Archaeological Department and the Eastern Circle of ASI.

But in the core areas of the Sundarbans, it is the fishermen and locals who end up finding the largest number of artefacts. These accidental discoveries then fall into the hands of antiquities dealers, or find their way to local antiquarians and museums, if they are lucky. A lack of regular public auctions, infrequent museum audits, and no legally easy alternative to determine the market value of objects by the finders, all contribute to trafficking.

Heritage education

It is illegal to obtain antiquities from an unverified or unlicensed dealer. But in a country like India, most of these objects are found by farmers or construction workers and they eventually hand it over to middlemen, who are part of a clandestine network. They pay a minimal amount to the finder before selling it off to the highest bidder. The strictness of the laws becomes counter-productive.

But more important than laws or regulations is the need to impart basic historical knowledge of a place to the local people – especially in schools. Because, at the end of the day, why would people protect something if they don't know what they are protecting?

Also, finders of art objects could be educated about their economic and historical value – and the fact that they might be better compensated by government authorities. In effect, poverty remains a fundamental problem underlying the plundering of heritage.

Besides including archaeology and heritage conservation in education, it may help to involve local politicians at the panchayat and district board level, to tighten vigilance and help control local trafficking agents, who currently have unfettered access to historical sites. As for the state departments and museums, auditing and registering their collections and finds is the first thing that needs attention.

The phenomenon of the growing market for Indian and other Asian art objects is caused due to the dichotomous relationship between the rich "demand" countries and the poorer "source" countries. But the supply from the so-called poor countries can be limited with simple initiatives that need to be taken immediately. Otherwise soon there may be a situation where India's rich ancient heritage will cease to be accessible to its own people.

The itinerary of a stolen stele

This is the story of a Greek funerary stele from the fourth century BC, put up for sale by an international auction house in 2017. The piece was not withdrawn from the auction catalogue even after the warnings of an expert regarding its dubious provenance, backed by solid evidence. It would take over a year and numerous initiatives before the stele was finally returned to the Greek authorities.

Christos Tsirogiannis

Forensic archaeologist and Associate Professor at the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Aarhus, Denmark. He is co-author of the 2019 book, *Trafficking Culture: New Directions in Researching the Global Market in Illicit Antiquities.*

In May 2017, Sotheby's, the international auction house, put an antiquities catalogue online for their auction in London a month later. One of the lots included the upper part of a Greek marble grave stele [an upright slab], decorated with an anthemion [floral design] and a fragmentary inscription bearing the beginning of the Greek male name ΕΣΤΙ [ΑΙΟΣ].

Dating back to the mid-fourth century BC, the stele was estimated at £60,000-£90,000, and its consigner was not named. The "provenance" with which Sotheby's accompanied this stele was: "John Hewett, Bog Farm, Kent, 1960s". The Greek origin of the stele – the region of Attica, close to Athens, in particular – was mentioned in a catalogue note.

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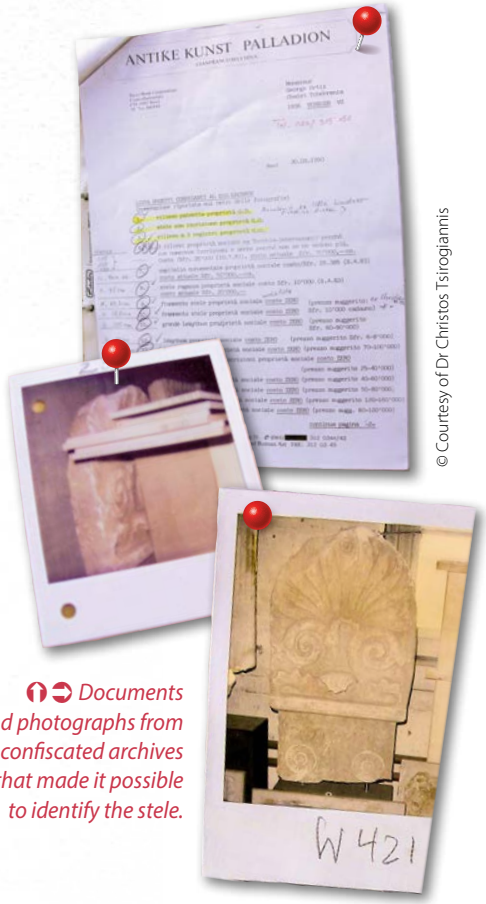
Raids on fake dealers

One important leap forward in the fight against illicit trafficking was made between 1995 and 2006, with a series of police raids on the properties of antiquities traffickers Giacomo Medici, Gianfranco Becchina, Robin Symes and Christos Michaelides.

Having participated in the last of these raids as an archaeologist, I identified the stele in several Polaroid and professional images from the photographic and documentary archive confiscated from Becchina, the notorious Italian dealer convicted for his involvement in illicit antiquities.



© Courtesy of Dr Christos Tsirogiannis

Documents and photographs from the confiscated archives that made it possible to identify the stele.

Thus began many years of work to identify, gather the evidence to reconstruct its true provenance, notify the authorities – and finally make it possible for this stolen antiquity to return home. To identify objects in the market, to contribute to their repatriation, and to open new cases against the parties involved in the trafficking, I was given official access to all three archives and others.

The Becchina file – which contained Polaroids of the stele – was dedicated to transactions between Becchina and the late Antonio Savoca, a known Greek-Italian dealer of illicit antiquities. The Savoca Polaroid images depict the stele uncleaned, still covered with soil encrustations, and with recent breaks still visible on its marble surface.

Several Polaroids show that the stele was not properly treated. In one, it is depicted frontally in a warehouse full of other uncleaned antiquities, partly propped against a window and several metal pipes.

Concealing the true provenance

The Becchina archive also includes documents that shed more light on the true provenance of the stele. It was in Becchina's hands from at least 1978 until 1990, when its ownership appears to be shared between Becchina and George Ortiz, a Swiss dealer and collector. There is no mention of Becchina, Savoca or Ortiz in the "provenance" section of Sotheby's 2017 catalogue. Conversely, there is no proof that a "John Hewett, Bog Farm" ever owned this antiquity, especially in the "1960s" – or that Savoca was ever associated with him, for any antiquity.

After identifying the stele, I notified the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), Scotland Yard's Art and Antiques Unit, and the Greek police art squad on 8 June 2017 – supplying them with all the relevant photographic and documentary evidence. The British police informed me that there were insufficient grounds for them to seize the item for a criminal investigation and that Sotheby's had strongly refuted the allegation. The Greek police art squad merely told me that they had forwarded the case to the Greek Ministry of Culture – which never contacted me.

During the few days before the auction, the case with all the evidence appeared on the website of the European Association of Archaeologists (Committee on the Illicit Trade in Cultural Material), posted by the archaeologist Marianne

Mödlinger. It also appeared on the blogs of archaeologists David Gill (*Looting Matters*), and Neil Brodie (*Market of Mass Destruction)*.

On the day of the auction (June 12), the freelance journalist Howard Swains informed me that he had attended the Sotheby's auction and saw that the stele had apparently been "sold" to an absentee bidder for £48,000. However, when Sotheby's announced the results, the stele was not included among the sold items.

On 6 July 2017, the online magazine, *VICE*, published details of the case in their Greece edition, and included a statement from Sotheby's, dated 23 June 2017: "We chose not to withdraw the burial column from sale based on our due diligence before the sale and its known provenance that pre-dates the time it was allegedly in the possession of Becchina. […] In this instance, the photos that Mr. Tsirogiannis [the author] has released, depict the column mounted on a stand. Thus, in combination with our provenance pre-dating the time of those photos, we do not see the photos as a basis to question the clear title of our consignor."

A "voluntary goodwill gesture"

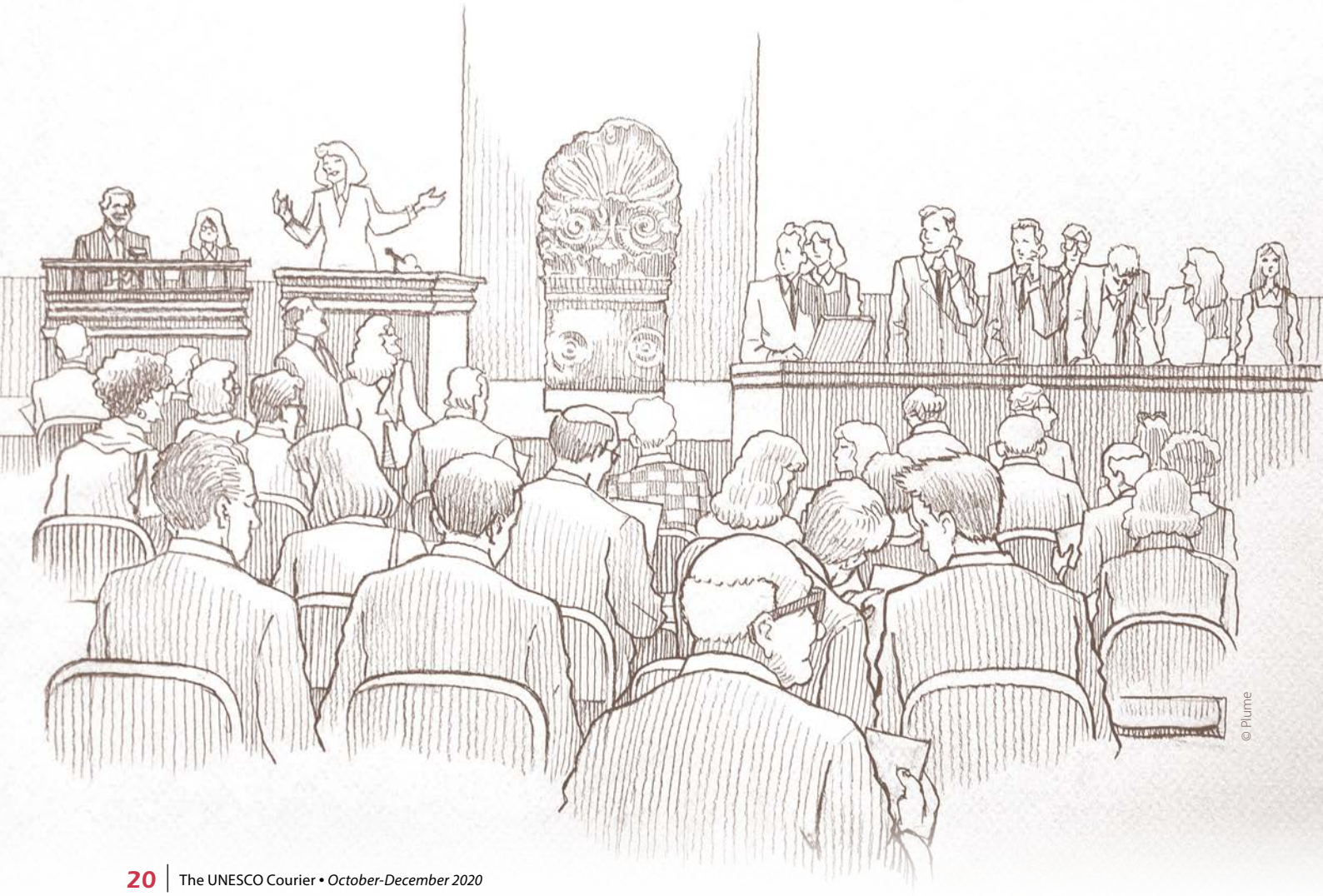
Sotheby's response ignored both the poor condition of the object as depicted in the Polaroids, and the involvement of Savoca, Becchina and Ortiz in its provenance – even after the evidence had been widely published.

Almost eleven months after the auction, the British newspaper *The Times*, published an article, more broadly about my research, on 7 May 2018. It also referred to the case of the stele, and added: "Sotheby's said it had recently learnt that the provenance provided to it in 2008 was false. It said that, working with the Metropolitan Police Art and Antiquities [sic] Unit in London, 'all relevant parties have agreed to convey the stele by way of a voluntary goodwill gesture to the Greek authorities'".

No more information was available regarding Sotheby's discovery that the provenance provided was false (they still protect the final owner's identity), or why they only found this out "recently" despite "extensive provenance research" which had made them "confident" that "there was no bar". Of course, calling it a "voluntary goodwill gesture" also mislabels the repatriation of an antiquity that they were forced to return, after evidence demonstrated its illicit origin.

On 27 June 2018, I testified about the case at the Greek Consulate in London, following the invitation of a Greek public prosecutor to assist an ongoing legal procedure. The next day, I was informed by telephone by Scotland Yard's Art and Antiques Unit that the stele was still in London, awaiting its repatriation to Greece. However, the Greek Ministry of Culture announced the repatriation of the stele on 8 September 2018. It is currently in the Epigraphical Museum in Athens.

This case ended well, but it demonstrates the involvement of some of the most "reputable" members of the antiquities market, and underlines the need to update laws in the so-called "market countries". In the future, the concerned authorities must be able to act in a more co-ordinated and timely manner, so that the next stolen stele does not take as long to find its way back to its country of origin.



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Social networks: The new El Dorado for traffickers

Auction sites and social networks have, in the last few years, become hubs for the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. Though Facebook recently banned the trade in antiquities on its platform, much remains to be done to curb this relatively recent marketplace, which offers traffickers a global showcase.

Tom Mashberg

A writer, editor and journalist focusing on art and antiquities theft and repatriation, he is a regular contributor to *The New York Times* Culture section. Based in Los Angeles, Mashberg is also the co-author of *Stealing Rembrandts: The Untold Stories of Notorious Art Heists*.

In June 2020, after more than two years of formal complaints from antiquities trackers, Facebook finally acknowledged that its site was being used as a vast online bazaar for the sale of looted Middle Eastern artefacts.

The social media conglomerate announced a major policy change, saying "to keep these artifacts and our users safe, we now prohibit the exchange, sale or purchase of all historical artifacts on Facebook and Instagram."

It was high time. According to the Antiquities Trafficking and Heritage Anthropology Research Project, ATHAR (the Arabic word for antiquities) – a watchdog group whose experts brought the scandal to Facebook's attention as far back as 2014 – online platforms have done little to prevent the illicit trade of relics or other objects.

The COVID-19 crisis has compounded the problem by driving more and more dealers and buyers online – where they are discovering that by joining certain unmonitored Facebook groups, they can enter the illegal market with ease.

A global scourge

Facebook is hardly the only online outlet where illegal antiquities are being traded. A wide variety of auction sites – notably eBay, Invaluable, Catawiki and GoAntiques – are also being used to locate buyers,

© Courtesy of ATHAR Project

Antique pottery offered for sale on Facebook, January 2018.

largely in Europe and the United States. Theoretically, the policies for the use of these sites prohibit these sales.

For example, eBay's policy claims: "Listings for antiquities must include the provenance or ownership history of the item and, where possible, a photo or scanned image of an official document including both the item's country of origin, and the legal details of the sale. The item must also be approved for import or export."

But in practical terms, blocking sales that violate those rules is virtually impossible.

"Due to the large numbers of objects sold online and the speed of the transactions, regular monitoring and research of the online market is impossible for many national law enforcement agencies," explains Neil Brodie, a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, who specializes in endangered archaeology, and has written extensively about the online trade.

The number of illegal items auctioned online would be difficult to estimate. In a 2019 report for the European Commission on the illicit trade in Europe, Brodie estimated that in the United Kingdom in 2018, some 52,560 antiquities lots were likely sold, realizing €1.8 million. Many of these transactions are illegal, he adds.

UNESCO and its law enforcement partners – among them the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the World Customs Organization (WCO), and the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) – have also criticized the expanding online trade.

At a web conference on June 26, 2020, aimed at taking new measures to thwart such sales, Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture, said, "We must double our efforts in the fight against this global scourge." Facebook, eBay and other sites have also faced questions over their role as platforms for illicit sales.

Loot to order

Antiquities trafficking began on Facebook at about the time of the Arab Spring in 2011, experts say. According to Amr Al-Azm, a professor of Middle East history and anthropology at Shawnee State University in Ohio and co-director of the ATHAR Project, it was around this time that ISIS began professionalizing the plunder of archaeological sites in Iraq and Syria, using Facebook as a vital tool.

"Social media lowered the barriers to entry to the marketplace," he said. In September 2020, Al-Azm and Katie A. Paul, archaeologist, anthropologist and co-director of ATHAR, estimated that there

were at least 120 Facebook groups – most of them in Arabic – connected to the illegal trade in Middle Eastern antiquities. They have hundreds of thousands of members in total.

Online auction sites are also part of the problem. But, as Paul noted, on eBay, for example, "you don't have hundreds of thousands of people following a single illegal antiquities seller, like you have hundreds of thousands of people in these Facebook groups."

"It's an issue of scale," she added. "eBay has roughly 182 million users, whereas Facebook has over 2 billion, and is accessible in all developing countries."

Typically, Al-Azm explained, those seeking to buy or sell artefacts initiate inquiries in a Facebook group, and complete negotiations by switching to encrypted apps. Buyers also widely circulate requests for desired objects, he added, creating a predicament that Al-Azm calls "loot to order."

In a 2019 report, ATHAR released numerous photos and videos culled from Facebook groups offering mosaics, architectural elements, statuary, Egyptian funerary masks, and even Pharaonic coffins.

"They literally will post pictures from auction catalogues and say, 'See, this is how much this stuff can sell for, so go for it guys,'" Paul pointed out. Online traffickers will also try to reassure illicit buyers that they are getting genuine items by posting photos or videos showing the objects being unearthed *in situ*, she added. Some go as far as to post detailed instructions for aspiring looters on how to locate vulnerable archaeological sites and properly dig up potential treasures.

In an irksome twist, Paul noted, Facebook's algorithms "recommend" groups and sites devoted to antiquities trafficking to its users. "Each time ATHAR joins one antiquities trafficking group to examine it, Facebook's algorithm actually recommends three more," she said.

© Courtesy of ATHAR Project

Looted artefacts for sale on Facebook.

ATHAR has noticed another trend – live real-time bidding for artefacts as looters pull them from the ground, to further demonstrate their authenticity. When a purchaser wins an item, they are shown how it can be falsely labelled and routed via countries of transit.

In the event that Facebook or an auction site does ban a seller, Al-Azm and others have asked them not to delete the pages – because they constitute crucial evidence for law enforcement and heritage experts. But citing data privacy concerns, the online platforms say they do not intend to preserve any removed content.

The wave of antiquities hitting the online market will likely continue. Some traffickers sit on looted antiquities for years, waiting for attention to die down – or forging documents about the items before offering them for sale.

In this context, photos and videos of the stolen objects are documents of prime importance. "They are digital evidence that will be of great value to scholars and potentially critical to future repatriation efforts," Al-Azm concluded.

"Buyers widely circulate requests for desired objects, creating a 'loot to order' predicament"

China: Bronzes from around the world reunite in a digital museum

A new kind of museum in Tongling, China, virtually displays ancient copper and bronze objects from the Han dynasty, many of which have found their way to museums abroad. It foretells the future of digital museums – institutions capable of sharing their resources and offering unprecedented access to their collections to global audiences.

Tang Jigen

Chair Professor at the Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) in Shenzhen, with an expertise in Chinese Bronze Age archaeology.

Caught in the turmoil of history, many cultural objects were taken away from their countries of origin, and remain overseas. Often, it is unlikely that this stolen heritage is returned – at least in the short term. When the objects are not restituted for years, sometimes centuries, how do people in their countries of origin get to see these cultural treasures?

In the city of Tongling in the Anhui province of eastern China, the question of how to enjoy these objects that have remained overseas has been resolved by establishing a digital museum. A city of only 1.6 million, Tongling is famous for the production of copper – copper mining and bronze casting were established there in the late seventeenth century BC. During the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), this river port along the Yangtze river supplied most of the raw material for the casting of copper coins.

In 2016, the city's local government, with the help of experts, decided to construct a museum dedicated to copper and bronze. The goal of the Digital Museum of Copper and Bronzes (DMCB) is to share globally, the cultural resources of ancient Chinese copper and bronze objects online – especially those that remain abroad.

A very special rhino

Some of the treasures that visitors to the DMCB website (expected to go online by end 2020) will have access to, are: *100 Highlights of Chinese Bronze Objects*, an online exhibition of a hundred bronzes selected by archaeologists through a voting process. It includes some Chinese bronzes from museum collections overseas. Another exhibition, *100 stories about Bronze Objects*, recounts details of how these bronzes left China and still remain abroad.

A virtual exhibition hall at the Digital Museum of Copper and Bronzes in Tongling, China.

One of these stories tells of how the *Xiao Chen Yu zun* – a 3,000-year old ritual bronze vessel shaped like a rhinoceros, from the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC) – made its way to Paris through C. T. Loo, an art dealer, and was bought by Avery Brundage, an American sports administrator and former president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This Bronze Age Chinese ritual vessel, unique because it was made in the shape of an animal, was finally donated to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco – where it remains one of the museum's most visited pieces, and even serves as its mascot.

The idea of sharing cultural resources online is not new. Many museums which are part of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) network have their own websites. What makes the DMCB unique is that it integrates and shows cultural resources spread across different countries. China has experienced great losses of its cultural heritage over centuries. Millions of cultural objects are estimated to have left the country through different means.

More than just a website

A survey conducted by this author in 2016 concluded that over ninety per cent of respondents hoped that the cultural objects which had left China would one day be returned to their country of origin. The fact that these cultural objects can now be shared online through the DMCB, may serve to relieve the long-lasting tension between China and the countries that currently house them.

Though the DMCB is an innovative idea, it is limited to sharing only a specific type of object online – Chinese bronzes. In future, digital museums will be built and run by several museums collaborating across different countries, integrating a wealth of resources to exhibit a wide range of art objects. These new digital museums could be called "digital museum networks" or "cloud museums".

The cloud museums are neither simply websites that display a specific museum's collections, nor the combination of the websites of different museums. Instead, they are the result of collaborations of various museums across the world. These futuristic digital museums already exist – the online exhibition by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and the British Museum, both in the United Kingdom, is one such example.

The rapid and dramatic strides in big data storage and transfer technologies will facilitate the birth of cloud museums. Some scholars have predicted that the advent of these museums could change the current state of these institutions, and even culture in general.

© Zu Jie

Limitless possibilities

The digital museums of the future will be able to select different types of objects on a range of themes, to design exhibitions on an unprecedented scale by sharing huge amounts of data. They may also be able to interpret and display an object in a variety of ways, drawing on cultural resources from across the globe. Scholars from different countries would be able to engage in a conversation with each other, and with the public, about the objects on display.

Three thousand years ago, during the Shang Dynasty – the earliest archaeologically recorded dynasty in Chinese history – bronze craftsmen created at least two known bronze *you* objects, depicting a tiger eating a human. Because of historical reasons, these two objects are now in the collections of the Musée Guimet in Paris and the Sen-Oku Hakukokan Museum in Kyoto, Japan. If these two museums and the Chinese archaeologists specializing in the Shang period all featured on a cloud museum one day to share their knowledge and stories about these *you* objects with a worldwide audience, how wonderful it would be.

> "What makes the virtual museum unique is that it shows cultural resources spread across different countries"

The Netherlands:

Museums confront the country's colonial past

The pioneering Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (The National Museum of World Cultures) in the Netherlands was one of the first museums in Europe to develop mechanisms for repatriating artefacts looted from former colonies.

Catherine Hickley

A freelance arts journalist based in Berlin, she is a regular contributor to *The Art Newspaper* and *The New York Times*, and the author of *The Munich Art Hoard: Hitler's Dealer and His Secret Legacy.*

Back in 2014, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam was threatened with closure when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it would withdraw funding from its owner, the KIT Royal Tropical Institute.

The museum was eventually saved by creating a new entity to manage the national ethnographic collections. The National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) was founded in 2014 by a merger of the Tropenmuseum, the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal. It also oversees the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, whose collection belongs to the city.

But during those months when a question mark hung over the Tropenmuseum's future, some important soul-searching took place among the custodians of Dutch ethnographic collections.

"This crisis situation was a wake-up call for all these institutions," explains Stijn Schoonderwoerd, director of the NMVW. "It led us to question our colonial history and we saw that we had the potential to ask a lot of questions about identity, control, power, inequality and decolonization."

The Tropenmuseum of world cultures, housed in an impressive building in Amsterdam, has been a part of the National Museum of World Cultures since 2014.

Ahead of the curve

These questions are not unique to the NMVW – they have risen to the fore across Europe in recent years. In 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron promised to permanently restitute African patrimony in French museums in a speech in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. He commissioned a report by the Senegalese scholar Felwine Sarr and the French art historian Bénédicte Savoy, published in 2018, which recommended the return of sub-Saharan African artefacts in French museums. In June 2020, a bill allowing the restitution of twenty-six looted artefacts to Benin and a historic sword to Senegal was the first legislative step towards fulfilling this commitment.

In Germany, the culture ministers of the sixteen states agreed on their own set of guidelines in March 2019. They promised to create the conditions for the repatriation of artefacts in public collections that were taken "in ways that are legally or morally unjustifiable today" from former colonies. In the United Kingdom, the Institute of Art and Law is drawing up guidance for museums commissioned by Arts Council England, with publication planned for autumn 2020.

But the NMVW was a little ahead of the curve. A 2016 doctoral work by researcher Jos van Beurden, published in English as *Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*, added impetus to the Dutch debate over colonial-era artefacts. "It had quite a lot of impact," says Henrietta Lidchi, chief curator at the NMVW.

© Kirsten van Santen

Afterlives of Slavery, *an exhibition at the Tropenmuseum since 2017, traces the history of slavery and explores its current-day legacies.*

The museum began work on its guidance for repatriation in 2017. While repatriations have occurred over the decades, claims have previously been handled on an ad hoc basis. "We are shifting from case-by-case scenarios to make it more systematic and equitable," Lidchi elaborates. "There is a need for structural change to make this happen."

The guidelines were adopted on 7 March 2019, and published in a document called *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process*. The paper was designed to express "the overall mission of the museum to address the long, complex and entangled histories that have resulted in the collections the museum holds." It includes a "commitment to transparently address and evaluate claims for the return of cultural objects according to standards of respect, cooperation and timeliness."

No protests from citizens

The guidelines encompass more than stolen heritage – they include a commitment to return artefacts that are of great value to source communities regardless of how they were obtained.

Claimants are also not obliged to prove that they have a suitable museum to house returned objects – a factor often cited in the broader discussion as a reason against repatriation.

The public response to the museum's new policies has been positive. "To my relief, when we presented our position, there was not much opposition and no outcry from political groups or citizens saying we should keep everything," Schoonderwoerd says.

The advent of a national policy could change that. The museum director doesn't

UNESCO facilitates negotiations between countries

Since 1978, there has been an international mechanism for mediation between States on the issue of restitution, or the return of lost cultural property. It deals with cultural objects that are lost as a result of foreign or colonial occupation, or following a previous theft – committed before the entry into force of the 1970 Convention by the States concerned.

Created by UNESCO, the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP) is a permanent body, independent of the 1970 Convention. Its mission is to facilitate negotiations between countries and encourage them to conclude agreements.

Under the aegis of the Committee, Germany returned the Kueka stone – considered sacred by the indigenous Pemón community – to Venezuela in January 2020. It was taken to Berlin to be part of an exhibition more than two decades ago, and had been on display at the capital's Tiergarten Park since 1998.

Another example that illustrates the Committee's success: the missing fragments of a Roman mosaic discovered in the ancient town of Zeugma in modern-day Gaziantep province, Turkey – and part of the art collection of Bowling Green State University, Ohio, since 1965 – were returned to Turkey by the university in 2018.

> "The public response to the museum's new policies has been positive"

rule out the risk that far-right groups could rally opposition to the repatriation of artefacts from Dutch museums to stoke nationalist sentiment.

On the trail of colonial-era objects

The museum oversees about 450,000 items in total. Lidchi says the NMVW's "broad estimate" is that about forty per cent of the collection was acquired in colonial contexts. Since 2019, for the first time, the museum has two full-time provenance researchers. It has applied for a government research grant of €4 million to finance and speed up this massive task.

In a collaboration with the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Expertise Centre for the Restitution of Cultural Goods and the Second World War at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, the NMVW will focus initially on Indonesia, with projects to consolidate research into, for example, colonial-era military expeditions and trading-house networks.

The museum has not yet received any official claims via its new channels – perhaps due in part to the coronavirus pandemic. But the institution is in discussions with many different groups of potential claimants, including indigenous communities in North America. The NMVW also has a long-standing collaboration with the National Museum of Indonesia to share information and make the collection jointly accessible.

An Indonesian hero's dagger returned

In March 2020, the Dutch culture minister returned a gold-inlaid kris or *keris* – a large dagger – to the Indonesian ambassador in The Hague on the basis of research conducted by the museum. It belonged to Prince Diponegoro, a Javanese rebel leader and Indonesian hero who waged a five-year war against Dutch colonial rule from 1825 to 1830. Some of his belongings, including a saddle and a spear, were repatriated to Indonesia in the 1970s on the recommendation of a committee of Dutch and Indonesian experts. The *keris* could only be located much later.

The NMVW is also a member of the Benin Dialogue Group, founded in 2007, which comprises European museums with holdings of Benin artefacts looted by British troops in 1897, and Nigerian representatives.

The museums have recently received funding to create a digitized inventory of the so-called Benin bronzes [which come from the ancient kingdom of Benin, now in southern Nigeria] and have also agreed to loan collections to Benin City in Nigeria on a rotating basis – though they have so far stopped short of pledging to repatriate them permanently. "I have no doubt that there will be a repatriation of looted Benin objects from European museums to Nigeria," Schoonderwoerd says.

Criticism of the NMVW has come primarily from those who believe the restitution process is moving too slowly. In June 2020, a group of activists hit the façade of the Tropenmuseum with white paintballs to protest human remains in its collection – while saying in a statement that they recognize the museum's commitment to addressing its colonial past.

A dagger belonging to Prince Diponegoro and housed at the Museum Volkenkunde, the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, was returned by the Netherlands to Indonesia in March 2020.

© Courtesy of Museum Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta (MNI 192.999)

Restitution of art: Some examples

2020: A Sumerian limestone votive wall plaque dating to 2400 BC and looted from Iraq, will soon be returned by the British Museum in the United Kingdom to Iraq.

2014: Two *maithuna* bas-reliefs from the ninth and tenth centuries, depicting intertwined lovers and stolen from a temple in Rajasthan in 2009, were returned to India by the United States.

2010: A Makonde mask, stolen in 1984 from the National Museum in Dar es Salaam, was returned by the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland, to the United Republic of Tanzania.

2006: The G'psgolox totem pole belonging to the Haisla First Nation tribe, was returned to Canada by the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, Sweden. It was the first totem pole to be restituted by a European state.

2000: A twelfth-century Uma Maheshwar stone sculpture depicting the Hindu god Shiva and his wife Parvati, stolen from Nepal in 1982, was returned to Nepal by the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin, Germany.

1989: A Paracas mantle, a 2000-year-old textile stolen from the National Museum in Lima, was returned to Peru by the National Gallery of Australia.

But Schoonderwoerd points out that the museum's management is merely the custodian of the national collection. Any repatriation must be signed off by the Culture ministry and usually entails lengthy diplomatic negotiations.

"As heritage organizations, we have become a part of political processes which we don't control," he points out. "Sometimes we are accused of hiding behind the state. But we cannot just give things back of our own accord. Restitution is not an act of heritage, it is a political act."

Argentina: At the forefront of restitution

Since 2004, Argentina has returned nearly 5,000 cultural objects seized on its territory to their countries of origin. A greater recognition of the art of pre-Columbian civilizations and the adoption of a law protecting archaeological and palaeontological heritage are at the origin of this new policy.

Irene Hartmann

Journalist at the *Clarín* newspaper, based in Buenos Aires.

The press called it "the heist of the century". The theft was spectacular, no doubt. In July 2002, some individuals dug a thirty-metre-long tunnel to enter the basement of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Asunción, Paraguay. Five paintings were stolen, including *San Jerónimo*, an anonymous sixteenth-century painting valued at $200,000. The burglars escaped and crossed the border into Argentina. Soon after, the painting was put up for sale in Posadas, in the country's northeast. But security forces tracked it down in 2008 – and Argentina returned the artwork to Paraguay that same year.

The story of the return of *San Jerónimo* is not an isolated case. Since 2004, Argentina has returned 4,825 pieces of stolen heritage – works of art, archaeological remains, and historical documents – seized on its soil, to their countries of origin. Over the last decade, the country has become a regional example in the restitution of stolen goods.

María Florencia Galesio, director of research at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Argentina, explains that this policy is the result of a growing awareness of the heritage value of objects from pre-Hispanic cultures. "Pre-Columbian art, whose aesthetic value has been under-estimated for a long time, has benefited from greater recognition in the last fifteen years," she says.

© MNBA Collection Buenos Aires Argentina (8936)

A bronze disc of the Santamariana culture, dating back to the pre-Columbian period.

The opening in 2004 of a pre-Columbian art gallery at the fine arts museum in Buenos Aires was a decisive step towards the recognition of these vestiges of past civilizations. "It is proof of the aesthetic value that we now give to the exhibits, beyond their ethnological or archaeological dimension," Florencia Galesio adds.

The Janeir affair

"This valorization owes a lot to museological institutions, but the phenomenon did not come out of nowhere – it accompanied the adoption of the law on the protection of archaeological and palaeontological heritage in 2003," says the researcher. It was the same year that Argentina ratified the UNESCO 1970 Convention to fight illicit trafficking.

The new legislation entrusts the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (INAPL, the National Institute of Latin American Anthropology and Thought) with the implementation of the law at the national level, and obliges owners of objects originating from archaeological or palaeontological sites to officially register these objects.

The adoption of the 2003 law is related to the "Janeir case", which had an impact on public opinion and helped mentalities and legislation to evolve. In the early 2000s, agents of the law enforcement agency Policía de Seguridad Aeroportuaria (Airport Security Police) were surprised to notice a large number of archaeological objects passing through the Ezeiza International Airport in Buenos Aires.

© MNBA Collection Buenos Aires Argentina (9130)

An anthropomorphic ceramic vase of Ciénaga heritage from the pre-Columbian period.

They turned to the INAPL, which trained officers to identify archaeological and palaeontological vestiges. Between 2000 and 2001, around 10,000 objects were seized from various shops in the Argentinian capital. Most of them belonged to Néstor Eduardo Janeir, an antique dealer.

It is difficult to assess the market value of goods returned by Argentina over the last fifteen years or so. "As the purchase and sale of these objects is prohibited, archaeologists are reluctant to evaluate them. For many pieces, we have no price; for others we make estimates based on the sales publications of the offenders. It could be a few hundred, thousands, or millions of dollars," explains Marcelo El Haibe, the federal police commissioner in charge of Cultural Heritage Protection, INTERPOL-Argentine Federal Police.

In fact, just over three per cent of the almost 5,000 objects repatriated to their countries of origin have a "price" attached to them. They would be worth about $860,000 in total if these pieces had been sold on the black market. Is that not enough? But this figure far from represents the importance of these restitutions, which would require calculating the sales value of the remaining ninety-seven per cent – a number that would, in any case, not reflect

the much more significant symbolic value of the objects in question.

Peru, a major beneficiary

Peru, one of the countries most affected by trafficking in the region, tops the list of states to benefit from the restitution of objects by its Argentinian neighbour – with eighty-eight per cent of stolen goods recovered. It is followed by Ecuador, which had only nine per cent of its goods returned. In 2016, 439 objects of Ecuadorian heritage and 4,150 pieces of Peruvian heritage, seized seven years earlier, were returned to their countries of origin. Restitutions were also made to Bolivia, Paraguay, and Spain.

Maps designed by Ptolemy – the second-century Egyptian astronomer, mathematician and geographer of Greek descent – were stolen from the Biblioteca Nacional de España (the National Library of Spain) in 2007 by a man posing as a researcher. Two of the stolen maps were found in Argentina, where the thief resided. They were returned to Spain the same year.

As in the case of the Spanish maps, it is common for antiquities traffickers to use labyrinthine routes across borders and oceans. "This is why victims report these incidents in their own countries, while the stolen objects are generally sold in other countries – which does not make the work of investigators any easier," says El Haibe, who estimates that the illegal trade is worth around $6.5 billion a year.

To be successful, these operations often require the collaboration of police services of different countries, but also the use of outside expertise to identify objects. "We work side by side with other organizations, such as the INAPL, or the Bernardino Rivadavia Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences, if it is a question of palaeontological pieces. Our success is the result of our commitment to this interdisciplinary work," El Haibe says.

The most recent successful operation was in 2019. It involved the recovery of 115 documents – written between 1824 and 1900, and valued at $10,000 – which were on sale at a shop in Buenos Aires. They will soon be returned to Peru, from where they were stolen.

> "Pre-Columbian art has benefited from greater recognition in the last fifteen years"

An anthropomorphic ceramic vase from the Condorhuasi culture, dating back to the pre-Columbian period.

ZOOM

When jazz fever gripped the townships

Photos: Jürgen Schadeberg
Text: Katerina Markelova, UNESCO

Jürgen Schadeberg (1931-2020), the photographer who chronicled apartheid, also documented the evolution of South African jazz for almost sixty years.*

The encounter of this exceptional photographer with a momentous era and a vibrant and revolutionary musical milieu resulted in a rich and authentic photographic series that has the value of a historical document.

At the age of 19, in 1950, Schadeberg fled Germany and its Nazi past. But the country he chose to settle in, South Africa, had just fallen into total apartheid. In Sophiatown (Johannesburg) and other South African townships, to where non-whites were gradually being expelled from the city centres, the photographer mingled with the young generation of black musicians. Mostly self-taught, with their eyes glued on Manhattan, they took over the music scene with a new and distinctive style. "In South Africa, the American jazz sound was adapted and Africanized, giving it a unique township flavour," Schadeberg explained.

Future world jazz stars – among them, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela and Abdullah Ibrahim – took their first steps in these working-class neighbourhoods. Forced into exile, mainly in the United States and Europe, many of these musicians would continue to use their talent and fame in the fight against apartheid.

It was this epoch, these aspirations, this struggle, that Schadeberg's camera captured. His work resulted in several arrests and led him into exile in 1964. Regarded as the father of South African photography, Schadeberg – who became artistic director of the black urban culture magazine *Drum* – trained a whole generation of South African photojournalists in the 1950s.

"Music, and jazz in particular, is an international language that represents freedom because of its origin – growing out of slavery," said Herbie Hancock, jazz legend and the initiator of International Jazz Day, in a special 2012 issue of the *Courier*. Declared by UNESCO in 2011, this day, marked each year on April 30, celebrates the universal values of jazz – which originated in the south of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

* *Jazz, Blues & Swing: Six Decades of Music in South Africa.* Photographs by Jürgen Schadeberg, with essays by Don Albert, Gwen Ansell, Darius Brubeck and Hotep Idris Galeta. Claremont, David Philip Publishers, 2007.

Previous page: *As a teenager in 1954, Hugh Masekela, who went on to become internationally renowned, examines a trumpet gifted to him by the jazz legend, Louis Armstrong, while his companions from the Huddleston Jazz Band look on.*

Todd Matshikiza, pianist, writer, and music critic for Drum, *the leading magazine for black urban culture, photographed in 1952. He also composed the music for* King Kong, *South Africa's first black jazz opera.*

Kippie Moeketsi in 1951. One of the greatest jazz musicians to emerge from South Africa, the saxophonist decided to stay in his country after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 – unlike many other musicians who went into exile.

Miriam Makeba, internationally renowned jazz singer and an icon of the struggle against racial segregation, in a recording studio in Johannesburg, 1955.


TRUTONE
Jambo record
NEW-STYLE DISCS
TROPIK D-C
TROPIK D-C
Envee
TRUTONE
COLUMBIA
QUALITY
Envee
TRUTONE
BB records
TRUTONE
COLUMBIA
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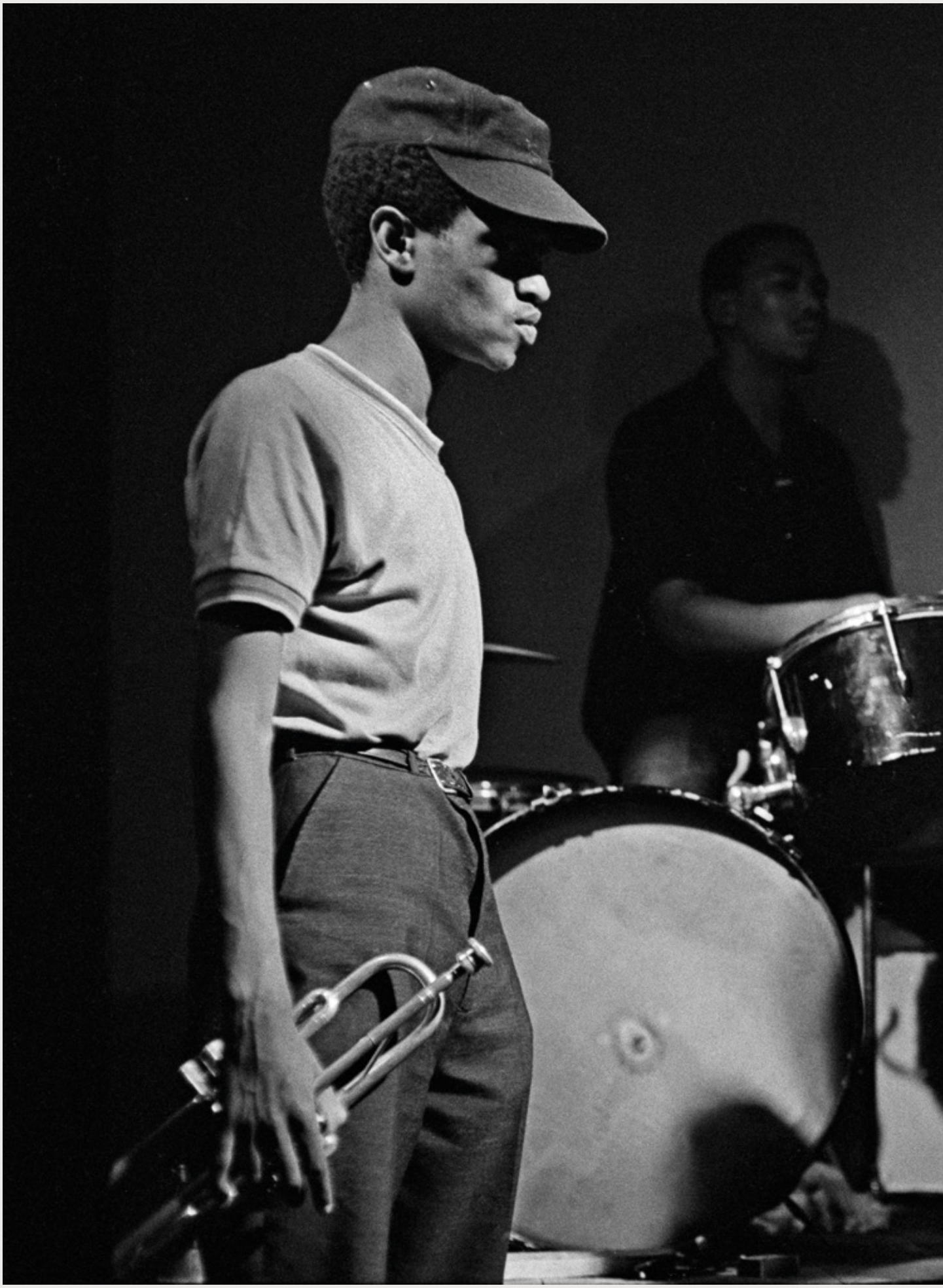
TRUTONE
BB records

General Duze, the legendary jazz guitarist who played with South Africa's leading jazz bands, photographed with his children in George Goch township, Johannesburg, 1951.

A brilliant saxophonist, Mackay Davashe (photographed in 1952) was also one of the most creative composers and band leaders of his time. His composition Lakutshon Ilanga, *which transcended time and borders, was made famous by Miriam Makeba in the late 1950s.*

Tap dancing at the Ritz, a fashionable club in downtown Johannesburg, 1952.

From Orlando to Sophiatown to Mamelodi, Pretoria, improvised dance halls flourished everywhere in South African townships, 1951.



Pianist and musical icon Abdullah Ibrahim founded South Africa's biggest bebop band, the Jazz Epistles, in 1959. In this photo, taken in 1979, he is playing at a friend's wedding in New York, where he went into exile in the 1960s.

Pages 36-37: *Members of the legendary Blue Notes sextet, trumpeter and flautist Mongezi Feza and saxophone maestro Dudu Pukwana jamming in a smoky basement club in Hillbrow, a district of Johannesburg, 1962.*

Jazz diva and composer Gloria Bosman, photographed in 2001. She studied opera at the Pretoria Technikon, and is one of the faces of a new generation of South African jazz musicians.

In 1998, The Divas – Abigail Kubeka, Thandi Klaasen, Dolly Rathebe and Mara Louw – sang classical jazz and blues from the '50s at a tribute to Sophiatown. The township, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, was razed to the ground by the regime in 1955.

> "Systemic racism is based on the inferiorization of certain minority groups, who are historically considered subordinate"

Racism:

Confronting the unthinkable

The police brutality that came into focus in the United States in spring 2020 sparked a wave of protests that extended far beyond the country's borders. Racism, whether systemic or "ordinary", remains deeply rooted in the minds and workings of contemporary societies, the author argues.

Véronique Tadjo

A writer, academic, and artist who was born in Paris and grew up in her native Côte d'Ivoire, Tadjo is the author of several books, including *Far from My Father,* her most recent novel. She now divides her time between London and Abidjan.

Images of George Floyd, a handcuffed man who was suffocated and killed by a policeman in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 – posted on the internet and then picked up by the international media – sparked worldwide protests and brought the issue of racism back into the spotlight.

For a while, we may have nurtured the illusion that we are living in a post-racial era. The elections of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa in 1994 (to 1999) and of Barack Obama, the first black head of state of the United States in 2008 (who served as president from 2009 to 2017) were key moments that contributed to this feeling. A similar optimism prevailed in France, where republican values seemed to have overcome the notion of race, which was condemned to obsolescence.

Yet "ordinary" racism has never ceased to permeate our daily lives, feeding on prejudices and preconceptions. Sometimes subtle, often head-on, it rests on three pillars, according to French genetic anthropologist and ethnobiologist Évelyne Heyer and historian Carole Reynaud-Paligot, who worked on an exhibition (2017-2018) at the Musée de l'homme (Museum of Mankind) in Paris. These are: "categorizing individuals into groups (which is a reflex of the human brain, but the criteria for classification vary according to socio-historical contexts); hierarchizing them (some are valued or devalued for arbitrary reasons); and essentializing them – or presenting these differences as being insurmountable or inevitable, because they are hereditary."

Rejection of the Other

This rejection of the Other takes many forms. It does not spare celebrities – manifesting itself, for instance, in the jeering of a black football player or the unleashing of social media networks against black politicians. More often than

> "'Ordinary' racism has never ceased to permeate our daily lives, feeding on prejudices and preconceptions"

CC BY 2.0 photo by Tony Webster

A group of protestors in Minnesota pulled down a statue of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, June 2020. It was one of several statues associated with slavery and colonization that were toppled during nationwide demonstrations in the United States.

not, however, it is ordinary citizens who are the victims – as they struggle to find housing or employment because of their racial origin. This discriminatory attitude is usually disowned by the general public. Recognized as being detrimental to social cohesion, it is rightly or wrongly attributed to reactionary thinking.

According to the psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, a leading advocate of decolonization, "Racism is not the whole but the most visible, the most day-to-day and, not to mince matters, the crudest element of a given structure."

It is this given structure that we call "systemic racism". More pernicious and therefore more difficult to expose, it is concealed even in the workings of the state. For those who have never been confronted with these forms of racism, it is easy to deny that they even exist. Aren't there laws that censure different forms of discrimination? In France, the first national law against racism, which dates back to 1 July 1972, has been amended and improved many times. In addition, there are several European and international conventions that can be used to condemn abuses. But laws alone are not enough to curb everyday discrimination. More needs to be done.

© Patience Zalanga

Protestors march in July 2020 to commemorate the fourth death anniversary of Philando Castile, who was fatally shot at a traffic stop by police in Minnesota, United States on July 6, 2016.

Systemic racism

The extent of systemic racism cannot be understood by reducing it to isolated acts. It is about the inferiorization of certain minority groups, who are historically considered subordinate – because of the legacy of slavery and/or colonization. In a so-called democratic society, it infiltrates the law enforcement system (racial profiling and police violence), the prison system (higher numbers of prisoners and heavier sentences), the education system (failure at school), the health system (limited access to health care), the world of work (higher unemployment rates) and social mobility (working-class housing estates and neighbourhoods) – the list is not exhaustive.

According to historian Laure Murat, Director of the Center for European and Russian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), systemic racism is "an institutional monopoly that most often perpetuates a culture – [that is] sexist, racist, violent".

The demonstrations that have taken place around the world in support of America's Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement are the expression of an awareness of the multifaceted nature of racism – which paves the way for different forms of abuse (such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism, transphobia, etc.). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic – marked by its collective experience of confinement, suffering, and death – has undoubtedly accentuated public sensitivity to this tragedy.

Black Lives Matter is part of the history of the struggle of black Americans for racial equality – from the beginnings of slavery on the plantations of America's southern states in the seventeenth century, to the fight for civil rights in the 1960s, which ended segregation in public places, transport and the education system.

This movement draws its strength from past struggles and victories, even if they did not lead to the eradication of racism from American society. But it is striking to note that it did succeed in mobilizing the masses around the idea of an internationalization of social injustice. Whether in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia or South Africa, the denunciations of police brutality and other forms of exclusion have multiplied – and led to a collective rejection of oppression, humiliation and domination.

Resistance to change

However, some resistance to change is to be expected. After the anti-racist signs and slogans, major commercial brands using more inclusive advertising, and bookshops rushing to promote works by black authors and books on racism, a turnaround is possible.

Confronted with the material damage during many of these demonstrations and the fear of public disorder, support for anti-racism could wane – and give way to clashes between hostile groups, any challenge to the status quo, or to violent clashes with law enforcement.

In this context, the toppling of monuments to racism has already proved contentious. The fact that BLM has no real centre is also a stumbling block. The movement seems to have split and is struggling to control the extremism of a minority of very active militants.

In order to change society, the momentum of solidarity must go beyond protests and symbols. "But if there were no 'divisions' and if everyone was always in full agreement on everything, we wouldn't need democracy," Jan-Werner Müller, professor of politics at Princeton University reminds us in an op-ed in the French daily *Libération*, on 30 June 2020. "Democracy is a matter of regulating conflicts (by constitutions and, in particular, by fundamental rights). In a democracy, unanimity is not a value in itself."

Fighting racism is not about helping black people, but of achieving a society where differences are respected, and there are equal opportunities for all.

OUR GUESTS

Aude Bernheim and Flora Vincent

Biologists at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, they are the founders of WAX Science, an association that promotes gender equality in the sciences.

“We must educate algorithms”

© François le Loup

Sexist algorithms? The question may seem odd. Coded by humans, the algorithms used by artificial intelligence are not free of stereotypes. But while they can induce sexist or racist biases, they can also be used to advance the cause of gender equality. This is what Aude Bernheim and Flora Vincent demonstrate in their book, *L’Intelligence artificielle, pas sans elles!* (Artificial intelligence, not without women!).

Interview by Agnès Bardon

UNESCO

● ***How did you become interested in the gender issue in artificial intelligence (AI)?***

Aude Bernheim: Originally, our thinking focused on the links between gender equality and science. In 2013, we founded the association WAX Science, or WAX (What About Xperiencing Science), to examine how the lack of gender diversity in scientific research teams could potentially affect the products of science and technology. Our work on AI stems from this reflection.

Actually, we weren’t really surprised to find gender biases in these technologies because they exist in many other fields. There was no reason for AI to escape them. But the consequences are numerous, and go beyond the usual issues of professional equality or salaries. The stereotypes contained in the algorithms can have a negative impact on the way job applications are screened – by excluding women from technical positions – salary proposals, and even medical diagnoses.

Flora Vincent: Scientific teams lack diversity – the phenomenon is well-known. What is not so well-known is that this has consequences on how research is developed and what subjects are given priority. An American science historian, Londa Schiebinger, has been working on this topic recently. She shows that the more women there are on a team, the more likely it is for the gender issue to be taken into account in the study itself.

There are many examples of this discrimination in research. One example is that drugs are tested more on male rats because they have fewer hormones, and therefore it's considered easier to measure side effects. Another example: for crash tests, standard 1.70-metre and seventy-kilogram dummies, modelled on the average size and build of a man, are used. As a result, the seatbelt does not take into account certain situations, such as pregnant women, for example.

● ***Has computer science been a predominantly male-dominated discipline from the outset?***

Bernheim: No, that was not always the case. In the early twentieth century, computer science was a discipline that required a lot of rather tedious calculations. At the time, these were often done by women. When the first computers came along, women were in the lead. The work was not seen as prestigious at the time. As recently as 1984, thirty-seven per cent of those employed in the computer industry in the United States were women. By comparison, in France in 2018, only ten per cent of students in computer science courses were women; it is estimated that only twelve per cent of students in the AI sector are women.

In fact, a significant change took place in the 1980s, with the emergence of the personal computer. From then on, computer technology acquired unprecedented economic importance. The recreational dimension of computers also emerged in those years, developing a very masculine cultural imagery around the figure of the geek. This dual trend was accompanied by the marginalization of women. This shows that boys' affinity for computers is not natural, but that it is, above all, cultural and constructed.

● ***One might think that algorithms are neutral by nature. To what extent do they contribute to reproducing gender bias?***

Bernheim: Some whistleblowers realized quite quickly that algorithms were biased. They found, for example, that translation software [into French, which has masculine and feminine nouns] tended to give professions a gender by translating the English "the doctor" into "*le docteur*" (masculine), and "the nurse" into "*l'infirmière*" (feminine). When voice assistants appeared – whether Alexa, Siri, or Cortana – they all had feminine names and responded to orders in a rather submissive manner, even when they were insulted (see box).

In 2016, Joy Buolamwini, an African-American researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), became interested in facial recognition algorithms. Her work showed that they [the AI] were trained on databases which contained mostly photos of white males. As a result, they were much less effective on [recognizing] black women or Asian men, than on white men. You can imagine that if she had been part of the team developing these algorithms, the situation would have been different.

Vincent: Coding an algorithm is like writing a text. There's a certain amount of subjectivity that manifests itself in the choice of words, the turns of phrases – even if we have the impression that we are writing a very factual text. To identify the biases, our approach consisted of dissecting the different stages of what we call "sexist contagion". That's because there isn't a single cause that creates a biased algorithm, but rather, it's the result of a chain of causality that intervenes at the different stages of its construction.

In effect, if the people who code, test, control and use an algorithm are not aware of these potential biases, they reproduce them. In the vast majority of cases, there's no wilful intention to discriminate. More often than not, we simply reproduce unconscious stereotypes forged in the course of our lives and education.

● ***Is there an awareness of the bias in certain AI products today?***

Bernheim: AI is a field where everything is evolving very quickly – the technology itself, but also the thinking about its use. Compared to other disciplines, the problem of discrimination emerged very early on. Barely three years after the onset of algorithm fever, whistleblowers started drawing attention to the differentiated treatment of certain algorithms. This is already a subject in its own right in the scientific community. It fuels many debates and has led to research work on the detection of bias and the implications of algorithms from an ethical, mathematical and computer science point of view. This awareness has also recently been reflected in the mainstream media. Not all the problems have been solved, but they have been identified and once they have been, solutions can be implemented.

© François le Loup

Voice assistants: Apps that reinforce gender bias

"I'd blush if I could": for years, this is how Siri, Apple's voice-activated assistant reacted, if a gendered insult was hurled at her. This incongruous response was the inspiration for the title of *I'd Blush if I Could*, a UNESCO publication that examines the impact of gender bias on the most common artificial intelligence (AI) applications, like voice assistants.

Most voice assistants, like Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Microsoft's Cortana, have women's names and voices, and a docile "personality". These machines that have invaded our daily lives express a submissive style that illustrates the gender bias in some AI applications.

This is not surprising, given that the tech teams developing these cutting-edge technologies are made up mainly of men. Globally, only twelve per cent of AI researchers today are women. They comprise only six per cent of software developers and file thirteen times fewer patents in information and communication technologies (ICTs) than their male colleagues.

To overcome these prejudices, the UNESCO publication makes a series of recommendations. In particular, it recommends ending the practice of giving voice assistants a female voice by default, and programming them to discourage the use of sexist insults. In particular, the publication stresses the need to provide girls and women with the technical skills to develop new technologies on an equal footing with men.

In this area, statistics sometimes defy conventional wisdom. The countries closest to achieving gender equality, particularly in Europe, have the lowest rates of women employed in the technology sector. In contrast, some countries with low levels of gender equality have high percentages of women graduates in new technologies.

In Belgium, for example, only six per cent of graduates in ICTs are women, while in the United Arab Emirates, fifty-eight per cent are women. Hence the need – insist the authors of the publication – to adopt measures to encourage the presence of women in digital education everywhere.

Launched in May 2019, *I'd Blush if I Could* was produced in collaboration with Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the EQUALS Skills Coalition, a global partnership of governments and organizations that promotes gender balance in the technology sector.

> "Coding an algorithm is like writing a text. There's some subjectivity that manifests itself in the choice of words"

● ***How can algorithms be made more egalitarian?***

Bernheim: To begin with, we must act at the level of databases, so that they are representative of the population in all its diversity. Some companies are already doing this and are working on databases that take into account differences in gender, nationality or morphology. As a result of work published on the shortcomings of facial recognition software, some companies have retrained their algorithms to be more inclusive. Companies have also emerged that specialize in developing tools to evaluate algorithms and determine whether they are biased.

Vincent: At the same time, in the scientific and research community, there has been reflection on how to implement a more independent evaluation, and on the need for algorithmic transparency. Some experts, such as Buolamwini, advocate the development and generalization of an inclusive code, just as there is for inclusive writing.

Among existing initiatives, we should also mention the work done by the collective Data for Good, which is thinking about ways to make algorithms serve the general interest. This collective has drafted an ethical charter called the Hippocratic Oath for Data Scientists, establishing a list of very concrete parameters to be checked before implementing an algorithm, to ensure it isn't discriminatory. It is important to support this type of initiative.

● ***Could AI eventually become an example for how biases can be combated?***

Bernheim: In a sense, yes, to the extent that we became aware fairly quickly of the biases these new technologies could induce. AI is in the process of revolutionizing our societies, so it can also make things evolve in a positive way. AI makes it possible to manage and analyze very large amounts of data. It enabled Google, in particular, to create an algorithm in 2016 to quantify the speaking time of women in major American film productions and show their under-representation. At the same time, the teams developing algorithms also need to become more gender-balanced. Today, however, for a number of reasons – including girls' self-censorship when it comes to scientific fields, and the sexism that reigns in high-tech companies – very few women study computer science. It will take time to reverse this trend.

Vincent: Of course, the algorithms need to be educated, but changing a few lines of code will not be enough to solve the problems. We must bear in mind that there will be no willingness to code for equality if the teams involved do not include women.

MAPPING

THE WORLD

Beirut: Rebuilding the future through education and culture

CC BY-SA 4.0 photo by Edeym87

The Sursock Palace, a family residence in Beirut's historic Achrafieh district, photographed in June 2020, before the blasts.

The 160-year-old Sursock Palace and the Sursock Museum opposite it, both have rich art collections. The buildings have been severely damaged by the explosions.

Mila Ibrahimova

UNESCO

Already reeling from the economic crisis and the global pandemic, Beirut was rocked by two deadly explosions on 4 August 2020. The blasts claimed nearly 200 lives, left thousands wounded, and ravaged a large area at the heart of the Lebanese capital.

To help the city recover, UNESCO launched Li Beirut (For Beirut, in Arabic) on 27 August 2020, an international fundraising appeal to support the rehabilitation of schools, historic heritage buildings, museums and galleries.

A preliminary assessment of the damage found that at least 8,000 buildings have been affected. These include 640 historic buildings, around sixty of which are at risk of collapse. The Sursock Museum, the Archaeology Museum of the American University of Beirut, and the historic neighbourhoods of Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhaël have been severely damaged. The Marfa contemporary art gallery and Galerie Tanit are completely destroyed. In addition, cultural institutions are facing substantial losses in revenues. According to initial estimates, $500 million will be needed to support heritage and the creative economy in the coming year.

On the education front, 163 public and private schools in and around Beirut were damaged by the blasts – which could deprive more than 85,000 students of their right to education. Five technical and vocational compounds, which include twenty TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) schools and institutes, have also been damaged.

UNESCO, which co-ordinates the United Nations action for education in Beirut, is leading the efforts of partners and donors to rehabilitate schools, and to ensure that learning never stops. The Organization has committed that forty of the 163 schools affected will be immediately rebuilt with funds it has already raised. An estimated $23 million will be required to support education.

Schools

Source: UNESCO

163 schools damaged or destroyed

A public school in Beirut's Achrafieh district, one of 163 schools badly damaged by the blasts.

85,000 students deprived of education

© UNESCO/Fouad Choufany

$23 million needed to support education

© UNESCO / Fouad Choufany

The École des Trois Docteurs, a school in the Gemmayzeh district, damaged by the blasts.

UNESCO, which co-ordinates the rehabilitation of schools, has committed to immediately rehabilitate 40 of the 163 schools affected.

Heritage

Source: UNESCO

8,000 buildings damaged

640 historical buildings affected

Surveying the damage wrought by the blasts in the Mar Mikhaël neighbourhood, 13 August 2020.

© Bilal Jawich/Xinhua/Newscom/ABACAPRESS.COM

60 of these are at risk of collapse

Donate to Li Beirut

Galerie Tanit, a contemporary art gallery, photographed two days after the explosions.

© Roy Dib / Courtesy of Galerie Tanit

$500 million needed to support heritage and the creative economy

UNESCO Publishing

New publications

World Heritage No. 95

Interpretation and COVID-19

ISSN 1020-4202
EAN 3059630101950
68 pp., 220 x 280 mm, paperback, €7.50
UNESCO Publishing/Publishing for Development Ltd.

The year 2020 began with an unprecedented health crisis that has affected us all. Inevitably, World Heritage sites have also suffered. The abrupt halt in travel and tourism has cut off the stream of visitors and the revenue they bring. For some sites, this is the only source of income to cover conservation, maintenance and salaries.

Even so, some positive aspects were noted. For a number of properties, the halt in visitors and traffic provided a respite for natural areas – in some cultural sites, rehabilitation or restoration works were made possible. In this issue, site managers tell us how they have coped in these exceptional circumstances.

Global Education Monitoring Report 2020

Inclusion and Education: All Means All

ISBN 978-92-3-100388-2
424 pp, 215 x 280 mm, paperback, €55
UNESCO Publishing

The 2020 Report looks at social, economic and cultural mechanisms that discriminate against disadvantaged children, youth and adults – keeping them out of education, or marginalized in it. Spurred by their commitment to fulfil the right to inclusive education, countries are expanding their vision of inclusion in education, to put diversity at the core of their systems. Yet, the implementation of well-meaning laws and policies often falters.

Released in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis – which has exacerbated underlying inequalities – the Report argues that resistance to addressing every learner's needs is a real threat to achieving global education targets.

Culture | 2030 Indicators

ISBN 978-92-3-100355-4
110 pp, 210 x 280 mm, PDF
UNESCO Publishing
Publication available on https://unesdoc.unesco.org/

The Culture | 2030 Indicators is a framework of thematic indicators whose purpose is to measure and monitor the progress of culture's enabling contribution to the national and local implementation of the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs).

The methodology is developed to assist countries and cities with very different capacities regarding the collection of data and cultural statistics. The evidence gathered will inform policies and decisions, as well as operational actions – enabling greater investments in culture as a sector of activity, and a greater recognition of its transversal role across other sectors.

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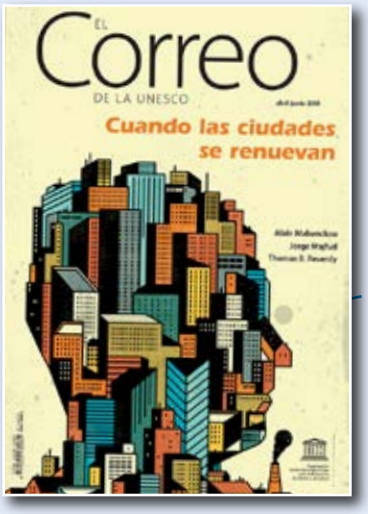

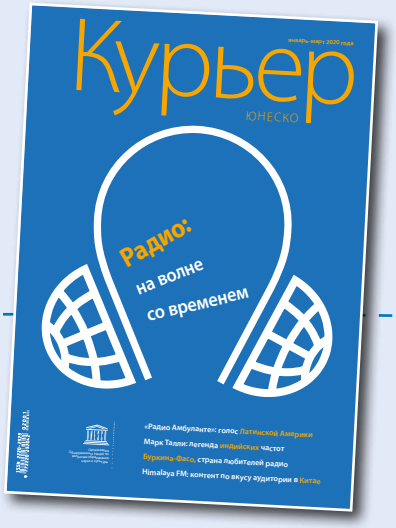

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How much for the soul of a nation?

The Just Judges
Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, 1432
This is the lower left panel of the Ghent Altarpiece, a national treasure and one of the major paintings of the Flemish Renaissance. This essential part, which may contain portraits of Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, was stolen in 1934 and never found again.

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