

# LOOTED/STOLEN CULTURAL ARTEFACTS

## DECLARED “SHARED HERITAGE”

*“The restitution of those cultural objects which our museums and collections, directly or indirectly, possess thanks to the colonial system and are now being demanded, must also not be postponed with cheap arguments and tricks.”*

Gert v. Paczensky and Herbert Ganslmayr, *Nofretete will nach Hause* (1)

We must admit that the supporters of Western domination in the cultural area are very active and are never tired of inventing conceptions and slogans that will protect their illegal holding of looted / stolen cultural artefacts of others. Their capacity for inventing hegemonic constructs that may even impress some of the deprived peoples should not be underestimated.

Hardly is one theory destroyed, another one rises or an old one is revived or modified. The “universal museum”, at least as a mechanism for defending Western holding of looted artefacts, is now considered dead. (2) But in its place appears a revived theory of “shared heritage” advanced to serve the same purpose as all previous inventions: justify the continued wrongful detention of the cultural artefacts of others.



*Queen Mother Idia, Benin, Nigeria, now in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin. Declared a shared legacy by the Humboldt-Forum, Berlin, Germany*

Just in time before Neil MacGregor moves on to the new Humboldt-Forum, Berlin, as prime mover in the triumvirate that will direct the new pompous cultural institution (3), now under construction until 2021, members of this body are very active in explaining the position of that institution as regards the enormous amount of looted/stolen artefacts, some 508, 000 objects, that are to be transported from the Ethnologisches Museum, Dahlem, Berlin, to the Humboldt-Forum, Berlin Mitte. The other two members are, Horst Bredekamp, art historian and professor of Art History at the Humboldt University, Berlin and Herman Parzinger, archaeologist and President of the rich and powerful German cultural foundation, *Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz*. To assist the triumvirate is an international [Advisory Board](#) consisting of 38 international museum experts including the archaeologist George Abungu, museum director Samuel Sidibe and Prof. Jyotindra Jain. Another body of 8 members, [Agora Advisors' Circle](#), assists with planning the content of activities in the Humboldt Forum and includes Okwui Enwezor and Arjun Appadurai.

Before the ultimate spin doctor (or should it be spin professor or better, emeritus spin professor) assumes his functions in Berlin, his German colleagues have been doing the ground work to prepare Germans as regards the looted/stolen objects in Berlin. The German public has been made aware of this issue by the very active group, No-Humboldt 21, which is opposed to the continued illegal detention of artefacts of others by German institutions. (4)



*Berlin Palace-Humboldt Forum, Berlin.*

Members of the triumvirate have been spreading the concept of “shared heritage”, a new defence line against possible claims of dispossessed countries, such as Nigeria, for the Benin Bronzes. As readers know, our main concern is not with the concept of Humboldt-Forum itself, which is a matter for Germans to decide. We are concerned with the status of the looted/stolen African and Asian artefacts that are to be moved to the new institution. As far as we are concerned, the physical change of the location of looted objects does not by any

means affect their legal or illegal status. The concept of “shared heritage” is intended to mask illegality through the new location and new presentation of the objects. This new institution will not change the status of the looted objects any more than the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, did when it was opened in 2006. (5)

Herman Parzinger has spoken for more international cooperation between museums, saying Germans have in Berlin collections from various countries with interesting origins. *”We want to expand our view of the objects through histories that link to the countries of origin”*. This model of shared heritage means a common responsibility in the research and presentation of the collections. This offer of a concrete dialogue of cultures has been accepted by all. *“So far there has been no demand for restitution from other countries.”*(6)



*Lime Flask in the form of a standing male figure, Colombia, now in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin.*

Parzinger’s understanding of “shared heritage” is an intensive and permanent communication with the countries from which the objects came, with artists, scholars and representatives of indigenous groups, together to interpret the

various objects. With interpretation of objects, he thinks of what he calls multiperspectivity: several interpretations of the same object - interpretation by the Germans, interpretation from the country of origin and common interpretation by both.

For Parzinger then “shared legacy” does not involve sharing the legacy that is in the Berlin museums. It simply means cooperation with countries of origin and scholars from those countries. Can one really assert that the people of Benin City, Nigeria and Berlin, Germany have a shared legacy in the Benin Bronzes? The 508 Benin Bronzes that are in the Berlin Ethnology Museum are no legacy from Oba Ovonramwen of to the Germans. They bought these artefacts three months after the British had invaded Benin in 1897 and looted some 3000 artefacts, knowing very well they were looted/stolen items. Indeed [Felix von Luschan](#) who was instrumental in procuring these artefacts for the Berlin Ethnology Museum expressly approved the British use of force to secure the artefacts. In what sense then can they be described as shared legacy? Can a person or his friends steal my objects and later on describe them as our shared legacy? This would be a shameless affront that leaves respect and morality banned from human affairs.

It would also appear that the Germans are not thinking of sharing German or European artworks with Africans and Asians with whom they allegedly have a shared heritage. Works of Sandro Botticelli, Albrecht Durer, Hans Holbein, Pablo Picasso, Raphael, Rembrandt, Peter Paul Rubens, Van Gogh and other European masters are not involved. They do not wish to share with African and Asian States even the looted/stolen African and Asian objects. They wish to share the task of interpretation and display with chosen experts from those States. A seemingly generous act that can only benefit the new German institution that holds the objects. These objects have not been seen in their countries of origin since they were looted. For example, the looted Benin Bronzes have not been seen in Benin since 1897 when they were seized by the invading British Army. The policy is [mine is mine, yours is ours](#) The Europeans’ idea of sharing is very strange indeed.

As for the assertion by Parzinger that no country has asked for the restitution of artefacts, I can only shake my head in utter disbelief at this provocative assertion that is bereft of evidence but seems to be the favourite argument of many museum officials in the Western world. We have repeatedly written articles decrying this shamelessness but this baseless assertion keeps coming from people who should know better. (7) At the opening of various exhibitions on

Benin the Nigerians demanded the return of their artefacts. A Nigerian Minister of Culture travelled from Lagos to Berlin asking for the return of the Benin Bronzes, in a speech entitled precisely [Berlin Plea for the return of the Benin Bronzes](#). The persistent denial by Western officials of the demand for the return of our cultural artefacts does not serve any purpose except perhaps to underline the European contempt for Africans, our intelligence and our institutions.

How can Westerners speak of a shared legacy at a time when they do not even want Africans and Asians to come to their countries and many thousands have lost their lives in trying to reach Europe, fleeing disastrous economies for which the West has been largely responsible? They speak of migrants as if they were animals and describe them as a danger to their environment and standard of living. African and Asian art objects are very welcome in Europe but Africans and Asians are less appreciated. They will praise African and Asian art to the skies but keep Africans and Asians to the ground.



*Avalokitesvara, Goddess of Compassion, China, now in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin.*

The concept of shared heritage is not new and can be found in different formulations such as “heritage of all nations of the world”, “world heritage”, “cultural heritage of all mankind” in United Nations and UNESCO conventions and under given circumstances, can encourage States to co-operate. (8) But the immediate model for the use of the concept “shared heritage” by the Humboldt-Forum is, not surprisingly, the British Museum. The museum defends it holding of the Parthenon Marbles by saying “*They are a part of the world’s shared*

*heritage and transcend political boundaries”.*

[www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/news.../trustees\\_statement.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news.../trustees_statement.aspx)

The usage made by the venerable museum of the concept of heritage in its dispute with Greece over the Parthenon Marbles does not correspond with the normal understanding of the notion of shared heritage in international relations.

Can the concept of shared heritage be used to cover stolen/looted objects which have well-documented and known histories indicating the use of violence in the acquisition of the cultural artefacts of others? Critical Germans have rejected the use of the notion in this context. (8) Will Africans and Asians also reject vigorously this veiled attempt to rewrite our histories and deprive us of our cultural artefacts?

As for the concept of multiplicity of interpretation, we are not sure that it is intended seriously to enable the discussion of other views, different from those of the planners of the Forum that could lead to the abandonment of Western assumptions of superiority. A conclusion, for example, that these African and Asian artefacts would serve mankind better by being returned to their countries of origin could hardly be accepted by the management. Whatever discussions take place in the Forum would be under the control of the Forum. Even if Western positions are criticised, what would be the effects of such discussions regarding basic issues such as the acquisition of artefacts in the colonial days? The distinction between the West and the rest of the world is the basis of all the learned rhetoric from the Forum.

That Germans/Westerners would have their own interpretation of an object, different from the interpretation of the owners and users in its country of origin and then think of a common interpretation may appeal to some. But we suggest that as long as looted artefacts remain in Western museums primacy should be given to the interpretation in the country of origin. We should not encourage the possibility of a different interpretation being used to justify retention. For instance, an interpretation based on the presence of an African diaspora in the West. We are reminded of attempts to attribute to the Benin Bronzes values and functions other than what they had in Benin and indirectly suggest they should remain where they are in the West. This idea is of course, not unrelated to the idea of Neil MacGregor that the Parthenon Marbles in London have a different history from that of the Parthenon Marbles in the Acropolis. This approach is only a step away from declaring that the object does not even reflect the history

of its country of origin but rather that of its present location. The notion of shared legacy does not seem very far.

We do not so far see in the discussions around the Humboldt-Forum a genuine desire to respect the cultures represented by the looted/stolen objects in Berlin or a desire to share knowledge or the objects. We see efforts to procure for the institution flair of internationality by selecting scholars from around the world but not asking cultural institutions in the relevant States to nominate representatives. The Germans thus choose their own Asians and Africans and present the advisory body of experts as representative of the world.

As for returning or sharing the objects now in the Ethnologisches Museum, this has not occurred to the founders of the Humboldt-Forum. We have suggested that, for example, 300 or so of the 508 Benin artefacts in Berlin could be returned to the Oba of Benin as a mark of genuine withdrawal from the hitherto Eurocentric position that justifies actions and crimes in the colonial period and does not try to make amends. (9) But who cares? When introduced to the public at the awarding of a prize, Neil MacGregor declared:

*“When the non-European collections from Dahlem are exhibited at the Berlin Palace it will be possible here in the centre of Berlin to view the cultures of the world better than anywhere else. This is an historic opportunity for Germany, for Europe, for the entire world.”* (10)

With his usual hyperbole, masking the truth about the violations of the human rights of African and Asian peoples, the future artistic director of the Humboldt Forum revealed the future direction of the new institution. Similar statements were made by him to justify the presence of stolen/looted objects of others in the British Museum: It was only in London that one could understand the various cultures. Now it is only in Berlin that one could understand the various cultures of the world.

No matter what is said, nothing has been done so far to indicate that European arrogance and assumptions of superiority have been abandoned. Can one condemn colonial aggression and still keep its benefits without regret?

No one would object to international co-operation in the field of culture but can we honestly achieve anything worthwhile when one side dictates all along and is not willing, even to apologize or say sorry for shameful events and make necessary amendments but declares unilaterally the looted/stolen artefacts of others as shared legacy?

Let there be no mistake. The new institution in Berlin is to reflect the power and glory of Deutschland. It is to cement and document the regained might of a country that has lots of achievements to show. Nothing will detract from the successful and triumphal march of regained power of a State conscious of its own position in the world. Certainly no moral or legal claims of former colonized and enslaved peoples would hinder the utilization of their looted or stolen artefacts by the strong State to demonstrate its might, showing the relative positions in terms of cultural and political development. Berlin should be the centre of the world from which all other cultures will be judged and assessed. There is the word of a well-known expert that we can best assess all cultures from the banks of the Spree. He will soon be singing the song or the hymn, as some have made him a saint, that the Germans would like to hear We shall soon hear that the Benin Bronzes have never been better displayed as in Berlin, far better than in the British Museum where the daylight never shines on them; they are better exposed in Berlin City than in Benin City where the public never had easy access to the palace of Oba Ovonramwen until the British invaded Benin in 1897, forgetting conveniently that a person from Benin City would have no visa for Berlin City



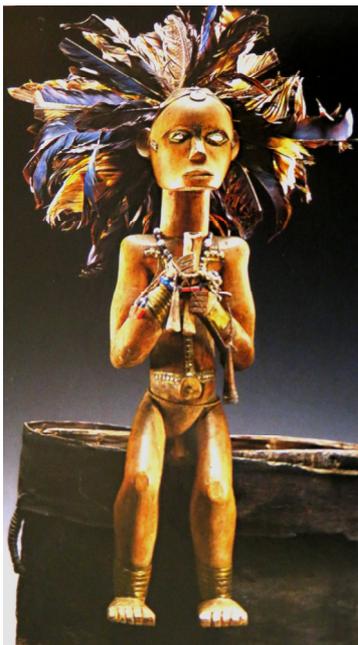
*Uli figure, New Ireland, now in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin.*

The President of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, [Herman Parzinger](#), has stated clearly the ambition of the Humboldt-Forum:

*“At the same time, there is an uncommonly human message behind the Humboldt-Forum project. The world will be able to see itself here.*

*Germany is thus reflecting on its great tradition as a nation of science and culture and developing from that a new vision for the future.”*

When the idea of transferring the artefacts from Dahlem to the centre of Berlin was raised in 2008, we pointed out that in our times, the essential question was not whether the artefacts should be transferred to the centre of Berlin but rather the legitimacy of German possession and the need to return the objects to their rightful owners: *“Ethical and legal considerations should lead German intellectuals to plead for the return of all these objects except those which the owners consent to leave in Europe. This should be considered as the minimum sign that the evils of the past are condemned by the present generation and that they are seeking to take new paths in their relations with Africa and Asia. They should abandon any belief that one can overcome the past without any effort and without any critical examination of the past. They should consider “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (“coming to terms with the past”) as relevant not only with regard to the Nazi past but also the colonialist past. Colonialism did not come to an end with the end of colonization any more than Nazism came to an end with the termination of Nazi domination in Europe.”* (11) Must we remain silent in the face of obvious violations of our human right to our cultural artefacts because of the ambitions of rich and powerful States?



*Byeri, guardian of ancestral relics, Republic of Congo, now in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin.*

It was in Berlin that the African Continent was divided and shared among the European powers in the notorious Berlin Conference of 1884-85. It is in Berlin again that some of the fruits of colonialism and imperialism are being consecrated and confirmed. The first time around we were not invited or informed but now we know what is going on. We have our diplomatic missions in Berlin. Have any of them conveyed our position to the German Government and the German public? Where are the defenders of African interests? Where are those paid to protect and preserve African culture and its achievements?

***“The men and women of these countries have the right to recover these cultural assets which are part of their being”.*** (12)

Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, Former Director-General of UNESCO.

Kwame Opoku.

20 August, 2015.

## **NOTES**

1. *“Die Rückgabe jener Kulturschätze, die unsere Museen und Sammlungen direkt oder indirekt dem Kolonialsystemverdanken und die jetzt zurückverlangt werden, sollte ebenfalls nicht mit billigen Argumenten und Tricks hinausgezögert werden“.*

Gert v. Paczensky and Herbert Ganslmayr, *Nofretete will nach Hause*, 1984, Bertelsmann Verlag, Munich, p.185.

2. K. Opoku, “Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums: Singular Failure of an Arrogant Imperialist Project”,  
[www.modernghana.com/.../declaration-on-the-importance-and-value-of-...](http://www.modernghana.com/.../declaration-on-the-importance-and-value-of-...)

3. On the Humboldt-Forum, see inter alia,

[Stiftung Berliner Schloss – Humboldtforum](http://www.sbs-humboldtforum.de/)

[www.sbs-humboldtforum.de/](http://www.sbs-humboldtforum.de/)

Home - Humboldt-Forum

[www.humboldt-forum.de/en/home/](http://www.humboldt-forum.de/en/home/)

Humboldt-Forum: Startseite

[www.humboldt-forum.de/](http://www.humboldt-forum.de/)

Critics have not failed to notice the symbolism of the choice of location of the new cultural institution. The new institution is standing on the ground where the Berlin Stadtschloss was built in 1400s as home for the rulers of Brandenburg, Prussia and later of Germany. It was an important symbol of Berlin that was damaged during the Second World War through bombardment. In 1950 it was torn down by the German Democratic Republic (D.D.R.) which built in its place the Palace of the People. Reunited Germany tore down the Palace of the People and is now building a new palace that will house the Humboldt Forum. Some have called building palace of hypocrisy. Die ZEIT: "Humboldt-Forum: Palast der Verlogenheit"; ZEIT ONLINE: <http://www.zeit.de/2015/24/humboldt-forum-berlin-richtfest>

[www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de) › ... › Jahrgang: 2015

Others say it is the palace of slave traders:

Der Tagesspiegel: "Proteste gegen Stadtschloss in Berlin-Mitte: Schloss preußischer Sklavenhändler"

See [No Humboldt 21](http://www.no-humboldt21.de)

[www.no-humboldt21.de](http://www.no-humboldt21.de)

A very useful study for those who want to pursue this matter, especially in its ideological and critical aspects. Friedrich von Bose [The Making of Berlin's Humboldt-Forum: Negotiating History and the Cultural Politics of Place](http://www.darkmatter101.org/.../the-making-of-berlin's-humboldt-forum-neg).  
[www.darkmatter101.org/.../the-making-of-berlin's-humboldt-forum-neg](http://www.darkmatter101.org/.../the-making-of-berlin's-humboldt-forum-neg)

*Despite the diversity of the involved institutions to be moving to the Palace Square with their respective collections, aims and public functions, the public advertising statements are much focused on the non-European collections now exhibited in Berlin's peripheral district of Dahlem. The above quote thereby reveals a problematic that is constitutive of the project as much as it is*

*constitutive still to the majority of ethnographic museums up until today: we do find all continents represented except for Europe. 'Cultures of the world' is thus used to denote the non-European cultures, leaving out that part of the world, which traditionally has claimed to hold the definitional power over what 'non-Western' arts and cultures are or should be perceived to be. This not only equals a perpetuation of the fundamental division between Europe and its various 'Others', which has been an essential rationale in the history of ethnology and which has been widely critiqued both within and beyond the discipline; it also reproduces the blind spot in the representation of the 'Others', which is constitutive to the history of ethnographic politics of display. Despite the assertion that the Humboldt-Forum, with its non-European historical collections, is aimed at completing the Museum Island as the world famous place for the arts of European civilization, the basic dividing line between the two is nevertheless being redrawn*

[Jürgen Zimmerer Humboldt Forum: Das koloniale Vergessen | Blätter für ...  
https://www.blaetter.de/.../humboldt-forum-das-koloni](https://www.blaetter.de/.../humboldt-forum-das-koloni)

Der Kolonialismus als erinnerungspolitisches Vakuum

*Sicherlich wäre es unfair, den Machern der heutigen deutschen Kulturpolitik eine koloniale Weltsicht zu unterstellen, wie sie im 19. Jahrhundert vorherrschte. Es gibt keinen Grund, ihren Erklärungen, die Objekte der ethnologischen Sammlungen im besten Lichte ausstellen zu wollen, die Ernsthaftigkeit abzusprechen. Anlasten kann man ihnen jedoch mangelnde Sensibilität – ganz offenbar fehlt ihnen schlicht das Wissen um die Geschichte der ethnologischen Sammlungen und völkerkundlicher Forschung im Kontext des Kolonialismus.*

*Bedauerlicherweise ist dies durchaus typisch für eine deutsche Gesellschaft, die sich zwar sehr viel auf ihre kritische Haltung zur deutschen Vergangenheit einbildet, und nicht müde wird, dies immer wieder zu betonen, die aber die koloniale Vergangenheit Deutschlands weitgehend vergessen und verdrängt hat. Es ist dieses erinnerungspolitische Vakuum, in dem das unreflektierte Feiern kolonialen Sammelns und völkerkundlicher Ausstellung, wie es aus vielen Verlautbarungen im Umfeld des Humboldt Forums durchscheint, besonders negative Reaktionen hervorruft.*

*Den Verantwortlichen hätte von Anfang an bewusst sein müssen, dass viele der Sammlungsobjekte unter den Bedingungen des Kolonialismus erworben wurden, was die Legalität und die moralische Legitimität dieser Erwerbungen in Frage stellt. Dabei ist hier von den menschlichen Überresten die Rede, die beispielsweise während des ersten deutschen Genozids im heutigen Namibia zu*

*rassenanthropologischen Untersuchungen auch nach Berlin verbracht wurden. Nimmt man diesen historischen Kontext ernst, müssten alle Objekte einzeln untersucht werden. Entsprechende konkrete Planungen liegen jedoch nicht vor oder sollen zumindest nicht in einem breiteren öffentlichen Rahmen diskutiert werden*

4. No Humboldt 21

[www.no-humboldt21.de/](http://www.no-humboldt21.de/)

5. K. Opoku, “Musée du Quai Branly Benin to Quai Branly: a museum for the arts of the Others or for the stolen arts of the Others?” [www.museum-security.org](http://www.museum-security.org)

6. Parzinger wirbt für "Shared Heritage" Hermann Parzinger wirbt für "Shared Heritage" [www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/hermann-parzinger-wi..](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/hermann-parzinger-wi..)

7. K. Opoku, “Berlin Plea for the Return of Nigeria’s Cultural Objects: How often must Nigeria ask for the Return of its Stolen Cultural Objects?” [www.elginism.com](http://www.elginism.com)

8. The notion of *Common Heritage of Mankind* appears in the preamble of the 1954 [Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict](#); The [Outer Space Treaty](#) (Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies) of 1967 elaborates this concept; [United Nations General Assembly](#) Resolution 2749 of 1970, the *Declaration of Principles Governing the Seabed and Ocean Floor*, declared the sea-bed and ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction as well as the resources of the area, as the “*common heritage of mankind*”; States parties to the [UNESCO World Heritage Convention](#) are bound to protect the world’s cultural and natural heritage as the *heritage of all the nations of the world*, ; The [UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations](#) contains provisions relating to the *common heritage of mankind*

9. Bündnis-PM zu den aktuellen "Grundpositionen" der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz No Humboldt 21 [www.no-humboldt21.de](http://www.no-humboldt21.de)

10. K. Opoku, “Germans Debate Legitimacy and Legality of Looted Artefacts in Ethnology Museum, Berlin” <https://www.modernghana.com>

11. Awarding of the Friedrich Gundolf Prize to Neil MacGregor at the spring conference of the German Academy for Language and Literature from 13 to 17 May 2015 in London. [www.deutscheakademie.de](http://www.deutscheakademie.de)

[Neil MacGregor honoured with Gundolf Prize - .  
www.britac.ac.uk/news/fellowsnews-news.cfm/newsid/1276](http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/fellowsnews-news.cfm/newsid/1276)

12. K. Opoku, “Why Do Europeans, even intellectuals have difficulty in contemplating the restitution of stolen African cultural objects? Wolf Lepenies and the Ethnology Museum, Berlin,” [www.afrikanet.info](http://www.afrikanet.info) >

13. *Museum*, Vol. XXL, no 1, 1979, Return and Restitution of cultural Property, pp. 18-21, at p.2, Nigeria. See also  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh2Tac1gNPU&feature=share>  
<http://www.modernghana.com/news/241980/1/youtube-crown-fraud-stolen-benin-bronzes-british-m.html> <http://www.youtube.com>

## **ANNEX**

OMO N’OBA EREDIAUWA CFR, Oba of Benin, Introductory Note to the Catalogue of the Exhibition, Benin Kings And Rituals, Court Arts from Nigeria, (Snoeck Publishers, 2007, p.13)

*"The exhibition is showcasing some of the works that made Benin (Nigeria) famous. It once again, reminds the world of a civilization truncated by the imperial forces of the colonialist. The works on show at this exhibition are some of the 3000 odd pieces of bronze and ivory works forcibly removed from my great grandfather’s palace by some Britons who invaded Benin in 1897. The British kept some of the loot for themselves and sold the rest to European and American buyers. These works now adorn public museums and private collectors’ galleries, all over the world*

*We are pleased to participate in this exhibition. It links us, nostalgically, with our past. As you put this past on show today, it is our prayer that the people and government of Austria will show humaneness and magnanimity and return to us some of these objects which found their way to your country."*

The modest request by the Oba was rejected by the Western Museum directors that organized the exhibition including Dr. Viola Koenig, Director, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The directors considered the Oba's request as directed to all Western museums holding Benin artefacts. How can any German official now in 2015 say there has been no request for restitution for the artefacts in the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin?

See K.Opoku, "German debate Legitimacy and Legality of Looted Artefacts in Ethnology Museum, Berlin," [www.museum-security.org/.../germans-debate-legitimacy-of-looted-arte](http://www.museum-security.org/.../germans-debate-legitimacy-of-looted-arte)

Statement made by the Nigerian Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, Prince Adetokumbo Kayode at the opening of the exhibition *Benin Kings and Rituals: Court Arts from Nigeria* on 8 February 2008, at the Ethnology Museum, Berlin.

*I wish to appeal to the conscience of all as the BERLIN PLEA OF RETURN OF NIGERIA'S CULTURAL OBJECTS that while Nigeria prepares itself and perhaps Africa prepares an official request for the return of its stolen artifacts, those hearts that are touched by that reckless act of colonization should on their own return all or part of the objects in their collection to Nigeria and Africa. It should not be seen as another declaration of war but a passionate plea.*

*There is this coincidence of history in this great city by the presence of this exhibition. Berlin was the meeting place for the partitioning of Africa in 1884 (the scramble for Africa). It was here that the instrument of colonization was first hatched. African nations were then vulnerable and very weak. They were recovering from the ravages of the Slave Trade. Africa had no voice in the partitioning of its land by the powerful countries of the time. It was an unbalanced equation in the theatre of war. The Berlin Conference led to and gave muscle to the plunder of African colonies and hence Benin Kingdom.*

*This exhibition presents the soul of our Nation, the pages of history that were torn away violently, the emblems and insignia of power and authority and the source of inspiration to our country. I hope that this appeal shall be taken in good faith, in brotherhood, love for one another and in bridging gaps between the rich and powerful countries of the world and the weak. It is a way of reaching out to the once oppressed and wounded with the view that there can be a new healing process in the world where we live to share and play responsible*

*roles. This process of voluntary return will go a long way to correct the ills of the past and heal the wounds of colonization.*

K. Opoku, “Berlin Plea for the Return of Nigeria’s Cultural Objects: How often must Nigeria ask for the Return of its Stolen Cultural Objects?”

[www.elginism.com](http://www.elginism.com)