

Working Topic

The topic of my paper is museums and the need for restitution and repatriation of looted artifacts. Till today, many museums in the western world are still in possession of cultural, historic, and religious artifacts that were looted during the colonial era. These artifacts have been obtained non-consensually and through harmful, illegal acts towards the original owners. And therefore, it is only just if they go through the process of repatriation to be given back to their owners. In my paper, I will argue for restitution and repatriation of looted artifacts. I will be presenting my argument not only from an ethical and moral perspective, but I will also present the advantages gained by host countries in returning said artifacts.

My paper aims to convince museum-frequenterers of why museums should return looted artifacts to their countries of origin and why they as frequenterers should take part in activist movements that pressure their countries to return looted artifacts. Many are unaware of the harm that is caused by continuing to display looted artifacts in these colonial museums away from their cultural and historic context. Many more argue that these artifacts should not be returned for the sake of keeping them safe and away from harm, which can only be guaranteed in their now host museums. And many think that those artifacts should not be returned because the ethnic ties between the original owners and those who inhabit the country of the originals today, are very weak and therefore these artifacts should instead be looked at as belonging to world culture and heritage.

In contrast, I argue that we ought to first look at the situation from an ethical and moral perspective. The methods in which these artifacts were obtained were illegal and have caused harm to the original people whose grief was passed down generations. Therefore, it can only be right to return these stolen artifacts to their original countries where they are in possession of

their rightful owners. In addition, I argue that the countries of origin have more reasons to take better care of the artifacts given that most of these artifacts have cultural, historical, and religious importance to their people all of which the host country, who has looted them, does not have. Returning artifacts also gives everyone the chance to learn about them from the perspective of the people of the original country and the context of their culture.

Brief Introduction

My target audience are museum frequenters. As someone who likes anthropology and going to museums, I care that people understand that museums which we see as havens for human culture and heritage can be problematic and even harmful to different groups of people. In my paper, I am focusing on western museums in countries with colonial pasts. I care that people understand that not all artifacts have been acquired ethically, many being looted from their original countries during colonial times. The current possession of looted artifacts by today's museums is harmful towards the original countries who cannot re-claim ownership of these culturally, historically, and even religiously significant artifacts. One very prominent example of such a situation is the Parthenon Marbles which were "removed from the Acropolis and shipped to England without the proper consent of the Greek people, who were the legitimate owners of the Marbles" (Björnberg, 2015, p. 464). The Marbles request for return was recently rejected by the UK. As I did more research, I learned about more illegally acquired artifacts as such as the Benin Bronzes of the Kingdom of Benin in Nigeria as well as Jewish artwork that was "given by Jews to Nazi authorities in exchange for visas during the Second World War" (Björnberg, 2015, p. 464).

In addition, I care about this topic because as a Syrian, after ISIS entered Palmyra, I saw a surge in people who argued for western countries keeping their looted artifacts from colonial

times, measuring all situations with the Syrian situation. I do agree, that when the original countries are unstable and unsafe, artifact return should be halted until the country regains security. However, the conditions in Syria are unique and cannot be used as the counterargument for returning looted artifacts to all other countries of origin.

Research Questions and Methods

My primary research question is, “Should museums return looted artifacts to their original countries?” and my working secondary questions are, “Why should we return artifacts to their original countries? Do we return all artifacts regardless of the stability and safety of their country of origin? How do we go about the process of returning artifacts?” I will do rigorous research using high-quality journal articles, along with scholarly books, and will read about as many stolen artifact cases as I can. I will also use news sites such as the New York Times, HistoryExtra, Sky News, and The Guardian to my advantage since restitution and repatriation of looted artifacts has resurged in the news lately due to the public’s effort in pushing for the decolonization of museums. In my research, I will consider popular counterarguments such as “Museums should not return artifacts as that would discourage people from learning about cultures outside that of the host country” and use my resources to successfully refute them. The databases I will be using for my research paper are JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest.

References

- Björnberg, K. E. (2015). Historic Injustices and the Moral Case for Cultural Repatriation. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 18(3), 461–474. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24478633>
- Green, J. (2017). Museums as Intermediaries in Repatriation. *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies*, 5(1), 6–18.
<https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.5.1.0006>

The first source I have chosen discusses when a claim for restitution due to historic injustices is valid. I can use this paper for its argument on using cultural repatriation to bring justice back to communities which have been victims of historic injustices. The paper also discusses counter arguments for repatriation, for example: artifacts should not be repatriated for protection reasons. I will be using the counter arguments brought up by the paper alongside other sources to refute them.

The second source I have chosen brings light to repatriation and restitution efforts of Mediterranean artifacts by Northern European and North American museums. It also discusses how museums can be intermediaries in repatriation. I can use the examples of effective repatriations brought up in the paper to argue that repatriations can be successful, and the countries of origin can provide the care the artifacts require.

Planning

Luckily for me, I have already created a weekly plan for my semester from the first week. The general plan I created includes assignment due dates, midterm dates, and quiz dates. And now that I have a better understanding of the process of writing my research paper, I can easily plan for it.

Week 4:

In this week, I will be reading as many sources as I can to better build my argument. I will be summarizing, extracting quotes, and paraphrasing relevant parts of different journal articles. In this week I have 3 quizzes: Electronics 2 quiz on Monday, Electronics 2 Lab quiz on Monday as well and Discreet Math on Wednesday. Therefore, I may not be as free to research as I'd like to be on Sunday and Tuesday.

Week 5:

In this week I will start writing my research proposal. I have a lot of time to work on writing as I don't have any quizzes other than my Computer Networks quiz on Saturday.

Week 6:

I will be polishing my proposal as this is the week when it's due. I will make sure to book a session with the writing center to get my proposal checked. For week 6, I have a discreet math HW, Computer Networks HW, and a Computer Networks quiz. I will also be preparing for my electronics 2 midterm and my discreet math midterm in week 7. As for my paper, I will start working on one or two body paragraphs as I find it easier start with the body than with the introduction.

Week 7:

I have my first electronics 2 midterm. I will be spending a good deal of time studying for it during this week. I will also be preparing for my Computer Networks midterm on week 8. A lot of my attention will go to computer networks since the course has only one midterm with a big weight. I will continue writing paragraphs in the body of the paper.

Week 8:

I have my computer networks midterm and so, I will be using up the two days leading up to the midterm for revision. I will write my introduction and continue with body paragraphs.

Week 9:

I will write my conclusion and then book a writing center session to check my paper before I submit my first working draft. I also have my second Discreet math midterm during week 9 and so I will not be free to write anything the day before.

Week 10:

Since by this week I would have received remarks for my working draft from my professor, I am going to be polishing my work using the feedback. I will then book a session with the writing center to further edit my paper. During this week I will also be working on my progress report.

Week 11:

Further polish my paper and try to get opinions from peers in class or friends who have finished the course in the past. I will also prepare for my second electronics 2 midterm.

Week 12:

I will be taking a break from the research paper and instead focusing on my electronics 2 midterm and starting revision for all of my other courses.

Week 13:

I will be re-reading my research paper and making final changes. I will book my last session with the writing center and ask my professor for his final thoughts on my paper.

Week 14:

I will submit my research paper.