To cite these articles:
Z. S. Strother, "Iconoclasms in Africa: Implications for the Debate on Restitution of Cultural Heritage" and "Iconoclasms as Sites for the Production of Knowledge." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 10 (3) 2020: 928-952, 985-988.

2020 | Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10 (3): 928–952

COLLOQUIUM: ICONOCLASM, HERITAGE, RESTITUTION

Iconoclasms in Africa

Implications for the debate on restitution of cultural heritage

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This article demonstrates that a long history of iconoclastic struggles exists in numerous countries of sub-Saharan Africa and extends into the present. Exploring a range of motives and messages, I argue that iconoclasm targets people and their emotions and not just things, as monuments, devotional objects, and works of art become substitutes for those individuals, who are identified with them as patrons, makers, or caretakers. Iconoclastic controversies constitute a site where knowledge about the nature of representation and about the relationship of the past to the present is created and challenged. Whereas ongoing discussions about restitution have tended to foreground professionals in the culture industry, iconoclastic controversies provide a valuable opportunity to listen to self-identified stakeholders who claim a voice in determining the role of images in their societies, the question that lies at the core of the restitution debate.

Keywords: iconoclasm, restitution, aniconism, emotion, Yoruba, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia

In November 2018, a report commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron of France recommended the restitution of African cultural heritage acquired during the colonial era (ca.1885–1960) from French national collections to African nation-states unless there was verifiable proof of consent for the transfer of ownership (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

But who is restitution for? An important question that the report's recommendation immediately raises is who might serve—in Africa—as the stakeholders for the collections that are repatriated. The report opens with a psychoanalytical justification of the need for both the former colonizer and the colonized to reclaim suppressed memories in order to move forward and forge a "new relational ethics" (35–36, 39–41). Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, the authors of the report, insist that African, diasporic, and European "youth" are the primary audience for the initiative (4, 85). But Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi expresses discomfort at the exclusion of "regular folks" from the Sarr-Savoy report and from subsequent discussions: They "are spoken for by the cultural/intellectual elite. . . . Yet they're the ones expected to take advantage of the objects when they become available on the continent. Their opinion on this subject matters and must be cultivated" (2019). Responding to demands for the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Belgium to repatriate its collection, Placide Mumbembele likewise notes that he is concerned that so few Congolese living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been consulted: "Suppose you get all the objects you ask for tomorrow, where are you going to exhibit them? In Congo right? Then you should ask the Congolese what they expect from restitution and how you can help them." He would also like to see the communities for whom some of these objects still serve as important symbols or religious icons to be brought into the discussion (2019). Manthia Diawara, who prioritizes reparations over restitution of works of art, has written a searing critique expressing the oft-voiced suspicion that restitution primarily serves European economic and political interests:

> I'm tired of hearing these days about the restitution of so-called African cultural heritage because it's yet another ruse created by the west to distract Africans from the true problems that they face. . . . The philosophical, artistic, and practical question posed by specialists from around the world today is to know where will

HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory. Volume 10, number 3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/712219
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> these objects go and under what conditions? Will they be restituted to the Dogon, the Bamana, or the Baule, as sacred objects, to be protected from vandalism, desecration, and the intolerance of monotheistic fundamentalists? (2019, my translation).

Diawara asks rhetorically if the Dogon, Bamana, Baule—in other words the original makers of the works in question—will be consulted given the fact that "restitution" usually means "giving back something to its proper owner" (OED). He poses this question because he is aware of events that reflect religious change such as the damage or destruction of thousands of monuments and cultural artifacts in Mali in 2012 (Keita, Tessougue, and Fane 2018).

When I asked Mary Jo Arnoldi who the stakeholders for restitution in Africa might be, she did not shy away from the complexity of the question and rattled off a succinct list based on her experience of working closely with the National Museum of Mali for many years as curator of African ethnology at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History: the secular state and its representatives; the original owners of the objects in question along with coreligionists speaking for the original owners; Christian and/or Muslim fundamentalists; and contemporary artists.[1] The organizers of open fora on restitution have most often invited state representatives (e.g., ministers of culture and museum professionals), contemporary artists, and public intellectuals. It is startling for someone like Arnoldi with such a long track record of working with secular state institutions to conceive of religious practitioners as stakeholders alongside avant-garde artists. However, Arnoldi has learned to reach out not only to those with legal, historical, or educational claims on museum collections but also to those who hold passionate opinions about the objects in question and *who may show up whether or not they are invited*. The following case study will demonstrate that these four publics are intertwined and often deeply invested emotionally in the arts.

In 1947, Kevin Carroll and Sean O'Mahoney, Catholic priests with the Society of African Missions, established a workshop in Nigeria to encourage the government and Christian churches to patronize local Yoruba artists. This project met with some success, and churches such as St. Paul's Catholic Church Ebute-Metta in Lagos commissioned many artists to work for them, including the Muslim sculptor Lamidi Ọlọnade Fakẹyẹ, who carved a magnificent set of doors depicting the life of Christ in "Yoruba style." In the resurrection panel, located at eye level, the risen Christ shows his wounds to a priest of Ṣàngó, an *òrìṣà*, which is a powerful spiritual force in Yoruba religion, and to Odùduwà, the "mythological founder of the Yoruba nation" (Falola 1997: 157).[2] In other words, Christ is shown welcoming them into his kingdom. The church was a recommended artistic pilgrimage site during FESTAC, the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977, and is also now a United Nations heritage site owing to the way it adapts historical styles to new uses.

Nonetheless, sometime after 1992, an iconoclast neatly sliced off the head of the Yoruba priest while leaving in place his distinctive dance wand and rattle, to leave no question that a devotee of the *òrìṣà* had been decapitated (fig. 1). By so doing, the iconoclast reinterpreted the scene to say that the followers of Yoruba religion will *not* be saved. The message is cruel; however, it may be that this transformation is precisely what enables these doors to survive in place.[3] Many churches (including St. Paul's) are purging themselves of carvings, paintings, and vessels executed in recognizable "indigenous" styles (Ndubuisi and Anthony 2014). The point is that a Muslim carving doors for a Christian church, who was praised by contemporary artists and by UNESCO, cannot strip his work from its associations with a living religion, leading to the question of whether its display will inspire viewers in Nigeria to pray to Ṣàngó and maybe even abandon Christianity or Islam?

Most art historians today accept that visual culture is continually reinterpreted to new ends. What iconoclastic struggles bring into focus are shifts in meaning that are *contested* and which are "valuable to study because they make visible the tensions that were always there" (Crow 1999). But under what conditions are these tensions instrumentalized and by whom, for whom?[4] By asking these questions, scholars of iconoclasms situate

1. Mary Jo Arnoldi, email, May 26, 2019.

2. I thank Rowland Abiodun for identifying Odùduwà. For a photo of the undamaged panel, see Fakẹyẹ, Haight, and Curl 1996: 212, fig. 98.

3. Finbarr B. Flood has argued that decapitation in early Indian mosques was a "creative" strategy facilitating the "licit survival" of preexisting images during periods of heightened sensitivity (2005: 16, 24, 29).

4. Finbarr B. Flood, pers. comm., June 1, 2020.

Figure 1: Lamidi Ọlọnade Fakẹyẹ, Resurrection panel for the door of St Peter's Roman Catholic Church, Ebute Metta, Lagos, Nigeria, 1960. Photo: Elisabeth L. Cameron, 2006.

their studies historically and resist timeless formulations of African art as an expression of "vital force."[5]

In order to understand how the transfer of Yoruba visual language to a Christian context at St. Paul's could be praised to the skies in the 1960s and 1970s and grudgingly tolerated or rejected in the 2000s, we need to examine the complex and conflicted history of images in sub-Saharan Africa and take into account the rise of religious fundamentalism in the 1990s. We have to wrap our heads around the fact that some Africans have fought to preserve and reimagine their artistic legacy precisely as others have felt oppressed by it and – like so many avant-gardists—wished to free themselves from its influence in order to embrace the future. Iconoclasm in Africa (as anywhere) is not only an intellectual exercise in the construction of meaning. The destruction or radical transformation of material culture both indexes and triggers emotional responses. Famously, philosopher Paulin Hountondji, writing using the vocabulary of the 1970s, warned against the "myth of primitive unanimity," that is, the myth that Africans always agree (1996 [1976], 60). As in the case of St. Paul's, potential stakeholders such as state representatives, religious practitioners, and contemporary artists and their patrons may diverge from one another, and their opinions are likely to shift over time.

Iconoclasms in Africa

It is time to acknowledge that monuments and works of art often come to a violent end in Africa, whether burned, buried, smashed, or drowned. The scale can be epoch -changing, as when Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm al-Ġazī systematically burned the churches and illuminated manuscripts of Christian Ethiopia in the sixteenth century (1529–1543) or when in 1913–14 the Grebo Christian prophet William Wade Harris from Liberia inspired "two hundred thousand or more people [. . .] to burn their fetishes [religious icons]" in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, 1913–14 (Haliburton 1971: 147). Over the years, a few authors have observed that destruction is important to indigenous histories of image making. Léopold Sédar Senghor, the poet-president of Senegal, counseled in 1956 that in Africa "the artisan-poet is not concerned to make a work for eternity. The work of art is perishable. The style and the spirit are preserved, but the old work is quickly replaced and realized anew as soon as it becomes antiquated or is destroyed" (1965 [1956]). In the 1970s, anthropologist John Janzen argued that an almost continuous chain of "iconoclastic and iconorthostic" movements

5. Placide Tempels (1945) argues that "vital force" is a philosophical principle for Bantu speakers in Central Africa. Léopold Sédar Senghor takes the concept as a linchpin for his aesthetic philosophy, arguing that rhythm serves as a unifying principle across the arts because it is "the pure expression of vital force." Senghor's interest in force is divorced from any analysis of form (Bidima 2007: 90–91) or history. Vital force has resurfaced as an explanatory principle in many conferences devoted to restitution.

could be documented in Central Africa beginning in 1506 in the Kingdom of Kongo (1971; 1977). Janzen's texts are foundational but were so far ahead of their time that they only began to find an audience in African studies in the 1990s.

Contrary to popular belief, the term "iconoclasm" may have been coined in Byzantium to describe the "breaking of images," but it did not gain currency in European languages before the early modern period (Bremmer 2008: 8, 12–13). By the 1790s, its meaning had been extended from the destruction of images to the "attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs" (OED), and the iconoclastic posture of rejecting tradition has become central to definitions of modernity (Giddens 1991). Contemporary scholarship has emphasized that the material object serves as a vehicle for the iconoclast in the "breaking of meaning."[6] For example, many forget the scale of devastation unleashed during the French Revolution when statues were cut down, cathedrals damaged, and aristocratic collections defaced (Réau 1994). The guillotine was raised on the site of the obliterated statue honoring Louis XV. Through these actions revolutionaries made clear their determination to institute a new form of secular government. Antiquarians responded by inventing the modern art museum and the historical monument as a strategy to safeguard possessions of the Church or Aristocracy by reframing them as "cultural heritage" belonging to the nation (Poulot 1995; Choay 2001).

The dialectic of destruction and creation is also important in Africa, but it has been veiled because what are called "iconoclastic movements" in Europe are characterized in Africa as "anti-witchcraft movements," "prophetic movements," "demystification campaigns," or "arson."[7] This literature often concentrates on religion, neglecting political and personal motivations.[8] Another problem is that scholars who study destructive campaigns in Africa often parrot the dismissive vocabulary of the iconoclasts, referring to "idols" or "fetishes" (Rivière 1969) and thereby validate the critique made by the iconoclasts to justify their actions. Many authors point out that objects were discarded, but they seldom elaborate on *what* precisely was selected or *how* they were destroyed, even though it may be highly symbolic whether the works were drowned or burned or swept away.

In this text, I use the term "iconoclasm" to signal that the violence directed at monuments and works of art is intentional, communicative, and has the "right to attain intelligibility or even intelligence" (Gamboni 1997: 17–18, 20, 336). Recent scholarship has emphasized that destruction (in the sense of true obliteration) is rare and has moved to reframe "acts of iconoclasm" as "exercises in compromise" that have the effect of turning the object in question into "a vehicle for a message utterly different to its original meaning" (Wrigley 1993: 185).[9] The transformation of the resurrection panel at St. Paul's Catholic Church Ebute-Metta might qualify as one such application of "creative" iconoclasm; however, my analysis of a series of African case studies indicates that destruction—or more precisely disappearance—is more often the goal than a "sign transformation" (Clay 2007: 94).

6. Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders give the most comprehensive and precise formulation of this position: "Destruction, and iconoclasm in particular, targets material entities as the bodies of specific sign-objects and, more importantly, their semantic fields. Iconoclastic acts, thus, target not just objects, but signifiers and, more significantly, their meanings, the relations between signifier and signified, and more or less extensive portions of the semiotic system underlying the existence of the sign-object" (2007: 31).

7. Fardon and Sarró trace the gradual rise to consciousness of iconoclasm as a subject for investigation in the 1990s and 2000s among a small cadre of Africanist art historians and anthropologists (2017: 37–38). Sarró alerted me to the value of rereading the classic literature on prophets and prophecy "under the prism of iconoclasm" (email, May 22, 2017).

8. Paradoxically, political motives for destruction may become more visible in the archaeological and contemporary record. Ekpo Eyo was struck by the wanton smashing of sculptures that he discovered when excavating in Nigeria at Igbo Laja (Owo city) and concluded that soldiers from the Edo Kingdom of Benin were responsible during a period of war between the two polities, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (1980: 14, 115; Ekpo Eyo, pers.comm., 2001, and Chris Slogar, pers. comm., 2010.) Dominique Malaquais gives a tight political analysis of the campaigns of "arson" that swept Bamiléké (Cameroun) chieftaincies in the 1950s and 1960s (2002).

9. See also Gamboni (1997: 19–20), Gell (1998: 62–65), Hedrick (2000: 89–130), Flood 2005, Clay 2007, and Rambelli and Reinders (2007: 20–23).

Aniconism

The impulse to iconoclasm is often attributed to aniconism, an opposition to figural representation of God or living beings. In *The Power of Images*, David Freedberg asserts that it is a "myth" that any society completely eschewed image making: "Abstinence from figuring the deity does occasionally occur, but for the rest the notion of aniconism is wholly untenable" (1989: 54). In his wake, Kalman Bland has demonstrated that the figure of the aniconic Jew was a creation of late nineteenth-century anti-Semitism (2000: 3–12, 59–70), and Finbarr Barry Flood has queried the transhistorical idea of the iconoclastic Muslim (2016).

But what about Freedberg's grudging exception for abstinence in the representation of God the Creator? Anthropologist Jack Goody has made a similar argument for Africans. He remarked that no one associates iconoclasm with African cultures owing to the European depiction of African religions as the lowest form of object worship ("idolatry" and "fetishism"). And yet, "the curious thing about Africa is that the indigenous Supreme Deity, whom we usually call the High God, and the one that is identified with Allah and Jehovah . . . rarely if ever takes material form." God is "not represented, imaged, iconed" and is rarely granted so much as an altar (n.d.: 8–9; see also 1991: 1240–41).

Indeed, it is undeniable that there is a widespread reluctance to image the creator God even though there is no explicit commandment, *Thou shalt not*. . . .[10] For example, historically, among the Yoruba, artists commonly represented the devotees of strong spiritual forces called òrìṣà—but rarely the òrìṣà themselves (the exceptions being trickster Èṣù and Ṣàngó, who may be represented in his human aspect as king of Oyo before his deification). Ọlórun (Olódùmarè), who created the òrìṣà and everything else, was never figured. As David Doris quips, "How would you do it?" He elaborates: "How do you begin to depict that which, from the get-go, surpasses every possibility of its figuration? Ọlórun's very name, 'Owner of the Sky,' suggests that (the sky's) invisibility is the most appropriate figuration of what is absent (and yet ubiquitous)."[11] Practitioners in the Bantu language family show a similar disinclination to represent Nzambi-God (Janzen 1977: 70).

It is probably more fruitful to probe the issue of representation of spiritual forces by asking what *is* represented rather than what is not and by considering what the purpose of figurative representation might be. For example, in Pende religion (DRC) anyone may pray to God directly, without need of any mediating object. A schematic head may serve as the focus for prayer before a communal altar and be used to contact the ancestors in a community. More fleshed-out three-dimensional representations serve as containers for spirit and warn viewers that they are dangerous to approach (Strother 2014–15) No one can contain or delimit God; it is therefore pointless to try to represent that force.

In Africa, as in so many parts of the world, it is three-dimensional, anthropomorphic sculpture that is most likely to attract violence and there appear to be instances of iconoclastic movements halting the practice of sculpture altogether (Bourgeois 1986, 7). However, we rarely understand the dynamics involved. The exception is found in the work of anthropologist Ramon Sarró among the Baga in Guinea, which confirms David Freedberg's hypothesis that blanket aniconism is difficult to maintain (the representation of the Creator God aside).[12] In 1956–1957, Asekou Sayon, a Malinké Muslim evangelist converted many young Baga men and led them on an iconoclastic campaign against their religious culture, burning, drowning (or selling) masks, religious sculptures and other regalia, assaulting ritual specialists, and transformed woods used for initiations or sacrifices into manioc fields or sites for mosques and schools (Sarró 2002: 227; 2007: 269). Sayon's movement was followed by the establishment of a socialist state in Guinea (1958–84), which criminalized the practice of what it called "fetishist" religion as well as syncretic ("maraboutist") Islam and conducted ferocious demystification campaigns against both (Sarró 2007: 263, 270–73).

Art historian Frederick Lamp gives a haunting description of working in Baga communities where it seemed that every road, path, and bare spot was remembered as the site of past ritual. He concludes that Baga culture had become too rich, with too much art, too many rituals to be sustained. His interviewees explained their support for Sayon stating that "We the young men spent all

10. Although Goody has made this argument multiple times (1991, 1993, 1997), few have grappled with it. The exception is Christian Kordt Højbjerg (2002: 63–64).

11. David Doris, email, July 9, 2018.

12. Sarró's research is particularly rich because he was able to interview the movement's leading iconoclast Asekou Sayon (2009: 122–147), his followers (2007), and his victims (2002).

our time going up and down the palm tree to tap palm wine for the old men. They were insatiable" (Lamp 1996: 238–39).

Sayon's campaign exposed deep tensions between youths and their elders, who took advantage of their arcane ritual expertise to make demands in goods and services on everyone else, a situation only exacerbated by the French colonial state (Sarró 2009: 2, 94–95). It also was only possible for Sayon to enjoy the success that he did because the masks and other sculptures "were steeped in contradictions common to iconic representations in Africa in general: they could protect and heal, but they could also punish and kill" (2007: 261). The youths believed that they were taking away the tools that their elders used to maintain their authority.

Although the government grew far more tolerant in the 1990s, Sarró discovered that many Baga elders had embraced aniconism, a "passive rejection of images," and had no intention of reintroducing masks or other sculptures (2007: 274).[13] After all, from their perspective, it was Sayon who was the "fetishist," who believed that spiritual agencies were contained in or identical to carved representations. The elders knew that they were only a "simulacram" of what existed in an invisible "second reality" (2002: 227): "By getting rid of the objects," Sarró points out, "they made sure that their religiosity could not be taken away from them. . . . [I]f you wanted to steal their *molom* [masquerades, etc.], you really would have to open their bellies" (2002: 228). Ironically, the fierce aniconism of the elders placed them in conflict with the next generation of young men, Muslims who wished to reintroduce masquerades, albeit in modern forms and without covering their faces (2002: 229–30).[14] This turn of events is not unexpected, however—as we know from deeply studied events such as the Reformation or French Revolution, mass iconoclasm has far-reaching and frequently surprising consequences.

From destruction to renewal in colonial society

European colonialism and missionization are often associated with iconoclasm in Africa. Indeed, from the 1880s until 1946, British military and commercial interests in southern Nigeria burned several thousand community shrines, which they imagined served as sites of heinous acts of human sacrifice. The overblown and politically motivated accusations of ritual murder have permanently tainted the shrines and the paraphernalia associated with indigenous religions and have made it challenging to find a local audience for museum collections.[15]

Focused on the obliteration of the shrine, British were free to purloin beguiling objects from the altars before they were burned, whether they conceived of the works as trophies, scientific artifacts, or works of art. However, by 1890, African Christians had already developed an alternative, far more effective form of iconoclasm than the colonizers' burning of shrines, namely, the willing relinquishment of religious icons to demonstrate the sincerity of their religious conversion. Christian converts shifted emphasis away from the shrine to the *objects on the altar*. Furthermore, they selected works closely identified with the individual, and so the offering of particular sculptures or ceramics or beaded textiles, which could include the object intended to serve as the owner's memorial after death, communicated poignant gestures of personal sacrifice.

In the late nineteenth century, these works were sometimes delivered by socially prominent individuals in a parade with musicians playing. They might be burned or thrown into a flowing river or given as gifts to European missionaries (fig. 2). What mattered was that they communicated a message to local audiences, for example,

13. In contrast, most Loma (neighbors of the Baga) returned to their religious practices once the socialist state softened its positions (Højbjerg 2002, and 2007). Højbjerg (2002) would like to suggest that the Loma were more resilient than the Baga because an "iconoclastic" perspective was built into their ritual practice (2002). However, the Loma escaped Sayon's jihad, and Sarró's position —that it was the double punch of one iconoclastic campaign following on the heels of the other that made it impossible for most Baga to resume their ritual life—is more persuasive (2009: 5–6).

14. Frederick Lamp describes a nostalgia for what was lost and suggests that his own art historical research may have sparked the revival (1996: 240–59, especially 256).

15. For a full discussion of shrines in practice and the British imaginary, see Strother 2016–17: 21–31. Depending on the denomination and the individuals involved, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries vacillated between "iconoclasm by annihilation" and "iconoclasm by preservation," often influenced by their indigenous converts (Hooper 2008; see also Corbey 2003).

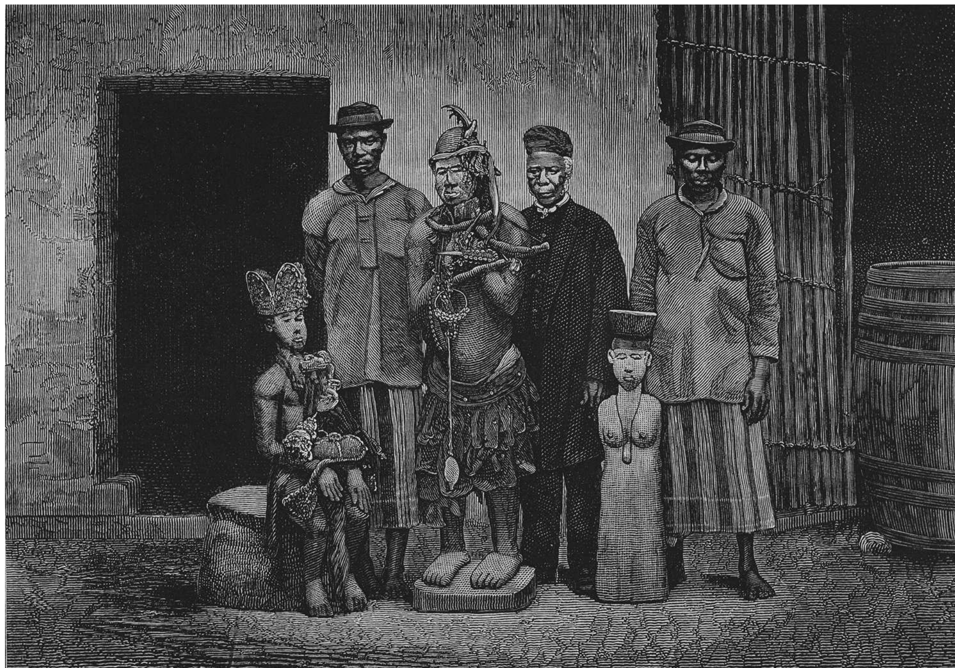

Figure 2: Anglican Bishop Ajayi Crowther (in the center) accepts the gift of three Nembe Ijo royal images sent by King Ockiya of Brass to mark his conversion to Christianity. According to the 1877 article in which this engraving appeared, Ockiya threw the rest of his "charms into the river" ("The Gospel on the Niger," *Church Missionary Gleaner* 4 (43) (July): 78). The figure on the right is now in the collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (AF5122).

- I divorce my father/my mother/my uncle (whoever left me with this legacy)
- I divorce the spirits to whom I had pledged devotion
- I am no longer at war with Christianity or Islam
- I confess that I was a sorcerer or a witch but pledge never again to use my abilities to harm
- I turn my back on the past

These messages were moving and deeply personal. Conceived as sacrifice, acts of renunciation might be painful but they might also bring relief because the obligations for the upkeep of a ritual relationship could be onerous. Destruction could even be experienced as revenge on a spiritual entity that had failed in its contractual relationship with a devotee.[16]

After several decades during which colonial regimes in West Africa sought out prominent shrines for destruction, African prophets began to arise in the 1910s who understood the emotional appeal of renunciation and who harnessed it to unleash iconoclastic movements on a truly cataclysmic scale. William Wade Harris, a Grebo from Liberia, was "without a doubt the most successful missionary in West Africa's history," according to historian Elizabeth Isichei (2003).[17] Central to Harris's success was a simple, consistent message. He told his followers, "God has sent me to burn the fetishes" (Isichei 2003) and commanded them "to destroy all objects tied to supernatural power, whether they were items used for witchcraft or items used for protection. In dramatic scenes, villages responded to Harris's sermons by smashing clay images and ceramic vessels and by burning wooden objects" in huge bonfires

16. Often, across southern Nigeria, the relationship between an individual and his or her tutelary spirit was transactional. If the spirit failed to protect its devotee, he or she might respond with genuine anger, smashing, drowning, or occasionally burning the spirit's ritual artifacts. One man showed his scorn by using "his idol" as firewood to cook his food (Church Missionary Society 1889: 32). This history likely predisposed Christian converts to incorporate the transfer or destruction of religious objects into rites of conversion.

17. It is frustrating to note that, although there is a substantial literature on Harris, scholars seem almost embarrassed to acknowledge or analyze the iconoclasm essential to his success (e.g., Haliburton 1971; Dozon 1995).

(Visonà 2010: 46).[18] By participating in the destruction, the owners enacted an oath never to return to their former practices.

Almost simultaneously, in 1916, British district commissioner P. Amaury Talbot decried the "holocaust . . . of irreplaceable cult objects" carried out by a Kalabari Christian prophet named Garrick Sokari Braide who threw tens of thousands of sculptures into the delta of Niger River.[19] Talbot went so far as to engineer bogus charges of treason to have grounds to imprison Braide and to rescue threatened works of art, many of which ended up in the British Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University (Okoye 2000: 6–7, 14).

In 1930–31, Protestant apostle Joseph Ayo Babalọla inspired "the biggest iconoclastic orgy in Yoruba religious history."[20] A gifted healer, he called for the people drawn to his revivals "to bring out for burning all their idols and juju, for God was powerful enough to answer all their needs" (Peel 1968: 91).[21] Thousands relinquished "images made of brass, wood, leather, bronze, and iron" (Olowe 2007: 126). At Oké-Oọye, four thousand objects were collected and burned, and the church literature proudly declares that whereas many were browbeaten into giving up their icons to Braide, the penitents at Oké-Oọye and elsewhere brought their possessions voluntarily (Olowe, 2007: 126–127). The labels on surviving photos of the revivals often emphasize the importance of a change of heart, one describing the "voluntary surrendering and burning of idols, charms, and ungodly goods" (Olowe 2007: 157). A photo of Babalọla standing over a mound of works at Ilesa in 1931 is labeled "These are the òrìṣà that we renounced" ("Awọn òrìṣà ti a kọ̀ silẹ̀").[22]

For members of the Christ Apostolic Church today, Babalọla's revival at Éfọn Àlaàyé in 1930 is remembered as the site of an epic battle (Olowe 2007: 152–59; Ajibola 2008: 83–92). A photograph shows Babalọla presiding in the background while a man stands ready (on the left) with a flaming torch to burn Ẹpa masks and masses of ritual regalia associated with the òrìṣà (fig. 3). The king himself took part and became the first in Yorubaland to "empty" his palace of anything to do with Yoruba religion (Olowe 2007: 155–59). Some report that "objects would hop out of the fire to clinch [*sic*] to their owners, but the Apostle sent them back to the conflagration" (Olowe 2007: 156). It took "days and weeks" to destroy all that was delivered (Ajibola 2008: 88).

Harris, Braide, and Babalọla were superstars, but a legion of other charismatic leaders echoed their cry for individuals to burn or drown sacred works and really anything that would remind them of indigenous African religion. The sheer enthusiasm with which African Christian and Muslim evangelists have embraced destruction in mass movements has led scholars to hypothesize that iconoclasm cannot be something truly new to African history but must have indigenous roots (Goody n.d.: 12; Goody 1993: 420; Peel 2017 [2006]: 33). While this argument remains tentative in regards to West Africa, it rests on a firm foundation with respect to Central Africa. In a groundbreaking article, Willy De Craemer, Jan Vansina, and Renée Fox challenge a substantial literature ascribing the development of new "religious movements" in Africa to the "stresses of the colonial experience or modernization" (1976: 465; Sarró, 2009: 3–4).[23] Instead, they argue that such movements were an

18. Some Harrist churches continue to sponsor the destruction of African ritual objects (Isichei, 2003). In 1983, the National Museum of Côte d'Ivoire rescued some works of art from a mound of objects gathered by Harrists in Memni (Visonà 2010: 46).

19. Talbot 1916: 306; Okoye 2000: 2. According to G. M. O. Tasie, the "destruction of cult objects" played a pivotal role in the founding of twenty-four (or 15%) of congregations established in the Niger Delta, between 1861 and 1918 (1978: 242–250). For an up-to-date overview of the primary and secondary literature on Braide, see Ekebuisi 2015.

20. John Peel, pers. comm., December 4, 2009. Peel also describes Babalọla's Aladura revivals as the "largest mass movement Yoruba has ever seen" (1968: 91). Their impact was such that the areas where Babalọla was most active correlates quite closely with the areas of Yorubaland with the highest percentage of Christians (1968: 101).

21. Sympathetic to Babalọla, Peel downplays the destruction of "idols" in his academic history of the Aladura movement (1969); however, it is prominent in the literature of the Christ Apostolic Church, which grew out of Aladura and is today allied with Pentecostalism (Olowe 2007; Ajibola 2008). More recently, Peel has admitted that "expatriate scholarship, especially anthropological" has been loath to grapple with African iconoclasm (2017: 34–35).

22. I thank Reverend Babatunde Ezekial Ajibola for providing a copy of the photo and label.

23. Peel considered this article to be "one of the most important articles ever written on African religion" (pers. comm., December 4. 2009).

Figure 3: The apostle Joseph Ayo Babalọla (held aloft in the back) poses with a mound of Yoruba Ẹpa masks, shrine figures, and leather wallets belonging to the òrìṣà Ṣàngó, all destined to be burned during the Aladura revival in Éfọn Àlaàyé̩, Nigeria, 1930.

"integral part" of a "common Central African culture" (1976: 465).[24]

According to their outline, a movement originates with the appearance of a charismatic leader (male or female) who receives direction from the ancestors through dreams or possession. The goal of a movement is to "prevent misfortune and maximize good fortune." The leader "reshuffles" a set of established cultural symbols, rituals, and beliefs and adds something new so that the movement is both familiar (comprehensible) and revelatory. As it spreads, local "lieutenants" emerge who make adaptations based on their own visions (1976: 460). Successful movements may survive for twenty to thirty years, but many fizzle out (467). For the purposes of a study of iconoclasm, the critical point is that a new movement requires a new "object," "charm," or "statue" (1976: 463, 469, 473). These new works are displayed to the community or distributed to followers, and "old charms are discarded" (466; that is, burned, smashed, or cast into rivers). De Craemer and Fox were sociologists and Vansina a historian, and the vagueness of their vocabulary about material culture sometimes undermines the importance of their argument.

The "objects" in question are containers for medicine or human spirit. They may take the humdrum form of bundles of cloth, perfume bottles, calabashes, pottery vessels, or packed antelope horns. However, containers for spirit may also take the form of exquisite three-dimensional carved figures. In Central Africa, a "power object" refers to a container for human spirit dedicated to a specific purpose.[25]

Independently, John Janzen came to the same conclusions as De Craemer, Vansina, and Fox. He argued that a "dialectic" of iconoclastic and iconorthostic action was "the only constant underlying the perplexing wealth of Kongo ritual diversity" (1977: 112). Kikongo-speaking regions are among the best documented in Africa, and Janzen brought to light the regular reoccurrence from 1506 to the 1960s of "iconoclastic movements" calling for the "massive destruction of ritual objects," particularly *minkisi* (power objects) (1971: 135–136;

24. It is not that people did not react against colonial economic and political exploitation but that there was a structure already in place that had been developed to assuage earlier traumas such as war, famine, and epidemics (Janzen 1977: 84).

25. See Strother 2000 for indigenous exegesis on the making and use of power objects.

1977: 72). Importantly, he emphasized that these movements were also "iconorthostic"; they created new images and ritual complexes to replace the old, with the goal of inspiring a "renewal" (or revival) of society (1971, 1977).[26] Restitution is also framed as a dialectical and revivalist discourse (Sarr & and Savoy 2018). It is interesting to contemplate how restitution might be connected itself to these perennial impulses to renew society.

Making it personal

Iconoclasm targets people, not just things. Devotional objects and works of art become substitutes for those individuals who are identified with the work as a patron, a maker, or a caretaker. The personal component in even a political-religious campaign is captured by one of the most remarkable records of an iconoclast in Africa, *The Conquest of Abyssinia*, composed around 1559 by a follower of Imām Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm al-Ġazī from the Kingdom of Adal (Chihab 1897; Šihāb 2003). The writer documents an eight year period (1529–37) during which Aḥmad led his army across Ethiopia, destroying the Cathedral of St. Mary of Zion and many other churches, monasteries, and libraries. A leitmotif in the text is the author's pausing to admire the splendor and craftsmanship of what was burned and to imagine the pain that its loss exacted on the emperor (Ləbnä Dəngəl). At Andutnā, for example, they found "paintings: images of lions, men, birds, painted in red, yellow, green, white and other colors. The Muslims entered into this residence, admired what it contained, and burned it. The king of Abyssinia saw the flames. . . . He felt anger and an intense chagrin . . . and he said to his aristocrats: . . . I would rather die than see them act like this. Then he wept" (Chihab 1897: 215, my translation). The chronicler was not present when the emperor learned of the devastation, but he expresses exhilaration in *imagining* what his enemy felt—an intoxicating mix of sorrow, anger, and humiliation at the loss of so much beauty.[27]

Large-scale iconoclastic movements are traumatic, but we usually lose sight of the fright, pain, and chaos experienced by the victims in reports recounting the justifications of the instigators. The Àtíngà movement in Nigeria has been richly documented, and the records of it convey the emotional tenor of the events, make available the views of historical actors from different subject positions, and graphically illustrate how an object may be used to redefine a person.[28]

Àtíngà began around 1940 in the Tong Hills of northern Ghana as a practice honoring the earth but took on momentum in Dahomey (Benin) when it began to specialize in the identification and cleansing of anti-social forces. The king of Mẹ́kó invited Àtíngà leaders to introduce their practice to Yoruba in Nigeria in November 1950. These leaders set up a community altar to the Àtíngà spirit and prepared protective medicines (Morton-Williams, 1956). Youngsters would sing or dance in front of the house where a shrine had been set up, and some of them would "go regularly into a dissociated

26. Movements of the type described by De Craemer, Vansina, Fox, and Janzen still regularly occur in the DRC (Ngokwey 1978; Douglas 1999). However, their lifespan tends to be cut short by the government, which eventually loses patience with the social disorder that accompanies them. The Eastern Pende experienced a convulsive movement from 1980 to 1985 and appeared to be beginning another in 2017, when the leader of the movement was arrested for destroying property.

27. In 1997, many scholars and lay people alike assured me that Aḥmad bin Ibrāhīm al-Ġazī had destroyed "everything" in Christian Ethiopia—every single painting and manuscript—and that his campaign of destruction was unprecedented. Since then, however, a good number of works have surfaced that may be confidently dated to before 1529. Furthermore, the historical record contains accounts of iconoclastic events that took place before Aḥmad's time: princes destroying churches sponsored by rivals, Christian-Muslim exchanges (as described in Ǎmda Ṣeyon's chronicle), and Ethiopian Orthodox monks confiscating shrines sacred to local religions, not to mention episodes of "pagan resistance" (Tamrat 1972). Kristen Windmuller-Luna (2015) has also documented that the Ethiopian court and a Jesuit mission both engaged in "bibliocide" in the seventeenth century. All this said, the sixteenth-century campaign was devastating in its scope, and assessing its impact on the art produced afterward should be a scholarly priority. Oral history and folklore remember Aḥmad "the left-handed" (Henze 2000; Fisseha 2004), and the guardians of many individual churches and monasteries recount tantalizing stories about how people preserved their treasures.

28. The published and archival record has been supplemented by twenty interviews that Elisabeth L. Cameron and I conducted between July and August 2006 in southwestern Nigeria with Àtíngà witnesses and participants, including a sponsor and two of the iconoclasts.

state in which they were said to be possessed" by Àtíngà (Morton-Williams 1956: 317). They could tell who had or wished to harm others through supernatural means and knew where they hid their instruments. Their possessed state protected them, and "they were able to handle ritual artifacts that they would ordinarily not dare to touch, for fear of death" (317).

According to Àmọkẹ́ (Dolapo Omolẹyẹ Salako), one of the surviving iconoclasts I interviewed in 2006, ten or more Yoruba men came from Mẹ́kó to the city of Ilaro in February 1951 to establish Àtíngà there. Once they arrived, many young people were possessed by the Àtíngà spirit, including Àmọkẹ́, who fell unconscious on her way home from the fields.[29] She was the "first female member in Ilaro." The individuals who were struck would seek healing from Àtíngà. Some families tried to keep their children away, but hers was supportive. She insisted that only someone who was possessed by the spirit could join the movement.

Historically, older Yoruba women wielded considerable economic and ritual power and were believed to possess supernatural power rivaling that of the òrìṣà, which they could use for good or ill. In general, society preferred to cajole the women politely addressed as "our mothers" in order to encourage them to use their considerable resources for the greater good (Drewal and Drewal 1990: 7–9). However, women who used their powers for destructive purposes were feared as *àjẹ́* (a pejorative term usually translated as "witches"). Àtíngà was unprecedented in attacking àjẹ́ as a class and in publicly threatening them.[30] The numbers were staggering. In Aiyétòrò, more than 483 women were identified over a span of four days and 60 percent confessed immediately (Morton-Williams 1956: 320; Atkinson 1992: 57). Confessions were only accepted as genuine if the accused handed over her instruments of witchcraft, which were gathered in ever-growing piles.

Many people believed that malicious neighbors lay behind the accusations leveled at their family members. However, Àmọkẹ́ revealed that their group was tipped off by people within the family who invited them to visit their compounds because they suspected a relative of being an àjẹ́. Throughout the night, the public watched transfixed as one after another of the young followers would fall into trance while dancing and then dart off to point out the door of someone's house. Part of the crowd followed, and one or more of the men would blow into policemen's whistles that emitted shrieking blasts. Usually they relied on the accused's extended family to rifle through the suspect's possessions and emerge with an incriminating article. As the movement grew more aggressive, young men might break into houses and shrines themselves and threaten the accused.

Nonetheless, many women resisted and were obliged to pay to consult the oracle of Àtíngà to prove their innocence. They were ordered to strip to the waist and to sit for hours on the ground in the hot sun, exhibited before a crowd of thousands. On a single day, thirty-three women submitted to this the ordeal and only fourteen were acquitted (Atkinson 1992: 56). Scandal erupted when renegade deputies made the women sit on hot tin at high noon and laughed at their pain—all to get them to confess. When convicted by oracle, anthropologist Peter Morton-Williams discovered that almost every single one of the accused who were convicted by oracle accepted the charge that they had unconsciously worked harm on others.[31]

Àtíngà promised convicted women that they could be cleansed and restored to society—but only if they showed good faith by relinquishing their instruments of evil to be destroyed. Those who knew that they

29. District Officer Mike C. Atkinson estimated the average age of Àtíngà members to be between twelve and sixteen (monthly intelligence report, December 16, 1950: 1, Atinga File, Ibaden Archives, Nigeria). Àmọkẹ́ was twenty-two.

30. Before Àtíngà, individual women were only rarely accused and publicly shamed (Morton-Williams 1956: 331). In 2006, every person Cameron and I interviewed said that Àtíngà's methodology of open confrontation had failed abysmally, even though a certain number of malefactors had been exposed through it.

It is clear that the women accused during Àtíngà were socially and economically vulnerable (M. C. Atkinson, confidential letter to the resident of Abeokuta Province, November 30, 1950: 2, Atinga File, Ibaden Archives, Nigeria). In fact, in our 2006 interviews, Àmọkẹ́ and others attributed the rapid demise of Àtíngà to accusations launched against elite women, which cost it the support of the educated class.

31. Although Àtíngà was supposed to restore peace and harmony, the survivors interviewed in 2006 unanimously agreed that the accused women led shattered lives afterward. "No one could forget." However, the young people who supported Àtíngà did not fare well either. According to oral history, they had no "peace of mind" and died young, frightened of the women that they had accused. Àmọ̀kẹ́ survived but lost eight out of ten children.

did not own "dirty medicine" brought whatever they had, including the altar figures and other regalia associated with veneration of òrìṣà in their families (Morton-Williams 1956: 322). And then something unexpected happened. Everyone—from the district officer to the anthropologist to the Yoruba witnesses to the iconoclasts themselves—professed themselves astonished when Àtíngà dared to ransack domestic and public shrines for the òrìṣà (*ilé ipamo òrìṣà*). Entranced dancers accompanied by a band of young men would "run into houses and destroy shrines, drag out images, fire volleys of magic kola into [the shrines], knock down the walls, carry off the symbols of the orisa and heap them all together" (Morton-Williams 1956: 325). They also attacked shrines dedicated to twins with "particular zeal" and searched for instruments of sorcery owned by old men (325–26). They claimed that the altar figures and regalia had been "diverted from their intended purpose" to serve as an instrument of witchcraft.[32]

The result was that the majority of material culture used in Yoruba religion came under attack and prodigious piles of objects were gathered at various points in the cities.[33] In Ilaro, District Officer Atkinson "estimated that the largest pile occupied some 2,000 cubic feet" (1992: 63). His wife, Margaret, urged him to send for Kenneth C. Murray, the director of Nigerian Antiquities, who arrived "stuttering and drooling in his excitement. In three days, he sifted, selected and sent away three 3.5 ton lorry-loads of orisha figures, the richest haul in history. . . . The haul might have been greater had it not been that, with a number of heaps still unsifted, the locals attacked them with matchets, hacked the figures to pieces, and threw the pieces into nearby rivers. Even so, museums in Nigeria, other parts of West Africa, Britain and the U.S.A., have cause to be grateful to the Atinga" (1992: 63).[34]

Murray visited over twenty towns and cities (judging from the museum catalogue) with his assistant Ekpo Eyo (who would become a prominent archaeologist). Eyo's first job was to help him load the lorries and then catalogue the objects that would serve as the founding collection for the Nigerian National Museum in Lagos.[35] Murray made his selection with an eye to elite materials and artistic merit; however, the close-up photographs of a pile in Ilaro taken by by Morton-Williams demonstrate the sheer diversity of objects swept up. In some cases, Yoruba field associates identified genuine attack medicines—but only a few. Instead, there were medicines (*oògun*) in bundles, pots, and calabashes; òrìṣà shrine furniture including stools, rattles, and mortars; an ivory Ifá diviner's tool (*ìrọ́ké*); and *ibeji* (figures honoring deceased twins). In one of Morton-Williams's photos, there is an altar figure of Ẹṣù (covered with sacrificial materials) and a bowl for kola nuts in the form of a hornbill (in the lower right corner), belonging to an altar for the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ society (fig. 4). The hornbill is a potent symbol of "our mothers." Morton-Williams found that young Christians and Muslims took advantage of the event to dispose of "nuisance objects," ritual objects that they no longer wanted but hesitated to destroy themselves.[36]

In Ilaro, Àtíngà members dared to break into an Ògbóni house. Ògbóni is a highly respected fraternal organization with restricted membership. In Morton-Williams's photo, an exceptionally fine pair of *ẹdan* are carefully displayed upright on top of a broken stool.

32. The usual term is "gbabode," which can mean "possessed," "bewitched," or "corrupted," as when Àmọ̀kẹ́ said, "Oju Sango ati Oya ti o ba ti gba bo de ni won ma wo" ("The altars for Shango and Oya were corrupted and [so the Àtíngà followers] cleaned them out").

33. Women hitherto had gained prestige from acting as priests for the òrìṣà. J. Lorand Matory observes that only "four priesthoods that are almost entirely male and non-possession-related were exempt—Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́, Egúngún, Orò, and Ògún" (1994: 504).

34. Atkinson's assertion about the connection of Àtíngà to museum collections warrants investigation. It is suggestive, for example, that the American Museum of Natural History accessioned over one thousand Yoruba artifacts in 1951.

35. Eyo, pers. comm., 2001. Àtíngà artifacts identified by the museum catalogue include iron gongs, iron and brass staffs, an ivory comb and brass braclelets of Ọ̀ṣun, leather fans, Neolithic stone axes from shrines of Ṣàngó, kneeling figures representing devotees, figurative stools, and a prodigious number of commemorative twin figures and dance wands for both Ṣàngó and Ẹṣù. Although Murray was far less interested in pottery, he did rescue three figurative vessels made by the acclaimed ceramicist Àbátàn (Thompson 1969: 126, 167–69, pl. 87).

36. Elisabeth L. Cameron and I interviewed Morton-Williams in March 2002 and December 2009. We are deeply grateful for his generosity in discussing his Àtíngà photographs at length and in permitting us to make copies. David Doris also shared many insights in 2010 and June 2018 gleaned from his fieldwork in Nigeria.

Figure 4: Close-up of a display of Yoruba religious icons and artifacts that were collected to be thrown in the river during the Àtíngà movement, Ilaro, Nigeria, 1951. Photo: © Peter Morton-Williams, 1951.

Ẹdan are not sacred objects but brass emblems awarded to honor personal accomplishment and hard work. It is hard to believe that the owner of the ẹdan would have voluntarily relinquished them or have been obliged to do so. David Doris believes that it is more likely that a family member whose deceased father or mother was in Ògbóni took advantage of Àtíngà to take responsibility for doing away with the objects, announcing "This belonged to my father. I divorce myself from my father."

At the end of a week or so, Àtíngà members would fire into the piles with Dane guns loaded with medicated kola nuts to neutralize the power of the objects (Magbagbeola n.d.: 6), and their leaders would direct a parade during which they would carry all the objects that had been collected down to the river. When the organizers were ready to move on to the next community, Morton-Williams witnessed the ẹdan pitched into the current along with the other objects.[37] The explanation given to Morton-Williams for hurling all the objects into the river was that their "power was washed away by water."[38]

Àtíngà was an indigenous movement, but it came from outside Yorubaland and licensed its adherents to attack Yoruba spirit possession (Matory 1994: 503–4). Before it was outlawed by the British in 1951, its members had already visited at least fifty-five cities, and the ban left many outstanding invitations unfulfilled.[39] Morton-Williams believes that Àtíngà developed such momentum because youth saw an opportunity to free themselves from the past, particularly many who had some Christian or Muslim education and who had learned to "abhor the òrìṣà, yet still fear their power" (1956: 333). He speculates that wealthy and influential men, who paid the substantial fees to invite Àtíngà to their community, realized that they would only gain in influence if the cults of the òrìṣà were abolished and their priests could no longer criticize or hold them accountable (333).[40]

As happened during iconoclastic events in other parts of Africa, the enormity of the mounds and their

37. Morton-Williams was adamant about this memory in our interview, but it is worth noting that the museum catalogue in Lagos lists two other sets of ẹdan Ògbóni collected in Ilaro (51.16.16, 15.16.17, 51.16.18, 15.16.19).

38. Murray learned that the followers of Àtíngà in Óké-Odan threw everything that he left into the Yewa River. However, followers did not always dispose of objects by throwing them into bodies of water; in Ibeshe, a court clerk led Murray to a shallow refuse pit on the edge of town where objects had been deposited (as people also used the pit as a latrine, nearly everything in it was damaged) (Thompson 1969: 126). Àmọ̀kẹ́ explained in our 2006 interview that the accused were interrogated about the purpose of the objects that they surrendered. Containers of medicine (oògun) could be burned to ashes, buried, or sometimes thrown into thick forest, depending on their contents.

39. This information comes from a list I compiled from archival records in Ibadan, from the national museum catalogue, and from the field interviews Cameron and I conducted in southwestern Nigeria in July and August 2006.

40. Between November 1950, when Àtíngà was founded in Meko, and February 1951, when it was established in Ilaro, the fee exacted to become a member rose from two hundred to eight hundred pounds (Atkinson 1992: 53), and so those who wished to join required the support of wealthy benefactors. Matory discusses the appeal of "this bourgeois-sponsored movement" for both businessmen and the royal elite (1994: 504–5). Andrew Apter (1993) sees Àtíngà as a social crisis provoked by fluctuations in cocoa prices.

heterogeneity enhanced the sense of danger and underscored the urgency of drawing on the expertise of Àtíngà (Richards 1935). After the objects had been destroyed, it was not as if the figures, dance wands, and ritual paraphernalia could just be replaced and indigenous practices could resume. Òrìṣà religion itself was seriously undermined when Àtíngà revealed so many of its priests to be "untrustworthy."[41] Nearly twelve hundred objects in all were transferred to the Nigerian National Museum in Lagos (fig. 5), and many more began to circulate in private collections. There is an intimate relationship as yet unexplored between the great twentieth century iconoclasms and museum collections, in Africa as well as Europe and the United States.

Desecrating exposure

Cerebral semiotic arguments downplay the intensity of the emotions involved in iconoclastic contests. Historians of religion Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders maintain that "iconoclastic acts" target objects in order to break the relation between signifier and signified and to transform the semantic field (2007: 31). Indeed, in Àtíngà and in the African Christian movements I have been describing, the objects associated with òrìṣà worship or Ògbóni service were radically redefined. Awards of personal merit (such as the Ògbóni ẹdan) became tools of witchcraft. Ẹpa masks became "idols." And yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that targeting the objects was a strategy used to redefine the people (with or without their cooperation) as good Christians or Muslims or repentant witches. Auto-iconoclasm may be conducted with everything from self-hate to a sense of liberation and glee (Boime 1993). The wealth of sources in the Àtíngà record make visible the degree to which destruction aimed at others was designed to inflict pain on named individuals through their self-identification with material objects.

In Àtíngà, as it seems in almost every significant iconoclastic movement, there was a script to be followed (Stewart 1999: 164–66). For Àtíngà, it included possession by the spirit of local adolescents; the revelation of the witch (often at night); her display in full sun, in a bare field, exposed to the eyes of all; the prolonged

Figure 5: Yoruba carving made out of ivory that was thrown away in Ilaro in 1951 during the Àtíngà movement. William R. Bascom, "The Yoruba in Cuba." *Nigeria* 37 (1951): 18.

41. Chief Esther Bede Onipede (mother of the palace in Ilaro), July 29, 2006. She shared Morton-Williams's view that many young Christians and Muslims saw Àtíngà as an "opportunity" to free themselves from the òrìṣà.

display of a prodigious mound of objects, composed of works not meant to be seen together now mixed higgledy-piggledy; the parade to the river and the heaving of the objects en masse into the current. One is struck by the relentless emphasis on display—of the women as much as the images. The imagination comes into play, as it did for the Ethiopian chronicler. One can vicariously experience the sensations of the accused: thirst; sunburn; defiance; fear; shame. Exposure makes viewers squirm and forces them to take sides: do you identify with the iconoclasts or with the victims?

In the context of religious images, Rambelli and Reinders argue that "display can be a form of iconoclasm." Before the work can be turned into something else, before it can mean something else, "sacred value" must be "stripped away" (2007: 30–31). Desecrating display usually precedes destruction, as in the brutal campaign of the socialist state of Guinea to eradicate African religion. From 1959 to 1961, the state sent squads to visit communities that forced masqueraders to perform and then undress in front of everyone. Men who were ritual specialists were exhibited, threatened, and assaulted in front of everyone. At the end, the authorities would invite the women to handle the masks and other ritual regalia and then burn as much as they could find (Rivière 1969; Højbjerg 2002: 59–60). The goal was to redefine sacred works as rubbish and the elders as charlatans.[42]

One of the most innovative uses of display to impose new meanings came out of another indigenous movement called Massa (1946–ca. 1985). Again, great heaps of objects were gathered along the road, but what was extraordinary was that the movement's adherents in northern Côte d'Ivoire sometimes embedded statues and packed horns of medicine onto the rooves or walls of their temples (fig. 6). The temples were built in great, cleared spaces, visible to all who passed, and the exhibition boasted about the number of individuals who had been persuaded by Massa to renounce their anti-social practices and its success in protecting its members.[43] Massa was gentle. In contrast to Àtíngà or the "demystification" programs in Guinea, it relied on donations from people wishing to change their reputations.[44] Diviners, blacksmiths, and healers could continue their work but under the supervision of the temple.

There is another variant on exposure, one very popular in Africa, in which responsibility for the destruction of monuments or works of art is transferred onto the elements. I call this "iconoclasm by proxy" (Strother 2002). Although intentionally exposing ceramics or wood sculpture to the rain or termites is common enough, the sight of decaying architectural monuments can be particularly affecting. In 1834–35, the reformer Sékou Amadou humbled the city of Djenné (in what is today Mali) by destroying its famed thirteenth-century mosque.[45] He objected to its beauty, in particular to its towers, which he attributed to vanity. One suspects that he also wished to humiliate the city, whose clerics had dismissed him as an ignorant cowherd. Amadou evaded the Koranic prohibition against destroying a mosque by plugging its gutters and by allowing rainstorms to do his work for him. The scale of the adobe building was such that the people of Djenné were obliged to live with its hulking ruin for many decades. If the Great Mosque once served as a symbol of the city's commercial might, its decay became a

42. The burning of architecture combines desecration with destruction, resulting in a potent display of social discontent. Press reports between 1957 and 1962, when 98 percent of Bamiléké (Cameroun) chieftaincies "went up in smoke," capture the visceral drama of seeing flames consuming stately, sculpture-rich compounds (Malaquais 2002).

43. Apart from the British sack of Benin in 1897, Massa is probably the most discussed iconoclastic event in African art circles. It is linked to the appearance in the market of some of the most celebrated sculptures in the African art corpus. Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi provides a careful analysis of the published and archival sources available on Massa (2015: 105–17, 278–79). She is suspicious of the claims of Catholic missionaries who depicted themselves as rescuing works from Massa while profiting from the sale of sculptures for their building projects (116–17).

44. Hans Himmelheber writes that people were asked to bring out from hiding all of their "fetishes," which they did publicly or under cover of darkness. He observed large piles of pottery vessels, wooden figures, masks, and "large numbers of finger and arm rings made of brass" (1954-55: 57–58). In the 1970s, Till Förster observed small figures embedded into the walls of Massa temples and others inside the buildings. He insists that the donations were voluntary (pers. comm., Basel, June 3, 2016). For a pioneering analysis of the manipulation of exposure and destruction in public relations, see Cameron 2000.

45. The following history of Djenné's original mosque is drawn from Bourgeois, (1996 [1983]: 127–39, 177–78. For other architectural case studies, see Argenti 1999 and Strother 2004.

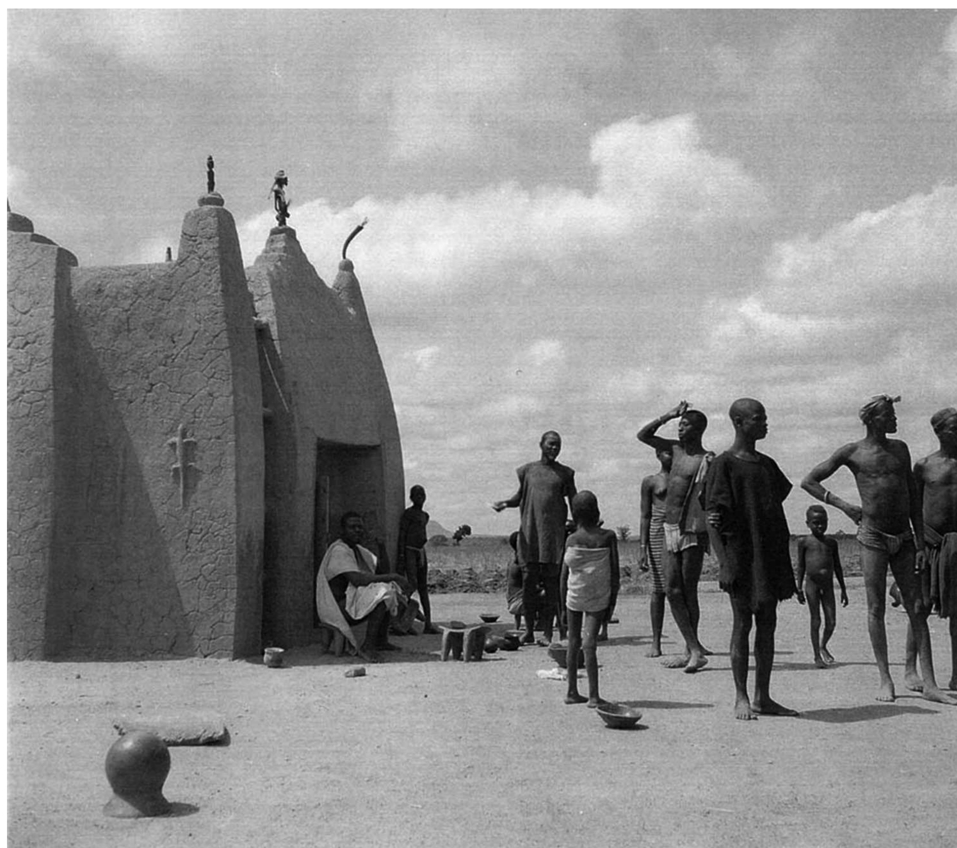

Figure 6: Bohumil Holas, *A Massa temple among Senufo in Côte d'Ivoire*, ca. 1952. Benjamin Holas, *L'art sacré Sénoufo* (Abidjan/Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1978), 187.

living index to Djenné's progressive decline. Display is not only an instrument with which to discredit past meanings or to win an argument; it is also a means to wound.

Artist iconoclast

The great iconoclasts of history, such as John Calvin or Sékou Amadou or William Wade Harris, saw themselves as reformers and believed passionately in rules. And yet, we have come so far now that the artist-iconoclast (as portrayed in the recent documentary about convicted art smuggler Michel Van Rijn) believes only in pure creativity entailing the unending overturning of norms and expectations.[46]

The violence of the iconoclastic posture in modern and contemporary art has posed philosophical problems for African artists. I once asked El Anatsui if he thought of himself as an iconoclast on the model of the futurists or Damien Hirst. He often insists that destruction is a necessary condition for rebirth, and I was thinking of his use of a chainsaw to evoke the blitzkrieg of devastation unleashed by colonialism. However, he quickly responded, "No! African artists try to reclaim the past."[47] Many African artists in the generation who came of age following independence feel that there was too much loss of African heritage for them to adopt the European avant-gardist posture of "kill the father." Instead, many heeded a call for their work to engage indigenous artistic practices. Today their work generates controversy when it draws on figurative models (Fiofori 2009). El Anatsui told me that a now famous sculpture of his, *Chambers of Memory* (1977; fig. 7) (inspired by a Nok terracotta), had been returned to him by a Nigerian patron whose wife (a fellow university professor) perceived the work to be a "graven image" the making of which is forbidden by the second commandment

46. *The Iconoclast*, 2017, directed by King Adz. For a scathing history of the iconoclastic posture of modern art, see Weibel 2002.

47. El Anatsui, interview by the author, 12 February 2013.

Figure 7: El Anatsui, *Chambers of Memory*, 1977, h. 40 cm. Photo Z. S. Strother, 2006.

(Exodus 20:4). Anatsui loved the idea that his work had enough impact to be castigated as a "graven image." However, Bruce Onobrakpeya, once praised for his "synthesis of past and present," has been saddened by the number of works that have been returned to him when he has worked hard to cultivate a Nigerian clientele. As he explains, increasingly, "they don't like anything with roots in traditional art—they call it ʻdevilish.'"[48] The logic that compels Nigerians to return Onobrakpeya's art to him is the same that spurred the person to slice off the head of the Yoruba òrìṣà priest represented on the doors of St. Paul's Catholic Church Ebute-Metta.

Up to the present, most of the artists who accept the mantle of the iconoclast are South African. Kendell Geers understands iconoclasm to be a "disruptive reading of power relations," and he began quite literally by hurling bricks through art gallery windows or vitrines (*T. W. [Vitrine]* 1993). However, he now argues that iconoclasm does not have to be spectacular, and he is interested in finding "subtle and gentle" means to subvert hierarchy. The change of strategy reflects a change in subject matter. As a white South African, it behooved Geers to attack the power structures represented in South African government and art markets, but he needs to show more discretion in engaging the history of display of West and Central African sculpture. He has taken various approaches: on the one hand, he has "asphyixiated" and defaced carvings that he has found in the flea market in Brussels with ink; on the other, he has made 3-D plastic scans of acknowledged masterpieces. His overarching metacritical statement on iconoclasm is captured by the poster that he made for his 2017 *AfroPunk* exhibition. Geers was inspired by Jamie Reid, graphic artist for the Sex Pistols, to take a distressed photo of the ivory cameo that depicts Idia, queen mother of the Edo Kingdom of Benin, and to pierce her lips with a large red safety-pin. Geers strips off the deadening crust of beauty and heritage from this "masterpiece" in the collection of the British Museum and thereby restore a frisson of danger to the memory of a fierce woman warrior. If African sculptures go to the museum to die, Geers finds that "trashing" the works brings them to life again by granting renewed contemporary relevance.[49]

Monuments

Contemporary debates around iconoclasm often center on public memorials. Since perestroika and the dismantling of a great many Marxist states, the fate of commemorative monuments has become an obsession around the world, leading Michael Taussig to ponder whether there does not exist "a sort of death wish deep within the monument," the pompous scale of which "cries out to be toppled, besmirched, desecrated" (Gamboni 1997: 51–90; Taussig 1999: 20–21).

In Africa, the most vibrant and politically engaged debate on the subject of monuments is found in post-apartheid South Africa (Coombes 2000; Marschall 2017). Initially, the African National Congress was protective of existing monuments, and few connected to the apartheid regime were destroyed or moved following universal elections in 1994. Artists have played a central role in subverting the message of such memorials (Peffer 2005). Annie Coombes has even hypothesized that the sheer number of interventions by artists

48. Interview with the artist, Lagos, July 8, 2006.

49. This account is informed by several interviews I conducted with the artist in 2016. For a full discussion of iconoclasm as artistic strategy in Geers's work, see Strother 2018.

and activists at the Voortrekker Monument, the ultimate shrine to Afrikaner nationalism, will license its survival by transforming it into a "hybrid" monument (2000: 195). However, the mood is changing and there is far less tolerance for politically fraught representations of any kind, as evidenced by the successful "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign initiated by students at the University of Cape Town in 2015 to remove the dramatically sited memorial on campus honoring Cecil J. Rhodes, ardent advocate of British settler colonialism (Marschall 2017).[50] David Freedberg has warned that censorship shifts to destruction very easily, noting that the impulse to censor politically sensitive representations has expanded beyond symbols of colonial and apartheid era authority to works of art with political content mounted in the public domain (2016: 88–94).

Ghana has a fascinating history of postindependence controversies about heritage (Gavua 2015). Carola Lentz has published an invaluable study of the struggles surrounding the mounting of statues honoring Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, building on Dietrich Erben's position that monuments spring from conflicts rather than consensus. Erben wrote "Monuments are not affirmative expressions of a well-established order, but rather instruments to legitimise and stabilise precarious claims to power" (trans. by Lentz, 2017: 553). Although Nkrumah is regarded as an anticolonial hero across much of Africa, he is a contentious figure in Ghana. The trouble began when the government reproduced his portrait on Ghanaian stamps and mounted a number of naturalistic statues of him in public squares. Nkrumah claimed that it was necessary to replace the queen of England's image in order to help Ghanaians believe in their own freedom; however, the use of the president's portrait fueled suspicions that Nkrumah wished to set himself up as a despot (Lentz 2017: 560–61). The statue by Nicola Cataudella that was mounted in front of Parliament House in 1958 mirrored the pose immortalized by a press photo in 1957 when Nkrumah declared independence: "Ghana, your beloved country is free!" (2017: 560). Protestors set off a bomb in 1961 that damaged the statue. It was replaced with an identical copy, which was toppled and decapitated during the 1966 coup.[51] The headless statue was stored in the central police station and moved to the National Museum of Ghana before being remounted by a government friendly to Nkrumah's memory in 2007. Extraordinarily, the officials in charge did not reattach the head (which surfaced soon after from a private collection) but displayed it alongside the mutilated statue (fig. 8). Although art historians tend to applaud the innovative display strategy for respecting the biography of the monument, Lentz discovered that some of Nkrumah's supporters were genuinely pained by the display of the body in parts; in their view, this only replayed the violence of the original dismemberment and was particularly disrespectful considering that the statue was mounted in a park meant to celebrate Nkrumah's accomplishments (2017: 571–72).

Over the past twenty years, the politics of commemorating the colonial past have become increasingly contentious in the former metropoles (Silverman 2015; Rea 2018), but less so in parts of Africa. In Zaïre (now DRC), all the statues honoring colonialists disappeared from view during President Mobutu's "authenticity" campaign from the late 1960s through early 1970s and were presumed to be destroyed. However, we now know that they were stored in warehouses and museum storerooms, and recently, important Congolese voices have spoken in favor of their reinstallation, arguing that they are part of Congolese history.[52] In Kinshasa, a lovely park opened in 2010 on Mount Ngaliema with many commemorative statues. Brilliantly, though, the oversized and foreshortened figures, designed to be elevated on

50. There is a huge internet literature addressing the Rhodes memorial. A good place to begin is Stoltz 2015.

51. Lentz untangles the complicated history of Cataudella's statue and its doppelgangers (2016: 168–74; 2017: 565–67, 570–71). Although it cannot be proven beyond all doubt, she argues persuasively that the armless version of the statue standing today in the garden of the National Museum of Ghana is the true "original." The press reported that the (second) statue was "attacked by a mob" in 1966 during the coup against Nkrumah (one commemorative plaque also states as much), seeking to imply that there was support from the people for the coup led by the military and police. However, the physical evidence suggests the use of explosives or other heavy equipment that was only likely to have been in the possession of the police or military (see Lentz 2016: 170–71; 2017: 564).

52. These voices include the former director of the national archives Antoine Lumenganeso (1995: 198) and the former Minister of Culture Christophe Muzungu (Lagae 2008: 13). Alfred Liyolo led the Society of Sculptors in a demonstration when the Chinese proposed to raze the empty pedestal where a statue for Albert I once stood. He argued that it was a "palimpsest of colonization, the trace of the suffering of forced labor" (Toma Muteba Luntumbue, pers. comm, November 29, 2016).

Figure 8: Nicola Cataudella, bronze replacement statue of Kwame Nkrumah, cast from the same mould as the 1958 original, and mounted in front of Parliament House, Accra, Ghana, in 1963. It was toppled and decapitated in 1966; and remounted in Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park in 2007; without the head. In 2009, the head was mounted alongside it. Photo: Carola Lentz, 2014.

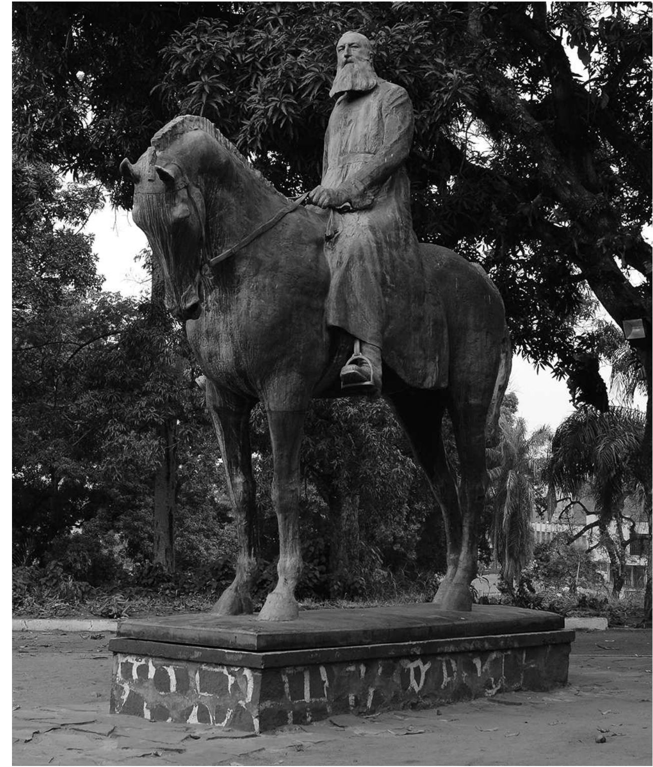

Figure 9: Statue of Leopold II in Mont Ngaliema Park, Kinshasa, DRC. Photo: Rachael Hood, 2012.

pedestals and viewed from below, are now placed on short plinths, which position them more or less on eye level with the viewer (fig. 9). The increased intimacy that the statues enjoy with the viewer renders the figures' grandiose posturing somewhat ridiculous, as though they are deluded about their own self-importance. The short plinths may have been intended as a temporary measure, but they perform important conceptual work that may ease the integration of the colonial memorials into Congolese public spaces.

Context is everything. When the equestrian statue of Leopold II, the self-proclaimed founder and sovereign of the murderous Congo Free State, was remounted in the middle of Kinshasa on a substantial pedestal in front of the railway station in 2005, public outcry led to it being dismantled within twenty-four hours and moved back into hiding (Lagae 2008: 12–14). However, it was relocated in 2010 with other colonials to a leafy park, where it goes unremarked, at least for the moment.

Conclusion: Radical listening

Despite the drama of flames, machetes, and roiling waters, most of the leaders of iconoclastic movements I have discussed in this essay were willing to see at least some of the objects that they targeted sold or given away. What was important for Asekou Sayon (Sarró 2002: 134–35), for Harrist Church members, and for Àtíngà followers was that the works disappear. As Baule field associates told Susan Vogel, selling to foreigners was equivalent to throwing something in the bush, as no one would be able to find it easily again.[53] Although iconoclastic campaigns release objects into circulation, it is not a simple matter for them to reappear in African museums.

The history of other repatriation programs gives us insight into the issues that may arise when institutions seek to develop the new "relational ethics" that the

53. Susan Vogel, pers. comm., October 2003.

Sarr-Savoy report urges. The Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA) was signed into US law in 1990 after many years of campaigning by activists and "affords tribes the right to repatriate five types of Native American [collections]—human remains, associated and unassociated funerary objects, cultural patrimony and sacred items—when certain criteria are met" (Graham and Murphy 2010, 106). When asked what Africanists might learn from their experience with NAGPRA, three repatriation officers at major US museums (all of whom had over ten years' experience of adjudicating claims) recommended—without a minute's pause—"Listening." According to Nell Murphy in the Cultural Resources Office at the American Museum of Natural History (New York): "Be flexible. Never assume that you know what a group wants. Never generalize. Listen more than you talk."[54] The museum representatives emphasized listening because they have been frequently surprised by what was requested. Although some groups like the Tlingit Deisheetan clan in Angoon, Alaska, have sought the return of sculptures that would be valued as works of art by auction houses like Sotheby's or Christie's, often the objects requested are cherished according to quite different criteria. Moreover, the museums have discovered that when they notify the tribes about objects eligible for restitution, they cannot predict what will happen. Among the responses they have received: 1) We want to rebury these items, 2) We don't want these items back because we don't want to rebury them. We want *you* to exhibit them so that our history is not forgotten, 3) You took it—you deal with the danger, 4) We've changed our religion and prefer to leave it with you, 5) or even: we would like you to make an archival 3-D scan to keep for us of the objects as we intend to dance with them.[55]

Initiating a "new relational ethics" will require what Carol Gilligan has called "radical listening," in other words, "replacing judgment with curiosity."[56] I would add that the mark of good listening is the ability to be surprised. When probed and not dismissed out of hand as mere "vandalism" (Gamboni 1997, 18–19), iconoclastic controversies afford valuable insights into how "regular folks" theorize and experience images. As Thomas Crow observed, they make visible the tensions that were already there (1999). In this essay, I have highlighted intergenerational friction, debates on what images can or should do, and the legacies of colonial violence, religious competition, political and economic rivalries, societal distrust, and artistic change. A reckoning with the complex history of image making in sub-Saharan Africa will lay the groundwork for a more sensitive practice of listening to the perspectives of various stakeholders who should be consulted in any discussion of restitution.

54. Nell Murphy, pers. comm., June 25, 2019.

55. As of 2009, 1,550 institutions and nearly six hundred tribes had participated in the repatriation process (Brown and Bruchac 2006). For more on the range of requests made: Strother 2019.

56. https://icmspeakers.com/speaker/carol-gilligan/?post_type=speaker&print=print-custom

Acknowledgments:

This article is a revised version of an essay that was first published in 2018 as "Les iconoclasmes en Afrique: émergence d'un sujet d'étude" in *Perspective: Actualité en histoire de l'art* . I thank Martin Zillinger, Annette Snoep, Michi Knecht, and Anna Brus for the invitation to reframe the original essay so that it addresses more directly the ongoing debates about the proposed restitution of cultural heritage to Africa. Readers will find more and better quality reproductions in the French edition, available online at https://doi.org/10.4000/perspective.11923 (in the pdf version). Throughout, I mark tones and diacritics for Yoruba terms unless I am quoting names, words, or phrases from published or archival documents without such notations. For example, Àtíngà and Yorùbá are often left unmarked in the scholarship.

Fellowships from the National Endowment of the Humanities (2013) and the Getty Research Institute (2018) supported research and writing. Over the years, I have been nourished through lengthy icono-klatches with Elisabeth L. Cameron, David Doris, Ekpo Eyo, Barry Flood, Till Förster, Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi, Dario Gamboni, Kendell Geers, Toma Muteba Luntumbue, Peter Morton-Williams, John Peel, and Ramon Sarró. Rowland Abiodun, Babatunde Ezekiel Ajibola, Mary Jo Arnoldi, Sarah Bevin, Abosede George, Lisa Homann, Carola Lentz, Chinyere Ndubuisi, Oluremi Onabanjo, Yann Petit, Raymond Silverman, and Thabiti Willis all shared invaluable insights or archival materials.

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2020 | Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10 (3): 985–988

COLLOQUIUM: ICONOCLASM, HERITAGE, RESTITUTION

Iconoclasms as sites for the production of knowledge

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Iconoclasms provide a rich and richly contested interdisciplinary terrain to probe the affective and intellectual investments in visual culture by people from every social stratum. I thank the authors for their courage in engaging with issues that trigger emotions across a spectrum ranging from euphoria, to fury to despair. Elisabeth L. Cameron sparked my own interest in 1999 when she shared a manuscript, "Creative Iconoclasm among the Sala Mpasu of Zaire" (1991). Cameron was inspired by the work of anthropologist John Janzen, discussed in my article in this colloquium. I had just published a book, *Inventing Masks: Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende*, and a series of essays foregrounding creativity and individuality. And yet, Cameron's choice of what was at that point an unfamiliar term in African studies struck home. In a flash, I reviewed 32 months of fieldwork in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in my mind's eye, and realized that I had seen plenty of acts of "iconoclasm." Instead of seeking synthesis, I became attentive to the debates and quarrels provoked by images.

Another reason I was happy to begin research on iconoclasm was because the topic became a lingua franca in the 1990s-2000s in the humanities and social sciences, enabling scholars to engage in a truly interdisciplinary dialogue on the "power" or "agency" of images. Ironically, within art history, the destruction of monuments and works of art is one of the few subjects permitting scholars of different fields to find common ground. For this reason, studying iconoclasms was a means to "field" African art, to render it less exotic by demonstrating that across time many Africans had experienced similar anxieties about figuration and the use of images as the adherents of monotheistic religions. The first mission of this essay is to demonstrate that there is a history of iconoclasms on the continent and to use its study, as Ramon Sarró words it, to shatter the "myth of immanence" maintaining that "'traditional' African people lived so very deeply immersed in their mythical universe that they had no doubts, no skepticism, no reflexivity, no critical distancing" (Sarró, this issue).

In November 2017, the politics of studying iconoclasm shifted dramatically with French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement in Ouagadougou that he would pursue a policy of restitution. Fortunately, Sylvie Kassi squarely addresses the fear that talking about iconoclasms in Africa could be construed as a means to argue that Africans are resigned to the loss of their images. She is right: vigilance is now required when addressing the subject for fear that one's research could be mobilized by the market to dismiss questions about restitution by those who wish to argue that western collectors and institutions make better guardians for what is construed as "universal heritage." Increasingly, connecting an object to an African iconoclastic movement provides a desirable provenance because it reassures collectors that the presumed original owners threw their sculptures away without regard for their value (e.g., Gottschalk 2002).

Nonetheless, one cannot bury this history because there are intense ongoing debates – outside the museums–about the fate of historical works of art and monuments in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as the contributions of Kassi, Mumbembele, and Ouattara and Touré acknowledge. What to do? As the director of the Museum of Civilizations in Abidjan, Kassi is conducting a significant outreach campaign to raise awareness about the "necessity of preserving cultural heritage." I am particularly impressed by the "*Collection fantôme*" initiative in which thirty-two ministers of culture have gathered signatures from a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities, police, customs officials,

HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory. Volume 10, number 3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/712218
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teachers, students, and artists as well as the politicians. Kassi enjoys the support of her government but not all countries share the same sense of urgency. Moderating the position of his predecessor, DRC President Félix Tshisikedi has stated "We support the return of the scattered cultural heritage, especially in Belgium. The idea is there, but it needs to be done gradually. . . . One thing is to ask for their return, but another is to conserve it."[1] In the meantime, Mumbebele judges it "imperative" to integrate religious institutions as stake-holders as well as local communities in the process of developing a "new relational ethic" built around restitution.

Private institutions also have a role to play. Artist Zina Saro-Wiwa is self-consciously building a new audience for "contemporary traditional artists" in her gallery, Boys' Quarters Project Space, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. She frankly acknowledges the reservations expressed by certain practitioners of Ogoni religion and by many Christians to the public display of masks and figures: "Responses therefore to our traditional masks are varied. But bringing them into the white cube space draws out these conversations and opens up the psychic and story-telling space around these works." Rather than dodging disputes, Saro-Wiwa argues that engaging in "lively, honest, and vulnerable discussion about monotheism, animism, and the connections to environmentalism" will help render these works fresh and meaningful in the present.[2]

Several authors challenge the formulation of "cultural heritage" as it appears in the Sarr and Savoy report (2018) and in public discourse surrounding restitution. Rosalind Morris hypothesizes that it is the capacious abstraction of the concept of culture that "summons the totally negating energy of iconoclasm, rather than critique." In their analysis of the controversy over the mounting of an emblem of a Senufo mask at the gate to a university in Côte d'Ivoire, Ouattara and Touré point to the "precariousness and instability of cultural heritage." Their conclusion echoes that of Peter Probst who writes that "the debate on restitution has globalized the uncertainty of heritage." Born of looting at the Louvre in 1795, the concept of heritage seeks to stabilize through the fixed forms of cultural property a modernist relation to the past known only through loss. Moreover, as Probst underscores, framing the debate about restitution in terms of "heritage" once again begs the question of *who* is empowered to make claims. In the case study at the university, for example, it is striking that Senufo practitioners did not feel empowered to speak nor apparently were invited to join the discussion about the representation of one of their masks.

Because cultural critics have embraced the iconoclastic posture of the "attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs" (OED), there is an inclination to argue as Rosalind Morris does in favor of making distinctions between a generative iconoclasm involving an internal "dialectic of self-critical self-renewal" and the "drive to totality" found in the destruction unleashed by outsiders who strive to impose their own norms on someone else's society. Although I understand the motivation to make such distinctions, I am concerned that they can overinscribe the singularity of mass movements such as Àtíngà, underestimate their revolutionary ambition, and discount their emotional intensity. Both the surviving iconoclasts and the relatives of the accused women interviewed in 2005 felt traumatized by the experience.

Morris fears that failing to separate sufficiently the study of colonialist violence from other forms of "self-critical" iconoclasm could imply that contemporary protestors are mimicking colonialists. This is a sensitive topic. Kassi, Outattara & Touré share my suspicions that colonialist and missionary attacks on African religions have poisoned the reception of many objects associated with indigenous religions by many African Christians, as when Kassi cites the pastor who expressed a hope that the Museum of Civilizations in Abidjan would be destroyed during the civil unrest of 2011. Iconoclasts draw their inspiration from many sources and I address the individuality, the creativity if you would, of their exchanges across cultural divides.

Mumbembele approaches some of the issues raised by Morris from a different angle. He contrasts the benign impact of "institutionalized" destruction (e.g. burning of masks or the abandonment of structures) with the "traumatic" impact of colonial, Christian or Muslim destruction, motivated by the goal of "restructuring the social pact." It is an important point that the same

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Museum_of_the_Democratic_Republic_of_Congo#:~:text=The%20National%20Museum%20of%20the,Congo%20in%20the%20capital%20Kinshasa. (Downloaded June 21, 2020)

2. Zina Saro-Wiwa, "*Worrying the Mask: the Politics of Authenticity and Contemporaneity in the Worlds of African Art*," a "performance lecture film," 2020.

outcome can be experienced quite differently, depending on whether or not there is a sense of coercion or loss. My work on what I call "iconoclasm by proxy" was inspired by Chinua Achebe, who encourages us to see ephemerality as a choice with both political and aesthetic implications. He maintains that Igbo historically valued process over product, eschewing collections, which "by their very nature will impose rigid, artistic attitudes and conventions on creativity which the Igbo sensibility goes out of its way to avoid." (Achebe 1988: 64).

I would just add that "institutionalized" destruction can redirect societal tensions. To take an example drawn from my research, Eastern Pende chiefs in DRC by law may not maintain their sculpted houses, so that they end up having to live with their progressive decay until their people take pity on them and build a new one (Strother 2004). Chiefs expressed anxiety and frustration over this state of affairs but they have been constrained by their elders (*malemba*), who hoped that forcing them to live with decay would drive home the lesson that they were going to die one day and should be careful to respect their people. Most of the time, transforming the chief's house into a *memento mori* is a splendid example of Mumbembele's argument about the benign nature of "authorized" destruction from within a society. It exemplifies the auto-critique lauded by Morris.

However, the tensions demanding the decay of the house in the first place stem from suspicions of chiefs' aggrandizing political motives, and the animosity against them can grow intense. Riots have even broken out, resulting in attacks on the house or the power objects within. The legislated decay and the physical attacks have a relationship that explains one another.

Sarró and Morris react to Sarr and Savoy's emphasis on "youth" as the primary audience for restitution. First, Sarró wryly notes how active young people are in my survey of iconoclastic interventions. This is interesting and a rich point for future research. It is certainly true for Àtíngà and Rhodes Must Fall but I will need to think more about how mature leaders find fellowship with youth to launch mass movements. Morris points to the slipperiness of envisioning youth as the primary audience for restitution since each generation "will be displaced by those who come after." Will future young people agree with what their elders have done? One way to think about the question via Janzen is to consider that what both iconoclasm and restitution have in common is the goal of renewing society.

Sarró outlines questions of agency, space, time, and the building of relationships that are germane to all of the contributions. His observation that "iconoclasm is always about place-making," applies to each and every instance in the volume. For example, the Yoruba who invited Àtíngà initiates into their cities or into their homes did so in order to create a new urban or domestic space in which they felt safe. The iconoclast at St. Paul's Catholic Church Ebute-Metta acted in order to mark the church as a "Christian-only" domain. Socialist Guinea burned masks and other works in order to usher in a modern socialist state. Certain Ghanaians attacked statues of Nkrumah to secure a republican space. Ouattara's and Touré's essay recounts an impassioned debate in Côte d'Ivoire about how best a university can set off a space devoted to "science and knowledge." As Sarró says, the restitution debate is just such a debate about place: what kind of new places will repatriation build? Who will feel comfortable in them?

Michel-Rolph Trouillot famously took to task professional historians who "grossly underestimate the size, the relevance, and the complexity of the overlapping sites where history is produced, notably outside of academia" (2015: 19). Iconoclastic controversies provide one such laboratory in which knowledge is created and debated about the nature of representation and about the relationship of the past to the present. They provide a platform for scholars and museum professionals to listen to self-identified stakeholders who assert a voice in determining the role of images in their societies, the question that lies at the core of the restitution debate.

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