

Lecture as part of the Teaching Assistantship Programme 2020

Colonial Archives and the Question of Restitution

Organizational details

Instructor: Riley Linebaugh

Date: October 1, 2020, from 4 – 6 pm

Location: Online (link will be sent in advance to the lecture)

Content

The last years have seen an increase in reporting on the question of colonial restitution of looted objects, including artifacts, artworks, and even human remains. Museums across Europe have responded to this question by conducting provenance research by examining the ways in which colonists acquired the objects that later ended up in museum collections. Ideally this research leads to more transparency regarding the objects' placement in Europe or even to their return to countries of their origin. However, documents of colonial administration removed from their location in the previously colonized world to Europe have received comparatively little attention in the public discourse. In contrast to this media silence, activists from both former colonies and Europe have advocated archival restitution for decades.

This lecture will introduce the topic of colonial archives and debates surrounding their ownership and use. Beginning with a historical contextualization of the archive as a function of imperial rule, this presentation focuses on European colonialism in Eastern Africa and South Asia. In addition to historical context, the presentation will outline contemporary debates regarding restitution, supported by three case studies:

- The United Kingdom and the India Office Records
- The United Kingdom and Kenya's colonial archives
- Belgium and the colonial records related to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda

The lecture will focus on colonial archives according to their civic, legal, historic, and political values in a variety of settings. Rather than propose a set of solutions, this presentation will confront its audience with some of the ambivalences and ethical concerns surrounding archival restitution.

Participants are not expected to have any prior knowledge to the topic but will be asked to share their thoughts in small groups.

Key words: archives, colonialism, decolonization, restitution

Learning Targets

- Describe current debates on the ownership and use of colonial archives
- Situate those debates in historical context
- Explain the different perspectives taken on by national governments, international organizations, the archival profession, and political activists
- Identify the variety of values ascribed to colonial archives, including their historic, political, and civic functions.
- Develop own ideas, opinions, and questions related to the problem of colonial archive ownership

Target group

Students, Doctoral Candidates and Postdocs of all Faculties

Course language

English

Registration

By ***September 29, 2020*** via e-mail at info@ggs.uni-giessen.de.