

THE SPECTRE OF ART ¹

Traditional art is one of the primary resources for contemporary state oriented and urban discourses about the construction of Angola as a coherent nation. Material culture, classified both as art and as Angolan, is either intentionally created to objectify the nation under the cultural practices of urban, educated ruling élites, or diffusely participates in the process as it is incorporated to popular culture. At the same time, however, the same artifacts are used to objectify the contest voiced by groups that reclaim their own ethnic specificity in the cultural mosaic they claim Angola to be. If it is taken for granted that the crafting of nationalism is at stake, none of the contenders, however, defer to question the notion of art. This paper examines the problem of art in the context of Cokwé art and the assertion of contemporary Cokwé ethnicity. Concentrating on the liaisons between the Dundo Museum of the old Diamonds Company of Angola, and the current National Museum of Anthropology of Luanda, the paper explores the continuities in concepts and practices between colonial and postcolonial notions of art.

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Three years ago the Australian Museum Victoria's web site featured the mystery novel *Stolen Property*. Quoting from the site:

This thriller was funded by Museum Victoria in the lead up to the ICOM triennial conference to be held in Melbourne from 10 to 16 October 1998.

Stolen Property has been published on the Internet in monthly chapters commencing February, 1998. The final chapter (and the 'murderer') will be revealed in October this year at the time of the ICOM conference in Melbourne.

Museum Victoria is pleased to announce that *Stolen Property* is now being published in paperback under the title, *Golden Relic*, and will be launched during ICOM'98. HarperCollins Publishers Australia was thrilled with the concept of a murder mystery surrounding museums and wanted to bring the story to those not hooked up to the World Wide Web.

Golden Relic is available at the ARP of \$13.95 from HarperCollins Publishers Australia (cf.:<http://www.mov.vic.gov.au/icom/stolen/index.html>).

The crime's motive is this Lwena Statue. Its disappearance, in the novel, is a pretext for disentangling the museum as complex site, with its conflicting agencies, using, instead of ethnography, the mystery genre, in a work of fic-

¹ With minor corrections this text corresponds to its oral presentation. The images that went along were removed for the purpose of publication. It is, as the reader will acknowledge, an inconclusive text, which had the purpose of opening questions with an ethnographic case in mind, rather than work them out for an article. I should like to express my gratitude to the editors for organizing the event and for having assumed the risk of publishing the paper as it is.

tion. The selling argument of this fiction lies in the 'might have happened' mood, as the true story of the stolen Lwena Statue – brought to the cybernaut's attention – is remembered. A mouse click on the page's hyperlink brings one to reality. No longer a fiction, the Lwena Statue belonging to the National Museum of Anthropology of Angola was indeed stolen and taken to France where it was put for sale in a 'Primitive Art' auction at St. Germain-en-Laye.

The 'Primitive Art' auction redresses as merchandise what had been a 'national culture' artifact at the museum. On the Museum Victoria web page, however, the Lwena statue is treated neither as a national property artifact nor as merchandise, but instead as a simulacra working as a metonym for stolen museum objects, within a fictive mystery in an economy designed to draw the 'public's' attention to the thrills of the museum world. It bears neither actual references nor actual consequences in real life. It might be possible that in the period of late capitalism anything goes for the sake of the museums, but despite fiction, cultural property is indeed being stolen as the Lwena statue was. What the web page doesn't account for would also probably be worth a novel under such a perspective. Let us focus then on the stealing of the Lwena statue, now a true story.

Stolen art (a true story)

In the beginning of 1996, a senior colleague was browsing through the French journal 'Arts d'Afrique Noire' at the library of the Department and Museum of Anthropology at the University of Coimbra and came across the advertising of a 'Primitive Art' auction in St. Germain-en-Laye featuring a 'Lwena statue'. Having himself done field and museum work in Angola he recognized the object as belonging to the National Museum of Anthropology of Luanda. He then addressed the Curator of the museum in Coimbra, who then contacted Marie Louise Bastin, the 'anthropologist who studied the statue in 1956' (cf. <http://www.mov.vic.gov.au/icom/stolen/htm.1>) to confirm this was the same statue. The ICOM and Interpol were notified, having confirmed that a report had been made on the theft of such an artifact by the Angolan government. The statue was then recovered from the auctioneers and delivered to the Angolan Embassy in France. The merchandise again became cultural property and as such was returned to its owners' official representatives. But this is not the end of the story.

Sony Cipriano, an Angolan anthropologist doing his Ph.D. in France, was nominated by the then Ministry of Culture of Angola to take the object back to Luanda, where he was awaiting an appointment as Curator of the Dundo National Museum, in the Northeast of the country. The day he went to the embassy to collect the object before heading to the airport in Paris, however, his house in Luanda was attacked, massive machine gun fire

turning his house to rubble. Only the fact that he had anticipated that something of the sort might occur has prevented the probable death of his family whom he had advised to leave the premises for a couple of days.

Unlike the story told at the Museum Victoria web site, the 'thrill' here does not regard the stealing of a museum object but its recovery and return, which was not a peaceful matter. Nor is the cultural property war in Angola a fiction intended to bring visitors to museums. It's not even a metaphor. At its crude bottom it appears to have become a 'cultural policy pursued by other means'; and one is tempted to take the unsettled meaning of this object to draw on the general problem of coloniality of African material culture. Such is the purpose of this presentation.

At the National Museum of Anthropology in Luanda, the artifact, though of Lwena ethnic extraction, is praised as a 'national' art object. It is valued as a collective semiophore – as Pomian (1984) would put it –, property of the people, and as such is suspended from having any other significance be it economic or otherwise. Exhibited at the museum it testifies for a multiethnic nation. This value is also assured by its superimposed classification as art, or – as the French auctioneers put it – as 'primitive art'. Because it is ancient and because it was collected while in use, it bears an alleged contiguous relationship with a pre-colonial past. It both represents it and, at the same time, is a part of it. For Angolans, the statue physically links the present to a culturally pristine, truly Angolan past, which is essential to make sense of the present.

Beyond the museum, however, there is a market for such objects and the traffic in and out of market did become a routine in the Angolan 'parallel museology'. Museum objects were stolen; the ICOM was informed; inquiry commissions were conducted; travels were made abroad to undertake investigations in Europe or in the United States; reports concluded inquiries had been inconclusive, and that was it. Against all odds this particular statue made its way back from its meaning as merchandise and all that goes along with it, and this may account for the gunshots at home.

As is obvious from this case, there is not a local context for the meaning of the object as merchandise. That is: the artifact is art according to a de-localized discursive formation that articulates the museum world with private gallery owners, art historians, anthropologists, collectors, dealers and the flow of capital. That is to say, if the object wasn't good enough to become 'national property' and therefore to rest in a local or national museum, it would certainly not be good enough to enter the 'primitive art' commercial circuit, where in fact many museums acquire objects for their collections. Let us disregard the complex process of determining what qualifies objects such as this as good, and make note, ultimately, that along the course of the evolving events not a single Angolan expert was called upon to testify about the object, as Marie Louise Bastin, whom had once studied it in 1956, was

available for the task. In other words, from the point of view of ICOM and Interpol – Angolans have little to say about their own material culture. Angolan agents act as mere subordinates in the process, thus eliciting the split between owning and voicing the contemporary cultural value of an object. Discursive de-localization seems to be as right as the material dispossession seems to be wrong. This split between expert authority and physical property of African artifacts rests on the contemporary resonance of the colonially established traffic between art and artifact, and the threads of power relations where it evolved – what I call the ‘spectre of art’.

To be precise, it should be said that in the sense given here, art is not about aesthetic intentions, statements or expressions, but rather about social relationships. Following Alfred Gell’s theory of art (1998), the art system is a system of action in which art objects perform social actions. Art objects, in this sense, such as the Lwena ‘statue,’ are objects that mediate social practices. Objects are not agents in the sense that they do not cause actions to happen, but as long as they embody some human driven or attributed behavior, they become secondary agents which materially enact (rather than represent) human action. Sony Cipriano’s house in Luanda was not destroyed by gunfire because the statue was cursed (or because it carried any other sort of intrinsic quality) but because its return to the NMA represented a punctual victory of one group over another on the cultural policy battlefield.

Under this perspective, one should attempt to formulate a colonial definition of art from a point of view in the present. Such definition may be characterized by the fact that it engages in a process of agency appropriation, in the sense that to think otherwise would imply a colonial domination relation. One should, therefore, examine collective rather than individual art; ancient (pre-colonial) rather than contemporary (colonial) art; practical (that is, put to use by their producers) rather than speculative art; terminated (the result, among others of colonial domination) rather than current and therefore subject to change art. Accordingly, such objects would require an expert process of recognition that would unveil true African art from its distorted colonial counterparts (objects produced with the colonial market in mind). This process of appropriation of agency performed within the threads of African art definitions, leads us back to Marie Louise Bastin’s expertise in Angolan Art and to the foundation of the National Museum of Anthropology of Luanda.

Crafting the Angolan nation out of African art

The NMA is housed in the former Luanda headquarters of The Diamonds Company of Angola (Diamang) – in the service of which Marie Louise Bastin became an expert in Angolan Art by the end of the 1950s (if indeed she did

not create the category). One year after independence in 1975, the creation of the NMA occurred within a broader nationalist museological movement, and had a key role in a complex network of museums. The official museology manual puts the situation like this:

Under colonial dominion, the people, ever and ever more engaged in the consumption society created by colonialism, was not interested in co-operating with Museums. We still ignore what popular reaction there will be to a request of objects for the museums. We are sure that it will make this Museological Movement grow. And that such a movement will lead the people to make ever bigger contributions, though we should not forget that each fabricated artifact implies a certain amount of work and that work is the people's capital. It will be necessary to convince the people to help the museums. It will be necessary to lead them (together with museum workers) to be the co-authors of the museums, to provide objects without neither occulting them nor subjecting them with any sale proposition.

The main task of contemporary museology, even before that of patrimonial recollection, is to make its inventory and to provide for security conditions (*Manual de Museologia* 1979: 24-25).

Such a need sprang from the fact that part of the collections housed in now National Museums belonged to individual colonialists and were not fully listed. As for the movement itself, its execution relied in a program of Experimental Museums, divided into Urban Museums, and Rural Museums, with diverse public roles. Their common ground was divided in five missions:

- a) to lead the People to make museums;
- b) to render accessible dispersed, and sometimes hidden, patrimonies;
- c) to discover the interest of different layers of the population;
- d) to identify progressive general drawbacks or incorrect ideas;
- e) to gather information (*Manual de Museologia* 1979: 25).

Such a project would be accomplished at the Urban Experimental Museum by leaving rooms empty to be available for Public Curatorship. It then proceeded suggesting that "In these exhibitions, some rare or highly valuable objects will eventually appear. Those will be immediately classified or acquired" (*Manual de Museologia* 1979: 26).

The Rural Experimental Museum:

Is even simpler. It is composed of one or two pieces from each Regional Culture, two fine-arts pieces, one or two from the Natural History Museum. With this material, an animator (this may be done during campaigns) tries to convince the people from a *Sanzala*, especially elders and chiefs, through a brief presentation and colloquium. She will then invite the people to display what she thinks are objects expressive of their culture in a house they designate. The people should also appoint a respected individual from the village to be responsible for the Museum. (...) This process can be begun by a visit to the nearest Regional or National Museum by a chief, by the Elders, or by a specific group of villagers (*Manual de Museologia* 1979: 27).

The Experimental Museum, be it Urban or Rural, was meant as nodal point in a National Network of Museums that followed political administration agencies. According to the Manual, a museological reproduction should be planned that would encompass the creation of Agencies for the National and Special Museums, Regional Museums, Provincial Museums, Municipal Museums, Communal Museums, School Museums, Units of Production Museums, and so on (cf. *Manual de Museologia* 1979: 33). The purpose of such a network would be:

- 1 – To influence the ideological formation of the masses, especially working, peasant and student masses, directing them to acquire and consolidate materialist thoughts, scientific knowledge and a realistic vision of the national problem.
- 2 – To combat, through scientific explanation, the alienation of the past that colonialism has tried to instill in our People.
- 3 – To develop the creative activity of our people, of their artists and intellectuals in particular, within the Cultural Revolution defined by the competent organisms of the MPLA and of the Government.
- 4 – To preserve for future generations the creations of the people from the past and scientifically explain the true nature of the transformations of historical, social, political, natural and other phenomena.
- 5 – To research, improve and systematize human knowledge, especially the knowledge of Angolans, through the diverse Museological Disciplines.
- 6 – To create an ever broader identity amidst the working staff of the Museum and the worker or student Public of the Museum, in a way that both groups may share an equal concern with the Museological Collection and the civilization it represents (*Manual de Museologia* 1979: 31-32).

If this project – albeit its revolutionary tone and its wishful thinking mood – still holds, the realpolitics of contemporary Angola has been engaged in a more pragmatic action, influenced by warfare, which accounts for over three million displaced persons, for an unstable economic system under which a significant part of the total population is made to live in poverty and for the consequential restrictions to state cultural policy. The National Museum of Anthropology has become, in this process, one of the objects of state interest.

The history of this museum reveals much about the shift from colonial to contemporary museology in Angola. In 1979 the collections of the National Museum of Anthropology were estimated at about 6,000 objects, a third of which were first choice artifacts that had been sent from the Dundo Museum, the private museum of the Diamonds Company of Angola located in its concession area of the North Lunda district, bordering the Belgian Congo. These objects were selected between the 1960s and 1974, to be housed in the headquarters of the Diamang in Luanda, under the auspices of a public-relations operation established to reverse the secrecy policy followed, until then, by the Company. The fact is that, despite the independence war, the 1960s were the

most prosperous years for the province, and facing international pressure regarding its colonial practices it was thought that secrecy no longer served the Company's best interests. So the Diamang brought objects to Luanda from the Dundo in order to give the Company more visibility, especially regarding what they called, its 'social welfare' activity.

The Dundo Museum

In a sense the Dundo Museum was the cherry atop the Diamang's slice of the 'African cake.' Considering that it became the colonial museum of reference for the Third Portuguese Empire, its existence alone provides a useful commentary on the specifics of 'Portuguese colonialism,' namely the mismatch between project and practice, its delegated execution and its diverse and coexisting colonial configurations.

The Dundo Museum became an icon of the Diamang colonial project. Officially stated as 'scientific colonialism,' it was implied that the institution would have a complex knowledge and a set of surveillance modalities that would function under the premise that knowledge was the basis for proper colonization. Albeit reclaiming their own identity as the 'Portuguese front line settlement in the in-land of Angola', they also maintained in the 1950s – when the light version of lusotropicalism doctrine became the state oriented imperial rhetoric – that their way of colonizing implied "(...) a basic postulate according to which it is not necessary, indeed that it is absolutely dispensable, that blacks and whites should sleep in the same bed" (Vilhena 1955: 39).

The emergence of African Art as a museological category at the Dundo Museum, as ambiguously transitive as it was (shifting between ethnography and aesthetics), evolved through an extremely complex process, in which, once again, different frameworks of relationships overlapped one another. In order to save time I will present them schematically.

The first director of the museum was an administrative assistant of the neighboring colonial post of Chitato, 10 km from the Dundo, and his technical skills were linked to the visual arts. His relationships with local populations and his knowledge of several native languages were due to his painting hobbies. He had realized that he could interest his peers in native cultures through the exhibiting and explanation of material culture. In 1936, the museum was created with objects from his personal collection. Among his works, the careful documentation of Cokwé wall and sand paintings was a priority. As the museum settled in its new building in 1950, the director invited Cokwé painters to decorate its walls. In literature his works are still considered rare, concerned as they are with African painting, for it seems that through the views of Western academic disciplines, sculpture (and not painting) was *the* African art.

A second factor, also idiosyncratic and biographical in its nature, was the fact that the Delegate Administrator of the Company was himself a collector. His Indo-European ceramics, as well as his sacred art collections can now be seen in Lisbon at the National Museum of Ancient Art. His collection of ancient books (a section of what was reputed as the best private library in Portugal) was dispersed and parts of it still appear every now and then in auctions all over Europe.

The third factor relates to the development of the museum on a scientific basis, decided, certainly not by coincidence, in 1946. To this purpose the Company hired a brilliant young scientist that had been dismissed by the dictatorship after having been expelled from the Sciences Faculty of Porto. Barros Machado became a world-renowned African entomologist, whose works are still a reference in the field. Under his guidance the Biological Researches Laboratory became a platform front line field laboratory for academies from all over the 'free world.' This practice eventually extended to the Ethnography section, which then started to develop academic links, namely with the Berlin Museum and with the Tervuren Royal Museum. From the first relationship a collection of some 1,000 objects were culled, which was hosted in the Hermann Baumann room, named after the German ethnographer who worked at the museum in the mid 1950s and again in the 1960s. A more diverse interaction was established with the Tervuren Royal Museum, its most significant outcome being the recognition of Cokwé Art as a specific style, under the work of Marie Louise Bastin.

1946 is also the year that marks the publication of the first issue of the *Diamang Cultural Publications*, a luxurious journal published in Portuguese, French and English, where all the museum's research has been published since. As the Company had no permit to trade in goods other than diamonds, it offered the journal to academies and major libraries worldwide.

Thus the emergence of the category of African Art at the Dundo Museum evolved within a strategy of globalising its achievements, legitimized by scientific endeavor. Such a strategy, entangled as it was with biographical idiosyncrasies, with international pressure condemning colonialism and specifically the Portuguese Empire, was well served by the African Art category, as I will try to make explicit.

Strictly at local level, the museum cultural salvaging (self-reclaimed) purpose associated with art, in that it produced a technical classification of artifacts creating a distinguishing sub-group. This technical classification of artifacts then became used as a grid to classify the social landscape, so the art concept was to be extended in order to devise further social classifications, and even to be incorporated in the Company's division of labor framework. At the Dundo it was used to create a disciplinary device, whereby persons classified as artists were to live in The Native Village. The same way one

could visit the museum and acknowledge material culture as iron works, paintings, pottery, weaving, cloth or sculpture, one could also visit the Native Village and meet sculptors, painters, pottery makers, iron workers, and so on. At the functional framework of the Company's labor division, all these persons were classified as 'specialized workers,' were paid accordingly and lived their lives by the clock. As time went by, they became instructed in the replication of masterpieces sent from Europe, which shapes were frequently refined according to instructions of their white supervisors. Along with the concept of the artist as having an autonomous social identity, individual authorship of the crafter was also recognized. Museum sculptures were therefore signed, so that they would not be confused with 'tribal' artifacts.

The Native Village not only housed the artists, but also any native visitor that asked for lodging, in particular native chiefs. It also served as a festival ground where usual ceremonies became disciplinised as folklore. Celebrations offered by the Company to distinguished guests were displayed in this cellularised space, and were more often than not associated with the Company's definitional ceremonies, such as the Diamang Day and a workers celebration day called The Grand Feast.

These sorts of celebrations were local variations of state ceremonies held under the Portuguese dictatorship, the performance of which by several hierarchized communities articulated the nation. In the construction of the Diamang area as a neighborhood of the empire and then of the nation, such ceremonies were crucial. During the ceremonies of the Grand Feast Day, after the flag hoisting ceremony that was carried out during the collective singing of the national hymn, after the distribution of National flags to local 'worthy chiefs' and after an open-air mass, the crowd was then directed to the Museum. From there, they went to the Folklore Ground at the Native Village, where native dances could last until dawn.

African Art supported, either directly or remotely, all these different occurrences. Under local conceptions of African contemporary history (i.e. colonial) as well as past African history, such practices were consistent with the repatriation – from Europe to the Dundo Museum – of African objects, carried out by the Cultural Services of the Company. According to the Hamitic theory, espoused by the Museum director, African peoples all came from a common line, and in his view adapting processes to different environments originated from the typical African organization, the tribe. The tribes were, in this sense, variations on a common essence the racial basis of which became a way to historically justify the essentialist discourses on the African Man, spirit, or soul.² Thus the sculptures and other African art objects were

² See Appiah (1992) for a critical account of this theory. Ravenhill (1996) shows how the tribe became an organizing device in French colonial museography, thereby providing materiality to the concept.

sent to the Dundo as a repatriating operation. They were being sent back to the African motherland, regardless of their cultural origin, which was only relevant inasmuch as it added another piece to the African puzzle. Through the emergent inventory of styles, this puzzle was actually put together, allowing either for serious speculation about pre-colonial cultural boundaries, for the periodicization and dissemination of technical skills, or for the hierarchizing of cultural areas according to the *refinement* of their material expressions.

Marie Louise Bastin's work, (whose first publications on the subject were issued by the Diamang after her fieldwork at the Dundo in the 1950s), asserted through aesthetic criteria the courtesan nature of Cokwé Art, a classification which, within the debate on the aesthetic qualities of Cokwé material culture, opposed the thesis of this form of art being "merely tribal" (Bastin 1982: 46). It is under this argument that neighboring groups, such as the Lwena, were also classified through their own art. The argument set forth had implications that went far beyond strict aesthetic qualifications: the court implied a more complex form of social organization; as such form was not contemporary, it endowed a historical depth on the Cokwé people. The tracing of this history, anchored in the formal characteristics of art objects, provided an extended context for its own existence. What had been once local and accidental, confined to parochial interests of a colonial district, became of overall significance to the understanding of the migration, social organization, power institutions and historical development of specific African peoples.³ Conversely, objects that dialectically sustained this discourse had their documentary, historical and market values significantly increased.⁴

Art rhetoric even further displaced African material culture from African contemporary agents, by locating material testimony over historical, cultural and aesthetic processes, in a Western network of museums, galleries and private collectors, who were posed as guardians of African knowledge. Once again, M. L. Bastin could not put it more clearly. Her later description of styles and sub-styles of Cokwé Art, is based on objects from the Museum of Volkerkunde (Berlin), the Museu do Dundo (Angola), the Museu Nacional de Etnologia (Lisboa), the Museu de Antropologia da Universidade do Porto (Porto), the Museu e Laboratório Antropológico (Coimbra), the Casa Museu Teixeira Lopes (Vila Nova de Gaia), the Pace Gallery (New York), as well as from the private collections of Lance Entwistle, Warren Robbins, Jeff and René Vander Straete, Jean-Claude Bellier, and the Ginzbergs. After her study she remarked:

³ In this sense, such discourse engages in an anti-conquest type of narrative in Pratt's (1992) terms. Such a fact may account for the contemporary difficulty in distancing from it (see below).

⁴ On this argumentative vein see Fabian 1998 and Keim 1998.

These [contemporary] carvers sometimes display considerable technical skills. Though their productions are generally mediocre, this is probably because they have been caught between two civilizations. On the one hand, they cannot fall back on traditional values. On the other, they are awkward in assimilating what Europe has to offer. It seems that all African artists are faced with the same problem (Bastin 1982: 255).

In other words, African Art is past history, is rarely to be found in Africa as it is exceptionally voiced by Africans.⁵

Last but certainly not least, a promising global market was developing for African Art, valued under the same empowering topics of other arts, mixed with ethnographic varnish, and polished by the rhetoric of antiques. A good object should have a specific style, would have been used in some sort of local action, and would have to be out of production. Intersecting with this rhetoric, the definition of a Cokwé style within this global setting meant, to put it colloquially, that when hamburgers were appearing everywhere the Cokwé were made 'fish and chips.' In other words, it is this globalized discourse – perceived locally as an-other – that was the basis for the validation of Cokwé artifacts as a distinct feature of relevance within the global inventory of African objects. To spread all the consequences of the sentence, so did the museum, its collections, its workers, its owners and the nation that hosted them.

Objects such as the 'Lwena statue' might be seen as objectifications of colonial domination. The material system of their production, circulation and consumption, as well as the diverse meaning investments to which they are (inter)subjected in those processes, confine them to overlapping networks of Portuguese colonialism and its standing in the world system. Objects such as those sculpted at the museum workshop by the company's specialized employees labeled as sculptors (who were directed to use their cultural knowledge to replicate ancient artifacts), were produced under the purpose of organizing a stock of objects to be offered to distinguished guests of the Dundo Museum. The tracing of this circuit reveals the paths through which the museum has constituted itself as a specific sort of colonial agent, refracting the interplay of the production of multiple identities.

The Lunda peoples, the Cokwé and their neighbors, the colons, and the Portuguese have all established themselves (or were established) as social categories through museum practices. These were not, however, stabilized as cultural forms. They were rather relational, interactive and, within themselves and against each other, open to contestation. It was as a product of such con-

⁵ Although I think these are immediate effects of M. L. Bastin's works I am not implying that they were intended to have led to such unpredictable effects, nor do I imply any devaluation of its merits. I picture this as a common situation of non-scientific results of scientific practice.

testation that objects such as this one were trivialized. Meeting a consensual one-sided view of the situation, they also met what had become valued native identities, based in cultural forms that had been formerly tamed and displaced.

The colonial agency was a feature of the museum itself in part because, as a peripheral zone within the modern world system, it was built at the crossroads of diverse paths of cultural, political and economic meaning flows, distributed through diverse interlinked and sometimes overimposed networks of dissemination. These objects are tokens of those dynamics: for the sculptor they were part of his subordinated way of living; for the museum and the company they were as much a material proof of their success in the cultural salvaging mission, as a statement of their identity as agents of that process; for the visitor who received them they were tokens of its partaking in the endeavor.

The spectre of art

Let me sum up a few points to pose a final question: the category of art, when applied to objects, becomes an index of a social relationship. Its establishment regarding African material culture grew steadily with colonialism. The category of African Art – either used out of Africa or by the African urban elite – today, carries the spectre of diffuse and multiple unequal power relations that corresponded with the domination of one group over another objectified in things. The mutual co-constitution of two groups within the colonial situation is present in these objects – objects called ‘art’ in the colonial situation. With such history in mind one may ask if there is such a significant fracture between colonial past and ‘post-’ considering this particular social practice.

Furthermore, considering the present situation regarding the manufacture of Angolan National Patrimony and its embodiment in this sort of objects one is tempted to question, how, in fact, does the ‘post-’ in the post-‘colonial situation’ materialize. Going back to the ‘Lwena statue’ and minding the fact that collecting is tantamount to ‘looting’ (or should one say it is in a close descent relationship from looting?) in Africa, was not the Museum Victoria web site merely updating current forms of a long history of dispossession and of agency abduction? After all, hasn’t the stealing of African Art artifacts – especially from African museums – become a trivia anecdote of the museum world, and of its less recognized, yet (and therefore) socially empowering counterparts of the ‘primitive arts’ market? Doesn’t this sound as if the postcolonial had gone local (a situation qualifying the terms of living in specific places after colonization), while colonialism persisted in its global forms?

Such are the questions. That’s all.

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Nuno Porto

O ESPECTRO DA ARTE

A arte tradicional é um dos principais elementos a que recorrem os actuais discursos oficiais e urbanos que pretendem representar Angola como uma nação coerente. A cultura material, classificada ao mesmo tempo como arte e como angolana, ou é intencionalmente usada para objectificar a nação de acordo com as práticas culturais das elites dominantes, urbanas e letradas, ou participa de forma difusa neste processo ao ser incorporada na cultura popular. Simultaneamente, contudo, os mesmos artefactos servem para objectificar a contestação de grupos que reclamam a sua especificidade étnica no mosaico cultural que é Angola, segundo afirmam. Embora seja assumido que em causa está a formação do nacionalismo, nenhuma das partes questiona a noção de arte. Neste artigo é analisada a questão da arte no contexto da arte cokwé e da afirmação contemporânea da etnicidade cokwé. Partindo das ligações entre o Museu do Dundo da antiga Companhia dos Diamantes de Angola e o Museu Nacional de Antropologia de Luanda, é explorada a continuidade das noções de arte dos períodos colonial e pós-colonial, tanto ao nível conceptual como ao nível das práticas.

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