

Rewriting the Colonial Past: Contemporary Challenges of Museum Collections

Seminar organized at the Maurice Halbwachs Centre (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales / Ecole Normale Supérieure) during the 2016-2017 academic year (November 2016 - May 2017), Paris

Organised by Benoit de L'Estoile (CNRS/ENS/Centre Maurice Halbwachs/ PSL), Felicity Bodenstein (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence), Margareta von Oswald (EHESS/Humboldt-Universität in Berlin), Damiana Otoi (University of Bucharest), Dominique Poulot (Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne), Laurella Rinçon (French Ministry of Culture and Communication/ENS) and Anna Seiderer (Université Paris 8).

This seminar will focus on contemporary forms of rewriting the past through the renegotiation and reappropriation of collections acquired during colonial times on the African continent, which have been preserved ever since in museum institutions. These collections include ethnographic objects, as well as written and visual archives, acquired or produced by or for museums.

These collections, constituted between the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, generate today frictions and tensions. They are seen as spoils of war from which the winners write the history of winners (Benjamin). The collections reflect scholarly practices that have been since then challenged. Collected for scientific, religious and / or political and merchant reasons, they bear the imprint of a conflictual history that is sometimes stuck in a manichean reading of history. In this seminar, we analyse how different social, scientific and artistic practices engage with this past and with its epistemological, political and economic heritage.

Through the input of researchers, curators, and artists, we shall address these practices and processes from a multidisciplinary perspective, opening the discussion to the challenges and opportunities offered by these objects and documents.

Webpage of the seminar: <https://enseignements-2016.ehess.fr/2016/ue/1729/>