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The Future of Return of the African Artefacts: A Review of African Union (AU) Vision 2063 on Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity Common Heritage, Values and Ethics

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2063.*

The successful return of African artefacts was absolutely echoed by the later Zairian President, Kukugbedu Zambanga Seseseke Mobuto, at the United Nations in New York. The parliaments' legislation, enactment of the national laws, and mutual agreement treaties in the joint International Council of Museums (ICOM) were implemented at a slow pace across Africa. The paper reviews discourse on "Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity Common Heritage, Values and Ethics" since unveiling the African Union (AU) Vision 2063 in the year 2021. It aims to unravel some issues that affect the return of African artefacts and its way forward. The paper has employed qualitative research design and historical methodologies. It has explored the desktop research framework by reviewing related literature on the restitution or return of African artefacts and formulation of the Africa Union's Vision 2063. The paper has analysed the experts' voices, reviewed related literature, and formulated government policies on the return of African art. It has randomly looked at some of the few African countries, such as the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of Kenya, among others, as examples. The paper is cognisant that the artefacts that were returned and preserved at various local sites of Kenya and African Heritage Houses such as the Murumbi Collection, Koitalel Arap Samoei Museum, and Alan Donovan House of Heritage. It applauds the candid documentation done by the African governments through social media on African culture, arts, and heritage in modern times. The paper concludes by alluding that African leaders should champion the bringing back of remaining African artefacts still held in other countries.

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INTRODUCTION

The Current French president, Emmanuel Macron, made a rejuvenated speech on the Future of the return of African artefacts under the 1970 United Nations Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization Convention (UNESCO) and the 1995 International Institute for the Unification of Private Law Convention (UNIDROIT), (Opoku 2017 and Adewumi 2015). Adewumi (2015) and Shyllon (2007) distinguished the slow momentum of fruitful return of African artefacts as a result of legislation, the enactment of national laws, and mutual agreement treaties in the joint International Council of Museums (ICOM) across Africa. Apoh & Mehler (2019) pointed out that in 2019, Namibians celebrated the return of the Bible and the whip of Hendrik Witbooi, the Nama leader who opposed German colonial rule. Similarly, Bashir (2023) observed in 2022 the Mijikenda tribe of Kenya celebrating the return of some ancestral artefacts that had been shipped to the United Kingdom.

Beurden (2017) learnt that the Tervuren collection was still exhibited at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), the former Museum of Belgium Congo, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He attributes the return of the Tervuren collection to a passionate speech from the former late Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko at the United Nations in New York. In addition, Shyllon (2007) revealed that Ethiopians accessed the remaining Magdala treasure and ancient Christian manuscripts, following the constant dialogues of former late Emperor Yohannes IV, Haile Selassie and the Ethiopian Associations. She further acknowledged that the steady negotiation initiated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in

collaboration with the International Council of Museums (ICOM), West African Museums Programm (WAMP), and the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM) saw the return few Ob treasures and Benin's bronze in 2022, according to Oltermann, (2022). Education curriculums in Africa include the vision of Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity, Common Heritage, Values and Ethics in their curricula (African Union 2021). Among the examples are South Africa curricula on South Africa's heritage and the Competency Base Curriculum (CBC) of Kenya Ministry of Education (2017).

Moreover, the discourses on "*African Cultural Renaissance is pre-eminent*"- a goal of African Union Vision 2063 (2021) receive priority in higher education in Africa. In 2019, the African Studies Association of Africa Conference (ASAA) held a conference at the United States International University in Nairobi-Kenya (USIU) with the theme titled *African and Africana Knowledge: Past Representations, Current Discourses, Future Communities* (ASAA, 2019). Just recently, Toyin Falola @70 Conference 2023 expanded the discourses at Kenyatta University under the sub-theme titled "*Colonial Literature and The Future of The Arts in Africa* (Falola 2023). The paper recognised that such scholarly discourses on the African Cultural Renaissance are pre-eminent (African Union 2021), and the return of African artefacts is still underway in many pockets of Africa and its diaspora.

The main objective of the paper is to unravel some of the issues facing the return of African artefacts and outline the African Union Vision 2063' on "*Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity Common Heritage, Values and Ethics*". It has accepted

unresolved issues such as delays in the enactment of treaties, mutual agreement, and legislation that governs the return of African artefacts, the deficiency of African ideologies, and the destructive globalisation trend on African artefacts. The paper advises the communication authority in Africa ought to manage the globalisation debates that demean the return of African artefacts. It even adds that African scholars, leaders, and government officials must champion the culture, arts and heritage in the education curriculum and other discourses pertaining to the return of African art.

METHODOLOGY

The paper employed qualitative research design and historical methodologies. It explored the desktop research framework by reviewing related literature on the restitution or return of African artefacts and the formulation of the Africa Union's Vision 2063 (African Union 2021). It has randomly looked at some of the few African countries, such as the Federal Government of Nigeria, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of Kenya, among others, as examples. The paper has developed a discussion on reviewed related literature, drawing its findings and a conclusion.

RETURN OF AFRICAN ARTEFACTS

Adewumi (2015), Shyllon (2007), and Beurden (2017) defined "return" as the process of bringing back the African artefacts that were once displaced to their original form or place. It refers to restoring or reinstating, conserving, restitution, or rejuvenating. Adewumi (2015) and Beurden (2017) alluded that return also applies to the unlawful possession of any artefacts by Europeans during colonial and missionary expansion, illicit trade, and illegal export to foreign countries.

Adewumi (2015), Russell (1993), Azeez (2010), and Gerstenblith (1980) indicated that the African artefacts are vessels used by early Africans even before the engulfment of the early missionaries and the expansion of European colonial power in Africa. Coffman (2015), Clarke (2006), Stokstan, and Cothren (2005) added the purpose of vessels

was to promote self-expression in religious deities, political power, ceremonial rites of passage, household utility, and self-efficacy in body adornment. Adewumi (2015), Russell (1993), and Azeez (2010) exemplified African artefacts to include cultural objects, artworks and heritage items.

Issues Surrounding the Returns of African Artefacts

Treaties, Mutual Agreement, And Legislation Law

Dahir (2019), James (2021), Adewumi (2015), and Bashir (2023) recognised the effort to return the African artefacts under the 1970 UNESCO Conventions, the 1995 UNIDROIT Conventions, and national law led to approximately 10% of the Kenyan artefacts returned and preserved in various local site of The National Museum of Kenya, and African Heritage Houses such as the Murumbi Collection, Koitalel Arap Samoei Museum, and Alan Donovan House of Heritage. However, Bashir (2023), Dahir (2019) and James (2021) complained that 80% are still held in European countries due to the failure of African nations to enforce the law and ratify the Convention's recommendation. Shyllon (2007), Adewumi (2015), and Beurden (2017) illustrated that Nigeria and Burkina Faso have tirelessly lobbied the United Kingdom and France respect the 1970 UNESCO codes on the return of artefacts held in their colonies with minimal success. Opuka (2017) mentioned that the conflicts have always revolved around the acquisition of African artefacts and their natural status of the artefacts at different levels of legislation. Shyllon (2007) and Adewumi (2015) gave a case of the Federal Republic of Nigeria vs. Alain de Montbrison when the Paris Court of Appeal rejected the claims of Nigeria under Article 13 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention pleading for the return of the Nok Statues. Nigeria lost the appeal on unsubstantial arguments of the non-extraterritorial foreign law, becoming one of the hurdles that face the return of the African artefacts.

Illicit smuggling of African artefacts

According to Opoku (2017) and Apoh and Mehler (2019), the return of African artefacts faces huddles with illicit smuggling of artefacts to European and United States museums. Opoku (2017), Shyllon (2007), and Hunt et al. (2018) revealed that French President Emmanuel Macron, together with other directors of prestigious world museums, gave disgusted remarks on corruption practices among African leaders. Opoku (2017), Beurden (2017), Apoh and Mehler (2019) established that African leaders purport illegal smuggling of African artefacts during internal turmoil such as Bifra in Nigeria, Lumumba/Kasavubu in DR Congo, and post-election crises in African nations. They noted that the high monetary value of African artefacts in the international market was a motivating factor for illegal excavation and collection.

In Kenya, Beurden (2017) proved that the code of 1970 UNESCO was bypassed and allowed the illegal excavation of Proconsul Africanus, an ape over fourteen million years old, and relics of Koitelet Arap Samoei. Later, they were illegally exported to the Natural History Museum in London. Opoku (2017) is unhappy to find out that African legislative leaders have also provided room for the illicit trafficking of African artefacts due to failure to enforce illicit traffic laws. In turn, Beurden (2017), Shyllon (2007), and Adewumi (2015) illustrated that foreign laws protect the buyers and keepers of artefacts from illicit export. Beurden (2017) and Shyllon (2007) give an example of Mali experiencing illegal excavation and plunder in the Niger Delta and Djenne during the war outbreak. Later, the Mali artefacts were airlifted to foreign countries like the Netherlands, which provided legal protection and market value. Therefore, unless the foreign laws for both parties under private international law are addressed, illicit smuggling still poses a challenge to the return of African artefacts.

Deprivation of African Ideologies

Beurden (2017) quoted Ngugi wa Thiongo, stating that a people's culture, arts, and heritage

are tools that control self-definition, identity, and beliefs. In Africa, the colonisers and missionaries used similar tools to rob Africans of their own beliefs, religion, and values, according to Arowolo (2010). Beurden (2017) and Ogutu (2020) wrote that most African artefacts were detached from their African inherited skills, knowledge, and craftsmanship. Opoku (2017) and Apoh and Mehler (2019) added the consequences of some African leaders and scholars disengaging from any meaningful contributions to African culture, arts and renaissance of heritage discourses.

The paper found an immense effort from the media reports Mwikio (2020) and Daily Nation (2020) when The National Museum of Kenya leadership executed codes of UNESCO and UNIDROIT to preserve the deteriorating oldest historical sites, such as Vasco Da Dama, Jumba la Mtwana (a large house of slaves), and Gede Homes (a medieval Swahili-Arab settlement). Similarly, Beurden (2017) revealed that former president Jacob Zuma of South Africa utilized his presidency patriotic influence to champion African culture, arts, and heritage in South African education curricula. The initiative was meant to promote African native identity and self-efficacy among South African citizens. Furthermore, the drafters of the Competency Base Curriculum (CBC) (2017) have considered such attributes in the ongoing Kenya education curricula.

Propagation of Western Content via Social Media

Arowolo (2010) and Awe (2010) are concerned that controversial globalisation poses a major obstacle to the return of African artefacts to the global market. Awe (2010) illustrated that the contents are eroding the minds of the 21st-century African generation. Arowolo (2010) and Awe (2010) were uncomfortable with the communication authorities in Africa for letting the streams of Western content to the general public.

The Statcounter website (2018) and Awe (2010) further expounded that social media via

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Google carries controversial content that degrades African culture, arts, and heritage. An example is the pop-out clip titled "*Defraud in the Fine Art Market*", which once displayed a distortive prototype of African art in some Western museums. Nevertheless, the paper applauds the fact that the government of Kenya has initiated a documentation project on African culture, art, and heritage. According to Bashir (2023), such documentation content is streamed on social media platforms to mitigate the controversial content from other countries and allow in-depth discussion on the return of African culture, arts, and heritage to the pocket of the world.

CONCLUSION

The paper recommends the current Head of State, other African leaders and scholars emulate the former South African President Jacob Zuma, later Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko, and the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in campaigning for bringing back the 80% of artefacts that are held by other countries. This will contribute to the achievement of the African Union (AU) Vision of 2063 on Africa with a Strong Cultural Identity, Common Heritage, Values and Ethics. However, the deprivation of arts, heritage, and culture via globalisation, colonisation imparts, and diminishing of African identity has continued to be a huddle in the return of African artefacts. The African legislative leaders should enact laws on issues concerning the return of African artefacts. There is also a need to harmonise foreign laws that are under the AU model law on the protection of culture, arts, and heritage. The paper applauds the South African education curriculum and the efforts of the new Competency Based-Curriculum CBC of the Government of Kenya for incorporating arts, culture, and heritage in the education system. It also acknowledges the active attitude of some leaders in the documentation of African culture, arts, and heritage content on social media platforms. The documentation is already making already in-depth discourses on the Future of the return of African artefacts.

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