

16th EASA biennial conference [New anthropological horizons in and beyond Europe](#)

EASA2020 – P179: Curating the (post)colonial in Europe and beyond

Convened by Chiara De Cesari (University van Amsterdam) and Wayne Modest (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam/National Museum of World Cultures), moderated by Wayne Modest <https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2020/panels#8549>

Wednesday 22 July 2020, 08:30-10:15 and 11:00-12:45 (Lisbon/London time)

This panel explored how museums in different contexts respond to the (post)colonial condition. Its main question was: In what ways are museums colonial institutions, how do they represent colonialism, and what does it mean, practically, theoretically, to decolonize them? Nuno Porto (University of British Columbia, UBC) talked about the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver at UBC and the project to decolonize its African collections in the context of a university located on unceded land of the Musqueam first nation, emphasizing the socially situated nature of decolonization. Damiana Otoiu (Bucharest University) examined how questions of ownership and representation have been approached by French and South African (post)colonial museums with regard to collections of physical anthropology and human remains; and how claims to the dead help constitute Indigenous communities in the present. Ana-Rita Amaral (University of the Free State) interrogated limitations and potential of research on missionary collections, especially from colonial Angola, for the mission to decolonize. Vittoria Caradonna (University of Amsterdam) focused on the relations between Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum and the Black Archives, a local grassroots archive focusing on colonial legacies, to investigate whether such connections may engender a space for true recognition beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and policy constraints. Aleema Gray (Museum of London) discussed “radical curating” using the London Sugar & Slavery gallery as a case study to probe the meanings of “representation” and “knowledge” in museum displays and their potential to represent the multiplicity of Blackness. Margareta von Oswald (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) asked how we can theorize the convergences across activism, politics, and curatorial practice with a view to trans-European postcolonial reckoning departing from a long-term research and publication project entitled “Across Anthropology” carried out together with Jonas Tinius. Lukasz Bukowiecki (University of Warsaw) explored how current European debates concerning ethnographic museums and colonial collections affect the narratives and practices of Polish museums, discussing some recent exhibitions as examples. Merve Kayikci (KU Leuven) analyzed how Islam is represented in contemporary museums and especially how a narrative focusing on the splendor of “Islamic civilization” to counter negative public representations itself erases key dimensions and unwittingly reproduces highly racialized discourses. Banu Karaca (Forum Transregionale Studien) examined possibilities and limitations of attempts to decolonize museum collections at times of war, looking at Syrian heritage today and art stolen in the late Ottoman period in the context of the Armenian genocide, probing contemporary entanglements of historical artifacts and art with war and political violence, past and present. Ferdinand de Jong (University of East Anglia) explored the potential of restitution to address the effects of colonialism, and particularly restitution as an act of repair taking place in a complex neo-colonial context while focusing on the Museum of Black Civilisations in Dakar, Senegal. The final discussion touched upon issues of racializing assemblages, forms of racialization, the agency of museums and objects, the value of comparison, the problem of legal frameworks, the politics of emotions, and the social forces and processes driving museological shifts, the relationship with communities, and with policy making and diversity frameworks.