DO AFRICAN SCULPTURES EVER DIE? COMMENTS ON THE EXHIBITION “ODE AU GRAND ART AFRICAIN : LES STATUES MEURENT AUSSI”, PARIS

« L’art africain comme tout grand art, me dira-t-on, en tout cas plus que tout autre, et depuis si longtemps si ce n’est depuis toujours, est d’abord dans l’homme, dans l’émotion de l’homme transmise aux choses par l’homme et sa société.
C’est la raison pour laquelle on ne peut séparer le problème du sort de l’art africain du problème du sort de l’homme africain, c’est-à-dire en définitive du sort de l’Afrique elle-même »

Aimé Césaire, Discours sur l’art africain. (1)

Kota reliquary, Kota-Obamba, Gabon, previously in Musée de l’Homme, now in Musée du quai Branly, Pavillon des Sessions.

During a recent visit to Paris, I was struck by a notice which announced an exhibition as “Ode au grand art africain: Les statues meurent aussi” from 9 September to 2 October 2010. The word “grand” which I understood to mean “great” is not a term I am used to hearing from Europeans in connection with African art which some still describe as “primitive art” (“art primitif”) despite the various discussions on “arts premiers”. (2) The official announcement refers to “arts premiers”. A short walk through the “rue de Seine”, the street where
many French dealers in African art are located, demonstrates that many shops and dealers there indicate that they deal in “primitive art”, a term used to refer to all non-Western art from Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas.

An announcement stated that the exhibition was to “pay homage to a film and an extraordinary period in which institutions, private collectors and dealers worked together with the same passion.” The exhibition organized jointly by Parcours des mondes, (3) and La Monnaie de Paris (4) was also intended to be part of the celebrations of the 50th anniversaries of African independence and also an homage to Alain Resnais and Chris Marker, two great filmmakers who made a critical film that challenged many of the assumptions of the colonial system.

Les statues meurent aussi (1953) was made at the request of Présence Africaine which felt that there should be a way of demonstrating the genius of African art and its equal validity with other arts. (5) The initial question posed to the film makers was why African art (or “art nègre” in the French original) was not in the Louvre in the same way as Greek or Egyptian art but was to be found in the Musée de l’Homme. The film-makers, like many intellectuals such as Aimé Cesaire, Sartre and others were of the view that the African statues should be liberated from the dusty and lifeless museums of the ethnologists. This view is expressed in the film:

“When human beings die, they enter history. When statues die, they enter art. This botanic of death is what we call culture “

(“Quand les hommess sont morts, ils entrent dans l’histoire. Quand les statues sont mortes, elles entrent dans l’art. Cette botanique de la mort, c’est ce que nous appelons la culture.”)

Plaque depicting drummer playing two split drums, Benin, Nigeria, seized in the notorious Punitive Expedition of 1879 by the British Army and now in the British Museum, London, United Kingdom.
The short film of 30 minutes duration shows in fairly rapid succession some 150 masterpieces of African art that were in the British Museum, London, Musée de l’Homme, Paris and in the Musée Royal de l’Afrique Central, Tervuren, as well as in private collections of Jacob Epstein, Charles Ratton, Helena Rubenstein and others. Other scenes include a group of Africans working on road construction paid by a colonial master in helmet, dancers and welcoming crowds at visits of colonial governors and officials.

The introduction of modern machinery and medicine and their effects on the Africans are also mentioned. Further scenes show African-Americans excelling in sports such as basketball and boxing, indicating that the racism of the colonial government and the USA, oppressive as they were, left open for Africans some chances of using their talents provided they did not go too far. Beating Europeans in boxing was often greeted with projectiles and insults at the victor who by his achievement had exceeded the limits set by a racist society.

*Baule mice divination box, Côte d’Ivoire, previously in the Musée de l’Homme, Paris. now in possession of Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, at the Pavillion des sessions.*

Although *Les statues meurent aussi* uses a lot of statues and other art objects and is primarily a work on African art, its tenor and basic anti-colonialist position regarding the French colonial system, perceptible from beginning to the end, caused the French authorities to censure it. The film made in 1953 could only be shown in its entirety to the general public in 1968 although modified versions were shown to small circles. The precise grounds for banning it were never fully explained to the film makers.
One main theme of *Les statues meurent aussi*, as indicated by the title, is that the African statues in glass windows in European museums are dead. This is stated by the commentary of the film by Jean Négroni as follows:

“An object is dead when the gaze that used to be on it has disappeared. And when we disappear, our objects will be sent to the place where we send the objects of the Negroes: the museum.”

(“Un objet est mort quand le regard vivant qui se posait sur lui a disparu. Et quand nous aurons disparu, nos objets iront là où nous envoyons ceux des nègres : au musée »).

The idea that African statues in the museum are dead deserves some examination. Are the statues dead because they are in the museums or are they in museums because they were already dead? The statement that when statues die they are sent to museums, will support the view that these objects were already dead before reaching the museums. However, parts of the commentary could be understood to mean that because these objects are no longer seen and revered by those for whom they were made, because they are locked up in glass show cases, they are dead for all purposes. Indeed, the commentary declares that an object is dead when an object is no longer viewed by those for whom it was made and whose gaze the object was used to.

Were all or most African artefacts dead at the time, 1953, when the film was made or only those in Western museums? Clearly, in 1953 and indeed even now, many African artefacts are being used by those for whom they were destined even though a large portion of very important objects are still in the museums of the former colonial powers in London, Paris and Belgium as well as in private Western collections. There are also a lot of African artefacts in the United States of America.

We do not regard African cultural artefacts that were looted and stored in Western museums as dead. They are to be considered as objects in exile even though exile some times seems equal to death. The symbolic and spiritual values attached to some of the artefacts are such that they cannot be considered as dead by those who have legitimate connections with them and the societies that produced them. Their strengths and powers are restored the moment those who understand, revere and utilize them are able to welcome them back home and are able to restore their traditional roles. There may be need for purification and other ceremonies since many of these statues have been desecrated by Europeans and others who took them away from their destined locations. African statues do not die and cannot be killed since they represent and symbolize powers that are not subject to such physical elimination. The societies that produced them are still in existence and have need and purpose for them even if those nations that stole them declare them dead. In any case, dead or alive, Africans want their artefacts back home in the same way as we insist that s
human remains stolen or looted by Westerners be returned to their homes for proper burials.(6)

The idea of African statues dying comes dangerously close to the theory that those African artefacts have acquired in Europe additional value and begun a new existence or history, in addition to their previous history in Africa. (7) Such ideas come usually from dealers and others who are very reluctant to reveal the provenance of the objects they sell or possess and do not want to contemplate their restitution. However, the intention of the film was to liberate African artefacts from the dusty ethnological museums of the 1950’s rather than obscure their provenance or declare the society that produced them as extinct.

It is also relevant to recall that Western anthropologists have often propagated the idea that non-Western societies and peoples were about to disappear and therefore it was imperative to save their artefacts before those peoples and societies disappeared and with them, parts of important history of mankind. Some Europeans, such as Luschan were prepared to go as far as to justify the use of force in saving cultural artefacts even if it meant decimating the peoples whose artefacts were to be saved. (8) This way of thinking is not very far from that of some of our Western contemporaries who believe one could bring democracy into non-Western countries first by bombing the countries and destroying basic infra-structures.

With similar pretexts, the colonial governments organized so-called expeditions, ostensibly to collect artefacts in the interest of science but they all ended in depriving the countries they visited of valuable objects which are now in the Western world. The French organized an expedition, The Dakar-Djibuti Ethnographic Expedition (1931-1933), which collected some three thousand and six hundred cultural artefacts from Africa which were first kept in Musée de l’Homme and later transferred to the Musée du quai Branly when it was established in 2006. Many of the African art objects now available on the free art market came from this expedition. The oppressive and doubtful methods used by the members of the French mission to obtain many important artefacts have been described by Michel Leiris, a member of the expedition in his book, Afrique Fantôme which contains details about how Africans were forced and frightened to give up artefacts, under threats of punishments and reprisals for refusal to part with objects the French mission demanded. (9)
The British also sent expeditions to Africa that not only collected many cultural artefacts but also meted punishment to the inhabitants of non-Western countries. The so-called punitive expeditions (as opposed to allegedly scientific expeditions) were sent to Magdala, Ethiopia (1868), Kumasi, Ghana (1874) and Benin City, Nigeria (1879). Many Ethiopian religious relics, crosses and manuscripts, Asante gold pieces as well as the Benin bronzes that are found in Western museums came from these notorious punitive expeditions in which thousands of Africans were massacred. Although Benin bronzes feature very prominently in *Les statues meurent aussi* and in the catalogue of the expedition, there was no discussion of the punitive expedition that burnt Benin City killed many of its inhabitants after looting thousands of artefacts. The cruelties of King Leopold of Belgium should also be remembered when we think of the thousands of Congolese artefacts in the Tervuren museum. Moreover, there is no discussion about the fact that the Ethiopians, Ghanaians and the Nigerians have for decades been requesting the return of some of the looted treasures. The reaction of Western museums and their governments to such restitution requests have been negative, arrogant and supercilious. Indeed, the British Museums, Musée du Quai Branly, Ethnology Museum, Berlin, Ethnology Museum, Vienna, Art Institute of Chicago, Field Museum, Chicago and others do not even bother to acknowledge receipt of the various requests, even from the Benin Royal Family (10) On what basis then do some believe that Westerners are now prepared to share with Africans?

The exhibition, « *Ode au grand art africain; Les statues meurent aussi* » showed some 30 out of the 150 artefacts shown in the film. It is remarkable that the artefacts in the film were and are all in the hands of Europeans and Americans. None seems to be owned by African institutions or private
collectors. Nath Mayo Adediran contributes to the catalogue a useful and interesting article on the establishment and development of museums in Nigeria. (11) Ironically, the article of the Director of Museums at the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, is accompanied by a Yoruba *ifa* divination plate, previously in the *Musée de l’Homme*, and now in the possession of *Musée du Quai Branly*. Were the editors of the catalogue aware of the irony of this juxtaposition? Probably nobody thought about the significance of placing this object next to an article on the development of museums in Nigeria. What will the oracle plate tell us about Nigeria’s chances of recovering lost/looted/stolen Nigerian artefacts from the French?

The exhibition followed the usual pattern of Europeans in showing African objects in semi-obscurity even though in Africa itself most of these objects, except those with special religious and ritual significance would be exposed to normal daylight. Africa and darkness seem intertwined in the minds of those influenced by Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. We never see in exhibitions of Western art the kind of darkness or dim light reserved for non-Western art. They must be presented as mysterious and exotic. The effect of course is that one cannot clearly see the objects displayed and the relevant texts. Original documents displayed in such an exhibition can only be read by those with exceptionally good sight. The eyes of most visitors become quickly tired and they leave with relief such exhibitions.

*Plaque representing the sacrifice of a bull. Seized in the notorious Punitive Expedition of 1897 by the British Army, now in the British Museum, London, United Kingdom.*
The question which was at the base of *Les statues meurent aussi*, namely why African art is not in the Louvre like other arts, remains unanswered by the film and by the exhibition. The exhibition does not try to provide an answer or explanation to this fundamental question. In a contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition, Sarah Frioux-Salgas mentions that four of the artefacts mentioned in the film are now in the *Palais des Sessions*, part of the Louvre set aside for the *Musée du Quai Branly* before it was completed. The author ends her contribution with a statement which I can only understand as ironically meant: “We should congratulate ourselves that forty-seven years after the making of the film, *Les statues meurent aussi*, some of the objects that appeared there are now shown in the Louvre where they have been since 2000.”

(“Félicitons-nous de savoir que quarante-sept ans après la réalisation du film *Les statues meurent aussi* certains objets qui y apparaissaient sont aujourd’hui exposés au Louvre depuis l’an 2000 »). (12)

We all know that the reason why African art is not located in the Louvre is the basic European notion that African art is inferior art, the art of savages and primitive peoples. This art has to be distinguished from the art of civilized nations like the Europeans. An exception is made for Egyptian art which many Europeans, past and present, do not consider as part of our African continent. The philosophers of the so-called European Enlightenment, at their worst, declared Egypt not to be part of Africa. Hegel in his wisdom considered that part of Africa as more or less part of Europe. (13)

The fact that African art has been influential in the development of modern art has not radically changed the basic arrogant and condescending attitudes of many Westerners. This is surely a reflection of their general attitudes towards Africa and Africans. The recognition of the obvious contribution of African art to modern art has not always been clear and unambiguous. Prof. Gates outlines this ambiguity and ambivalent found even among those who should be the first to know this: “Picasso’s discomfort - and the discomfort of critics even today - with the transforming presence of African art in painting underlines the irony of an encounter that led to the beginning of the countries of European disapprobation of African art - art that is now taken to be neither “primitive” nor “ugly” but to embrace the sublime.” (14)

In her contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition, Hélène Joubert, states that the wish for recognition, respect and sharing expressed in the film is in the process of being realized: “The dream of recognition, respect and sharing which this film-manifesto expressed is in the process of realization.” (“Le rêve de la reconnaissance, du respect et du partage que ce film-manifeste formulait, est en marche.”) (15)
Just in case we get the impression from such pronouncements that the recognition of African art in France is now without any problem, Nadine Martinez in *La réception des arts dits premiers ou archaïque en France* (2010) starts her book with the statement that the colonial past of France has influenced attitudes towards the arts of colonized nations and shows itself still in the display of art works. The author ends her book with the affirmation: “The arts of the African continent are not still recognized by French institutions”. (« Les arts du continent africain ne sont pas encore reconnus par les institutions françaises ».) (16) This may be an exaggeration in so far as the exhibitions on African and other non-Western arts have increased considerably in France in the last decades. What is true though is that these arts are not accorded the same respect as Western arts and especially, the practice of displaying these arts in semi-obscurity, in order to create an air of exoticism and mystery is a reflection of the colonialist ideology that Africa is a continent of darkness and mystery. Africans find it difficult to understand how intelligent persons can describe their continent, with its blistering and intensive sunshine as a dark continent.

None will dispute that African art has gained some recognition and respect in the past decades but this process will surely be a long one, given the background of established prejudices and ideas on this matter. Even in the catalogue of the present exhibition we find an expression such as “art tribal.” (17) An increase in appreciation of African art surely helps also those who have cornered and dominate the African art market. They also determine what is authentic and what is not. The best pieces of African art were taken away to Europe and America during the colonial regime and are still there.

As far as France is concerned, the question whether African art should also be in the Louvre or not, seems to have been already answered in the negative and the issue is no longer discussed. African art, except Egyptian art, is not to be in the Louvre but in a different place from the arts of civilized nations: in the musée du Quai Branly.

Benoît de l’Estoile, in *Le goût des autres: de l’exposition colonial aux arts premiers* confirmed the reluctance of the French to accord African art the same status as European art. (18) The success of the museum at Quai Branly and its architecture with the French public is partly due to the fact that it corresponds to their expectations and prejudices. Images conveyed by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* prevail there. Even the grass and other plants in the surroundings of the museum are allowed to grow wild and unkempt in order to create a jungle atmosphere in a city where gardens are normally well-kept. A desire to entertain and amuse is very present there. If the French wanted to give equal recognition to the cultures of non-European origin, there would have been no need to establish a new museum where European culture is absent. These works could have been put in the Louvre just as a few non-European works of art were placed...
in the Pavilion des Sessions of the Louvre. But the great resistance and resentment against that experiment showed how deeply the Europeans believe that African art cannot be put on the same level as European art. There is a clear reluctance to put European art in the same hall as African, Oceanian and American arts. The exposition of these cultures displayed in Quai Branly still bears the stigmata of European slavery, colonialism and imperialism.

Statue of GU, god of war and iron, Fon, seized by the French Army from from King Behanzin, Dahomey, now Republic of Benin. Previously in possession of Charles Ratton, now in Musée Dapper, Paris.

What I found remarkable in the exhibition *Ode au grand art africain* and its accompanying catalogue is the absence of a discussion on the question of restitution and the efforts of the UNESCO and the United Nations in this regard. It is almost as if the curator and the editor of the catalogue were not aware of the persistent demands for the return of looted/stolen cultural objects to their countries of origin. Yet it was stated that one of the aims of the exhibition was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of African Independence and to contribute to the appreciation of African art. Can one really be said to contribute to either aims if one ignores the fervent desires of the African peoples to recover at least some of their cultural objects looted/stolen in the colonial times? Are the demands for the
restitution of looted/stolen objects not part of the history of the objects and art history?

Also to be noted is the absence of any assessment by Présence Africaine of developments since the completion of Les statues meurent aussi in 1951. After all, the film which is at the centre of the exhibition was made at the request of Présence Africaine. Are they satisfied with progress so far regarding the status of African art in France and elsewhere? Do they still want to see African art in the Louvre or are they satisfied with its location and treatment at the Musée du Quai Branly? Are they in anyway concerned with the lack of progress in the restitution of African cultural objects as discussed at the Cairo Conference on Restitution, 2010?

![Yoruba Ifa divination plate, Nigeria, previously in Musée de l’Homme now in Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.](image)

Do they prefer African art objects to be kept in the same Western museums that were mentioned in the film of 1951? There are a whole series of matters concerning African culture which this review, with the support of Jean-Paul Sartre, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Aliune Diop (its founder) Léon Cheikh Anta Diop and others brought to the attention of the public. Can they now remain silent on an issue such as the restitution of cultural artefacts stolen/looted during the colonial period?

It is to be noted that African music was not used in the film which is about African artefacts. Were the film makers not aware of the considerable corpus of African music that existed at the time of making the film? It is probable that they, like many filmmakers of today, did not think for one moment that a work on African art and society should also be accompanied by African music. The music used is quite good but not African. Could one imagine making a film about European art and using African music?
The exhibition, *Ode au grand art africain: Les statues meurent aussi* has undoubtedly shown some masterpieces of African art either directly in the exhibition itself or indirectly by reference to the film by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker which was shown in the course of the exhibition. The excellent catalogue accompanying the exhibition and the reissue of L’art nègre by *Présence Africaine* will undoubtedly contribute to interest and knowledge of African art.

Regarding celebration of the 50th anniversary African Independence, one may question the legitimacy and basis of such participation by some of the great beneficiaries of French colonial and imperialist rule. Have the dealers in African art and the French institutions finally rejected colonialism and its basic tenets? On what basis are they seeking to celebrate with us? Have they shown any particular signs that they have different positions from the colonial masters? A concrete change of attitude and rejection of colonialism would be the return of some of the looted/stolen cultural artefacts which are the subject of the film and are still in Western museums. Can they reject colonialism and keep the fruits of that system of oppression? So far French art dealers and institutions such as *Musée du Quai Branly* have rejected any idea of restitution and prefer not to talk about it. (19) In any case there was no mention of restitution of African artefacts either in the exhibition or in its catalogue. But how long can they avoid this issue which is considered important by many Africans?

*Les statues meurent aussi* ends on an optimistic note that nothing would prevent Africans and Europeans from being the inheritors of both civilizations provided there is equality in the present and no repression. Direct repression can be said to have ended with the colonial regime and the acquisition of independence. But is there equality? Can there be equality when the Europeans and their American allies have hijacked, among other things, our cultural icons and are refusing even to discuss the possibility of restitution, not to talk about compensation for all these decades of wrongful possession? How can Africans make a useful contribution to a universal culture when others refuse to let us have back the artefacts of our ancestors so that we may build on what our peoples have achieved in the past? High praises of African culture are clearly no substitute for the return of our cultural artefacts.

Kwame Opoku, 24 October, 2010.

**NOTES**
1. “African art, like any great art, some would say, in any case more than any other, and for a long time if not always, is first of all in man, in the emotion of man transmitted to objects by man and his society. This is the reason why one cannot separate the problem of the fate of African art from the fate of the African man, that is to say the fate of Africa itself”

Aimé Césaire, « Discours sur l’art africain » in Annick Thebia-Melsan, Aimé Césaire; Pour regarder le siècle en face, 2000, Maisonneuve & Larose, p. 25. Aimé Césaire wrote his brilliant statement from which the above extract has been taken, in response to André Malraux who had given a statement on African art at the opening of the “Colloque sur l’art dans la vie du people,” Dakar, 30 March-7 April 1966. (Translations from the French are by K. Opoku.) Malraux had declared that what the African masks represented, like what the European cathedrals represented, was lost for ever. Africans must take into account the changes in African art and society. They must build the future on the basis of a present which did not have the same relationship with the past as it was previously. The magic world that created the masks could no longer be found again. Césaire argued that African art depended on the African who depended on a future Africa which had not been cut off from its traditions. See Aimé Césaire, Études litteraires, vol 6, no.1, 1973, pp. 99-109. http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/500270ar Malraux’s idea suggests an African art developing with no connections to the much admired sculptures whereas Césaire correctly points out that African art is a reflection of African society and one cannot separate the one from the other. African traditions are still with us.

2. On the use of the term “primitive” see the interesting comments by Warren M.Robbins and Nancy Ingram Nooter, in their book African Art in American Collections, Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA. 2004. The authors write: “It is ironic that an art form as highly sophisticated, technically skilled, and richly inventive as traditional African sculpture should continue to be regarded in the Western world as primitive - in the pejorative sense of crude, untutored, savage.” … But the attitude conveyed by the use of the term primitive with reference to African sculpture persists today, carrying controversy with it wherever it is used, for both right and wrong reasons…” pp. 20-21 The authors add that some linguistics experts say that it is unrealistic to believe that such a term as primitive can be eliminated from the Western vocabulary. Their own preference is for the term traditional African art. On the use and implications of the term “arts premiers”, see the following excellent books: Marine Degli and Marie Mauze, Arts premiers: Le temps de la reconnaissance, Gallimard, 2000: Mathilde Annaud, Les arts premiers: Reflets sauvages d’Occident, Editions Milan, 2007.
Prof. Ekpo Eyo has written very useful notes on the notion of primitivism and its use regarding African art: *Primitivism and Other Misconceptions of Africa Art*, Africana Library Notes, Issue 63, April 1982, California Institute of Technology.

3. *Parcours des mondes* is an organization of French and international art dealers who organize annually a fair of non-Western art. [http://www.parcours-paris](http://www.parcours-paris)

4. *La Monnaie de Paris*, a state-owned industrial and commercial company, has the monopoly of manufacturing coins for France. [http://www.monnaiedeparis](http://www.monnaiedeparis)


9. See Annex below. See also, *La misión etnográfica y lingüística Dakar-Djibouti y el fantasma de África*, 2009, La Imprenta CG


12. Sarah Frioux-Salgas :

13. The separation of Egyptian art from other African arts goes back to the idea of Hegel that Egypt does not belong to Africa and should be excised from the Continent:
“The northern part of Africa, which may be specially called that of the coast-territory (for Egypt has been frequently driven back on itself, by the Mediterranean) lies on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic; a magnificent territory, on which Carthage once lay — the site of the modern Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. This part was to be — must be attached to Europe”. p.92
And why did Hegel prescribe this excision? His plan was to declare the whole of Africa as a continent without history and without any development and not part of world history: “Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World — shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself — the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition.” p.91
But Hegel could not pursue this line of thought so long as Egypt was part of Africa. Egypt had been known to the Europeans since the Greek and Roman times as a civilization. He had the choice of either abandoning his prejudice or accepting that there had been development in Africa. He preferred to keep his unfounded prejudices and decided to sever Egypt from the Continent. After the severance of Egypt, what follows in Hegel's discussion is uncontrolled vituperation and unmitigated attacks against Africans. See Olufemi Taiwo: “Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy”, http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v1/4/2.htm K.Opoku, “Why do Europeans, even intellectuals have difficulty in contemplating the restitution of stolen African
cultural objects? Wolf Lepenies and the Ethnology Museum, Berlin”
http://www.modernghana.com

Prof. Ekpo Eyo has written an excellent contribution in which he states, inter alia;
“The idea that northwestern Africa and Egypt are not part of Africa has gained such wide acceptance that when the Royal Academy of Arts in London contemplated mounting the exhibition Africa: The Art of a Continent, it had first to justify the inclusion of the arts of northwestern Africa and Egypt in an exhibition dedicated to the continent as a whole. That it decided to do so was for me a triumph for truth and common sense. This is an unprecedented exhibition and, hopefully, one that will foster the necessary changes in the way that people look at the African continent, its history, and its arts.” Putting Northern Africa Back into Africa”, in Africa: The Art of a Continent, Guggenheim Museum, (1996), p.9.

Some Western writers even still draw their own maps of Africa which do not include the northern parts of our Continent even though such a truncated entity does not exist in reality. They take their own prejudices and ideology for reality. See Ivan Bargna, Afrika - Der Schwarze Kontinent, Parthes Verlag, 2008, P.374.

The crass racism of the philosophers of the so-called European Enlightenment has been thoroughly examined by the late Prof. E. Chukwudi Eze, a brilliant Nigerian intellectual who left us too early. His Race and Enlightenment, (Blackwell Oxford, 1997) is certainly worth reading. For information on the life of Eze, see http://en.academic.ru/dic http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmanuel_Chukwudi_Eze

It is noteworthy that Western museum directors, who often refer to the European Enlightenment as the source of the idea of museum, are very reluctant to practice the very first principle of the Enlightenment. According to Tzvetan Todorov, “At the end of the century, Kant confirmed that the first principle of the Enlightenment resided in holding autonomy: “Have the courage to use your own understanding, is thus the motto of the Enlightenment”: the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is enlightenment”. In defence of the Enlightenment. Atlantic Books, London, 2009, p.42. How come then that the racist ideas of previous generations still prevail in contemporary museology?


**ANNEX**

**EXTRACTS FROM AFRIQUE FANTÔME, MICHEL LEIRIS**
Gallimard, 1953. (Translations from French are by K. Opoku.)

28 August 1931

“After the journey. Dinner at Sido (128 km). Raid, as in the other village, of all that we can find by way of dance costumes, utensils, children’s toys, etc.” (Ibid. p.96)

6 September

“On the left, hanging from the ceiling in the midst of a crowd of calabashes, an indefinable packet covered with feathers of different birds and in which Griaule feels that there is a mask. Irritated by the equivocations of the people our decision is quickly made: Griaule takes two flutes and slips them into his boots, we place the other things in place and we leave.” (Ibid. p.103)
“Griaule decrees then and through Mamadou Vad, informs the chief that since they are obviously mocking us, they must, as reprisals deliver to us a Kono (a religious object) in exchange for 10 francs, on pain of the police, said to be hiding in our vehicle, coming to take the chief and the important persons of the village to San where they will have to explain themselves to the Administration. What a terrible blackmail!

With a theatrical gesture, I gave the chicken to the chief and as Makan has arrived with the canvas sheet, Griaule and I ordered the men to bring us the “Kono” (religious object). With everybody refusing, we went there ourselves, enveloped the holy object in the canvas sheet and went out like thieves whilst the panic-stricken chief fled and at some distance, drove his wife and children to their home with a baton. We crossed the village, which had become completely deserted, in a deadly silence, we reached our vehicles...

The ten francs are given to the chief and we leave in a hurry, in the midst of general astonishment and crowned with the aura of particularly powerful and daring demons or rascals.” (Ibid. pp.103-104)

7 September

“Before leaving Dyabougou, visit to the village and the taking of the second “Kono”, which Griaule had spotted by entering into the reserved hut surreptitiously? This time it is Lutten and myself who have the responsibility for the operation. My heart beats very strongly for since the scandal of yesterday, I realize with more clarity the enormity of what we are committing.” (Ibid. p.105)

“In the next village, I recognised a hut for a “Kono” with a door in ruins, I point it out to Griaule and the action is decided. As in the previous case, Mamadou Vad announces suddenly to the village chief whom we have brought before the hut in question, that the commander of the mission has given us the order to seize the Kono and that we are ready to pay an indemnity of 20 francs. This time, I alone take care of the operation and penetrate into the sacred small place, with the hunting knife of Lutten in my hand in order to cut the links to the mask. When I realise that two men - in no way at all menacing, have entered behind me, I realise with an astonishment which after a very short time turns into disgust, that one feels all the same very sure of one’s self when one is a white man and has a knife in his hand.” (Ibid. p.105)

“Towards the evening, the French teacher informed us that the mosque was the work of a European, the former administrator. In order to implement his plans, he destroyed the old mosque. The natives were so disgusted by the new building that they had to be punished with imprisonment before they would agree to sweep the building.” (Ibid. p.115)
“Departure to the Habés. From the first village visited problems. The Habés are nice peoples who stand firm on their feet and do not seem to be ready to let others disturb them. Attempts to buy a few locks, even a purchase, they will protest and denounce a completed bargain; in a gesture of anger, Griaule breaks a “waamba” (a music instrument for the circumcised) which he had paid for and let it be said that he curses the village.” (Ibid. p.120)

12 November

“Yesterday, we were refused with shock several statuettes which were used to cause rainfall, as well as a statuette with raised arms, found in a sanctuary. Taking away these objects would have been like taking away the life of the country, said a young man who, even though had been in the army, had remained faithful to his customs, almost crying at the thought of the disasters that our impious gesture would have provoked, and opposing our evil design with all his strength, had alerted the old men. Feeling like pirates: saying good-bye this morning to these affectionate old men, happy that we had spared them a disaster, we kept an eye on the huge green umbrella which was normally used to protect us but was today carefully bound. There was a strange bulge looking like the beak of a pelican: it contained the famous statuette with raised arms which I had myself stolen at the foot of the earth mound which served as its altar. I first hid it in my shirt... and then I put it in the umbrella... pretending to urinate in order to divert attention.

This evening, at Touyogou, where we are camping at a public place, my chest is full of earth: my shirt served again as a hiding place for a kind of double edged blade, as we left the cave of masks of this village.” (Ibid. p.156)

14 November

“In addition, the abductions continue and the information. Sanctuaries and holes in which one throws old masks are systematically explored.” (Ibid. p.157)

15 November

“Our friends, Apama and Ambara brought us secretly costumes of fibres for masques which we had asked them. They requested us, above all, to hide them well. Today, I am preparing with them cards on these objects. Apama and Ambara are very attentive to the slightest noise. A child who wanted to enter was scolded. No doubt; our methods have set an example and the two nice boys went to take the costumes of fibres in the cave of masks where they were hidden. The influence of the European...” (Ibid. pp.157-158)

18 November
“In another cave, we were authorised to take one of these objects (objects destined for causing lightning to fall on the heads of thieves). But when we put our hands on it, the people turned away from us, for fear of seeing us terribly punished for our sacrilege... To the right of the cave, in a small sanctuary, a beautiful wooden sculpture. We did not look at it too much in order not to draw too much attention; but it was agreed that this night, Schaeffner and I, we were going to seize it.” (Ibid. p159)

Bearer of a bowl, Luba, Democratic Republic of Congo, now in musée Royal de l’Afrique central, Tervuren, Belgium.