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UNSETTLING HERITAGE & MEMORY FUTURES

**DECOLONIAL TRAJECTORIES
BETWEEN CRISIS & POSSIBILITY**

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UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? PEOPLE, PLACES, & THE RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ERA PLUNDER (1)

Panellists: Camilla Orjuela, Staffan Lundén, Fisseha Fantahun Tefera, Maria Menzel, Ayman Ibrahim Ali, Xi “Títílayò” Jin, Annika Vosseler, Michael La Corte, Madalyn Grant, Kia Pyykkönen, Ahmed Laala Loaar and Elke Selter

Recently, the critique against the continued retention of colonial-era plunder in Western institutions has virtually exploded, pushing museums to initiate or speed up initiatives towards return. Typically, restitution is understood as a process where cultural objects are given back to the community from whom they were once wrongfully removed, and a way to rectify historical injustices and address their manifold endureances into the present. The “problem” posed by (ill-begotten) objects out of their original cultural context is “solved” by returning them “home”.

However, these initiatives, and the heated debate about whether and how artefacts should be returned, raise a number of thorny questions about ownership and “home”. What place artefacts belong to after many years in “exile” is sometimes disputed. Moreover, it is not always self-evident who best represents the community that the objects were taken from in a context of multiple levels of governance and conflicting power structures. The fact that not only objects leave their places of origin, but also people, adds to this complexity. Diversity is increasingly recognised as an intrinsic part of the societies where many colonial-era objects are retained, and over time, migrants from former colonies and their descendants have made themselves at home there. However, recurrent political debates and campaigns in migrant-receiving countries picture immigrants and diasporas as “out of place” and in need of returning “home” unless they properly assimilate into the majority culture.

The panel puts the focus on how the historical trajectories of mobility of both objects and people, and their multiple belongings, shape the debate and provide novel perspectives on restitution and representation. It discusses the different ways in which objects can “come home” or be seen as being “at home”, and how multiple claims over the proper “home” of objects are negotiated or resisted. It also investigates the meanings objects are loaded with as they are connected to (diverse) places and communities, and how this affects representation and display.

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? PEOPLE, PLACES, & THE RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ERA PLUNDER (1)

Contrapuntal Objects: Rethinking Restitution and the Question of Home - **Xi “Títílayò” Jin**, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Recent museum exhibitions on African artefacts often present restitution as a process of repair achieved through collaboration and the return of objects to their places of origin. Starting from two recent exhibitions—the 2025 Benin Bronzes exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and the 2024–2025 African art exhibition at the Tsinghua University Art Museum— this paper examines how global institutions narrate restitution through the language of origin, authenticity, and return, often presuming that cultural objects possess a singular and identifiable “home.”

Adapting Edward Said’s concept of contrapuntal reading, the paper introduces the notion of the contrapuntal object to expose contradictions embedded in narratives of the “original” and return. It revisits Wole Soyinka’s pursuit of the Ori Olokun head in the 1970s, re-reading what was presented as a recovered artefact but was in fact a museum replica. Long dismissed as a mere “replica,” the object occupies an unstable position within colonial hierarchies of authenticity. Reconsidered contrapuntally, the Ori Olokun head reveals how, at moments of rupture, a replica may gesture simultaneously toward the authority of the “original” and toward alternative genealogies of value and agency emerging within its own historical moment.

The paper thus shifts the problem of restitution from the spatial question of where home lies to the temporal question of when belonging becomes legible. The issue is therefore not where home is located, but when home becomes historically possible.

Xi “Títílayò” Jin (she/her) is Ph.D. candidate in African Cultural Studies, with a minor in Visual Cultures, at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research explores restitution, African cultural objects, and the spiritual and political dimensions of return across literature, cinema, and museum spaces. She is the inaugural recipient of the “Restitution and Reparation: Africa and the Post-Colonial Condition” Fellowship at The Africa Institute.

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? (1)

*"It was as if I had brought Benin with me here". On the Benin bronzes, belonging and home - **Staffan Lundén**, University of Gothenburg*

During the colonial era, large quantities of cultural objects were translocated from colonial peripheries to metropolitan centres. The colonial and post-independence period also saw large movements of people from periphery to centre. The Benin bronzes – icons of African art and colonial plunder – have been in the limelight of the debates of the restitution of colonial-era loot. A main argument for return is that it rights historical wrongs and addresses their present-day legacies, including global inequalities and structural racism. The objects' continued presence in showcases in Western museums is portrayed as an ongoing injustice, causing grief and sorrow. Return to the places and communities of origin is likened to the healing of collective "wounds."

However, the issue of "return" of objects to their right locations and custodians is complicated by many factors, which include the historical and contemporary diversity and fluidity of communities and – crucially – that not only objects, but also people move. Therefore, where objects are in or out of place is not self-evident. Nor is it always clear which (if any) historical injustices could and should be amended by return.

This paper presents results from work in progress on how Benin (Edo) diasporas view the restitution (or otherwise) of the Benin bronzes. It zooms in on the Benin bronzes (still) held in the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm (but due to be returned to Nigeria), and on diaspora reactions to their presence there, and in particular how the bronzes evoke notions of belonging and "home".

Staffan Lundén works as a researcher at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Staffan's research is located within the fields of critical heritage studies and critical museology, and focuses on the contemporary illicit antiquities trade and colonial-era loot. His publications include the book *Displaying Loot. The Benin objects and the British Museum* (2016). He is currently working with the project "People, places and plunder. Diasporas and the restitution of looted heritage."

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? (1)

"Where Does a Taonga Go 'Home' To? Restitution, Relationality, and Indigenous Belonging in the Case of Hinematiaro's Pou - Annika Vosseler and Michael La Corte, Museum of the University of Tübingen

This paper examines the restitution of Hinematiaro's Pou from the Museum of the University of Tübingen to Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti in Aotearoa New Zealand as a case through which to critically interrogate the notion of "home" in debates on colonial-era plunder. Rather than framing restitution as the straightforward return of an object to a singular and stable place of origin, the paper argues that "home" is not fixed or self-evident, but relational, historically shaped, and subject to negotiation. In this context, Hinematiaro's Pou is understood not simply as a museum-held entity, but as an ancestral taonga embedded in Indigenous frameworks of belonging structured through genealogy, custodianship, place, and ongoing responsibility.

Drawing on provenance research and on the restitution process developed in sustained dialogue with representatives of Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti, the paper explores how return is shaped by competing yet asymmetrical regimes of authority, representation, and care. It asks how "home" is articulated and claimed when cultural belongings have been displaced through imperial collecting networks, while remaining embedded in enduring social, spiritual, and territorial relationships. Particular attention is paid to restitution as a process of re-situation: not merely the transfer of a material entity, but the restoration of relational conditions through which belonging can be reactivated. By foregrounding Indigenous perspectives on belonging and return, the paper argues that restitution is less adequately understood as closure than as a relational practice of reconnection, recognition, and responsibility, thereby contributing to wider debates on place, mobility, and the afterlives of colonial dispossession.

Annika Vosseler is Head of Provenance and Collections Research at the Museum of the University of Tübingen. Her work focuses on colonial-era collections, Ancestral Human Remains, restitution processes, and partnerships with scholars and descendant communities, especially in African contexts. She previously led research in the project Precarious Provenance. She holds a PhD in African Studies from Leipzig University and an MSc in African Studies from the University of Edinburgh. She teaches provenance research and decolonial approaches to museum practice.

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? (1)

Michael La Corte has been a research assistant at the Museum of the University of Tübingen (MUT) since 2020. After studying art history in Stuttgart, he received his doctorate in 2019 with a comprehensive study on early modern emblems in the interior design of German noble residences. At MUT, he is responsible for exhibition management, cultural mediation, public relations, as well as the design and editing of print media. In addition, he is a lecturer in the master's profile "Museum & Collections" and is involved in interdisciplinary teaching cooperations. His thematic focus is on emblematics, baroque spatial art, art on construction and digital inventory.

SESSION 1: WHERE IS HOME? (1)

Rethinking Home Through Untranslatability in Restitution Debates - **Ayman Ibrahim Ali**, Africa Institute

“Opacity is not the obscure; it is that which cannot be reduced.” — Édouard Glissant. Debates on the restitution of colonial-era objects are frequently framed through the language of return: looted artefacts are imagined as displaced entities that can be restored to an identifiable place, people, or culture and thereby brought “home.” Yet such a framework presumes that the meanings of objects and the homes to which they supposedly belong can be made transparent and fully legible across different cultural and epistemic contexts. This paper questions that assumption by approaching restitution through the concept of untranslatability. Drawing on the work of Emily Apter and Barbara Cassin, I treat untranslatability not as the impossibility of translation but as a critical lens that reveals the friction between different epistemic worlds through which colonial objects circulate. Removed through colonial extraction and subsequently incorporated into museums, collections, and heritage regimes, such objects have already undergone multiple processes of translation that redefined their meanings and relations.

At the same time, diasporic communities encounter these objects through their own histories of displacement and memory, while museums and nation-states frame them through heritage and ownership claims. As a result, colonial objects may be understood as being “at home” in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways across museums, nation-states, originating communities, and diasporic publics. Rather than resolving these tensions, the paper reads them as productive sites of theorisation. If restitution discourse presumes that objects can simply return “home,” the persistence of untranslatability reveals that the very idea of home is unstable. Colonial objects thus function as relational sites where competing histories and epistemologies remain partially incommensurable. Attending to this condition shifts the debate from identifying where objects properly belong to understanding how relations to them are continuously negotiated across dispersed communities and institutions.

Ayman Ibrahim Ali is a researcher in comparative literature and critical heritage studies. He holds an MA in Comparative Literature from the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies and a BA (Honours) in English from Al-Neelain University. He is currently pursuing an MA in Global African Studies (Museum and Critical Heritage Studies) at the Africa Institute. His work engages decolonial theory, restitution debates, and questions of language, untranslatability, and belonging.

SESSION 2: HERITAGE, MATERIAL CULTURE AND COLONIALITY: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY PERU

Panellists: Claudia Uribe-Chinen, Katherine A. Román Aquino, Javier Lizaraburu and Aldo Accinelli Obando

This roundtable brings together four scholars working on different dimensions of heritage and material culture studies in Peru to reflect on how heritage and materiality are interpreted, negotiated, and contested. It examines the nature of “coloniality” as an underlying issue, not as a fixed analytical framework, but rather as a set of logics that continue to manifest, reproduce, and even reconfigure themselves in moments of political and social uncertainty. The discussion considers the implications of these dynamics for human-non-human relations, heritage-making, memory, forms of heritage governance, and identity narratives. The discussion asks: What kinds of scenarios emerge when heritage and material culture intersect with political instability, social unrest, and institutional weakening? And to what extent do colonial logics continue to shape the ways identity is defined, managed, and negotiated in such contexts?

Together, the four papers situate these issues within the broader transformations of the Peruvian political and institutional landscape over recent decades. In this context of prolonged institutional weakening and political tension, the interpretation of heritage and material culture become arenas where historical structures of power — coloniality — are reproduced, challenged, or renegotiated. The contributions, therefore, reflect on the uncertain trajectories that heritage governance, preservation, and public narratives may follow under conditions of sociopolitical volatility.

Ultimately, the roundtable invites a broader reflection on heritage and material culture studies as a field of tensions that intensify in times of political uncertainty, where historical inequalities, institutional structures, and competing visions of the past intersect.

SESSION 2: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

IN CONTEMPORARY PERU

Commitment and constraint: The fragility of heritage ethics amid coloniality and Peru's institutional crisis - **Claudia Uribe-Chinen**, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

This paper examines the fluctuating trajectories of state-led efforts to promote ethically oriented approaches in heritage policy in Peru. Drawing on the cases of the Qhapaq Ñan Project and citizen participation programs developed by the Ministry of Culture, it analyses how the politics and ethics of heritage—particularly those centred on local community involvement—are often reduced to limited margins of action, oscillating between nominal commitments and moments of short-lived institutional enthusiasm. I argue that these constraints are shaped by colonial logics that continue to permeate the state heritage regime, restricting the scope of participatory and ethically framed initiatives.

These structural conditions are further compounded by Peru's recurrent institutional crises, which create a climate of instability that undermines the continuity of less orthodox policy approaches. As a result, the persistence of longstanding paradigms focused on material conservation and authorised extraction cannot be explained solely by regulatory frameworks. Rather, it reflects entrenched professional practices that have internalised specific ways of governing relationships with pre-Hispanic material culture. By highlighting these dynamics, the paper discusses the limits of participatory heritage policies and the challenges of advancing ethical transformations within unstable state contexts.

Claudia Uribe-Chinen is an archaeologist specialising in public archaeology, heritage studies and the archaeology of earthen technologies. She holds a Ph.D. in Heritage Studies from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Her research critically examines heritage policies and governance frameworks, archaeological ethics, and the production of Pre-Hispanic earthen technologies in the central coast of Peru. She currently serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Humanities at PUCP, Curator of the Josefina Ramos de Cox Museum of Archaeology (IRA-PUCP), and Associate Researcher at the Riva-Agüero Institute.

SESSION 2: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

IN CONTEMPORARY PERU

Peru's Virtual Museums. What do they Narrate? - **Katherine A. Román Aquino**,
Independent researcher

This paper examines the virtual museums developed by Peru's Ministry of Culture as curated digital spaces that actively construct and disseminate narratives of national identity. It explores how these platforms translate physical exhibitions into virtual environments while reconfiguring historical storytelling for online audiences. The analysis focuses on the institutional frameworks that shape these narratives, asking how museums, as state-driven entities, participate in defining Peru's cultural memory. By comparing different virtual museum initiatives, the study identifies recurring themes, omissions, and emphases that reveal how history is selectively represented. Particular attention is given to how pre-Columbian, colonial, and contemporary periods are framed, and how these narratives negotiate tensions between heritage, diversity, and national unity. The paper argues that virtual museums do not merely replicate traditional exhibitions but adapt them to new communicative logics, where accessibility, interactivity, and global visibility influence curatorial decisions. Ultimately, the article contends that these digital institutions function as ideological instruments that both preserve and reshape collective memory. They promote developmental and cohesive narratives while attempting to reconcile Peru's complex and often fragmented historical identity with present-day cultural and political aspirations. Through this lens, virtual museums emerge as key sites for understanding how nations reimagine themselves in the digital age.

Katherine A. Román Aquino is a Peruvian researcher specialising in the intersections of space, culture, memory, and development. Her work explores how cultural practices and spatial dynamics shape collective identity and social transformation in Latin America. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Andean Archaeology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and a Master of Arts in Arts and Cultural Management from Leuphana University, Germany. In 2022, she attended the María Lugones Decolonial Summer School in the Netherlands, where she deepened her engagement with decolonial thought. Her recent academic contributions include "Instagram and migration. What do "Latinas" micro-influencers tell us?" presented at the XIII The Nordic Latin American Research Network Conference this year, "Contrastes de la legislación peruana sobre patrimonio," co-presented in 2025 at the VIII Jornadas de Estudios Latinoamericanos, and "The Clash of the Ephemeral: Collective Action in Disputed Spaces During Lima's 2020 Social Protests," published in 2024 in Urban Matters Journal.

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IN CONTEMPORARY PERU

Urban Landscapes and the Politics of Memory: The Case of Lima - **Javier Lizarzaburu**, Independent researcher

This presentation examines how, in the pursuit of a republican capital—symbolically intended to break with the colonial past—post-independence elites shaped an urban landscape that encoded exclusionary narratives even as it claimed to represent the nation. Drawing on historical analysis, critical heritage and landscape approaches, it explores this process through a series of early examples of republican architecture and monuments in which references to Indigenous memories and identities were progressively marginalised. The presentation then turns to contemporary debates surrounding the monument to Francisco Pizarro, revealing how colonial narratives embedded in urban space remain politically active and contested. Rather than representing isolated symbolic disputes, these conflicts highlight deeper structures through which public space continues to organise historical legitimacy, citizenship and belonging.

The presentation reflects on what the politics of memory in Lima reveal about the possibilities and limits of decolonial heritage practice. It argues that a decolonial approach requires reassessing urban monuments that perpetuate colonial narratives and rethinking cultural representation frameworks to better reflect diverse legacies. In Lima's case, this involves reconsidering the place of pre-Hispanic heritage within the city's identity and exploring heritage frameworks capable of addressing persistent spatial and representational asymmetries.

Javier Lizarzaburu is a heritage and memory scholar whose work explores the relationship between heritage, narrative and citizenship. A former BBC editor, he holds an MA in Heritage and Spatial Planning from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In Lima, he founded Lima Milenaria, a decade-long, city-wide initiative dedicated to recognising and integrating the city's pre-Columbian heritage into a more inclusive understanding of citizenship. In 2025, he published *Landscapes of exclusion: spatial heritage and belonging in postindependence Lima, 1845–1945*.

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IN CONTEMPORARY PERU

Upper-Class Households and their Colonial Legacies: how Affluent Domestic Materiality Perpetuates Coloniality in Lima, Peru - **Aldo Accinelli Obando**,
University of Amsterdam

This presentation focuses on the intricate dynamics of domestic spaces in ex-colonised societies, using Lima, Peru, as a prime case study. It posits that the materiality of households serves as a crucial lens to unveil how coloniality becomes ingrained in everyday life. It explores how the domestic space in Lima for the upper-class has evolved since colonial times, while fundamental underlying divisions in this space between owners and domestic workforce have persisted.

This research endeavours to shed light on how these spatial arrangements continue to symbolise social status and perpetuate racial inequalities. The study shows how contemporary domestic workers are allocated cramped and inadequate spaces within the household environment, which reflects an ongoing subjugation, even in the face of improved labour rights gained during the twentieth century. Since the research is ongoing, the results presented are preliminary and look to foster a discussion about the broader issue of persistent colonial legacies in domestic spaces within ex-colonised countries.

Aldo Accinelli Obando is a Peruvian archaeologist who is currently doing his PhD at the University of Amsterdam. His project is analysing the coloniality of domestic spaces in Lima, Peru, specifically the ones of the elite of the city. He did his undergraduate studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and his Research Master's in Heritage, Memory and Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam. He is the editor-in-chief of Kleos, Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology. He has been the coordinator of the Site Museum Julio C. Tello of Paracas in Peru, co-director of the Nasca Highlands Archaeological Research Project and has several years of experience working in both the private and public sectors for heritage management, as well as archaeological research.

SESSION 3: DECOLONIAL OPERA

Panellists: Emilio Aguilar, Marcus Tebogo Desando, Marte Bernaerts, Krisztina Lajosi, Nicholas Till and Xiaoke Zhang

Our panel will explore ways to decolonise opera (histories) and will focus on community engagement with opera as both tangible and intangible heritage. We aim to explore the tensions between opera as cultural heritage and as an experimental performing art, and examine how artists have challenged traditional power relations and epistemic assumptions about the genre.

We will address two main questions: what does a decolonial opera (history) look like? What methods could contribute to decolonial transformations in opera? This panel examines how opera has functioned as a site of colonial knowledge production and explores how practices of epistemic disobedience and archival refusal can challenge and transform its histories, institutions, and performance traditions.

Through selected case studies, we identify how colonial power persists in operatic structures and propose alternative approaches grounded in decolonial theory and community engagement. Papers will explore how non-European and non-traditional voices in opera have been excluded, silenced, and distorted, and how contemporary opera artists do decolonial work, opening up new ways of creating, performing, and understanding opera.

Our panel brings together a globally diverse set of perspectives—from Europe, South Africa, China, and Latin America—to examine opera through decolonial lenses across different historical, institutional, and artistic contexts.

The papers range from an analysis of opera's heritagisation in European policy and participatory practices (Bernaerts & Lajosi), to a practice-led reflection on creative disruption and decoloniality in contemporary South African opera (Desando). Till's contribution revisits early opera through the lens of colonial expansion and epistemic domination, while Aguilar interrogates the Fach system as a global infrastructure shaping operatic labour and vocal classification. Zhang, finally, explores internal decolonisation in China through the evolving meanings of *The White-Haired Girl* as living cultural heritage.

SESSION 3: DECOLONIAL OPERA

Opera's Heritagisation: Authority, Participation, and the Remaking of Communities - **Marte Bernaerts and Krisztina Lajosi**, University of Amsterdam

This paper explores the interactions and tensions between opera as cultural heritage and as artistic practice. Opera is often framed through opulence and traditionalism: majestic buildings, expensive stage design and high-cost productions, star singers, and affluent audiences who sustain the art form and its makers, but also influence its artistic freedom. On the other hand, opera as an artistic practice is more than the classical repertory of a few dozen mainly European works. Many opera artists are also well known for their socially engaged, critical creativity with old works and for their innovative new operas. We wish to address how opera, as an art form, is negotiated between heritage regimes and contemporary artistic and public demands for inclusion, innovation, and sustainability. The argument is situated in the turn towards living heritage following the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). We approach opera as a revealing site of what the special issue terms of 'the age of (in)tangibility', operatic knowledge and practices are profoundly embodied and relational (voice, gesture, craft, rehearsal cultures, and audiences), yet they are controlled and rendered governable through tangible infrastructures and mediations (buildings, archives, recordings, digitisation and policy frameworks). This tension is sharpened when opera houses mobilise heritage as a claim to public value and contemporary relevance, while simultaneously being asked to respond to decolonial realities, social inequalities, and the ecological footprint of large-scale production.

Conceptually, we mobilise critiques of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006) to examine how opera institutions might be operating as 'authorising machines'. Opera's inheritance is produced through expert authority, programming conventions, funding narratives and professional hierarchies. Within these regimes, safeguarding can become synonymous with maintaining an authorised canon, and innovation can be framed as acceptable only when it maintains legible to established standards of excellence. Therefore, we propose to read opera's heritage not as a stable object, but as an ongoing process of heritagization that assigns value, distributes visibility and voice, and draws boundaries around who counts as a legitimate bearer, audience member, or co-creator/co-author of the art form. Empirically, we draw on recent European examples such as World Opera Lab (Ring of Our Time) and Gran Teatre del Liceu (La Gata Perduda), which explicitly frame opera as a form of living heritage and develop co-creative processes with local communities and artists.

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By combining operatic production with participatory and socially engaged practices, these initiatives mobilise opera not as a static canon but as a platform for innovation, inclusion, and amplifying marginalised and decolonial voices. We treat these projects as laboratories for rethinking opera's community beyond the familiar lines of subscribers, donors, and specialist publics, and for examining the practical politics of participation: whose stories are selected, how artistic decisions are negotiated, and which forms of expertise (professional, local, diasporic) are recognised. Alongside these case studies, the paper analyses EU cultural policy documents that promote the fusion of cultural heritage and creativity, asking how institutional frameworks enable, or perhaps even constrain, opera's claims to social transformation. Contemporary policy discourse of participation, innovation, and heritage-led creativity can legitimise co-creative opera and provide resources to scale it, including through digital access and sustainability agendas. Yet, the same frameworks can favour institutions that are already equipped to translate artistic practices into policy-oriented evaluation metrics. We aim to show how opera's mobilisation as heritage can therefore expand the horizons of what/who opera is for, while also risking new forms of instrumentalisation and containment.

By bringing together empirical examples and policy discourse, this contribution positions opera as a distinctive testing ground for contemporary debates on (intangible) heritage and performance. It offers an analytical vocabulary for understanding how safeguarding in opera is performed, through repertory choices, formats of participation, documentation practices, and with what consequences for who is authorised to belong, to create, and to 'inherit', i.e. keep alive.

Marte Bernaerts is a cultural policy and heritage researcher with experience in European institutions. She holds an MSc in Culture and Conflict in a Global Europe from the London School of Economics, an MA in European Studies from KU Leuven and a BA in Theatre and Film Studies from the University of Antwerp.

Krisztina Lajosi is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher of European Culture at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and serves as Program Director of European Studies. A cultural historian, her work explores the social and political role of opera and the intersections of nationalism and culture, with particular attention to national opera and its place in nation-building. She recently founded a research group on Opera as Cultural Heritage and established close collaborations among the UvA, the Dutch National Opera, Opera OFF, and the Holland Festival. Previously, she led the research project National Styles in Music (2011-2017), funded by the Dutch Academy of Sciences, and directed the UvA Research and Innovation Grant project Digital Nationalism (2018-2022).

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Contemporary Creative Disruption in South African Opera - **Marcus Tebogo Desando**

Drawing on experiences as a director of several newly commissioned operas by Black South African composers, I will examine how authorship, narrative, and production processes are being reconfigured in ways that challenge inherited operatic norms. While the emergence of new works by historically marginalised voices is often positioned as evidence of “decolonial progress,” this paper interrogates what constitutes “decoloniality” within opera beyond questions of representation alone. Does the inclusion of new composers and stories fundamentally shift the epistemic and structural foundations of the genre, or does it risk being absorbed into existing institutional and aesthetic frameworks?

Therefore, two central questions are addressed:

1. What might decoloniality in opera mean when examined through processes of creation, direction, and performance?
2. What criteria or measures can meaningfully assess movement towards decolonial transformation within the field?

Through a practice-led lens, I will explore whether illuminating new voices within opera is sufficient or whether the form itself requires transformation, or even rupture, to escape its colonial genealogies. Is decolonising opera a matter of expanding the canon, reshaping production methodologies, or rethinking the very assumptions that underpin the genre? By placing South African contemporary opera within larger discussions on legacy, representation, and cultural authority, the argument for a more refined understanding of decolonial practice is made. This perspective acknowledges both the opportunities and limitations of engaging with inherited artistic traditions.

Marcus Tebogo Desando is an opera director and cultural leader whose work spans more than 50 productions internationally. His recent roles include the CEO of the Prince Claus Funds and the CEO of The Arts and Culture Trust, Johannesburg. Prior to that, Marcus was the CEO of Gauteng Opera in Johannesburg (formerly Black Tie Ensemble). In addition to his career as an arts administrator, Marcus Desando is a professional singer and stage director who has directed, conducted and performed multiple operas in South Africa as well as with international companies such as Really Useful Artists and New York Harlem Productions. He has been invited as a guest lecturer at various universities, where he taught stagecraft primarily and directed several opera productions. Marcus Desando has become a driving force in the development and training of young South African artists and aspiring arts administrators.

SESSION 3: DECOLONIAL OPERA

ORPHEUS CONQUISTADOR - **Nicholas Till**, University of Amsterdam and University of Sussex

In a scene at the end of the third act of Alessandro Striggio's and Claudio Monteverdi's opera *Orfeo* (Mantua, 1607), after Orpheus has crossed the river Styx to rescue Euridice from Hades, a chorus of Infernal Spirits sings an encomium to Orpheus's valour, associating it with man's unstoppable conquest of nature, and the technological feats of Daedalus, the first scientist, and Jason, who often personified the European conquistadors of the 16th century.

In this paper, I discuss the Florentine artist Stradanus's foundational depiction of the arrival of Amerigo Vespucci on the continent named after him, being greeted by a naked female representing America, behind whom are a group of cannibals. I will demonstrate how the musical powers of Orpheus over nature and humankind to bring humans to 'civilisation' enact the Baconian domination of nature expressed in Bacon's text 'The Masculine Birth of Time', in which Bacon writes 'I am come in very truth leading you to Nature with all her children, to bind her to your service and make her your slave', which is echoed by Striggio in *Orfeo*: 'No enterprise is undertaken by man in vain/Against him nature can no longer protect herself'. Drawing on the Marxist-feminist Silvia Federici's account of the nexus between the capitalist exploitation of nature, women and 'primitive' peoples, this paper will suggest that the often expressed anxiety about the seductive power of operatic singing is due to its affinity to that which it aims to subdue and silence.

Nicholas Till is a historian, theorist, and practitioner in opera and music theatre. He works across performance, scholarship, and cross-disciplinary arts. He has held academic positions at the University of Sussex, Wimbledon School of Art, and Queen Mary University of London, teaching across theatre, music, and visual culture. As a director, he has worked with major companies including Glyndebourne Opera and English National Opera, and led pioneering productions such as the UK premiere of *The Emperor of Atlantis*. His work extends to broadcasting for the BBC and to experimental practice as co-artistic director of Post-Operative Productions, recognised for innovative music theatre and installation work. He is founder and co-director of the Centre for Research in Opera and Music Theatre and held the first Chair in Opera and Music Theatre in the UK. He has held visiting positions internationally, including at the University of California, Los Angeles, and most recently served as Pierre Audi Chair at the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch National Opera.

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Opera as Living Heritage: The Internal Decolonisation within China through The White-Haired Girl - **Xiaoke Zhang**, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

As the pioneering work in the history of Chinese modern opera, *The White-Haired Girl* has, through its symbolic expression, become a significant cultural site for the construction of national memories and imaginations of the future. Its cross-temporal creations and performances have been closely intertwined with nation-building. However, existing scholarship rarely treats opera as a cultural medium for examining 'internal decolonisation'. To address this gap, this study combines the perspective of heritagization and a postcolonial theoretical framework, aiming to offer a critical reflection on the historical and epistemic hierarchies embedded within national operatic conventions.

Methodologically, the study employs a case study and comparative analysis, selecting two representative versions: the 1945 original and the 2015 adaptation of *The White-Haired Girl*. Through the three analytical dimensions of character construction, narrative structure, and musical expression, the study examines the work's creative and reception contexts under distinct historical conditions. As a living cultural heritage, the significance of *The White-Haired Girl* has been continuously negotiated through institutional governance and cultural policy. In this process, the work has served as a vehicle through which authorities and creators select and reconstruct historical narratives. This dynamic not only reveals the operation of power within the nation itself but also provides a representative case for understanding the tensions China encounters in constructing its cultural identity while engaging with global cultural exchange.

Xiaoke Zhang is a PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, working on a dissertation about negotiating identities and temporalities in modern Chinese opera, under the supervision of Krisztina Lajosi and Pál Nyíri. She combines academic research with professional experience in opera production. She previously worked as an Intern Producer at China National Opera & Dance Drama Theatre, where she gained experience in large-scale productions. She was the producer of *Yu*, the first Chinese psychological opera, and has also served as Assistant Producer for *Otello* at the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

SESSION 3: DECOLONIAL OPERA

The Fach system: Classification, Labour, and Decoloniality in Opera - **Emilio Aguilar**,
Independent researcher

This paper turns to operatic training as the somatic layer of opera's heritagization. I propose that it is through transmission—the ongoing passing of the specialized knowledge and skills that are essential for the enactment of intangible cultural heritage—that opera continues to shape a specific kind of operatic subjectivity that is itself rooted in coloniality. For this I focus on classification: the Fach system is used internationally to train, classify, and cast opera singers. It began to take shape in nineteenth-century Germany and was eventually codified and standardized in Rudolf Klobner's 1951 *Handbuch der Oper*—currently in its sixteenth edition (Bärenreiter, 2024). Building on and extending John Kapusta's "ideologies of voice type," this paper asks: through what specific body- and self-work is Fach legibility achieved? And in what histories is this technical regime rooted? Fach started to take shape at a time when earlier, more direct modes of body intervention had been foreclosed—surgical alteration needed to create the castrato voice (Gordon; Feldman), and slave labor, both on and off stage (Wilbourne; Hunter). In German-speaking countries, this was a time when Black performances "caused a listening public to work out the ties between music, race, and nation" (Thurman 3). Drawing on Aníbal Quijano's theorization of race as a colonial "instrument of basic social classification" installed within a global division of labor (Quijano 534), I argue that Fach is opera's specific codification of the labor-classification nexus inherited from colonial management, operating now on and through the soma as embodied technique. I extend Sophie Fetokaki's argument that the price of entry into western classical singing is the "excision" of aspects of the singer's identity (Fetokaki 7) by showing that Fach operates through a double interpellation: it contains racial difference as vocal excess while permitting its strategic display. Through close reading of press coverage and singer interviews, I analyze cases that vary in how Fach containment negotiates operatic legibility.

Emilio Aguilar is an Argentinian tenor and researcher, who has established himself as a versatile and accomplished singer in the Netherlands. He is a core member of the Nederlands Kamersing, and works as a soloist in oratorio and early music concerts with groups such as Musica Temprana (Adrian van der Spoel), La Sfera Armoniosa (Mike Fentross) and Les Cries de Paris (Geoffroy Jourdain). In 2020, Emilio completed two Master's degrees with honors: one in Early Music Voice at the Conservatory of Amsterdam under the guidance of Xenia Meijer, and the other in Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam. Alongside his performing career, Emilio has contributed articles to journals such as *Soapbox Journal for Cultural Analysis* (2018), *Diffractions* (2020), as well as a chapter in *The Replaceability Paradigm* (De Gruyter, 2024). His current research examines the operatic Fach system as a technology of vocal selfhood. He focuses on Fach dysphoria: the experienced misalignment between Fach's institutional expectations and singers' gendered, racialized, and accented embodiment.

SESSION 4: REPARATION, RETURN, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future: Navigating the Political Terrain of Memory in Georgian Social Media and Museums - **Bruno Luberti**, University of Amsterdam

The recent 2024 implementation of the 'Foreign Agent Law' in Georgia is not only about controlling foreign influences in the country; it also reveals an ongoing conflict over the control of collective memory and historical narratives. This paper explores how the disappearance of archive materials from museums, the closing of archives containing Soviet materials, and the limited teaching of the Soviet past in Georgia not only create uncertainty but also produce misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda about the Soviet past. Through the theoretical lens of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, this paper examines how political forces can shape the interpretation of archive materials related to the Soviet past. This essay argues that the Georgian government has immense control over the archive, as the actions of the Georgian Dream party demonstrate its power over the collective memory of the former Soviet era. These actions not only distort historical understanding but also reinforce misinformation and disinformation.

By analysing the role of social media platforms like TikTok and the counter-memory strategies employed by the Georgian nongovernmental organisation Soviet Past Research Laboratory, this paper highlights the contested nature of memory and the need for democracy in the presentation of the archive. Introducing a new conceptual framework of archivogens and archivopathogens to illustrate the dangers associated with authority over the archive. This research, located within the field of memory and media studies, stresses the urgent need to study the distortion of history and the control of the archive in the modern age.

Bruno Luberti is a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam in Media Studies. His research interests are primarily focused on the historical interpretation of cultural heritage and historical objects, and how these can be politically motivated. His master's thesis, for instance, examined how the Georgian government, throughout the years, has shaped the interpretation of archival materials of the Soviet past. Additionally, his focus in teaching lies in film history and the representation of historical memories of the past in media.

SESSION 4: REPARATION, RETURN, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

ACAMPADA: Archaeology of the Present as Decolonial Praxis - **Gabriele Gattiglia, M. Ambrosiano, F. Anichini, S. Basile, F. D'Antoni, C. Giovannetti and M. Puntin**, University of Pisa

What happens when archaeology directs its attention to the present, to the living, contested, and politically charged spaces created by protest? This paper introduces ACAMPADA, a participatory archaeological project developed by the MAPPA Laboratory (University of Pisa) in response to a pro-Palestinian encampment set up in May 2024 within the grounds of the University's Department of Civilisations and Forms of Knowledge. The encampment, part of a transnational student movement calling for academic disengagement from institutions linked to the Israeli military-industrial complex, formed a temporary yet dense spatial and material assemblage. ACAMPADA examined its traces (objects, inscriptions, temporary structures, murals, etc.) as archaeological sources, utilising photographic documentation, spatial mapping, oral history collection, post-dismantling surface survey, artefact analysis, and archaeometric campaigns on protest murals. Situated at the intersection of decolonial theory, contemporary archaeology, and activist practice, the project interrogates the politics of knowledge production within the discipline. By documenting a protest that explicitly challenged imperial and colonial entanglements within academic institutions, ACAMPADA enacts a reflexive decolonial archaeology: one that highlights positionality, dissolves the artificial boundary between observer and observed, and redefines who produces archaeological knowledge, for whom, and under what circumstances.

This paper argues that the archaeology of the present, when applied to activist spaces, provides a methodological and political experiment in maintaining decolonial memory futures. It adds to critical debates on the role of material culture studies in solidarity movements, the construction of counter-hegemonic collective memory, and the transformation of public space into a site of decolonial praxis.

Salvatore Basile is a postdoctoral researcher at the MAPPA Laboratory of the Department of Civilisation and Forms of Knowledge of the University of Pisa. He specialises in the use of digital tools for the interpretation of archaeological landscapes and for the spatial and geostatistical analysis of relationships between humans and non-humans in ancient and contemporary landscapes.

SESSION 4: REPARATION, RETURN, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Gabriele Gattiglia since July 1, 2016 is Assistant Professor in Archaeology at the University of Pisa, where he teaches Archaeological Methods and Theory and Digital Archaeology. He works at the MAPPA Lab, which manages the MOD (Mappa Open Data), the Italian repository for Open Archaeological Data. Gattiglia's fields of interest focus on Digital Archaeology (mainly Big Data and Artificial Intelligence), Archaeological Method and Theory, and Medieval, Post-Medieval and Contemporary Archaeology.

Francesca Anichini is Field archaeologist, project & communication manager, she is passionate about methodological issues, devoted to the Open philosophy and in love with contemporary archaeology. Francesca is one of the founders of MAPPALab, where she has been working since 2010. Moreover, Francesca is one of the creators and developers of MAPPA, ArchAIDE, MAGOH and MOD (MAPPA Open Archaeological archive) projects.

Cristina Giovannetti is a technical-administrative collaborator in the Library Services Sector of the University of Pisa. She is affiliated with the Units for Library Services, Monographs, and Periodicals, where she supports the management and organisation of academic library resources and services.

Massimiliano Puntin is Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pisa, conducting research in Heritage Science and digital archaeology.

Francesco D'Antoni is a researcher at the MAPPA Lab (Methodologies Applied to Archaeological Research and Ancient Landscapes) at the University of Pisa. His work focuses on digital archaeology, archaeological data management, and the application of computational and interdisciplinary methods to the study of cultural heritage.

Maurizio Ambrosini is a researcher in Film, Photography, Radio, Television, and Digital Media at the Department of Civilisation and Forms of Knowledge at the University of Pisa.

SESSION 4: REPARATION, RETURN, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Who Governs Collaboration? Funding Regimes and the Limits of Decolonial Provenance Research - **Jan Hüsgen**, German Lost Art Foundation

Postcolonial provenance research and collaborative methodologies are now widely established in museum research and exhibition practice. The prevailing assumption is that such research can only succeed through cooperation, understood as the joint development of research questions, methods, and projects with representatives of „source communities“. Despite the rapid growth of projects in this field, postcolonial provenance research remains structurally fragile, as it is largely dependent on short-term, third-party funding.

This paper examines how funding practices shape the conditions, possibilities, and limits of postcolonial provenance research as a decolonial research field. Focusing on the Department of Cultural Goods and Collections at the German Lost Art Foundation, which has funded nearly 100 projects with approximately €15 million since 2019, the paper analyses how funding guidelines, administrative requirements, and governance structures influence collaborative research practices. Particular attention is paid to recent adjustments to the funding framework — such as English-language applications and the transfer of research funds to international partners — designed to facilitate international collaboration and the involvement of source communities.

Situating these developments within debates on decolonising heritage and research infrastructures, the paper argues that funding instruments are not neutral tools but active agents in shaping authority, collaboration, and sustainability. It asks to what extent state-administered funding can enable genuinely cooperative research futures, and where it risks reproducing structural asymmetries of power and control within decolonial heritage work.

Jan Hüsgen is Head of the Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts. He is a trained historian and has conducted research in the Americas and West Africa. Before joining the German Lost Art Foundation, he worked on various research projects with a focus on colonial history. He has held fellowships from the German Research Foundation (DFG) as well as from the German Historical Institutes in Washington, DC, and Paris.

SESSION 5: RITUAL AND WORLD-MAKING

Beyond Folklore: Ritual Governance, Counter- Archives, and the Ontological Reordering of Heritage in the Black Atlantic - **Rolanda J.W. Spencer**, Morehouse College

Decoloniality has compelled heritage institutions to diversify collections and confront histories of violence, yet African diasporic ritual systems remain persistently categorised as folklore, performance, or “intangible culture.” Such classifications reproduce epistemic violence by severing ritual practice from its governance, archival, and knowledge-producing functions. This paper argues that the conflict between diasporic ritual systems and Western heritage institutions is not merely representational but ontological, entrenched in incompatible conceptions of time, authority, and materiality.

Drawing on the research project *Divine: Ritual Governance and the Architecture of Black Atlantic Counter-Archives*, I propose the exhibition as a site of decolonial praxis in which altar, offering, and divinatory protocol operate as curatorial methods and archival structures. Rather than treating ritual objects as ethnographic artefacts, *Divine* stages ritual governance as an active counter-archive within the Black Atlantic, one that organises memory through ancestral simultaneity, relational temporality, and material-spiritual interdependence. These logics challenge the linear time, classificatory regimes, and secular epistemology that underpin dominant museum and memorial practices.

Situated within histories of displacement and survival across the Atlantic world, African diasporic ritual systems have long functioned as mechanisms of communal governance and historical continuity. By foregrounding ritual as archive and exhibition as structural intervention, this paper advances a practice-based strategy for sustaining decolonial futures—shifting heritage discourse from inclusion toward ontological reordering.

Rolanda J.W. Spencer is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at Morehouse College and an Andrew Young Centre for Global Leadership Innovation Lab Research Fellow. An interdisciplinary artist-scholar, her work spans African diasporic studies, visual culture, and public humanities, examining Black expressive life, ritual governance, and counter-archival practices through film, installation, and codex production. Her current project, *Divine: Ritual Governance and the Architecture of Black Atlantic Counter-Archives*, foregrounds exhibition as decolonial praxis. She holds an MFA from Rochester Institute of Technology and an EdD from Loyola University Chicago.

SESSION 5: RITUAL AND WORLD-MAKING

'Working out Complicated Futures Together': Ecosomatic Practice as Epistemological Strategy - **Daisy Corbin O'Grady**, University of Amsterdam

According to an article recently published by The Guardian, human connection to nature has declined 60% in 200 years (Barkham). *'Working out Complicated Futures Together': Ecosomatic Practice as Epistemological Strategy* takes a feminist and posthuman approach to exploring the systemic issue at the root of climate change: our relationship with nature. This relationship is considered as a product of the cultural archive that forms "a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference" and shapes our colonial relationship with nature (Said 52; Subramaniam 34). To decolonise our relationship with nature, we must also decolonise traditional 'ways of knowing', and seek alternative epistemological strategies. Drawing on Donna Haraway's idea of 'situated knowledges' – that rejects the assumption of knowledge as objective, neutral and disembodied (Haraway 581) – *'Working out Complicated Futures Together'* seeks to locate 'embodied ways of knowing' through ecosomatic practice (Barbour 229; Riley 17). Troubling persistent dualisms of mind/body, knowledge/experience, nature/culture we turn our attention to our bodies, the sōma, and to the environment, the eco, and the porous boundaries to "cultivate awareness of entanglement" (Riley 18). Through sensing, breath and movement, we join together in "repeated small movements gradually acquiring larger-scale consequences" (Rigney 18).

Daisy Corbin O'Grady (she/her) is a researcher and movement practitioner based in Amsterdam. Her research centres around human–nature relations, colonial ecologies and embodiment methodologies. She has presented at academic conferences such as the 2025 AHM conference, and held research-grounded ecosomatic workshops for summer schools and private groups. Her approach is shaped by posthuman, feminist and decolonial thought, which seeks to investigate the culture and politics of 'nature' and the entangled histories of people, plants and place. She holds an MA in Heritage and Memory Studies from the University of Amsterdam

SESSION 5: RITUAL AND WORLD-MAKING

'Decolonising Socialist Heritage: Workers' Memory and the Politics of Heritage-Making in China's Ongoing Post-Socialism - **Charlie Zhangluyuan Yang**,
University of Coimbra

Since the collapse of the USSR and the transformation in Eastern Europe, the failure-centric perspective on socialism has become normalised as an ingrained discursive form. As a remnant of Cold War ideology, state socialism has from the outset been framed as a tragedy in need of analysis and redemption.

Within Critical Heritage Studies, this tendency is reflected in the field of post-socialist heritage, which has largely focused on grand monuments and sculptures within a Eurocentric frame. Evidently, due to the historical burden, the most enduring infrastructures and everyday habitual spaces of the socialist period, those that continue to be valued by their users, have remained largely excluded from the scope of heritage inquiry. At the same time, regions that have not undergone a clear rupture with state socialism have been largely overlooked.

Moving beyond the East European-centred, failure-oriented narratives of postsocialist heritage, my research examines current heritage-making projects centred on socialist-era factories in Cold War China. Once celebrated as national heroes, the working class carved out thousands of military factories deep in the mountains. After economic reform, these sites were closed, abandoned, and rendered peripheral, only to be re-designated three decades later as protected industrial heritage. Adopting an emic perspective from the working class itself, this study explores how official state heritage discourses negotiate and reshape workers' collective memories of double displacement by the state and market forces. Success and failure, glory and decline, intertwine with the multiple temporalities of the factory sites, producing complex affective and memory politics.

Charlie Zhangluyuan Yang is Ph.D. student in anthropology and a junior researcher at CIAS-Research Centre for Anthropology and Health, University of Coimbra. Her research focuses on the heritagization of socialist industrial ruins and memory politics in contemporary China. Drawing on critical heritage studies and anthropology of post-socialism, her work explores the intersections of statecraft, memory-making, urban care and the lived experiences of the former working-class in China's post-socialist transformation.

SESSION 6: CITIES AND POST-CONFLICT

'Rebuilt from Above, for Whom? Heritage, Memory and the Remaking of the Urban Fabric in a Post- Conflict City - Mehmet Tayfur, AMUP/ National School of Architecture of Strasbourg (ENSAS)

This paper examines the reconstruction of the historic centre of Diyarbakir (Suriçi), in southeastern Turkey, following the destruction caused by the armed conflicts of 2015. The case presents a particularly complex situation: only a few months before the outbreak of violence, the “Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape” had been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The subsequent destruction and reconstruction processes reveal deep tensions between heritage protection, political power, and competing narratives of memory. Drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2024, including interviews with local actors, institutional stakeholders, and civil society organisations, as well as spatial analysis and archival research, this paper explores how post-conflict reconstruction reshapes the relationship between heritage, urban space, and local communities. The analysis highlights how state-led reconstruction policies, implemented through centralised governance mechanisms, have transformed the historic urban fabric while marginalising local inhabitants and stakeholders.

At the same time, the study examines bottom-up initiatives led by local civil society groups, cultural actors, and residents who seek to preserve alternative forms of memory and heritage in the city. These practices reveal competing visions of the past and the future of Suriçi, reflecting broader struggles over identity, belonging, and the control of urban space. By situating the case of Diyarbakir within broader debates on contested heritage and memory politics, the paper contributes to discussions on the ethical and political challenges of reconstruction in post-conflict contexts. It argues that heritage in such settings becomes a critical arena where power, memory, and spatial transformation intersect.

Mehmet Tayfur is a civil engineer and urban planner. He defended his PhD in Urban Planning in January 2026 at the National School of Architecture of Strasbourg (ENSAS) / University of Strasbourg. His doctoral research, *The Heritage Process and the Challenges of Reconstruction in Diyarbakir*, examines heritage governance and post-2015 reconstruction, with a focus on centralisation, cultural policies, and historic urban transformation. His broader research interests include post-conflict and post-disaster recovery, reconstruction, memory, heritage, and power. He is currently preparing a book manuscript based on his PhD research, titled *Diyarbakir: State-Led Reconstruction, Power and Heritage in a Contested Urban Context*, for Brill Publishers.

SESSION 6: CITIES AND POST-CONFLICT

Dutch Colonial Footprints of Indonesia: The Case of Budapest - **Mirjam Hoijtink**,
University of Amsterdam

Dutch efforts to decolonise its history of occupation, wars, suppression and extraction are intrinsically bound up with critical introspection of museum collections in the Netherlands. The diaspora of Indonesian art (c.50.000 objects) that became part of European museums outside of the Netherlands was firmly intertwined with colonial government agency and has remained curiously neglected. My research seeks to understand the wider European involvement and presence in Indonesia, collecting practices, the narration of Indonesian art in various geopolitical and national contexts and scholarly discourses up until today. In double biographies of non-Dutch individuals and their collections emphasise will be given to the shifts of ownership of the objects in Indonesia and in Europe and its consequences for national or civic productions of knowledge and memory.

The national ethnographic Néprajzi Múzeum and Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asian Arts in Budapest contain ca 4000 objects from Indonesia. A firm basis of the Néprajzi derives from an Austro-Hungarian expedition of 1869/70, led by the Hungarian zoologist and medical-officer János Xántus (1825-1894). Entrepreneur Ferenc Hopp (1833-1919) was an art collector who left his house as a museum to the city of Budapest. Both collections represent a scientific and civic interest in Hungarian history that since the middle of the 19th century has focused on the possibility of ethnic origins in Asia. Discussing Xántus and Hopp and the museum narratives of their collections, sheds light on the particular Hungarian racial constructions of identity and origin myth and the memory of this in current exhibitions and scholarship.

Mirjam Hoijtink (research fellow at AHM) is cultural historian and archaeologist. In her work as an academic scholar, journalist, essayist and exhibition maker she seeks to understand relations between geopolitics, art and the individual. She specialised in 18 th and 19 th century knowledge and memory production on world- and classical antiquity in museums in Europe, all deeply entangled with nationalism, colonialism, imperialism and the diaspora of art.

SESSION 6: CITIES AND POST-CONFLICT

Waqf, Coloniality, and the Remaking of Urban Conservation in Historic Cairo
- **Lama Said**, University of Edinburgh

Historically, religious endowments, or waqfs, functioned as a decentralised system structuring relationships between property, revenue, maintenance, and social provision. Buildings were not treated as isolated entities, but as part of interconnected networks in which income-generating assets sustained specific functions, beneficiaries, and forms of upkeep. Within the early sixteenth-century complex of Sultan al-Ghuriin Historic Cairo, the revenues of a commercial wikala were endowed specifically to sustain the upkeep of an adjacent madrasa, mausoleum, and sabil-kuttab, binding commercial income to religious, educational, and public welfare functions within a single perpetual legal framework. In this sense, conservation was not a separate activity, but an inherent outcome of the system itself.

From the nineteenth century onwards, this logic came into tension with modern practices of urban planning and conservation, largely introduced under colonial conditions, with the establishment of the Tanzim, Cairo's urban planning authority and the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, the body responsible for the conservation of Islamic and Coptic Monuments in Egypt (1881-1953).

In this paper, I explore the implications of these institutional transformations for urban conservation in Cairo, focusing on the tensions that emerged between the Awqaf Administration/Ministry, the Comité, and the Tanzim. I examine how the adaptation of waqf practices for new purposes, alongside the introduction of new modes of intervention on the historic built environment, impacted the legal, spatial, and social logics of the waqf system. In doing so, I foreground not only institutional transformation, but also the displacement of alternative ways of understanding, maintaining and developing the city.

Lama Said is an architect specialising in the historic environment and a SGSAH-funded PhD candidate in Architecture at the University of Edinburgh. Her research examines colonial legacies in heritage conservation and management in post-colonial Egypt. She holds a BSc in Architecture from Alexandria University and an MSc in Architectural Conservation from the University of Edinburgh (Chevening Scholar). Lama has taught architecture and conservation in Egypt, the UAE, and the UK, and previously served as Manager of Continuing Education at ICCROM.

SESSION 7: COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND CONFLICT

“Kufiyahs in Buchenwald”: Necrosecuritisation, Staatsräson and Holocaust Memory as Governance Technology in Contemporary Germany - **Anat Kraslavsky**, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

This paper examines how Holocaust memory operates as a contemporary governance technology in Germany under the doctrine of Staatsräson and how it is contested. In 2008, former Chancellor Angela Merkel declared Israel's security part of Germany's *raison d'état* due to Germany's "historical responsibility towards the Jewish people." Since then, Holocaust remembrance has increasingly functioned as a framework structuring security policy. I am drawing on a case study in the memorial site in Buchenwald. It started with the banning of a Jewish woman wearing a Kufiyah at the Buchenwald concentration camp memorial (and the subsequent legal battle). This culminated in the campaign "Kufiyahs in Buchenwald," which aims to mobilise Holocaust memory and the Buchenwald oath to centre the Palestinian Nakba and the contemporary genocide of Palestinians. Building on critical debates in memory studies and decolonial theory, I introduce the concept of necrosecritization to describe the entanglement of three processes: securitisation (the framing of political dissent as a security threat), necrophilia (dead Jewish as moral authorities over living political subjects), and impossibilization (the systematic making-impossible of Palestinian political reality). In this assemblage, devotion to Holocaust victims generates moral legitimacy for restricting Palestinian political expression and solidarity. I ask whether memory culture in Germany can move beyond redemptive frameworks that legitimise state power and instead conceptualise memory as a site of accountability to and by living subjects.

Anat Kraslavsky is Ph.D. candidate at Humboldt University of Berlin. Their research explores how discourses on 'new Antisemitism' contribute to the erasure of Palestine in Germany, examining entanglements of memory culture, philosemitism, and racial governance. Grounded in anti-colonial and decolonial frameworks, their work foregrounds diasporic Jewish resistance and relational forms of solidarity. They hold a BA in Film and Television Studies from Tel Aviv University and an MA in Religion and Culture from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

SESSION 7: COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND CONFLICT

Difficult Heritage from Below: Russian Speakers' Narratives of De-Russification in the Riga Region – **Giorgio Di Liberto**, University of Bergamo

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine in 2022, Latvia has accelerated a series of deRussification policies — monument removals, the phasing out of Russian-language education, and the renaming of streets associated with Russian cultural figures — in one of Europe's most sweeping efforts to decolonise a post-Soviet country (Kaprāns 2022). Scholarship has framed these processes within Soviet and post-Soviet coloniality while charting Russophone identity differentiation and discursive strategies (Annus 2018; Hanovs 2022; Kaprāns & Mieriņa 2019; Cheskin 2016). Yet how Russian speakers themselves narrate identity, memory, and belonging amid these transformations has yet to be examined as a question of heritage experience.

This paper presents findings from semi-structured biographical interviews with Russian speakers of three generational cohorts conducted in the Riga region in early 2026, building on oral history research with Russophone communities in Latvia (Zirnīte et al. 2016). Applying thematic narrative analysis (Riessman 2008), it identifies three recurring patterns: an uneven persistence of erased toponyms in everyday speech, the construction of belonging through layered self-distinctions (pre-Soviet vs. Soviet-era) and divergent intergenerational memories over the Soviet past and the war in Ukraine.

Reading these narratives against Smith's (2006) Authorised Heritage Discourse, the paper argues that biographical voice and linguistic practice bring into view what official frameworks tend to obscure: the layered temporalities, internal differentiations, and ambivalent belongings of people navigating rapid symbolic change. In doing so, it contributes a humanities-grounded methodological perspective to current debates on post-Soviet decolonisation and the limits of top-down heritage transformation.

Giorgio Di Liberto is Ph.D. candidate in Transcultural Studies in Humanities at the University of Bergamo (Italy). His research investigates the identity positioning and collective memory of Russian-speaking communities in Latvia from a transmedial perspective. His interests also extend to Soviet-era autobiography as a site of tension between public and private memory, and to nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian prose.

SESSION 7: COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND CONFLICT

Rhetorical Decolonial Deployments in the Diaspora: Articulations of Hindu Nationalism within the UK-based Indian Diaspora - **Rishika Mukhopadhyay**, University of Southampton, **David C. Harvey**, Aarhus University and **Ali Mozaffari**, University of Melbourne

Broadly speaking, Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) literature frames decoloniality as a tool for 'epistemological pluralism' (Giblin et al., 2024), justice, democratisation and co-creation of heritage with marginalised voices. While there has been some critique connected to issues of institutional complicity, the entanglement with neoliberal and nationalist ideologies, as well as questioning the potential for emancipation (Bigenho and Stobart, 2016; Turunen, 2020; Soares, 2023), within CHS, this discussion has been limited.

This paper examines how the uncritical mainstreaming of decolonisation, whereby heritage is weaponised and essentialised, has undermined the emancipatory aims of the decolonial project. Critically examining the fraught terrain of decoloniality, scholars have increasingly found that it has been appropriated by right-wing actors amidst rising authoritarian populism (Menon, 2022; Hew and Chan, 2024; Mehta, 2025; Nigam, 2025) and strategically mobilised to advance anti-Western rhetoric within the education system (Lewis and Lall, 2024). Against this backdrop, this paper investigates the UK-based Indian diaspora's use of decolonial language to claim a revival of, and return to, purist Hindu indigeneity. The paper examines how these articulations sit alongside calls to protect Hindu civilisational heritage framed as being under the threat of 'anti-Hindu hate'. Such trends parallel what Sundaram (2022) calls a nebulous 'Hindutva futurism' in the US context, where the Hindu diaspora emulates and leverages an anti-racist, black and indigenous anticolonial struggle to position itself as a vulnerable minority.

Taken together, these developments raise a critical question: what happens to the project of decolonising heritage when decolonial itself becomes a resource for exclusionary and majoritarian claims to the past? The paper argues for a rethinking of how critical heritage scholars engage with decoloniality by attending to the political interests embedded within claims to epistemic diversity and plurality.

SESSION 7: COUNTER-NARRATIVES AND CONFLICT

Rishika Mukhopadhyay is Lecturer of development geographies at University of Southampton. Her research focuses on Critical Heritage Studies, Southern Urbanism, and the Craft Economy, particularly on the meaning, production, and politics of living heritage; like crafts, sacredness, and sensory heritage and community craft economies. She uses art exhibitions to make academic research accessible to the public and is working on projects about nationalist urbanism and transnational diasporic heritage, funded by the British Academy and UNESCO Korea.

David C. Harvey is Associate Professor in Critical Heritage Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark. He studies the geographies of heritage, including processual conceptions, heritage-landscape relations, climate change, remembrance, oral history, and farming practice. He is researching “heritage border complexes,” “peaceful/pacific heritage,” and “heritage, walking and everyday landscapes.” His selected publications include *The Future of Heritage as Climates Change: Loss, Adaptation and Creativity* (2015), *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War* (2018) and *Creating Heritage: Unrecognised Pasts and Rejected Futures* (2020).

Ali Mozaffari is an Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Asia Institute, a former ARC DECRA Fellow, and VP (Communications) of the ACHS. He researches the geopolitics of heritage, culture, and built environments in West Asia, focusing on ‘heritage-border complexes’. His publications include *Heritage Movements in Asia* (2020), *Development, Architecture and the Formation of Heritage in Iran* (2020), and *World Heritage in Iran* (2016). He co-edits Berghahn’s ‘Explorations in Heritage Studies’ and co-founded ACHS’s Heritage and Transnationalism Network.

SESSION 8: ARCHIVES AND DIGITALITY

Reading the Silence: Archival Violence, Contested Memory, and the Reclamation of Omar ibn Said – **Kameelah Mu'Min Oseguera**, Omar ibn Said Institute for Black Muslim Studies & Research and **Mamaram Seck**, Historical Museum of Gorée and the Université Cheikh Anta Diop

This paper advances a decolonial, community-engaged re-examination of the life and archive of Omar ibn Said (1770–1863), contesting dominant representations of him as an exceptional “learned slave” who converted from Islam to Christianity. Drawing on five years of collaborative research between the Muslim Wellness Foundation, Université Cheikh Anta Diop and the Historical Museum of Gorée, we re-situate Omar within the intellectual traditions of Fouta Toro, Senegal, and the lived realities of enslaved Black communities in North Carolina. Grounded in the SelebeYoon paradigm—a Black Muslim, healing-centred and decolonial research framework—this project engages what Hartman (2008) terms “critical fabulation” and what Troui (1995) identifies as the silencing of the past. Through archival analysis, oral history, and site-based inquiry, we interrogate the production of Omar’s narrative within missionary and colonizationist discourses, arguing that his “conversion” functioned as a tool of racial-religious governance in the aftermath of abolitionist resistance, including the movements associated with David Walker and Nat Turner. This paper conceptualises such distortions as forms of archival violence, wherein Black Muslim subjectivity is rendered legible only through Christian supremacist frames. By reading both the archive and its absences, we reclaim Omar’s Arabic writings as evidence of epistemic persistence, spiritual continuity, and constrained agency. Positioned within decolonial debates on heritage, temporality, and identity, this work contributes a transferable methodology for community-rooted research that challenges epistemic domination (Mignolo, 2011), restores subjugated knowledge systems, and models ethical engagement across marginalised and postcolonial contexts beyond the Black Muslim diaspora.

Kameelah Mu'Min Oseguera is a psychologist, restorative practitioner and Assistant Professor of Psychology and Muslim Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary. She is the Founding Executive Director of the Muslim Wellness Foundation and the Omar ibn Said Institute for Black Muslim Studies & Research. Her scholarship integrates trauma-informed psychology, spiritual care, narrative ethics, and Black diasporic studies, with particular attention to the psychological and moral consequences of white Christian hegemony, racialised Islamophobia, and Black Muslim intersectional invisibility.

Mamaram Seck is a Senegalese historian, linguist, and cultural scholar, and Director of the Historical Museum of Gorée, with academic appointments at Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar. His research focuses on West African Islamic intellectual traditions, Wolof language and oral history, Sufi pedagogy, and the socio-religious worlds of the Senegal River Valley, particularly Fouta Toro. His scholarship challenges reductive portrayals of African Muslim captives by restoring historical depth to their scholarly training, ethical reasoning, and cultural continuity.

SESSION 8: ARCHIVES AND DIGITALITY

Forgetting and Remembering the Colonial Administrative Services Course at the University of Oxford - **Maria Murad**, University of Oxford

This paper seeks to explain the contested memory of the Colonial Administrative Services (CAS) Course which trained British colonial officers at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to work across the British Empire (excluding India) in the 20th century. This course is forgotten in institutional memory at Oxford, despite the University housing the course (and its later iterations) for the last century. This has led to either no recollection or inaccurate renderings of the CAS course. In this paper, I will first provide a contextual history of the CAS course, using archival research and ethnographic interviews I have done across the United Kingdom. After, I argue that the reason this course was forgotten in Oxford's institutional memory is due to its taboo connection to colonialism. I support this argument by examining administrative records from The National Archives and the Margery Perham Papers from the decolonisation period in the British Empire, specifically after World War II. These archives reveal the desire to "rebrand" the CAS course into Development Studies and erase its colonial origins. I also support my argument by showing how there is no central archive of this training course in the United Kingdom. Its memory is lost because it is scattered in archives across the country. My aim is to coalesce these disparate archives to reveal the untold story of the CAS course while understanding why its memory has been lost, or purposefully forgotten, at Oxford.

Maria Murad is a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of Oxford. Her Ph.D. research specialises in the Colonial Administrative Services Course, a one-year course which trained British colonial officers in the 20th century at Oxford and Cambridge in several subjects, including anthropology. Her thesis will be the first complete written history of this course.

KEYNOTE PANEL 1:

DECOLONIALITY IN PALESTINE: LAW AND NARRATIVE SOVEREIGNTY

The keynote panel promises to be not just an analysis of a situation, but an active engagement in the intellectual and practical work of decolonisation. This keynote panel convenes at a critical juncture in international discourse on Palestine, framed explicitly through the lens of decolonial theory and practice. Moving beyond conventional geopolitical analysis, the panel will dissect the multifaceted structures of occupation, erasure, and resistance by examining two interconnected pillars: International Law as a Site of Struggle, and the Decolonisation of Interfaith and Cultural Narratives. The discussion will explore wider implications for European policy, legal accountability, and the ideological underpinnings of settler colonialism. The panel aims to create a rigorous, interdisciplinary academic dialogue that bridges the immediacy of political developments with deeper, systemic critiques of power, representation, and justice.

Keynote Panellists

Prof. Alette Smeulers

Alette Smeulers is a full professor of international crimes at the University of Groningen and one of the founders of Supranational Criminology, the criminology of international crimes which brings together scholars from various disciplinary fields who study mass atrocities. In her own research she takes an inter- and multidisciplinary approach and focuses on international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes) as well as terrorism: the causes thereof, the perpetrators and the international criminal justice system. She wrote *Perpetrators of Mass Atrocities: terribly and Terrifyingly Normal?* (Routledge 2024) which was translated into Dutch with the title: *Angstaanjagend normaal* (Alfabet 2025). She is a passionate scholar, teacher, public speaker and has published widely in the field. Together with Nicola Quaadvlieg she also has a podcast series also called: *Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal*, see <https://open.spotify.com/show/2Bt5Wg5nbekeSo8UBDI5MY>. For more information, see her website: <https://alettesmeulers.org/en/home/>

KEYNOTE PANEL 1:

DECOLONIALITY IN PALESTINE: LAW AND NARRATIVE SOVEREIGNTY

Rev. Prof. Dr. Mitri Raheb

Mitri Raheb is the Founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem. The most widely published Palestinian theologian to date, Dr. Raheb is the author and editor of 54 books including: Decolonising Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible; Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire; Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes; His books and numerous articles have been translated so far into fifteen languages. Dr. Raheb is a founding and board member of the National Library of Palestine.

Rev. Dr Raheb received two honorary doctorates and several international awards including the German Media Prize was awarded to Dr. Raheb. The work of Dr. Raheb has received wide media attention from major international media outlets and networks. Dr. Raheb holds a Doctorate in Theology from the Philipps University at Marburg, Germany. www.mitriraheb.org

Dr. Marieke de Hoon

Marieke de Hoon is Associate Professor of international criminal law at the University of Amsterdam and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for Criminal Justice. Her research examines the law and politics of legal interventions in conflict, to understand how law is shaped in geopolitical contexts and how politics is shaped through the use of the language of law and its institutions. De Hoon currently has a research grant to build a research group studying the digitalisation and transnationalization of the atrocity crimes investigations landscape, and how that impacts the role of the domestic prosecutor of international crimes. She has regularly testified in Dutch parliament on the application of and obligations under the Genocide Convention and international criminal law for states and their political actors, including related to Israel/Palestine.

SESSION 9: EMERGING SOLIDARITIES, NEW DIRECTIONS

Keepers of the Ground: The Abu Omar Family and the Decolonial Politics of Archaeological Labour at Abydos - **Amany Abd El Hameed**, Helwan University and University of Pennsylvania and **Robert Vigar**, Pace University and University of Pennsylvania

The history of archaeological labour in Egypt has long been written from the perspective of Euro-American excavators, rendering invisible the Egyptian workers whose expertise built the discipline. This paper examines the legacy of the Abu Omar family—a Qufti kinship network from Nag' Abu Omar in Qift—who have served as re'is (foremen) at Abydos continuously since 1899, when Ali Abd al-Rahim Omar was first appointed by W.M. Flinders Petrie. Across five generations, the Abu Omar family has managed excavation labour, trained workers, and shaped archaeological practice at one of Egypt's most significant sites. Yet their contributions remain largely absent from the scholarly record.

Drawing on archival research at Penn Museum Archives and Lucy Gura Archives about Qufti workers and local labourers at Abydos, this paper interrogates the entanglement of expertise, kinship, and inequality that structures archaeological knowledge production in Egypt. We argue that the Quftis occupy a paradoxical position: their authority and skilled labour sustain a system of knowledge production that neither recognises their epistemologies nor credits their intellectual contributions. Simultaneously, Qufti's monopolisation of leadership roles reproduces hierarchies that marginalise other local labourers from surrounding villages such as Bani Mansour and al-'Araba al-Madfuna. By centring Qufti voices and reclaiming Arabic geographical knowledge of Abydos—predating European engagement by centuries—this paper proposes that decolonial approaches to heritage must contend not only with colonial legacies but also with the internal hierarchies that colonial labour regimes produced and that persist today.

SESSION 9: EMERGING SOLIDARITIES, NEW DIRECTIONS

Policing the Áo Dài: National Dress and Gendered Authenticity in Vietnam - **Lyn Le**, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The Vietnamese Lunar New Year 2026 saw an emergent controversy over the use of so-called khuy Tàu (Chinese buttons) on áo dài designs, in which the use of these decorative knotted fasteners is framed as “dangerous” cultural contamination. First imagined as a national costume in the 1930s amid anxieties over French colonial influence and the decline of Confucian moral order, the áo dài garment has long been the object of debates over cultural authenticity, especially after its full institutionalisation as a heritage symbol during the market reforms. Despite its hybrid history of colonial-era redesign, socialist rejection, and most importantly, post-reform heritage revival, the áo dài has been widely recognised as a timeless and purified object of the nation’s essence. This paper pays close attention to the flattening of such layered history in contemporary digital discourse by applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) to viral Threads posts and accompanying comments. I argue, first, that authenticity is often a contested effect of discourse, primarily produced through selective processes by which sartorial elements are either absorbed into or excluded from what comes to be acknowledged as the national form. Second, I show how projects of cultural reclamation may also function as projects of purification and exclusion, while the policing of national dress remains inseparable from the making of gendered nationalism. Lastly, the paper highlights the role of digital discourse in simplifying the garment’s entangled history. In doing so, it contributes to debates on decoloniality, material culture, and contested identity.

Lyn Le is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her doctoral research examines how femininity, moral citizenship, and respectability are produced and negotiated in contemporary Vietnam through the intersection of state discourse, market logics, and digital platforms. Drawing on political sociology, anthropology, feminist theory, and media studies, she is particularly interested in middle-class subjectivities, gendered governance, and the ways online cultures shape ideals of modern womanhood in postsocialist Vietnam.

SESSION 9: EMERGING SOLIDARITIES, NEW DIRECTIONS

Refusing Disconnection: Decolonial Futures and Languages of Repair within the Museum Practices - **Lucas da Costa Maciel**, Leiden University and Technische Universität Berlin

This paper considers what becomes possible and what remains foreclosed when fields such as heritage studies describe the formation of so-called “colonial collections” through familiar terms like circulation, entanglement, and recontextualisation. Rather than treating disconnection as a simple outcome of removal, I approach it as a condition that makes removal intelligible in the first place. This assumption underpins analytic practices such as biography, contextualisation, mediation, and relationality, while also supporting museum governance. I refer to this underlying grammar as “images of disconnection,” situating it within broader cosmologies that render separability, transfer, and ownership as ordinary features of material worlds. I aim to delink these images as ethical limits for decolonial futures.

The argument draws on ethnographic engagement with *mogen*, forms of life inseparable from Mapuche land, and currently held in museum collections. In *mogen*’s presence, disconnection cannot function as a neutral descriptive tool. Removals do not sever relations but stretch them, generating illness that travels across land, people, and institutions. This tension exposes the limits of contemporary languages of repair, such as provenance, restitution, and reconciliation, when they rely on the very separations through which harm is enacted. Rather than seeking a delinked outside, I propose hesitation as an ethical method to refuse disconnection and commit to what remains trapped within these limits. Sustaining decolonial futures around “colonial collections,” I suggest, may require acting without presuming that what was taken was ever fully detachable.

Lucas da Costa Maciel is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at Leiden University and an Associated Researcher at Technische Universität Berlin. His research focuses on Indigenous collections, Mapuche repatriation, provenance research, and museum practices. He has collaborated with Indigenous communities, museums, and repatriation initiatives in South America.

SESSION 10: SPACE AND INFRASTRUCTURES

Can the State Decolonise Public Space? Non-Performative Policies and the Politics of Decolonisation in Ostend - **Alana Castro de Azevedo**, State Archives of Belgium

In this paper, I reflect on the recent adoption of the “decolonial discourse” within Belgian public memory policies. Following the global #BlackLivesMatter protests targeting statues of enslavers and colonialists, regional and local authorities began to formulate policies and recommendations to govern contested colonial heritage. In this context, I interrogate what Tuck and Yang (2012) described as the “too-easy adoption of decolonising discourse” and its impact at the local level. In particular, I analyse the case of the city of Ostend, where a competition for a critical artistic intervention to challenge the celebratory statue of King Leopold II on the seafront was launched in 2022. British-Guyanese sculptor Hew Locke won with a design consisting of five masts, each topped with a gold sculpture representing a different aspect of Belgium’s colonial past. Initially hailed as an important step toward the decolonisation of Ostend’s public space, the project was cancelled by public authorities after the municipal elections, making it a prime example of the “non-performativity” of decolonising policies in Belgium. Building on Sara Ahmed’s notion of “non-performative” policies (2012), I show how, over time, political support for this initiative weakened, polarisation heightened, and decolonial activists came to be labelled as an unrepresentative “vocal minority”. Using the Ostend case, I examine the political processes that shaped this outcome and reflect on the limits of state-led decolonisation of public space, at a time when scholars are beginning to critically assess the impacts of decolonising policies.

Alana Castro de Azevedo is a postdoctoral researcher at CegeSoma/State Archives of Belgium. She earned her PhD in Cultural Heritage Studies the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, with a thesis on the emergence of antagonistic conflicts in processes of memorialisation. Her research interests revolve around contested heritage, conflicts and emotions, with a particular focus on the role of (sacred) values in conflict escalation. Since 2024, she has been investigating how material traces of Belgium’s colonialism are being contested today and is a team member of the transnational EU-funded project CONCILIARE (Confidently Changing Colonial heritage).

SESSION 10: SPACE AND INFRASTRUCTURES

Cultivating the Sky: Colonial Radio Infrastructures, Thermal Media, and Decolonial Space Heritage - **David Duindam**, University of Amsterdam

This paper traces a genealogy from colonial extractive landscapes to post-war space exploration by following radio and astronomical infrastructures between Java and the Netherlands. Near Bandung, Radio Malabar – a key long-wave transmission site in the Dutch colonial ether network – was embedded in highland tea plantations whose profits also financed the nearby Bosscha Observatory (1923). Colonial capital from plantation agriculture thus underwrote both terrestrial radio infrastructures and an early “gaze into space,” tightly coupling extractive economies, imperial governance and astronomical modernity.

In the Netherlands, Radio Kootwijk functioned as Malabar’s metropolitan counterpart. After 1945, a Würzburg Riese radar left by the German occupier was repurposed here as one of the first Dutch radio telescopes before being moved to Drenthe, where it became part of the radio astronomy complex on the grounds of the former Westerbork transit camp. Nearby, the Diogenes bunker, another Nazi-era concrete media infrastructure, endures as an “undesirable heritage” site that complicates narratives of loss and ruination.

Drawing on decolonial heritage debates (Arregui; Giblin et al.), and Nicole Starosielski’s work on “hot and cold” media, I conceptualise these radio/space infrastructures as “cultivations of the sky”: relational ecopolitical assemblages that redistribute heat, noise and risk across colonial and post-colonial landscapes. Rather than a neutral frontier, space exploration emerges here as a project that extends colonial geographies, intensifies thermal and environmental inequalities, and transforms former plantation and camp sites into nodes of scientific prestige. The paper argues that decolonial heritage practice must move beyond technical or celebratory space histories and instead recognise these landscapes as palimpsests of extraction, wartime media, climate crisis and contested futures of both earthly and outer space.

David Duindam is assistant professor of Colonial Heritage and the Shoah in the Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam. His current research project is “Concrete Colonialism: Architecture and Heritage in Indonesia around Independence” (2024–2030). He is board member of AHM and coordinates the BA programme in Literary and Cultural Analysis. His monograph *Fragments of the Holocaust* investigates the postwar history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

SESSION 10: SPACE AND INFRASTRUCTURES

The Ecology of Heritage Violence: A Decolonial View of Cultural Dispossession -
Julian Postulart, Netherlands Defence Academy

Existing frameworks for understanding heritage violence – focused on destruction, individual acts, and legal violations – persistently underestimate harm by treating its dimensions in isolation. This paper argues that heritage violence is better understood as an *ecology*: a system of mutually reinforcing acts – *physical, administrative, symbolic, and discursive* – individually intentional but collectively producing dispossession, through which cultural property is damaged, distorted, or rendered inaccessible to the communities to which it belongs.

Physical violence disrupts material presence and maintenance; *administrative* acts undermine institutional standing or curtail access; *symbolic* reattribution replaces community meaning with curated meaning; *discursive* rewriting dismantles the basis of territorial or historical claims. Together, they dismantle the relationship between a community and its heritage. Because ecologies of heritage violence are systemic – their harm accumulative rather than reducible – responses that address individual dimensions leave the system intact. Decolonial transformation requires approaches capable of naming the ecology as a whole before the dispossession it enacts is complete.

The paper grounds the ecology of heritage violence in the decolonial work of Mignolo, Quijano, and Maldonado-Torres. Not as a cohesive model but as theorists whose tensions – between structure and epistemic agency, and between institutional and phenomenological accounts of harm – themselves reflect the irreducibility of the ecology's dimensions. Crucially, the explanatory power of the ecological structure is not limited to colonial contexts, yet coloniality provides numerous cases in which these dimensions operate systematically and simultaneously – hence the decolonial grounding.

Julian Postulart is Ph.D. researcher at the Netherlands Defence Academy. He analyses how state actors instrumentalise cultural property in peace, conflict, and war through various practices, like destruction, wilful neglect, and (mis)appropriation. His broader research interests include memory and identity politics, sovereignty, self-determination, political violence, and the lasting effects of colonialism, with a regional focus on Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Julian is also an editor at RAAM, a platform for journalism on Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

SESSION 11: COLONIAL LEGACIES

What is “Colonialism”? Omani Zanzibar, Portuguese West Africa, and the Politics of Historiographic Classification - **Gavin Herbertson**, SWPS University

What are the limits of postcolonial studies? The question has long animated debates about the prefix. Rather than reheating those, this paper begins by recognising what they all presuppose: namely, that the object of inquiry stands in some relation to colonialism. The question, then, is: what is this “colonialism”?

To address it, the paper brings into concurrent comparison two historiographic traditions: scholarship on fifteenth-century Portuguese rule in West Africa and the Atlantic islands, widely recognised as colonial, and scholarship on nineteenth-century Omani rule in Zanzibar, which is far less often framed in those terms. The comparison is pointed because both formations involved overseas domination and plantation economies sustained through the large-scale exploitation of enslaved Africans. What it reveals is that the same kinds of complexity are made to do different work across the two literatures. In the Portuguese case, hybridity and local embeddedness are usually contained so that they cannot dilute imperial responsibility. In the Omani case, comparable heterogeneity is more often foregrounded in ways that disperse responsibility across a wider field of actors and make the category of colonialism harder to apply.

The stakes are political. If historiography mediates cultural memory, then the classificatory choices through which historians name past formations help determine which histories become available for decolonial critique in the present. Populations subjected to Omani domination therefore risk falling outside the memory frameworks through which historical violence becomes legible and through which decolonial claims are most readily articulated.

Gavin Herbertson is an Assistant Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies at SWPS University, Warsaw, and an Early Career Fellow at the University of London’s Institute of English Studies. He completed his DPhil in English Literature at the University of Oxford with a thesis on Derek Walcott’s early writing, and work has recently appeared in *New West Indian Guide*, *Modernist Cultures*, *Comparative Critical Studies*, and *The Journal of West Indian Literature*. He is the recipient of the 2025 Wasafiri Essay Prize.

SESSION 11: COLONIAL LEGACIES

Beyond the 'Moro' and the 'Mercenary': Decolonial Re-readings of the Army of Africa - **Dario Fernandez Graziano**, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

The participation of tens of thousands of Moroccan soldiers (Regulares) in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) remains shrouded in myth and colonial terminology. Nationalist propaganda constructed a paternalistic narrative of "Hispano-Moroccan fraternity," framing the colonial subjects as willing participants in a religious crusade against atheism and communism. Conversely, Republican propaganda and subsequent historical accounts have often reduced these soldiers to "mercenaries" or pejoratively labelled them as *moros*. This paper utilises a decolonial lens to unsettle the established historiography of Franco's Army of Africa. Drawing on historical analysis and oral testimonies, it demonstrates that Moroccan soldiers were neither mercenaries nor volunteers, but marginalized victims of a coercive colonial system driven by the fascist *africanomilitarista* ideology. Recruitment was largely forced, exploiting extreme famine and utilising violent coercion from colonial authorities. By dismantling the deceptive discourse of brotherhood—which masked systemic racism and extreme oppression—this paper highlights how the post-war regime quickly abandoned its promises, leaving Moroccan veterans in absolute poverty and oblivion. Ultimately, this contribution argues that a true decolonial trajectory in Spanish Civil War memory requires rejecting racially charged descriptors and acknowledging the coercive colonial dynamics that shaped the Moroccan experience, thereby taking into account the agency and voices of these overlooked historical actors.

Dario Fernandez Graziano is History Ph.D. candidate at Universitat Pompeu Fabra researching African American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. He holds Master's degrees in American (UvA) and Transatlantic Studies (Radboud), plus Bachelor's degrees in History (Zaragoza) and Communication (UOC). Driven by an interdisciplinary, transnational approach, his academic journey spans the UK, Romania, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and the U.S., grounded in archival research conducted at the IISG, NYU's Tamiment Library, and across Spain.

SESSION 11: COLONIAL LEGACIES

Beyond the 'Moro' and the 'Mercenary': Decolonial Re-readings of the Army of Africa - Yoke-Sum Wong, Alberta University of the Arts

Papan, a small town in Malaysia attracts curious travellers today as a rebranded Heritage Village. Its derelict beauty is an instagrammable attraction. Once a prosperous tin mining town in the 19th century, it was designated a “New Village” during The Malayan Emergency (1948 – 1960). The “New Village” was in fact an internment camp, part of the British strategy to fight Communist insurgents (mostly Chinese-Malayans) during the Emergency. The anti-insurgent tactics that the British developed in Malaya were adopted by the Americans in Vietnam and hailed as a blueprint today for anti-guerrilla warfare. Fought in the shadow of the Cold War, the Malayan Emergency is the punctum of

Malaysia’s post-war history and decolonisation narrative. The Emergency left a legacy of inter-racial resentments, and divided families although official Malaysian history now proclaims the Emergency as a triumph over Communism that helped paved the way to national independence. Over the past 20 years, Malaysian and Singaporean filmmakers, artists, playwrights, writers and cultural workers have produced work that explores, questions, unsettles, and challenges the totality of the Emergency narrative outside the nation’s established history. This includes grassroots efforts to revitalise the New Villages as important sites of memory, and as significant spaces of vernacular memorialization. Papan is part of this movement, with most of its New Village houses remaining intact though dilapidated. A few has been turned into heritage centres, opened to curious visitors. My presentation explores the haunting materiality of Papan’s heritage efforts to question the national narrative. Poignantly, what is exhibited in these humble grassroots museums is the makeshift display of material possessions of former inhabitants – living and dead or disappeared; ordinary household objects and furniture gathering dust – as if they are waiting for their human possessors to come home.

Yoke-Sum Wong is a Professor in the School of Critical and Creative Studies and helms the research portfolio at Alberta University of the Arts, Calgary. Her background is in history and sociology, with a focus on cultural histories and historiography. She has written on post-colonial built environments in Singapore and Malaysia, and architecture and design (including the eurocentrism of the mid-century modern and Isamu Noguchi). She works in the intersections of art and history, and has organised and participated in international research-creation workshops drawing together multi-disciplinary artists, cultural workers, and academics. She is now embarking on a new project exploring the Cold War in Southeast Asia and cultural reckonings.

SESSION 12: THE POLITICS OF THE COLLECTIONS

On the Restitution of African Belongings in International Law: Colonial-Era Takings and the Myth of Legality - **Maxim Smets**, KU Leuven

Colonial interactions did not occur in a legal vacuum but, by and large, operated within the contours of international law, generating treaties, agreements, and legal arrangements between European powers and African societies that often explicitly stipulated respect for native property. By the end of the nineteenth century, an international customary prohibition on the plunder of both cultural and private property had already crystallised. Colonial criminal codes and private law, too, frequently protected Indigenous property rights. And yet, on a massive scale, European armies, civil servants, and missionaries misappropriated cultural objects in direct violation of these very prohibitions and arrangements.

Such illegality was, however, rendered subversive by the existence of a colonial legal framework that created – at least for the outside world – a carefully maintained appearance, and thus an assumption, of legality. That appearance was grounded in a Eurocentrism that accorded European colonial actors, a presumption of good faith, interpretive leniency, and benefit of the doubt, even where their practices clearly violated colonial law itself. The assumption of legality it produced has never been fully dislodged: it continues to generate a narrative reality in which the lawfulness of colonial actions remains the unexamined point of departure in contemporary restitution debates.

This presentation challenges that premise head-on. It argues that the international law of cultural heritage is haunted by a myth of legality, and that the conflation of the power to act with impunity with the legality of that action has fundamentally distorted our understanding of the colonial past. It is, in short, both historically and legally inaccurate to characterise the large-scale misappropriation of cultural objects by European colonial actors as 'legal' when, by the standards of the law that governed them, it was not.

Maxim Smets is a doctoral researcher and teaching assistant at the KU Leuven, Belgium. His research examines the restitution of African cultural belongings in international law, focusing on colonial-era takings and the enduring myth of legality. He has also been a visiting scholar at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law at the University of Cambridge and at the Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies at Leiden University.

SESSION 12: THE POLITICS OF THE COLLECTIONS

The Mapuche Collections at the Ethnological Museum Berlin and their Interpretations in the Present: A Collaborative Project to (Re)connect with the Memory and History of the Mapuche - **Lena Steffens**, Freie Universität Berlin

The Ethnological Museum in Berlin houses extensive collections of artefacts and media items from the Indigenous Mapuche people in present-day Chile and Argentina. A large part of the collections came to the museum during the violent colonisation of Mapuche territory at the end of the 19th century. In 2025, a collaborative project between the Ethnological Museum Berlin and a delegation of five Mapuche aimed to document the Mapuche's perspectives on these collections.

The Mapuche engaged with the Berlin collections as part of a counter-hegemonic and decolonial practice addressing colonial continuities in the knowledge production in museums. Material culture plays an important role in the collective memory and practices of the Mapuche, and they therefore recognise the Berlin collection as a source for the revitalisation, reconstruction and transmission of Mapuche kimvn (knowledge).

My ongoing PhD project aims to explore the meanings of the collections for the Mapuche people in the present and the impact of the collaborative project, which I closely accompanied. In documenting the stories, knowledge and practices connected to the objects, the research focuses on the Mapuche's epistemology and perspectives on their (im)material culture. Furthermore, the research considers the challenges and opportunities of such a project, focusing on its impact within the Mapuche territory. In this regard, aspects such as the (re)appropriation and restitution of Mapuche material culture, as well as its (re)construction and transmission of knowledge will be explored.

Lena Steffens is Ph.D. student in Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin. Previously employed as a curatorial assistant in the South American collections of the Ethnological Museum Berlin. Master's degree in Latin American Cultural Studies (University of Bonn). Research interests include (im)material culture and Indigenous movements with a focus on Latin America and the history of collections.

SESSION 12

Decolonising Heritage through XR: Achievements, Limits, and Custodial Authority -
Yulia Tikhomirova, Sapienza University of Rome

As cultural heritage (CH) institutions face demands to accommodate plural and conflicting narratives, the question of which mechanisms sustain this plurality—without collapsing it into consensus or fueling antagonism—becomes central (Mouffe 2013). Pozzi (2013) identifies digital technologies as an opening for agonistic museum practice; van Slooten (2023) identifies Extended Reality (XR) as a future research direction for connecting museums with debates on colonialism. Since then, a growing body of XR heritage projects has engaged decolonial commitments in practice. This presentation examines what these projects produce, and where they fall short. Drawing on a review of decolonial XR heritage projects (Tikhomirova and Vosmeer, forthcoming), I will first demonstrate XR's structural capacities for accommodating dissonant and contested heritage: place-anchored presence, non-linear temporal design, embodied transmission. These are significant achievements for both fields. Yet they constitute what Fraser (2000) identifies as recognition without redistribution: diversifying content while leaving unchanged who governs heritage over time. I will then argue that this points to what I term *custodial authority*—who hosts, archives, maintains, and can withdraw heritage materials. Where Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006) concentrates discursive authority, custodial authority operates as a parallel and analytically distinct mechanism. Digital infrastructure is not neutral—it encodes political commitments while presenting itself as technical necessity (Benjamin 2019). XR intensifies this through specific material dependencies—proprietary engines, platform constraints, hardware requirements—making it a particularly acute site for exposing decolonisation adopted as metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012): the language of transformation is present, but custodial authority remains concentrated. These dependencies make visible a mechanism that likely operates across heritage practice more broadly. In conclusion, I argue that governance specifying authority over heritage needs to precede curatorship, not be an afterthought.

Yulia Tikhomirova is Ph.D. Candidate in Heritage Science at Sapienza University of Rome and an art curator. Her doctoral research, within the Digital Transition for Museums programme, examines participatory and decolonial approaches to museology, with particular attention to how immersive technologies mediate sensitive and conflicting heritage and to questions of digital sovereignty. During her doctorate, she was engaged in a case study on embodied and affective dimensions of XR experiences at the Reggia di Caserta, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. She spent a year with the Civic Interaction Design research group at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, researching community curatorship in XR and decolonial museum practice. She is currently researching a VR case study on Afro-Caribbean identity and heritage. Tikhomirova is a co-founder of TIST-This Is So Temporary, a collective that operates as a practice-based research platform at the intersection of art, public space, and digital technologies, including immersive experimentation with community heritage.

SESSION 13: DIASPORIC MEMORIES

Decolonial Approaches to Heritage: the Case of Researching Diasporic Heritage with Syrian Women in Antwerp - **Line Dalile**, University of Antwerp

Despite decades of critical scholarship, heritage research remains deeply entangled with national and colonial frameworks that privilege fixed geographies, material authenticity, and institutional authority. This paper responds to the urgent need to centre decoloniality across theory, practice, and method. Focusing on diasporic heritage, a persistently underrated strand of research, I argue for a fundamental rethinking of heritage itself: not as a static notion tied to territory and objecthood, but as a hybrid, fluid construct that encompasses the intangible, the sensory, and the embodied.

Grounded in ethnographic research with Syrian women in Antwerp, this contribution examines heritage through multiple lenses. I explore food and collective kitchens as sites of memory and belonging, heritage as a lived experience through embodied and sensory practice presented in participatory urban projects, and the interventions of “official” actors such as museums and the methodologies they use in narrating diasporic heritage. Central to my approach is the use of participatory methodologies and the practice of co-researching with citizens, which serve not merely as research techniques but as decolonial tools that centre marginalised voices and redistribute interpretive authority. By positioning heritage not as a product to be preserved but as a practice to be lived, this work challenges dominant heritage regimes and opens space for more plural, relational understandings of the past.

In doing so, this paper contributes to broader conversations about how decolonial praxis can sustain precarious heritage futures amid resurgent nationalisms and neocolonial pressures. It critically reflects on both the generative possibilities and the ethical complexities inherent in participatory, decolonial research, ultimately demonstrating that diasporic heritage offers a vital site for reimagining memory, belonging, and material culture on more just and plural terms.

Line Dalile is a researcher at the University of Antwerp’s ARCHES research group. Her Ph.D. investigated urban belonging through participatory art and placemaking practices in Brussels. She now studies diasporic heritage, specifically the Syrian diaspora, with a focus on Syrian immigrant women in Antwerp. Her work traces how these women weave their diasporic histories into the fabric of the city, engaging in creative acts that transform urban space into lived heritage.

SESSION 13: DIASPORIC MEMORIES

The Trust Paradox: Bidirectional Mistrust Between Muslim Diaspora Communities and Heritage Institutions in Flanders - **Merve Kayikci**, Radboud University

This paper examines the bidirectional mistrust between Muslim diaspora communities and heritage institutions in Flanders, Belgium, exploring how these dynamics constrain cultural representation, community agency, and belonging.

At a moment when museums are increasingly embracing co-creation and community outreach in the name of inclusivity and decolonisation, existing studies reveal these processes to be far more fraught than institutional rhetoric suggests, making the conditions that enable or obstruct genuine collaboration an urgent object of inquiry. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2024, including interviews with heritage professionals, diaspora organisation representatives, and artists across Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, I analyse how mistrust operates both structurally and interpersonally. While institutions lament that communities "do not trust us," diaspora communities counter that institutions fundamentally distrust their capacity for autonomous heritage-making, maintaining control over narrative, form, and content.

Engaging the conference theme of community engagement with tangible and intangible heritage, I show how mistrust plays out across both registers: from the physical exclusion of migrant material culture from archives to the delegitimisation of embodied community knowledge and lived memory.

Departing from scholarship that examines how heritage sites shape visitor emotions, I ask instead how emotions — particularly mistrust — inform institutional gatekeeping and reproduce structural exclusion.

Through this lens, I engage Laurajane Smith's authorised heritage discourse as a colonial formation governing who counts as a legitimate heritage expert. Rather than a failure of goodwill, I argue that mistrust is structurally reproduced through mechanisms a decolonial reorientation would need to dismantle: the concentration of interpretive authority, the erasure of community expertise, and top-down collaboration models that render genuine co-production impossible.

Merve Kayikci is a cultural anthropologist whose research examines Muslim diaspora heritage in Europe. She holds a PhD in Anthropology and currently serves as a postdoctoral researcher at Radboud University, as well as a senior researcher in the Educational Department of the Anne Frank House. Her work explores themes of heritage and affect, heritage diversity, migration, and the experiences of minorities in European contexts.

SESSION 13: DIASPORIC MEMORIES

Material Heritage in Palestinian Diasporic Fiction: Homes, Objects, and the Afterlives of Dispossession in Enter Ghost - **Elvira Aguilera García**, Autonomous University of Barcelona

Since the 1948 Nakba, the settler-colonial project of Israel has targeted land, resources, and the material fabric of Palestinian life (Siegfried, 2020). The cyclical practices of dispossession and the erasure of Palestinian material and social structures reveal the centrality that matter holds for the Palestinian community and help explain the prominence of materiality in Palestinian diasporic Anglophone fiction, as in the case of Isabella Hammad's novel, *Enter Ghost* (2023). The protagonist of this novel, a British-Palestinian theatre actress who, at a moment of personal impasse, goes back to her home city, Haifa, undergoes a series of memory processes closely intertwined with the material world around her, such as houses, objects, and checkpoints. By engaging with Maldonado-Torres' account of "coloniality of being" (i.e. the effects of colonial power relations on lived experience, language, and understanding of one's existence), this abstract proposes an analysis of narrative moments in which human and non-human matter intra-act and become entangled (Barad, 2007), tracing the lived and inherited experience of settler colonialism, the consequences of such coloniality of being as well as the processes of (post)memorial navigation (Hirsch, 2012) and resistance that the characters pursue. Through close reading, I'll analyse the scene in which the protagonist visits her pre-Nakba family home as well as recurring references to objects from the characters' houses, showing how interactions between human and other-than-human matter co-produce memory and identity (Fox and Alldred, 2018). By drawing on Karen Barad's concept of intra-action and Ann Rigney's approach to new materialisms through cultural memory studies, this literary analysis will delve into the material traces of Palestinian heritage that "triggers memory by materialising and siting it" (De Cesari, 2019, p. 19) and it will show how these material traces as contested heritage mediate the ongoing operations of settler-colonial power.

Elvira Aguilera García is FPI-funded doctoral candidate at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the Department of English and German Studies. She holds a BA in English Studies and an MA in English Literature and Linguistics from the University of Granada, as well as an Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA). Her PhD examines Palestinian diasporic Anglophone fiction, focusing on how material objects and spaces mediate memory.

SESSION 14: COLONIAL MUSEUMS

Reclaiming the Silenced: Afro-Belgian Counter-Memory and the Seven Congolese Graves in Tervuren - **Leen Van Laere**, Leiden University

This paper examines Belgium's engagement with its colonial past through seven graves in Tervuren of Congolese individuals, who died after being exhibited in a human zoo during the 1897 World Exhibition. It explores the tension between Belgium's dominant memory, which presents colonialism as largely benevolent and silences its violence and evidence thereof, and Afro-Belgian counter-memory, emerging from the late 1990s to reclaim this site and history. The graves operate as a micro-site where the possibilities and limits of decolonising heritage become visible.

I will show how the Afro-Belgian community's counter-memory functions as a decolonial intervention. Through commemorations and activist practices, the graves are reclaimed as a space of evidence of colonial violence, remembrance, and resistance. By foregrounding colonial violence and its enduring legacies, including structural racism and discrimination, Afro-Belgian actors challenge historical silences and assert narratives linking past injustices to present inequalities. Drawing on research carried out for my MA thesis, the paper demonstrates that the interaction between dominant memory and counter-memory is characterised by an ongoing push-and-pull, with Afro-Belgian interventions prompting debate and symbolic recognition, and institutional responses tending to contain rather than transform these challenges. I will argue that Belgium's engagement with its colonial past constitutes a form of negotiated confrontation rather than transformative reckoning, highlighting the importance of decolonial work, and revealing, through the case of the seven graves, both the limits and ongoing significance of decolonial practice within a resistant memory landscape.

Leen Van Laere holds a Bachelor's in Korean Studies, a dual Master's in Heritage & Memory Studies from the University of Amsterdam, and is currently finishing a Master's in Asian Studies at Leiden University. Her previous research has focused on various contested memories in Korea, Dutch colonialism's relationship to the climate crisis in Suriname, and most recently, she has focused on Belgian colonial memory and the ways historical legacies shape present-day culture and heritage.

SESSION 14: COLONIAL MUSEUMS

Beyond Colonial Temporality: contemporary art as a Decolonial Practice in Southern Colombia - **Maria Suarez Caicedo**, University of Amsterdam

In this paper, I analyse two art projects: *Tierra, Conejos y Orígenes* (Land, Rabbits and Origins) by Estefanía García Pineda and *Secuestro Cultural por la Dignidad Caucana* (Cultural Kidnapping for Caucan Dignity) by the collective Minga Prácticas Decoloniales, to explore how they mobilise and challenge the concept of heritage in the Cauca region of southern Colombia. Drawing on Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's notions of "potential history" and "rehearsals," I interpret these projects as decolonial practices that simultaneously contest dominant, colonially-grounded understandings of heritage and insist on the recovery of Indigenous memories as a pathway toward historical justice and reparation. By connecting Azoulay's conceptualisation with the artists' emphasis on revitalisation and recovery, I trace new intersections for understanding contemporary art as a decolonial practice, in which the past needs to be revisited. This work involves unearthing worlds, knowledges, and figures that coloniality has sought to keep buried, thereby proposing an alternative temporal structure to colonial temporality.

Maria Suarez Caicedo is a researcher focusing on contemporary art and its engagement in processes of memory-making, reparation, and repair in contexts of conflict and violence, with a particular focus on Latin America and Colombia. Currently, she is Ph.D. candidate at the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture as part of the Critical Heritage Ecologies research initiative, where she is investigating the engagement of contemporary participatory art and heritage practices in processes of social and ecological reparation in post-conflict Colombia.

SESSION 14: COLONIAL MUSEUMS

Specimen and/or Artefact?: Unsettling Nature/Culture Distinctions in Oxford's Museums' - **Sofia Karliner**, University of Oxford and **Marlowe McCaffrey**, University of Oxford

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum stand physically contiguous yet epistemically segregated, divided by an architectural threshold that materialises one of Western modernity's most enduring colonial inheritances: the nature/culture binary. Crucially, both institutions emerged from the same Victorian collecting enterprise, and their separation marks a founding moment of (dis)encounter between ways of knowing. This paper examines how that original division reflects and reproduces the coloniality of knowledge embedded in museum classification systems, where natural history is severed from ethnography, and scientific authority is disengaged from other forms of knowing. Drawing on the history of taxonomy – itself a technology of imperial ordering, premised on extractive collecting and the hierarchical categorisation of humans, nonhumans and things – we trace how classificatory infrastructures naturalise distinctions between human and more-than-human worlds. Through an experimental pairing of objects across both collections (e.g., animal remains and animal-made objects; botanical samples and plant-based artefacts; insect specimens and insect jewellery), we analyse how these taxonomies continue to shape whose knowledge counts, what forms of life are preservable, and how (naturalcultural) heritage is governed. Situating this case within decolonial debates in museum and heritage studies, we argue that unsettling the nature/culture divide is not merely conceptual, but fundamentally an institutional and political act. At a planetary moment defined by 'polycrisis' (Pink 2025), this paper proposes museums as sites for epistemic repair and more-than-human relationality, exploring how reconfiguring material classification might contribute towards articulating decolonial futures within heritage institutions.

Sofia Karliner is D.Phil. candidate in Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford. Her research examines the historical construction of anthropological categories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their articulation within ethnographic museums, with particular attention to narrative authority and knowledge production.

Marlowe McCaffrey is D.Phil. Anthropology candidate at Oxford, co-funded by the ESRC and St John's College. His research focuses on forms of moth and butterfly conservation in the UK to rethink biodiversity, scale, hope and ideas of 'natural history' amid ecological crisis, drawing on ethnography with museums, citizen scientists and conservation organisations. He previously completed a BSc and MRes in Anthropology at UCL and is the recipient of the Rosa Morison Prize and the Anna Sturm Law Prize.

SESSION 15: MONUMENTS AND IMAGINATION

Countering Leopoldian Monuments: Dialogism and Provisionality on view in Belgium - **Zack Martin**, University of Illinois Chicago

Monuments to the legacy of Leopold II, King of the Belgians from 1865 to 1909 and *de jure* autocrat of the Congo Free State from its founding in 1885 until its cession to the Belgian state in 1908, proliferated in the interwar period and were built until the end of the colonial empire in the early 1960s. These public memorials testify to the concerted efforts of the Belgian state to nationalise the history of their Congo colony, which began as a private crown possession and was consistently regarded with suspicion by large segments of Belgian society. The combined efforts of the colonial lobby, the Ministry of Colonies, and the Royal Palace paid off, however, as by mid-century a majority of Belgians polled indicated their belief that Belgian presence in Central Africa was justified and offered tangible benefits to local peoples.

This paper considers recent counter-monumental actions at some of the most important of these Leopoldian monuments in the context of “post post-colonial Belgium,” a fractured nation-state whose colonial history may finally be ready to thaw. While these monuments to a highly polarising king may have once stood for a monolithic national memory apparatus, today they provide needed space for the articulation of more ethical futures for Belgium. As place-based installations, they gather activists for protest and inspire artists to create works that dialogue with the material traces of a violent colonial ideology.

Zack Martin is Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the University of Illinois Chicago. He studies the heritage of Belgian imperialism and is preparing a dissertation on the construction of heritage at the AfricaMuseum, Tervuren, which functioned as Belgium's flagship colonial institution during its occupation of present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. He is currently conducting research there with help from a grant from the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

SESSION 15: MONUMENTS AND IMAGINATION

Staged Histories, Living Stories: Challenges of Decolonial Curating in the Kartinizaal at UvA (2025–2026) - **Corina L. Apostol**, University of Amsterdam and **Zoi Psimmenou**, BJCEM Alkmere

During our presentation we will critically reflect on “Staged Histories, Living Stories,” (2025–2026) a decolonial curatorial intervention in the Kartinizaal (formerly the VOC-zaal) inside the Bushuis at the University of Amsterdam, developed collaboratively by Corina L. Apostol, Zoi Psimmenou, MA Museum Studies students, and featuring the work of artists of Indonesian and Dutch-Moluccan heritage, Daisy Ranoe, Herlambang Bayu Aji, and Ratri Notosudirdjo.

Our point of departure is the room’s status as a neocolonial monument: a 1990s architecturally staged reconstruction of the VOC boardroom that normalised Dutch imperial pride while obscuring histories of violence and epistemic erasure. We examine how artistic, design and pedagogical strategies can “unstage” colonial scenography and reorient an institutional site toward pluriversal memory futures. Building on decolonial theorists such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Catherine Walsh, and Gloria Wekker, as well as on student- and community-driven insights from the Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities programme (2023), our project advances three interlinked practices: revealing rather than erasing, reframing rather than replacing, and reclaiming the hall as a laboratory for critical pedagogy.

Through dismantling and reusing key scenographic elements (balustrade, fireplace ornaments, painting reproductions), transforming a colonial cabinet into a decolonial library, and commissioning site-specific works that mobilise Wayang as counter-archive and mural-based polyvocal testimony, our project reconfigured the space into a living, agonistic environment for decolonial inquiry. We situate this intervention within wider European debates on de-commemoration as well as corresponding backlash from conservative groups. The tensions surrounding such interventions became even more evident through a recent decision by the Municipality of Amsterdam, which classified the Kartinizaal redesign as a violation of a protected national monument and demanded their immediate reversal, despite the room itself being a speculative 1990s reconstruction rather than an authentic historical interior. This response reveals the danger of staged colonial scenographies acquiring heritage status, and of regressive historical narratives being protected from critical transformation and reflection under the guise of preservation.

SESSION 15: MONUMENTS AND IMAGINATION

Corina L. Apostol is assistant professor of social practice in contemporary art and culture at the University of Amsterdam. In 2022, she curated the Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, presenting the project “Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance” in the Netherlands “Rietveld” Pavilion. She has served as a curator and a member of the steering committee for the international, practice-based research project “Beyond Matter” (2020–23), supported by Creative Europe EU. She has also served as a curator and editor at the Tallinn Art Hall (2019–23), Creative Time (2017–2019), and was a guest lecturer at the Art Academy of Latvia (2021–23).

Zoi Psimmenou is interdisciplinary curator and architect based in Amsterdam. She holds a Master of Architecture from the National Technical University of Athens and an MA in Museum Studies from the University of Amsterdam. In 2025, she worked as exhibition designer and project manager for Staged Histories, Living Stories in the Kartinizaal at the University of Amsterdam. In September 2026, she will begin her PhD on JUST PRACTICES: Artistic Research, Curating and Climate Justice, part of the NWO-funded JUST ART project.

SESSION 15: MONUMENTS AND IMAGINATION

Internal Decolonisation: Heritage, Domination, and Post-Authoritarian Landscapes in Central and Eastern Europe - **Łukasz Gawel**, Jagiellonian University

The emergence of the critical paradigm in heritage studies marked a decisive shift from preservation-centred approaches toward analyses of power, exclusion, and the political consequences of interpreting the past. Building on this framework, this paper introduces the category of *internal decolonisation* to conceptualise how Central and Eastern European societies confront material and symbolic legacies of domination embedded in their own recent histories.

The argument is developed through the analysis of two highly contested sites in Poland: the Nazi administrative building erected on Wawel Hill in Kraków, positioned prominently next to the cathedral and symbolically dominating the historic complex, and the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, constructed as a “gift” from Stalin and still defining the city’s skyline. Both structures remain materially intact and continue to generate public debate, political tension, and divergent memory practices. While these cases do not represent classical overseas colonial relations, they reveal analogous conditions of imposed authority, ideological control, and enforced subordination. I propose the term *internal decolonisation* to describe the ongoing processes through which post-occupation and post-authoritarian societies negotiate such inherited landscapes of power after regaining political sovereignty.

By examining contemporary reception, contestation, and strategies of reinterpretation surrounding these sites, the paper argues that decolonial praxis must account for internalised forms of domination that complicate clear distinctions between colony and metropole. This perspective expands the geographical and conceptual scope of decolonial debate while preserving historical specificity.

Łukasz Gawel is a Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His research focuses on cultural heritage studies, critical heritage studies, memory studies, museum studies, heritage governance, and the social roles of museums. Alongside his academic work, he has extensive professional experience in museum leadership, having served as Deputy Director of the National Museum in Kraków (2016–2019) and Director of the National Museum in Warsaw (2019–2024), working at the intersection of heritage strategy, management, and interpretation.

SESSION 16: WHERE IS HOME? PEOPLE, PLACES AND THE RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ERA-PLUNDER (2)

"I Walk, I Won't Ever Stop": Speculative Voice and the Limits of Restitution in Dahomey (2024) - **Maria Menzel**, Ludwig-Maximilians University

Mati Diop's documentary *Dahomey* (2024) stages the restitution of twenty-six royal artefacts from France to Benin but not as a seamless act of historical repair, but as a contested transfer across temporal and affective registers. Although framed as a documentary, the film deploys fabulation to imagine what cannot be recovered from the colonial archive. This paper argues that *Dahomey* mobilises Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation to animate the returned artefacts, crucially granting one of them (number 26) a speculative, non-human voice. Emerging from a submerged, futurist soundscape, this voice exposes the silences of the archive and the unresolved violences of colonial extraction, while forging a connection between looted artefacts of the past and their role in imagining the possible futures of restitution.

By allowing an artefact to narrate its own displacement and return "home", the film refuses positivist narratives of restitution as historical closure. Instead, it foregrounds the ambivalences and unresolved violences that accompany material transfer – in part by staging a debate among students of Abomey-Calavi University – complicating what it means for an object to arrive, belong or feel "at home". Most strikingly, Diop's camera adopts the perspective of statue 26, allowing the statue to "look back" at the surveillance cameras in the museum, imagining a reciprocal relation of seeing between museum objects and their new-old communities.

Through critical fabulation, *Dahomey* reframes return not as a completed act of repair but as an ongoing process of metamorphosis. Statue 26's closing declaration "I walk. I won't ever stop." figures restitution not as a passive being "given back" nor as a simple arrival, but as remaining in motion, remaining uncertainty, and an unfinished future.

Maria Menzel studied English and American Studies at the University of Bamberg and Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Since 2024, she has been a doctoral candidate at the Research Training Group "Family Matters" at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. Her dissertation project examines Anglophone postcolonial family novels of the late 20th and early 21st century – including works by Salman Rushdie, Namwali Serpell, Yaa Gyasi, and Bernardine Evaristo. Her project explores how these texts use the interweaving of fact and fiction to address gaps in collective memory, and what forms of belonging beyond the nation-state they imagine. Maria's research interests include postcolonial literatures, magical realism,⁶⁰ and intertextuality.

SESSION 16: WHERE IS HOME? (2)

The Institutional Production of "Home": Repatriation and the Politics of Indigenous Representation - **Madalyn Grant**, University of Cambridge

Repatriation processes require museums and governments to determine who legitimately speaks for the "home" of displaced cultural materials. Through provenance research and cultural affiliation assessments, institutions operationalise "home" by linking objects to particular communities, territories, and representative bodies. This talk examines how these determinations intersect with legal regimes governing Indigenous land and sovereignty. Drawing on comparative examples from Australia, North America, and Japan, the talk analyses cases in which specific entities -- such as Native Title corporations, federally recognised tribes, or state-recognised Indigenous groups -- are recognised as interlocutors in repatriation negotiations while others remain excluded. I argue that these recognitions often reproduce evidentiary frameworks familiar from colonial land title and land claim regimes, particularly tests of connection, occupation, and political continuity. Yet repatriation processes may also operate in the opposite direction; by recognising certain organisations as legitimate cultural representatives, museums and heritage authorities can contribute to the formation of governance capacity that subsequently shapes land and sovereignty negotiations. Repatriation therefore functions not only as a mechanism for returning objects but also as a site where institutional understandings of "home" and political representation are (re)produced. Examining this dynamic highlights how restitution practices participate in broader struggles over Indigenous authority, territory, and belonging.

Madalyn Grant is Gates Cambridge Scholar and Ph.D. candidate in Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. Her research explores cultural repatriation, ethical debates around collecting, and how archaeological practices and looting have shaped the field and its legacies. Before this, she worked as the Repatriation Manager at the University of Queensland, Australia.

SESSION 16: WHERE IS HOME? (2)

The Politics of Homecoming: Conditional Restitution and Sámi Cultural Heritage in Nordic Museums - **Kia Pyykkönen**, University of Jyväskylä

The restitution of cultural heritage is often framed as ‘homecoming’ – an example of this is the exhibition Mäccmõs, maccâm, máhccan – The Homecoming, which celebrated the restitution of Indigenous Sámi people’s cultural heritage from the National Museum of Finland to the Sámi Museum Siida. However, this significant step towards Sámi self-governance regarding their own cultural heritage has its own, fundamental issues, which I will discuss in this paper. Since the 2010s, Nordic national memory institutions have worked together with Sámi museums to transfer their Sámi cultural heritage artefacts back to their places of origin in Sápmi. While these returns have been praised for their significance regarding reconciliation and historical redress, many of them have taken the form of conditional arrangements rather than unconditional returns. In the case of the National Museum of Finland, for example, the Sámi Museum Siida still has an obligation to loan their cultural heritage artefacts to the National Museum when requested.

This paper argues that such arrangements complicate the notion of ‘coming home’ in the restitution process. I argue that the loan conditions can limit Sámi institutions’ authority over their own heritage, thus reproducing colonial power asymmetries. By analysing cases in which the Sámi artefacts have been conditionally given to Sámi museums, I argue the following: for the returned artefacts to truly come home, there must also be a true transfer of decision-making power over their care and management. Without such structural change, the return of artefacts risks functioning primarily as a ‘benevolent gesture’ that continues to support state-centric colonial authority.

Kia Pyykkönen is doctoral researcher in Social Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä and works on the Academy Project ‘Reframing Restitution: Postcolonial Object Movement, Transnational Memory and Social Repair’ (2024–2028), funded by the Research Council of Finland. Her research interests include the political uses of memory and the power dynamics involved in defining belonging, constructing narratives, and addressing marginalised perspectives in the shaping of collective memory.

KEYNOTE PANEL 2:

DECOLONIALITY AND COMMUNITY:

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

This keynote panel assembles critical perspectives on community and decoloniality in heritage practices of archaeology, museology, and policymaking across Latin America and the Caribbean. The panel will consider “community” as an object that is, on the one hand, constructed by institutional logics as the face of recent decolonial approaches, and on the other, a real, material, and complex form of local social life that exists in historical and contemporary matrices of power, both from within and without. Panellists will engage with the affordances and pitfalls of the community concept for decolonial heritage work across three domains: archaeological discourse and practice, the museum, and policy and ethics. Attending to materiality, material inequality, histories and legacies of colonialism, and the real-world complexity of institutional arrangements, this panel aims to balance rigorous critique with practical case studies and offer flexible templates for the future.

KEYNOTE PANEL 2:

DECOLONIALITY AND COMMUNITY:

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH

AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Keynote Panellists

Dr. Claudia Hatsumi Uribe Chinen

Dr. Claudia Uribe Chinen is an archaeologist specialising in public archaeology, heritage studies and the archaeology of earthen technologies. She holds a Ph.D. in Heritage Studies from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Her research critically examines heritage policies and governance frameworks, archaeological ethics, and the production of Pre-Hispanic earthen technologies in the central coast of Peru. She currently serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Humanities at PUCP, Curator of the Josefina Ramos de Cox Museum of Archaeology (IRA-PUCP), and Associate Researcher at the Riva-Agüero Institute.

Dr. Bruno Brulon Soares

Bruno Brulon Soares is a museologist and anthropologist trained in Brazil whose research interests have focused on the relationships of museums with society, practices of collecting, and the political uses of heritage. He has a Ph.D. in Anthropology (2012) and another in Contemporary History (2019) both from Universidade Federal Fluminense, and an MA in Museology and Heritage Studies (2008) from Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Soares is currently a Reader in Museum and Heritage Studies in the School of Art History. Prior to joining St Andrews, he was Professor of Museology and Heritage Studies at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (2013-2022) and Chair of the International Committee for Museology of ICOM, the International Council of Museums (2019-2022).

SESSION 17: WHERE IS HOME? PEOPLE, PLACES AND THE RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ERA-PLUNDER (3)

Heritage, Memory, and Identity: The Ethiopian Diaspora in the UK and the Politics of Restitution - **Fisseha Fantahun Tefera**, University of Gothenburg

When the British expedition to Maqdala returned in 1868, it brought back thousands of Ethiopian heritage objects (such as manuscripts, sacred items, royal regalia) that have since remained mainly in major British institutions but also in other places. Currently, a large Ethiopian diaspora in the United Kingdom lives in close proximity to these objects. This paper looks at how these diaspora communities in the UK engage with the looted heritage objects, and what these engagements tell us about the often contested questions of where objects and people belong.

The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in London in 2025 and 2026, including interviews with diaspora members, observation at major British institutions holding Ethiopian objects, and observation of an Ethiopian diaspora community event on Maqdala and restitution in London. I look at the looted objects as sites of memory, i.e. as material anchors through which diaspora members encounter, interpret, and contest Ethiopia's past and their own place in the UK. The paper first looks at how British institutions display the Maqdala collections, focusing on issues of visibility and silence. It then turns to diaspora community views and perspectives. Diaspora community encounters/engagement with the objects generates ambivalence, i.e. a feeling of pride alongside anger and mistrust. Views on restitution also diverge on the timing and form of return, and on what 'home' means for these objects. These divergences observed in the diaspora community views and perspectives can be seen as a reflection and outcome of Ethiopia's contested memory and identity politics, now reworked within diaspora spaces in Britain.

Fisseha Fantahun Tefera is a Researcher at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His current research examines how diaspora communities engage with the restitution of looted heritage objects, with a focus on the Ethiopian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

SESSION 17: WHERE IS HOME? (3)

Negotiating Identity Across Space: The Material and Textual Circulation of Princess Salma bint Said's Belongings - **Ahmed Laala Louaar**, Global Studies University

This paper explores the transregional circulation of personal belongings through the case of Princess Salma bint Said (Emily Ruete), who left Zanzibar in the nineteenth century to marry a German man. Her Swahili-Arab jewellery and garments, together with her memoirs and correspondence, serve as material and textual articulations of belonging, shaped by mobility and cross-cultural encounters. Historically, Salma and her life have often been interpreted through an Orientalist lens, with attention focused on her attire, jewellery, and identity as an Arab-Swahili princess. Through her writings, including memoirs and letters, she consciously sought to resist such reductive framings and assert her own narrative. Paradoxically, some of her personal belongings were later donated by her daughter to collections in Zanzibar, where they continue to be read within conventional or localised narratives. Meanwhile, her archival materials (letters, memoirs, and library) remain preserved in Leiden University Libraries, where they offer resources to challenge and complicate Orientalist interpretations.

This dispersed legacy raises broader questions about how material and textual culture acquire new meanings when situated across different institutional and national contexts. Placing Salma's belongings in dialogue with similar Swahili-Arab jewellery and garments preserved in Oman and East Africa, the paper traces how objects and archives contribute to the construction of gendered and diasporic identities. Drawing on approaches from object biography and heritage studies, it argues that the circulation of Salma's belongings reveals a layered and relational conception of "home," negotiated across archives, museums, and postcolonial memory. Rather than framing restitution solely as physical return, the study considers how interpretive practices themselves participate in defining where and how "home" is constructed.

Ahmed Louaar is Ph.D. student in Global Studies University, Sharjah, UAE. His research focuses on slavery and abolition in East Africa during the nineteenth century, with particular attention to the interactions between Islamic legal traditions and the social, economic, and political transformations of the Indian Ocean world. He holds an MA in History from the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (2025), Qatar, where his thesis examined Omani elite responses in Zanzibar to the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, highlighting the role of Islamic jurisprudence in shaping diverse positions on abolition. He previously earned an MA in Islamic History from Batna 1 University (2022), Algeria, where he studied the historical relations between Norman Sicily and North African cities through Arabic legal texts, Geniza manuscripts, and Latin sources.

SESSION 17: WHERE IS HOME? (3)

The Challenges of Returning Spiritually Important Objects - **Elke Selter**, SOAS, University of London

This presentation will compare cases of the return of spiritually important objects to Cambodia and Nepal: a Harihara statue that moved from Musée Guimet in Paris to the National Museum in Phnom Penh and a Laxmi Narayan statue that was returned from the United States to Nepal and subsequently placed in a local temple. Building on Nepal's approach to return objects as much as possible to places where they can actively be worshipped, the presentation will ask why this is not the case or not possible in other places. It will look at the Nepali process, its stumbling blocks and its value. By doing so, it will ask why this approach is "unique" and not something that is practised elsewhere, even if religious statuary may have similar living cultural values in other places as well. It will discuss not only communal and living heritage value of returned objects, but also the challenges of moving beyond a museified model in which objects that were once (illegally) removed from communities end up being returned to institutions where they never belonged in the first place. The presentation is based on a recent publication: "Beyond Restitution. Exploring the Stories of Cultural Objects After their Return" (Bloomsbury, London, 2025).

Elke Selter is a researcher at SOAS, University of London. She has spent more than 20 years working with heritage at an international level, most of which with UNESCO and ALIPH (International alliance for the protection of heritage). In late 2025, Elke has published "Beyond Restitution: Exploring the Stories of Cultural Objects After their Return" together with Kristin Hausler. The book presents cases of objects that have been returned between European and Non-European museums, asking how those returns were made possible and what happened to the returned objects after their return to the source country.

SESSION 17: WHERE IS HOME? (3)

South Asia's Displaced Heritage Objects and the Question of Home - **Camilla Orjuela**, University of Gothenburg

Colonial rule in South Asia resulted in the displacement of numerous invaluable objects from the Indian subcontinent to Europe. Ranging from ancient temple statues to the legendary Koh-i-Noor diamond, they are now at museums and other institutions. Recently, an intensified global debate has called for the return of looted and otherwise unfairly acquired objects to where they belong, in order to correct historical wrongs. This, however, raises questions about where “home” is. Some objects belonged to several places and communities before reaching Europe. In other cases, source communities have travelled and make up large diasporas in countries where the objects are retained. The paper explores ideas of home and belonging in relation to some of South Asia’s displaced treasures. What does it mean to “come home” and “be at home” – for the objects and for the descendants of the people from whom they were once taken? Drawing on scholarly work on homemaking and belonging it asks how looted objects are constructed as “at home” and evoked in people’s constructions of “home”. Four examples are in focus: the Koh-i-Noor diamond, which is part of the British Crown Jewels but claimed by India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran; displays of South Asian objects at the British Museum and India Pride Project’s 2018 campaign where photos of gods asking to “come home” went viral; the South Asia Gallery at Manchester Museum, which was co-curated by a collective of diaspora artists, journalists, scholars and community leaders; and the exhibition *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One* inaugurated in New Delhi 2026 and displaying recently returned Buddhist relics.

Camilla Orjuela is a professor of peace and development research at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research focuses on how people and societies deal with large-scale violence. She has studied civil society mobilisation for peace and also investigated transitional justice processes after war, genocide and famines, as well as political conflicts and popular engagement around the memory of what happened. She is currently in charge of the project *People, places and plunder: Diasporas and the restitution of looted heritage*.

SESSION 18: KEYWORDS FOR RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ARCHIVES

Power and Creation in Colonial Archives – **Michael Karabinos**, University of Amsterdam

In this paper, I will reflect upon the notion of the archive creator (*archiefvormer*), particularly in relation to colonial and colonised archives. Tracing the historical evolution of the concept from the colonial period until today, I will look at its changing definitions while using examples to highlight the shortcomings and repercussions of the traditional framing of archive creator as the organisation that collects and collates documents into an organised archive.

Using the definitions of colonial archives—archives of colonial administrations such as the VOC or Dutch East Indies administration—and colonised archives—referring to archives of local institutions or individuals seized and looted and taken to Europe during the colonial period—I will draw attention to cases of both types to explore what a creator is and whose hands and voices make an archive whole.

I will focus on archives seized by the Dutch military intelligence service during the Indonesian war of independence, which eventually became part of archives “created” by various institutions of the Netherlands colonial state. These documents, made by both Indonesian government agencies and individuals, highlight issues in numerous archival principles such as provenance, original order and the concept of an archive itself. These issues will be discussed in this paper, with a focus on who is the creator of an archive—the creator of the records or the one who puts them together—and the inherent power structures and authority issues at play in such a definition of an archive creator.

Michael Karabinos is a lecturer of Archival Studies at the University of Amsterdam, focusing on colonial and displaced archives. Previously, he was a Deviant Practice fellow at the Van Abbemuseum, researching the museum’s colonial roots. From 2020–2025 he was a member of the Collecting Otherwise group at the Nieuwe Instituut. He was also a member of the Raad voor Cultuur committee on Colonial Archives, and was an editor of the recent book *Open Archief*.

SESSION 18: KEYWORDS FOR RESTITUTION

OF COLONIAL ARCHIVES

Voice and Personhood in Colonial Sound Archives - **Emily Clark**, University of Amsterdam

In this paper, I share reflections from an ongoing project on archival collections of sound recordings from the context of Dutch colonial sciences of ethnography and folkloristics. In the context of archives, “voice” is often used as a metaphor for diverse perspectives and representation. But historical sound recordings contain actual voices of individuals and ancestors. Sound recordings can thus serve as the grounds to bring archival notions of collector, creator, and owner into conversation with recent critical scholarship on colonial photography and human remains in museum collections: in what forms are voices, bodies, individuals, and ancestors present in archives, what does this mean in different cultural contexts, and how does this lead to different ways of thinking restitution for colonial sound archives?

I consider these questions in relation to my ongoing research in archival sound recording collections, and specifically from two case study collections of sound recordings created in the Dutch East Indies in the mid-twentieth century. In one collection, the separation of sound from contextualising archival documents demonstrates the challenges of using metadata to identify historical voices and potential ownership. In another case, recent efforts of a network of scholars and activists in the Netherlands and Indonesia explore the potentials and challenges of digitisation, access, and digital restitution. I reflect on the implications of these cases for frameworks for understanding ownership of historical sound recordings and how they could be challenged and expanded in contexts of restitution.

Emily Clark is Assistant Professor of Contested Archives, Media and Memory at the University of Amsterdam. With a background in ethnomusicology and archival studies, her work centres on music and sound, media archives and Dutch colonial history. She currently leads the project “Audibilities of the Colonial Past: Dutch Sound Archives as History, Heritage and Data,” funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

SESSION 18: KEYWORDS FOR RESTITUTION OF COLONIAL ARCHIVES

Panellists: Emily Clark, Michael Karabinos and Jamila J. Ghaddar

This panel explores key concepts around ownership and agency in relation to colonial archives, restitution and decolonisation. Through case studies from different historical and archival contexts, the three papers argue that terms such as owner and creator, which are often taken for granted in archival discourses and legal structures, come from specific, contingent histories, and require a critical rethinking grounded in case studies, historical and cultural contexts, different forms of archival media, and concepts such as voice, embodiment, presence, and affect. Rethinking archival concepts along these lines can lead to new ways of formulating agency and creation and complicating notions of ownership and authority. The overall aim of the panel is to put into question the possibility of universal(ising) frameworks for thinking archival ownership and, from there, to suggest new ways of rethinking agency that can serve as the grounds for specific cases and processes of colonial heritage restitution in the future.

SESSION 18: KEYWORDS FOR RESTITUTION

OF COLONIAL ARCHIVES

Palestine as Provenance: Archiving in Place from The Vienna Convention (1983) to The Tandanya Declaration (2019) - **Jamila J. Ghaddar**, University of Amsterdam

This paper considers questions of colonial erasure, genocide, provenance, and place in relation to two Global South interventions in the international arena, The Vienna Convention on Succession of States in Respect of State Property, Archives & Debts (1983), and Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (2019). The former, developed by the UN's International Law Commission during the Third World Project's ascendancy, calls for a global repatriation of all archives pertaining to Europe's former colonies after political decolonisation. The latter, developed recently by the International Council on Archives' Indigenous Expert Working Group, affirms archival sovereignty over all information and records pertaining to indigenous peoples. Both offer a radical decolonial and decolonising vision for the reclamation of the power of the knowledge held in archives, as well as new ideas about provenance, ownership, creatorship, and authority that break with the dominant eurocentric frameworks. My paper provides an overview of the history and the key provision of each international instrument, drawing out similarities and differences in relation to the many decades and developments separating the two, as signalled by the shifting discursive frameworks of Third World, Fourth World, and Global South. It highlights the centrality of place, land and self-determination in each, which have informed my ongoing theorising of *provenance in place* and *Palestine as provenance*, and *archiving in place* (Ghaddar 2025, 2024). While deepening our understanding of how race and colonialism shape debates about disputed archives, this paper elaborates on emerging approaches to provenance, including notions of *plurality of provenance* (Boiteau 2024) and *intercultural provenance* (Montenegro 2024).

Jamila J. Ghaddar is a Lebanese archivist, historian, and educator. She is Assistant Professor in Archival Information & Digital Humanities at the University of Amsterdam's School of Media Studies, founding director of the Archives & Digital Media Lab, and a Research Affiliate at the American University of Beirut's School of Architecture & Design. Ghaddar serves as Co-Chair of the International Council on Archives' Palestine Archives Task Force; and Chair of the Middle East Librarians Association's Archives & Records Management Training & Advocacy Group. Ghaddar serves as a co-lead of the project, Fighting Erasure: Digitising Gaza's Genocide and the War on Lebanon with Dr. Rami Zurayk and Dr. Hanine Shehadeh.

SESSION 19: HERITAGE BEYOND

HERITAGE

Organised by Chiara De Cesari and Nawal Mustafa, University of Amsterdam

How is socially relevant heritage research being produced? How can we as scholars mobilise our expert knowledge to facilitate/intervene in public debate? This roundtable brings together contributions by UvA scholars who are part of the so-called sectorplan heritage, an initiative of the Dutch government to support programmatic research in the field. These scholars come from a wide variety of disciplines and approaches, often adjacent to and intersecting with but outside of heritage studies: cultural and media studies, decolonial and queer studies, critical legal studies, critical archival studies, restitution, social and ecological justice, health, environmental and digital humanities. This roundtable leverages this diversity to unsettle and reconceptualise heritage studies, suggesting possible future directions. In the roundtable, we will present a range of our topics and approaches, exploring the potentiality of applying perspectives from the margins and from beyond heritage studies. We focus on the boundary-crossing and boundary-disrupting dimension of decolonial approaches, developing the following, core ideas for the study of heritage.

Transtemporality

Our research challenges traditional understandings of linear time by examining how the present and future are shaped by the enduring legacies of unfinished pasts and future imaginaries are enmeshed with heritage.

Translocality

Our research challenges a narrow focus on bounded sites of memory and formalised commemoration rituals as we interrogate dominant discourses and narrative frameworks, common-sense notions and stereotypes, 'implicit memories' that we silently inherit from the past and that help us make sense of and intervene in the world.

Transdisciplinarity

Our research builds on works from beyond critical heritage studies, and from the field's fluid margins, stretching them across shifting disciplinary landscapes. In this way, we also contribute to the ongoing project of rethinking the contours of academic disciplines in the humanities through a form of field-building that consolidates and nourishes crosscutting connections and dialogues.

SESSION 19: HERITAGE BEYOND HERITAGE

Collaborative imagination

Our research is in conversation with artistic practices and research as well as community organising. We uphold a vision of the university as part of a complex ecology, and a vibrant network of institutions, platforms, communities and agencies, including our many societal partners such as museums, art institutions and cultural organisations but also civil society movements, with which we work together in an extended, collaborative mode of knowledge production that actively reaches out to society.

Roundtable Participants

Jamila J. Ghaddar is a Lebanese archivist, historian, and educator. She is Assistant Professor in Archival Information & Digital Humanities at the University of Amsterdam's School of Media Studies, founding director of the Archives & Digital Media Lab, and a Research Affiliate at the American University of Beirut's School of Architecture & Design. Ghaddar serves as Co-Chair of the International Council on Archives' Palestine Archives Task Force; and Chair of the Middle East Librarians Association's Archives & Records Management Training & Advocacy Group. Ghaddar serves as a co-lead of the project, Fighting Erasure: Digitizing Gaza's Genocide and the War on Lebanon with Dr. Rami Zurayk and Dr. Hanine Shehadeh. Recently, she published, *Palestine as Provenance: Archiving against Genocide* (2025) in *Archival Science*

Chiara De Cesari is Professor of Heritage, Memory and Cultural Studies, and Chair of Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her wide-ranging research explores how forms of memory, heritage, art, and cultural politics are shifting under contemporary conditions of post- and decoloniality, neocolonialism and state transformation. An important strand of her research examines the ways in which colonial legacies live on today, especially in cultural institutions and museums, and how artists and activists are contesting, using, reclaiming and reimagining these institutions. Chiara is the author of *Heritage and the Cultural Struggle for Palestine* (Stanford UP, 2019) and co-author of *Decolonizing the Museum* (Routledge, 2026), and co-editor of two key volumes in memory studies (*Transnational Memory*, de Gruyter, 2014; *European Memory in Populism*, Routledge, 2019).

SESSION 19: HERITAGE BEYOND

HERITAGE

Tessel M. Bauduin originally trained as a medievalist but has specialized in modernism and avant-garde art, culture, and heritage for twenty years, with particular expertise in Surrealism. As Assistant Professor based at the University of Amsterdam, she teaches Museum Studies, Heritage Studies, and Art History. Her current research projects focus on critical heritage ecologies, colonialism in museum collections, and curiosity cabinets.

Guno Jones is Professor of the Anton de Kom Chair in the History of Colonialism and Slavery and their contemporary Social, Cultural and Legal Impact. His research is interdisciplinary in nature. Currently, he is involved, as projectleader, in an interfaculty VU research project on the legal history of Dutch slavery (Juridische Slavernijgeschiedenis). He also participates in a KITLV research project on the role of the royal Dutch family in colonial history (Het Huis van Oranje-Nassau en de koloniale geschiedenis). His main research interests are on political discourses on citizenship, post-colonial migration and the nation in the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK; the politics of World War II heritage in the Netherlands and its former colonies; the politics of the heritage of colonialism and slavery in the Netherlands; the construction and politics of 'mixedness' during colonialism, in the Netherlands and in the EU (EUROMIX - recently finished).

Nawal Mustafa is Assistant Professor in Black Studies, Critical Race Studies, and Indigenous Studies within the Cultural Studies department at the University of Amsterdam. Her work explores the intersections of law, colonialism, slavery, and the regulation of intimacy. mr. Dr. Mustafa completed her PhD at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, focusing on migration and the historical regulation of interracialised intimacy in the UK following World War II. After her PhD, she worked as a postdoctoral researcher examining the legal history of slavery within the Dutch empire. Next to her academic roles, mr. dr. Mustafa also serves as a strategic legal advisor at PILP, a human rights law firm and NGO based in Amsterdam.

Mikki Stelder is Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam. They work at the intersections of colonial legal history, critical race studies, political theory, oceanic and maritime studies, and settler colonial studies. Their forthcoming monograph, *Contract Colonialism*, examines the afterlives of the colonial-legal imaginary of Hugo Grotius. Building on their earlier scholarship on Grotius, slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and maritime imperialism, Stelder investigates how colonial forms of power continue to shape contemporary legal and political orders. They are co-editor of *Oceans as Archives* (Routledge. 2026 with Kristie Patricia Flannery and Renisa Mawani) and *The Gloria Wekker Reader* (Duke UP, 2026). Their work has appeared in journals such as *Postcolonial Studies*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, and *Settler Colonial Studies*.

SESSION 20: IRAQ AND CYPRUS

From Imperial Protection to War-Time Governance: Decolonial Legacies and Contested Heritage in Modern Iraq - **Madison Leeson**, Turaath Tech

This presentation, offering insights from the recently published *Heritage and Legitimacy: Cultural Governance in Modern Iraq* (Springer, 2025), examines competing legacies of cultural governance in Iraq from British Mandate-era antiquities protection to late 20th-century wartime heritage administration. This research, which drew on archival materials from Ottoman, British, and Iraqi repositories, highlights the tensions at play in modern Iraq surrounding which histories were preserved, whose cultural authority was recognised, and how heritage became both a site of political legitimacy and suppression. I trace how early conservation campaigns ostensibly framed as “protection” were embedded within colonial frameworks that prioritised certain narratives and material cultures over others, thereby shaping the very concept of Iraqi heritage in exclusionary ways. Later in the century, during the Iran-Iraq War and 1990–1991 Gulf War, state actors invoked heritage both to consolidate nationalism and to marginalise communities whose cultural productions lay outside this dominant frame. I argue that these historical moments continue to shape post-conflict heritage practice and memory politics in Iraq, where calls for restitution, community participation, and inclusive narratives increasingly contend with entrenched institutional power. Situating this analysis within decolonial heritage studies, the presentation will explore how governance itself manifests struggles for legitimacy, prioritising local actors’ engagement with global heritage regimes. By historicising governance and its implications for contested memory, this study contributes to debates on decolonial practices in heritage management, post-conflict reconstruction, and the politics of cultural recognition.

Madison Leeson is a cultural historian of modern West Asia and the Director of Turaath Tech, a research and development firm focused on protecting cultural heritage using digital tools and computational methods. Her work examines how cultural heritage is used to construct political legitimacy, identity, and historical narratives, particularly in Iraq and other Ottoman successor states. She received her PhD in Archaeology and History of Art (Cultural Heritage Management) from Koç University (2022).

SESSION 20: IRAQ AND CYPRUS

We Are Not Ghosts: Ethnographic Poetry as Transformative Memory Praxis - **Nafia Akdeniz**, Eastern Mediterranean University

Varosha, an abandoned coastal city since the 1974 war in Cyprus, has remained fenced off under military control over 50 years. It stands as one of the most extreme examples of an urban ruinscape suspended within an unresolved conflict. Partially opened to public visits in 2020 and reframed as a dark tourism destination, the city continues to be interpreted through a unilateral militarised narrative regime constraining how its past and future can be imagined.

This study examines how artistic intervention can shape understandings of such a forcibly abandoned urban heritage through *We Are Not Ghosts*, a geo-triggered ethnographic soundwalking poetry intervention on public space memory that I developed. The project introduced an embodied and mnemonic encounter with the city. Delivered via the *Echoes* application on participants' personal devices while walking through accessible areas, it invited participants to engage with spatial traces and memory through the poems. To examine its impact, online qualitative pre- and post-experience surveys were conducted with 45 participants, and narrative responses were analysed using thematic qualitative analysis.

Findings indicate shifts across four integrated modes of engagement: perceptual, affective, temporal, and relational. Participants moved beyond perceiving Varosha as a static symbol of conflict toward engaging with it as a lived environment connected to human memory and future possibility. Reflections further suggest that poetry functioned as a mediating practice enabling these shifts. I argue that such artistic interventions, by approaching memory beyond nostalgic and fixed representations of the past as dynamic and future-oriented matter, can operate as decolonial transformative praxis. They can unsettle unilateral, authoritarian, and militarised narratives and can therefore foster ethical, empathetic and imaginative engagement with contested heritage in contexts of unresolved conflict.

Nafia Akdeniz is an Assistant Professor of Humanities and Communication Studies at the Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus. She is a poet and interdisciplinary researcher working at the intersection of memory, narrative, and place. As a visiting researcher at the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, she conducts fieldwork at Wereldmuseum, focusing on decolonial and inclusive museum communication. Her article *Hope in the Ruins of Home* received the 2024 Early Career Researcher Prize from the Journal of Refugee Studies, Oxford University Press.

SESSION 21: PRAXIS AND INSTITUTIONS

How do you now feel...? Discomfort, Blind Spots, and the Work of Decolonial Collaboration - **Ruben Smit**, University of Amsterdam

This paper offers a reflexive analysis of *Sharing Stories on Contested Histories* (SSoCH), an international heritage knowledge-exchange programme that engages with the enduring legacies of coloniality. Earlier editions, hosted in the Netherlands, brought together early career museum and heritage professionals from around the world, but repeatedly revealed structural tensions: participants from the Global Majority highlighted that the programme's frameworks, pedagogies, and institutional assumptions remained implicitly Eurocentric. Despite its decolonial intentions, SSoCH often reproduced the power asymmetries it set out to critique.

In response, the 2023 edition was relocated to Cape Town in collaboration with the District Six Museum, an institution rooted in histories of forced removal, contested memory, and community agency. This geographical and psychological shift profoundly altered the dynamics of the programme. For the first time, members of the organising team found themselves pushed outside their own comfort zones, confronted with new forms of vulnerability, and challenged by different expectations of authority, knowledge, and accountability. This redistribution of discomfort became a productive force, exposing assumptions that had previously gone unexamined.

By tracing these moments of friction and rupture, the paper argues that discomfort can operate as a productive catalyst within transnational heritage collaboration. Recognising unequally distributed vulnerabilities – and creating conditions in which they can be safely acknowledged – proves essential for moving beyond performative decoloniality.

Ruben Smit is Senior Lecturer at the Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam University of the Arts (Netherlands). He holds an MA in Museum Studies (with honours) from the University of Leicester (UK). He is also a researcher and programme lead for International Knowledge Exchange Initiatives within the Cultural Heritage Research Group, and a team member of the Reinwardt Academy's UNESCO Chair: Museum Collections, Repatriation and Interculturality. His work focuses on worldwide international collaboration with heritage professionals across diverse contexts.

SESSION 21: PRAXIS AND INSTITUTIONS

Destabilising Heritage Universality through Turāth - **Charlotte Vekemans**, Ghent University

In this paper, I argue that we should not, as heritage scholars have argued, consider heritage to be part of the human condition (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006). Rather, I suggest we turn to a critical historicization of the term as it emerged from colonial encounters. My research on the history of heritage interventions in the SWANA region demonstrates that heritage as a term has a very particular, contingent history: it emerged from colonial interventions geared towards the definition of “Mankind”. Between 1890 and 1960, heritage acquired a new meaning in imperial science, shaped by scientific racial classification. In eugenicist scholarship, heritage functioned to sort people according to their perceived relationship to the past, ranking populations from “primitive” to “evolved”. The latter were considered to have amassed more heritage. Through analysis of their heritage, races could be situated at different positions on the teleological conveyor belt of time, as imagined by colonial scholars.

I trace key moments in the imperial history of heritage to put forward a staunchly decolonial approach, destabilising its assumed universality. Rather than arguing we should include more cultural engagements with the past under the label heritage, I build on the anticolonial scholarship of Sylvia Wynter to recognise the particularity of heritage and the emancipatory possibility of other engagements of the past, such as the Arabic turāth. Although colonial legislation in Jordan and Palestine equated heritage and turāth as a simple translation, they have very different histories, which reverberate into the present as they evoke different physical engagements with the past.

Charlotte Vekemans is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University, Belgium, whose work examines the political economy of heritage and its entanglements with colonial science, development and sovereignty. Drawing on ethnographic and historical methods, her research focuses on heritage development interventions by the US and various European countries in the SWANA region, with broader interests in colonial legacies, spatial politics, and decolonial approaches to heritage and memory.

SESSION 22: RETURNING TO HAIFA: DISPLACEMENT, MEMORY AND THE RIGHT OF RETURN — ROUNDTABLE

**Anna Mangiacapra, Domenico Salvatore Galluccio, Enya Dignam Mak,
Francesco De Nigris, Luís Calle y Bonaccorso**

Palestine has, for a long time, been marked by disaster, displacement, suffering and the denial of self-determination. More than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled during the Nakba and forced to leave their cities and houses, many still holding their keys with the hope of one day returning, seeing Palestine again, and opening their doors again and finding what was lost. This roundtable aims to engage with the novel *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani, as a way to explore these experiences of displacement, return, and memory. Set in 1967, twenty years after the Nakba, it tells the story of Said and Safiyya, a couple who, upon hearing of a possibility to visit their former city, Haifa, decide to embark on this journey with both hope and fear. They hope to see their house and find their first-born son, left behind twenty years earlier, only to discover that their house is now occupied by a Jewish family who preserved it and raised their son as their own. Now called Dov and serving in the Israeli army, he embodies a deeply complex and conflicting identity. Kanafani explores trauma, the meaning of the right to return, and questions of identity, of a nation, and Resistance. The novel raises tensions between past and present, belonging and the feeling of displacement, and challenges fixed understandings of victimhood and responsibility to act. The roundtable invites discussion on these tensions, encouraging multiple perspectives on how competing narratives shape understandings of conflict, memory, and the hope of return.

The first thematic axis — Dispossession, Destruction and the Unrecognisability of Place — interrogates what the novel renders visible as the deep structure of colonial violence: the systematic severing of the relation between subjects and the spaces that constituted them. In Kanafani's text, this severance takes the form of a preservation that excludes the house stands, the city is legible, and yet both have become alien to those who inhabited them.

SESSION 22: RETURNING TO HAIFA

Across different historical configurations — preservation, displacement, destruction — what settler colonialism operates is not merely the dispossession of property but the elimination of the relational and ontological coordinates through which a place becomes inhabitable (Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2013): a redefinition of the value and meaning of places and beings that proceeds through the culture of the coloniser (Bacon, 2019), and whose effects persist independently of the physical fate of the place itself. The roundtable will ask: what does it mean, phenomenologically and politically, to claim the right of return to a place that no longer recognises those who claim it?

The second axis — Identity, Essentialisation and the Colonial Production of Subjects — takes the figure of Khaldun/Dov as its analytical fulcrum: a subject actively generated by colonial conditions, resistant to resolution into any stable moral or cultural category. Kanafani constructs him not as a distorted pre-existing identity but as the site where colonial power operates most thoroughly, from within. This opens onto the epistemological and political risks that attend the mobilisation of identity in decolonial thought itself: the essentialisation and reification of categorical difference that Luft and Ward (2009) identify as central pitfalls of intersectional analysis, and the additive rather than multiplicative logic through which multiple social positions are aggregated rather than understood in their constitutive mutual imbrication (Collins, 2015). Against this, the roundtable draws on a distinction between identity as collective political consciousness constructed through struggle and identity as a reified category available for cooptation (Faccini, 2022) neither to be dissolved nor stabilised, but held, as Kanafani holds it, in irreducible tension.

The third axis — Testimony, Responsibility and the Political Horizon of Praxis — addresses the novel's conclusion as a theoretical event: the moment in which the posture of victimhood — historically produced, politically legible, yet ultimately paralysing — is refused as a sufficient ground for action. What Kanafani stages is not the denial of suffering but its epistemological displacement: the recognition that a knowledge oriented exclusively toward the recovery of what was lost forecloses the very capacity for political orientation. Said's movement from mourning to commitment enacts a rupture in the subject's relation to time — from restitution to construction, from testimony to praxis — that resonates with Harvey's (2000) conception of spaces of hope as politically situated and conflictually produced, and with the insistence that transformative projects locate their possibility in the generative tension between past and future rather than in the fetishisation of either (Kallis & March, 2015). The roundtable will ask: who bears responsibility for action under conditions of protracted dispossession, and what forms can that action legitimately take?

SESSION 22: RETURNING TO HAIFA

Chairs:

Francesco De Nigris is a Trainee Lawyer at Alfredo Guarino Law Firm and LL.M. candidate in International and Transnational Criminal Law at the University of Amsterdam. His research focus is on the modes of liability arising from the use of AI-driven targeting systems in war crimes, and on indirect financing of international terrorism between criminalisation and human rights protection.

Domenico Salvatore Galluccio is a sociology student at the University of Naples Federico II. His research engages with urban and environmental sociology, political ecology and the governance of the commons, examining socio-environmental conflicts, marginalised epistemologies and land- community relations. He has been involved in research projects at the National Research Council of Italy (CNR-IRISS) and University of Naples Federico II and has presented at national and international conferences, including those of International Sociological Association (ISA) and International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC).

Participants:

Anna Mangiacapra is an LL.M. candidate in International and Transnational Criminal Law at the University of Amsterdam, with a background in criminal and corporate litigation. Her research focuses on international criminal law, migration, and human rights, with particular attention to crimes against migrants in Libya, European involvement in migration control practices, and modes of liability before international courts. She is especially interested in questions of non-refoulement, and European accountability arising from the externalisation of migration policies.

Enya Dignam Mak is an LL.M. candidate at the University of Amsterdam studying Public International Law, having graduated from an LL.B. at Trinity College Dublin last year. She recently participated in the international rounds of the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in Washington D.C., ranking 82nd in the global top 100 oralists, and her team finished 20th out of more than 800 teams. Enya is passionate about decolonising international law, and her current research explores paths towards a reparative regime for climate-induced cross-border migration.

Discussant:

Luís Calle y Bonaccorso is a Portuguese-qualified lawyer working as a sole practitioner and an LL.M. candidate in International and Transnational Criminal Law at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on the right of peoples to self-determination through all necessary means, as well as the necessity for a “freedom fighters exception” within the international definition of terrorism in order to ensure coherence with the universally recognized right of peoples to self-determination.