

OBJECT DIASPORAS, RESOURCING COMMUNITIES: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with pursuing the issue of transnational museological relationality and responsibility in the context of Sierra Leonean cultural heritage. In particular it draws upon vocabularies more commonly associated with the study of human migration to consider both historical and contemporary transnational flows of Sierra Leonean material culture and associated knowledges. It does so in order to help rethink the status, value, and potential of ethnographic collections in the world's museums for different stakeholders. Focusing on Sierra Leonean collections in three European museums, the article explores the historical formation and distribution of this "object diaspora," and acknowledges its entanglement in the networks, flows, and power disparities of colonialism. Rather than arguing for repatriation, however, a case is made for recognizing the value of these collections in their diasporic locations as a resource for contemporary Sierra Leonean communities, not least through the "remittance corridors" they are able to open. [Sierra Leone, museum collections, diaspora, remittances, symbolic capital]

In the postcolonial era, the institution of the ethnographic museum has come under increasing scrutiny. Confronted with a vocal repatriation lobby and forced to recognize the colonial contexts in which their collections were often assembled, museum professionals have had to re-evaluate the legitimacy of these erstwhile "temples of empire" (Coombes 1997). In many cases, the quantity and quality of ethnographic collections dispersed in museums throughout the world far outweighs that retained in the territories from which the collections were acquired. Drawing on recent work on "migrant materialities" (Basu and Coleman 2008; Myers 2001; Peffer 2005), we might consider these dispersed collections as constituting "object diasporas," whose (material) culture flourishes in exile within the recontextualizing territories of a global museumscape, while their original homelands remain impoverished of

a potentially vital cultural resource. One response has been to reconceptualize ethnographic museums as "relational" entities (Gosden 2009): institutions that have continuing relationships with, and responsibilities toward, those communities with whom their histories are intertwined and whose cultural artifacts populate their stores and displays (Lonetree and Cobb 2008; Peers and Brown 2003; Stanley 2007).

This article is concerned with pursuing the issue of transnational museological relationality and responsibility in the context of Sierra Leonean cultural heritage. In particular it draws upon vocabularies more commonly associated with the study of human migration to consider both historical and contemporary transnational flows of Sierra Leonean material culture and associated knowledges. It does so in order to help rethink the status, value, and potential of ethnographic collections in the world's museums for different stakeholders. It is an attempt to think beyond the essentializing territorial sensibilities that frequently underpin debates over cultural patrimony. Whereas museums have been strongly localized (and localizing) institutions, with the increasing digitization of collections, ethnographic objects are again being untethered from their local contexts (in this case the museum store or gallery) and let loose to circulate in the "global mediascape" (Appadurai 1990). One of the objectives of this article is to explore the consequences of this rearticulation for our understanding of ethnographic objects and knowledges as cultural resources available for differently situated stakeholders to appropriate and reappropriate for their own ends.

CONTEMPORARY FLOWS OF CULTURAL ASSETS: FROM "REPATRIATION" TO "REMITTANCES"

Two sets of images of Sierra Leone dominate in the global mediascape and shape popular perceptions of this West African state. The first, and most dominant, includes those images of child soldiers, corrupt politicians, and limbless victims of war atrocities that proliferate in news media. These images constitute a representational paradigm of African states characterized as the "new barbarism"—a return to colonial stereotypes of Africa as a premodern, dark, and dangerous continent (Kaplan 1994). The second set of publicly available images of Sierra Leone—though, admittedly, its reach is much narrower—can be

found in the ethnographic galleries of public museums throughout Europe and North America. Indeed, the *sowei* mask of the Sande or Bondo initiation society is so ubiquitous in such galleries that it has become truly iconic of Sierra Leone (e.g., Phillips 1995). Here, too, outmoded colonial paradigms prevail, and yet the nomenclature of “tribes” and “fetishes” has gradually given way to an appreciation of these collections’ cultural and artistic significances. As this diaspora of Sierra Leonean collections becomes more widely accessible through online museum resources, we might ask what role it could play in restoring a more positive image of Sierra Leone internationally.

Whereas a prevailing popular critique sometimes indiscriminately regards such collections as “colonial loot,” for which the only legitimate course of action is repatriation to the communities from which they were “stolen,” the circumstances in which collections were assembled were often more complex. Rather than a knee-jerk reaction, we therefore need a more nuanced response, taking account of this complexity and considering not only the cultural losses associated with these flows of material culture from their source communities in the past, but also the various values that might flow back to communities from these cultural resources in the present. In the Sierra Leonean context, if we consider this in terms of flows of cultural capital, the question is whether such collections might play a more valuable role in Sierra Leone’s postconflict rehabilitation from their diasporic locations than if they were simply returned.

Just as Sierra Leone’s human diaspora makes an increasingly significant economic contribution to Sierra Leone’s gross domestic product (GDP) through financial remittances (Rajkotia and Addy 2008), so we might consider the value of the “remittances” that its *object* diaspora might contribute. Thus, whilst international agencies are seeking ways of opening up and widening so-called “remittance corridors,” the channels through which economic capital can be encouraged to flow (Page and Plaza 2006; UN General Assembly 2006), so we might think of more innovative ways of facilitating flows of cultural assets so that they can provide a meaningful resource for individuals and communities in Sierra Leone (and its human diaspora) to draw upon. Although my focus is on the Sierra Leonean context, these observations can, of course, be applied more widely too.

THE LANGUAGE OF DIASPORA: BEYOND EXILE AND RETURN

I shall return to the issue of remittances and the contemporary role of Sierra Leone’s object diaspora in due course. In the central section of this article, my intention is to explore something of this diaspora’s historical formation and distribution, highlighting the equivocal nature of its entanglement with the colonial project. Before embarking on this mapping exercise, however, it is perhaps necessary to reflect on the concept of diaspora that I employ. I use the term metaphorically, as a tool to “think with,” but I am also cognizant of recent work in migration and diaspora studies that has reminded us of its original, more neutral meaning (e.g., Safran 1991). Thus, the term diaspora—to sow over, to scatter—was first used in relation to human population movement to refer to ancient Greek expansionism in the Mediterranean (Cohen 1997:21), and only later became “saturated with meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and . . . pain” (Tölölyan 1996:9) associated with the anti-Jewish pogroms or the traumas of “the Middle Passage.” A return to this earlier usage of diaspora enables us to recognize that there are a multitude of often complexly intertwined and even contradictory forces that propel and attract the movements of populations, and that it is possible to belong to and identify with multiple territorial locations—and multiple cultural histories—simultaneously. As Clifford (1997), Gilroy (1993), and others have insisted, it is not only the “roots” but also the “routes” of diaspora that we need to attend to in our attempt to understand the nature of identity and belonging in what Appadurai (1990) terms the “new global cultural economy.” The thrust of contemporary diaspora studies has therefore been to problematize “nativist discourses” centered around essentialized notions of “origin,” “exile,” and “return,” and instead engage with how “diasporic cultures . . . mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford 1997: 255). Central to this notion of diaspora, then, is a web of social, spatial, and temporal relationships with which diasporic populations “connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways” (Clifford 1997:259).

To invoke the language of diaspora in relation to the dispersal of objects is not to trivialize the suffering

that has sometimes accompanied the human experience of displacement. Kopytoff's (1986) seminal discussion of the cultural biographies of commodities, and the transformation of people into commodities in relation to the transatlantic slave trade and creation of an historical African diaspora, reminds us that the "objectification" of people was often part and parcel of the violence of forced dispersal. The relationships linking people, places, and cultural histories can be fraught with difficulty and pain. While acknowledging these facts, it is, however, also necessary to recognize that diaspora communities are not static or monolithic, and that even traumatic origin narratives can be reconfigured to become sources of strength and creativity: diaspora as a hybrid space of future possibility and not only past loss (Eyerman 2001; Gilroy 1993).

MAPPING THE SIERRA LEONEAN OBJECT DIASPORA

Like human diasporas, object diasporas have been brought into being through various historical forces. Unlike the unequivocally violent displacement of the Benin bronzes from their place of origin (Coombes 1997), the diaspora of Sierra Leonean collections in European and North American museums was the result of more equivocal processes, including trade, exploration, gifting, and academic research, albeit within the broader colonial context of unequal power relations. A sense of the equivocacy of such transactions is communicated in an account given by the African American missionary, Joseph Gomer, of his attempts to acquire a carved wooden "twin figure" from a woman passing near his mission house at Rotifunk in 1877. Having been unable to persuade the woman to sell the figure, Gomer appealed to the local chief, who proceeded to negotiate with the owner, ensured that the appropriate ceremonies were performed to free the carving of the spirit that dwelled in it, and indeed obtained it for the missionary's collection (Flickinger 1882:247–248; see also Hart 2006). Certainly we see here the articulation of unequal power relations, but it would be wrong to characterize this straightforwardly as an instance of colonial-era "plunder."

Actually, such collecting practices predate the founding of the Sierra Leone Colony in 1787 or the declaration of its hinterland as a British Protectorate in 1896—in other words, they predate the colonial

era in Sierra Leone. Indeed, the earliest collections were formed, from the late 15th century, of a genre of trade objects that typify the hybridity of diaspora, belonging neither "here" nor "there" but materializing a kind of "double consciousness" in a space between. In the so-called "Sapi-Portuguese ivories," produced along the coast of what is now Sierra Leone in the period approximately 1490–1550, we find ample demonstration that object diasporas are constituted not merely by the movement of objects from place to place but through the concretization of movement in the very form of objects (Peffer 2005: 340). Here, then, are elaborately carved ivory spoons, table ornaments, and horns that combine in their iconography European decorative motifs, including floral scrolls, coats of arms, and hunting scenes copied from printed sources, with distinctively West African motifs and forms (notably bulbous-eyed human figures resembling soap-stone *nomoli* carvings unearthed in the region) (see Bassani 1994; Curnow 1990; Fagg 1959; Mark 2007). As Peter Mark explains,

The carvings were a direct response to demand on the part of . . . commercial middlemen, and of visiting European Portuguese merchants, for ivory implements and luxury items. The ivories are definitely West African, and they are assuredly not a product of Portuguese culture. They do, however, reflect both the close commercial relations that existed between West Africans and Europeans, and the presence in coastal societies of the acculturated descendants of Portuguese who settled there and had intermarried with local African women. [Mark 2007:190]

Such carvings soon found their way into the *Kunstkammern* of European elites, and eventually into the collections of many public museums in Europe and North America, where they were subsequently joined by all manner of Sierra Leonean *ethnographica*.¹

The mapping of this diaspora of Sierra Leonean material culture in the global museumscape is an ongoing process. While the larger and more significant collections in public museums are known, others are constantly coming to light. Indeed, there are few ethnographic collections that do not contain at least some Sierra Leonean objects. An important starting

point for this mapping process is a series of annotated accession lists compiled by Adam Jones in *Africana Research Bulletin*, a publication of the Institute for African Studies at Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, in which he enumerated the Sierra Leonean collections of museums in Liverpool (Jones 1981), Leeds (Jones 1983a), London (Jones 1983b, 1984, 1985a), Munich and Frankfurt am Main (Jones 1985b), Brighton (Jones 1989, 1990), and Cologne (Jones 1991). Other significant collections in North America and elsewhere in Europe (the collections, for example, in Dublin, Glasgow, and Bern) were not included in his survey.

The larger part of this object diaspora was formed in the classic era of colonial collecting from approximately 1880 to 1915, although more scholarly collections were assembled by individual “fieldworkers” later (e.g., the collection at Penn Museum assembled by Henry Usher Hall in 1936–1937, or that assembled by Guy Massie-Taylor in the late 1950s now held by Glasgow Museums). To provide greater insight into the historical trajectories along which these collections have travelled, and how these material migrations are intertwined with the itineraries of individual collectors along routes established through changing colonial interests, I will consider three diasporic contexts in a little more detail: that of the Alldridge collection held at the British Museum and Brighton Museum and Art Gallery; the Friedrich Ryff and Walter Volz collections at the Historisches Museum, Bern; and the above-mentioned Massie-Taylor collection at Glasgow Museums. The history of other Sierra Leonean collections has been described elsewhere, notably the Ridyard collection at Liverpool (Kingdon and van den Bersselaar 2008; Tythacott 1998, 2001) and the (largely missing) collection of the United Brethren in Christ (UBC) missionaries, the archives of which are held at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey (Hart 2006). Tracing the historical routes of this object diaspora provides a fascinating insight into the flows and conjunctions of distinct forms of colonial engagement: from shipping routes and cartels (Ridyard), colonial administration and treaty making (Alldridge), missionary activity (UBC), trade interests (Ryff), adventure and exploration (Volz), and ethnographic research (Hall), through to late colonial participation in the development of what were to become national museums after independence (Massie-Taylor).

THE ALLDRIDGE COLLECTION

While the Alldridge collection forms only a part of the Sierra Leonean material held at Brighton and the British Museum (a small part in the latter case), it is nevertheless a highly significant collection, not least since Alldridge was also a prolific writer and photographer of Sierra Leone in a period of expanding British interests in the region (see Alldridge 1894, 1901, 1910). Thomas Joshua Alldridge (1847–1916) first went to Sierra Leone in 1871 and was, for a time, a representative of the United States Consulate there before becoming an agent for the British trading company, Randall and Fisher, on York Island, Sherbro (Figure 1).² In 1889 Alldridge entered the British colonial service and, in the early 1890s, was one of two travelling commissioners whose function, according to the secretary of native affairs of the time, was to “fix the position of different places they passed through, . . . settle disputes . . . and carry out a special commission as regards making treaties” (Parkes quoted in Chalmers 1899:59). Alldridge and his fellow travelling commissioner, George Garrett, were “generally on the move during the whole of the dry season” (Parkes quoted in Chalmers 1899:59). Garrett was responsible for northern areas of what was to become the Sierra Leone Protectorate; Alldridge was in charge of the south, toward the Liberian border (Fyfe 1962:486). In 1894, Alldridge became district commissioner for Sherbro, a position he held through the turbulent months of the anti-colonial insurrections of 1898, until his retirement in 1905.

The period in which Alldridge and Garrett were most actively touring was one of considerable



Figure 1. Thomas J. Alldridge with hammock bearers, Sierra Leone. ca. 1890–1900. (Photograph: Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove.)

volatility in the Sierra Leonean hinterland, provoked not least by British and French colonial competition for “influence” in the region, and complicated by the expansion of the Islamic Wassoulou Empire led by Samori Ture. The commissioners’ charge of “settling disputes” and “making treaties” was, of course, the classic method by which European powers wrested control over territories through forming alliances with compliant local rulers and, if necessary, forcibly “pacifying” noncompliant ones. To these ends, Alldridge and Garrett worked alongside the newly formed paramilitary Frontier Police Force, members of which would be stationed in chiefdoms where treaties had been signed. Alldridge’s collecting activities were thus enmeshed in the very practices of colonial annexation.

During the 34 years that Alldridge traded and served in Sierra Leone, he assembled a large personal collection, much of which was sold to the Brighton Museum and the British Museum in various lots between 1899 and 1904.³ It is interesting to note that included in the material sold to the British Museum in 1904 are 23 items that are recorded as being collected by Garrett. Among these objects is a dagger with three blades that is attributed to the Human Leopard Society (original accession number Af1904,0415.16). This was probably acquired by Garrett when he was district commissioner and coroner at Sherbro between 1891 and 1893 (before Alldridge succeeded to the post), where a spate of murders associated with the society and its notorious adversaries, the Tongo Players, had taken place (Fyfe 1962:506–508).⁴ In 1895, even the possession of such a “three-pronged knife” had become a criminal offense under the Human Leopard Society Ordinance of that year (Beatty 1915:7).

Alldrige makes little mention of his collecting activities in his publications (although there are occasional photographs), and precisely what motivated him to assemble his collection we do not know. We do know, however, that prior to joining the colonial service Alldrige served on a committee appointed by the colonial government of Sierra Leone to collect exhibits from the Sherbro district to be sent to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886.⁵ In the official exhibition catalogue, it is explained that “the objects to be exhibited are left entirely to the discretion of the Governments participating, in so far as they illustrate the resources, products and manufac-

tures of the Colonies and the Indian Empire” (Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886:lvii). Alongside specimens of “Oils, Seeds, Fibres, Rubber, Woods and all other products of the country,” as well as examples of “Mandingo Leather work, . . . Native-made Cloths, Baskets, Pottery, &c.,” the Sierra Leone section of the exhibition included a central case “occupied with exhibits from the Sherbro, an outlying portion of the Sierra Leone Settlements, which have all been sent by Mr. Alldridge of that place” (Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886:499). The catalogue further remarks that the “cloths and chiefs’ gowns in this case are particularly good specimens of Native work,” and that the display also features “some of the most prominent Fetishes worshipped in these parts,” including “the heads of two ‘Bundoo’ devils made of cotton wood and stained by palm oil” (Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886:499). Four of these items, including one of the Bondo society masks, were subsequently purchased from Alldridge by the British Museum.

Alldrige’s writings demonstrate a keen interest in “native industries” and material culture; his photographs document everything from chiefly regalia, masquerade costumes, and “fetish images” to examples of local pottery and the processes involved in dying and weaving textiles. Like many of his contemporaries, Alldrige was both an agent of colonial trade and political intervention, and a witness to its destructive impact upon the “traditional” social order, including its material culture. Thus, Alldrige mourns the loss of authenticity even in the Bondo society masquerade costumes, where, under the raffia gown, instead of country-cloth leggings, “to-day some of the devils may be seen wearing tan-coloured stockings peeping above . . . lace-up black boots” (1910:224). As Phillips and Steiner (1999:17) note, the “characteristic form of resolution” to this paradoxical position was often found in “consumption”—in this case in the “salvage mode” of ethnographic collecting. In *A Transformed Colony*, opposite a photograph of a weaver using a traditional tripod loom that bears the caption “A Dying Native Industry,” Alldrige (1910) writes critically of the mass-produced English textiles, tin basins, and enamelled articles that are displacing locally produced goods. He adds, “A few of us, at any rate, regret the good old country-made cloths, and are thankful we managed

to secure enough of them to make our English home a pleasure to the eye of every artist who sees them there” (Alldridge 1910:58).

Through the collecting, redistribution, and display of material culture, Alldridge thus appeased his own sense of loss consequent upon the transformations of Sierra Leone that, as trader and colonial official, he played no small part in bringing about. It seems, however, that Alldridge felt little need to retain these collections in his “English home,” and once they entered the wider museumscape they acquired other meanings, following “a trajectory of renaming and status alteration uncannily similar to the changing status of African persons in diaspora” (Peffer 2005: 341). At the Brighton Museum, for example, as well as “illustrating a fast vanishing state of civilization,” they supported a cultural evolutionist paradigm of display and, according to the museum’s guidebook of 1900, were thus able “to throw an interesting light on periods of our own early history” (Brighton Museum 1900:28).⁶ Subsequently, of course, they have been recontextualized and redisplayed to illustrate, for example, cross-cultural ideals of beauty or, indeed, in Brighton’s current World Art Gallery, to explore the relationship between colonialism and collecting.

THE RYFF AND VOLZ COLLECTIONS

A more concise discussion of the collections of Friedrich Ryff (1857–1925) and Walter Volz (1875–1907) will perhaps suffice to illustrate other motivations that lay behind the creation of the Sierra Leonean object diaspora, and also to challenge an assumption that such diasporas were dispersed only along axes between the colonial metropole and its territories.⁷ As Jones’ inclusion of Munich, Frankfurt am Main, and Cologne in his initial survey of major Sierra Leonean collections attests, the networks of the distribution and redistribution of these objects was more complex. Ryff and Volz were both natives of Bern, Switzerland, and their Sierra Leonean collections are now largely held by the Bernisches Historisches Museum, although parts were also distributed to Basel and St. Gallen (Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft 1979, 1984).

Ryff was an industrialist born into a prominent Bern family. As a young man he travelled extensively in what was to become French Guinea before returning to Bern, where he established a knitwear factory.

He was also a shareholder in Ryff, Roth and Co., a trading company that was registered in Bonthe, the main town on Sherbro Island, where Alldridge was based as district commissioner until 1905. At the turn of the century, Ryff, Roth and Co. rapidly acquired a number of further trading depots or “factories” along the Guinea coast, and the company was relaunched as the Société Commerciale de l’Ouest Africain (SCOA), with its headquarters in Paris, in 1906. By 1914, SCOA had branches in most major cities in West Africa, including Conakry, Freetown, Monrovia, Accra, Kumasi, and Kano, and, along with the Compagnie Française d’Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), was a dominant force in international West African trade (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1975; Hopkins 1976).

As Bernard Gardi states, it is thanks to Ryff, Roth and Co. “that Bern owns an old and well documented collection from Sierra Leone, covering wide parts of its material culture” (1982:50–51, my translation). Company employees donated some of this material, notably Berner Ruppli, the main agent at Bonthe, who, in 1903, for example, sent several *sowe* masks, country cloths, and a complete loom. It is clear, however, that Ryff himself collected a great deal during his travels in the region. Between 1916 and 1919 he undertook a three-year excursion through West Africa, during which he collected a large number of objects, partly based on a long “wish list” that had been compiled by Rudolf Zeller, the director of the Abteilung für Völkerkunde (the ethnology department) at the Bern Museum. Some of these objects were evidently donated to the museum upon Ryff’s return to Switzerland; the majority, however, were put on display in the canteen of Ryff’s knitwear factory and only came to the Bern Museum when the factory closed in 1958. Of particular significance in the collection are a number of fine *nomoli* figures, small soap-stone sculptures of some antiquity that were receiving considerable scholarly attention at the time (e.g., Alldridge 1910:286–289; Joyce 1905, 1909; Néel 1913; Rütimeyer 1901; see Hart and Fyfe 1993 for a review of the literature).

Rather than commerce, the interests of Volz, who had a doctorate in zoology from the University of Basel, were more scientific in nature. As with Ryff, however, his motivations were not purely professional but were tinged with a desire for exploration and adventure. Having earlier worked as a geologist

for the Royal Netherlands Petrol Corporation in Sumatra, and subsequently establishing a zoological collection at the Museum of Natural History in Bern, Volz set himself a new challenge, in 1906, of making an expedition to the relatively unknown hinterland of Liberia. This was perhaps seen as a continuation of the pioneering work of Johann Büttikofer, also associated with Bern, who had made two major collecting expeditions to Liberia in 1879–1882 and 1886–1887 (Büttikofer 1890).

Despite being well planned, with sponsorship from various organizations, including the Geographical Society of Bern, and a collecting fund from the Bernisches Historisches Museum, Volz's expedition was fated. According to Gardi (1982:53), on arrival in West Africa, both the French governor of Guinea, based at Conakry, and the British governor of Sierra Leone, based in Freetown, attempted to warn Volz of his mission's folly, the latter explaining that, beyond a coastal strip of about forty kilometers, the Liberian hinterland could only be entered with a full military escort. Undeterred, Volz travelled on to Sherbro Island to continue his preparations. Here he established contact with Ryff, Roth and Co., and, together with Berner Ruppli, he set off on a preliminary expedition along the Kittam and Bum (Sewa) rivers in southern Sierra Leone. This seems to have been a successful journey, and Volz made detailed zoological notes and assembled a collection of around three hundred and fifty ethnographic objects, which he sent back to Bern on his return to Bonthe in October 1906.⁸

Spurred on by his success, Volz embarked on his expedition proper in November 1906, travelling up-country along the eastern border of Sierra Leone before entering the northwestern part of Liberia. Volz kept a detailed diary of his journey, which was later edited and published by Rudolf Zeller (Volz 1911). The diary documents the dire conditions Volz endured as he travelled in a war-torn region that was experiencing considerable political turmoil as the French pushed their colonial frontier south into Liberia. In March 1907, deserted by his carriers and without a proper translator, Volz found himself stranded in the Toma stronghold of Bussamai (present-day Boussédou, in Guinea), and it was here that he was killed when, on April 2, 1907, unaware of his presence, the French lay siege to the town and destroyed it (Suret-Canale 1964).

The diaspora of Sierra Leonean objects that may be found in Bern and elsewhere in Switzerland is thus the legacy of quite different colonial contexts than those embodied in the Alldridge collections. These Swiss collections do not reflect the direct political interventions of a colonial power but result from trading interests and business networks that were at once highly localized and international. It is clear, however, that business interests and the interests of the scientific community were not incompatible, and museums were quick to exploit such opportunities to expand their collections, providing "wish lists" and collecting funds to these prominent travellers. Whether driven by commerce or scholarly exploration, it is clear that the likes of Ryff and Volz were also adventurers, caught up in other imperialistic fantasies of the "dark continent." In the case of Volz, we might say that he was ultimately consumed by his consuming passion.

THE MASSIE-TAYLOR COLLECTION

Whereas Alldridge, Ryff, and Volz acquired their collections in a period of colonial expansion and consolidation, Guy Massie-Taylor's collecting activities took place on the eve of *decolonization*. Massie-Taylor (1919–1985) first went to Sierra Leone in 1956, a mere 50 years after Volz, yet the Sierra Leone he encountered could not have been more different. To cite Alldridge (1910), this was indeed a "transformed colony." Having been exposed to African art when studying sculpture at King Edward VII Art School in Newcastle in the late 1930s, and subsequently posted to Sudan during the Second World War, Massie-Taylor spent a further seven years based in Sierra Leone as an education officer in the British Colonial Service. As an art teacher first at the Prince of Wales School and then at the Training College for Teachers, both in Freetown, Massie-Taylor was keen that his students should draw upon Sierra Leone's own artistic heritage in their creative work rather than "blindly copying" European art traditions (Massie-Taylor in Gower 1980:3). To these ends, in his free time, he travelled widely in southern Sierra Leone, where he collected predominantly Mende art objects. As Bill Hart notes, Massie-Taylor "had an artist's eye for a fine piece, and over his years in Sierra Leone he put together what is perhaps the finest collection of Sierra Leonean artefacts in existence" (1989:103, n. 2).



Figure 2. Guy Massie-Taylor, pictured with the carver Pessima, Pessima's senior wife, and *soweï* masks in Moyambawo, Sierra Leone, ca. 1958. (Photograph: Vivien Scarth.)

Massie-Taylor was also something of an amateur ethnographer and, like Alldridge before him, he was keen to document and photograph the objects he collected in their original social contexts. This extended to documenting the work of indigenous artists and recording the processes involved in carving masks, for example. Perhaps the most interesting instance is a series of photographs that Massie-Taylor took in 1958 of a carver named Pessima (Figure 2), from the village of Moyambawo in Moyamba District, as he carved a *soweï* mask that Massie-Taylor had commissioned him to make. Alongside the photographs and descriptions, Massie-Taylor also acquired from Pessima a series of masks at different stages of production to illustrate the process.⁹ It appears that Massie-Taylor initially intended to make “a series of film strips of the existing Arts and Crafts” of Sierra Leone for distribution to schools and other educational establishments but, given the impossibility of

screening these without electricity or film projectors in many parts of the country, he decided to write a booklet on the topic instead. Although typescripts of a few pages survive, to the best of my knowledge, Massie-Taylor did not succeed in realizing this ambition.¹⁰

In addition to his teaching and collecting activities, Massie-Taylor was a member of Sierra Leone's Monuments and Relics Commission (MRC), which had been established by an Ordinance (No. 12) of 1946 in an effort to “provide for the preservation of ancient, historical, and natural monuments” in Sierra Leone and to restrict the export of articles of “archaeological, ethnographical, historical or other scientific interest” (Sierra Leone 1946). In the six years that he served on the commission, Massie-Taylor seems to have been an active member, undertaking field trips, compiling published materials, submitting reports, and collecting objects for the newly founded museum of the Sierra Leone Society (later to become Sierra Leone's National Museum). Through such activities, Massie-Taylor was agentive in a different phase in British colonialism: a “developmental” phase, which sought to inculcate European values, foster civic consciousness, and equip colonies such as Sierra Leone, politically and economically, for eventual self-rule within the Commonwealth of Nations. Although museums, monuments, relics, and artworks played only a modest part in this project, they did, nevertheless, play a part—both within Sierra Leone itself, in this case, and in Britain (Basu in press).

When Massie-Taylor returned to the United Kingdom after Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, he brought with him his large collection of Sierra Leonean artworks, including carvings, but also musical instruments, country cloths, and other ethnographic artifacts. In August of that year, a selection of objects from Massie-Taylor's collection was displayed in an exhibition devoted to “Traditional Carvings and Craftwork from Sierra Leone” held at the Commonwealth Institute in London. Alongside Massie-Taylor, the opening was attended by Sir Maurice Dorman, the last colonial governor of Sierra Leone, as well as W. H. Fitzjohn, the first Sierra Leonean high commissioner in London. An article in the *West African Review* reported that “London has seldom seen such a comprehensive display, containing many rare ‘society’ and tribal masks”; and noted

that the exhibition “included some 70 ceremonial masks—some of them very rare—as well as excellent examples of carved ‘nomoli’ figures” (Crafts of Sierra Leone 1961:26). Unlike earlier colonial exhibitions, which displayed Britain’s imperial wealth and reach, such events sought to re-present and redefine Britain’s relationships with its erstwhile colonies along more egalitarian lines.

In fact, by taking such a fine collection out of Sierra Leone, Massie-Taylor left some controversy in his wake, which led to a strengthening of the law controlling the export of antiquities and “cultural works” from the country. The 1946 Ordinance had only prohibited the export of “ethnographical articles” that had been *proclaimed* as such by the governor of Sierra Leone (on the recommendation of the MRC), “by notice published in the [Government] *Gazette*,” and, until that time, the only such proclamation that had been made (Public Notice No. 19 of 1949) had related to the stone *nomoli* figures. As an entry in the Annual Report of the Commission for 1962–1963 states,

The Massie-Taylor case showed clearly that the existing antiquities Ordinance did not fully provide for the indiscriminate exportation of Sierra Leone’s archaeological and ethnographic treasures. After studying the legislation enacted in Nigeria and Ghana, the old Ordinance No. 62 [*sic*, actually No. 12] of 1946 was amended (Ordinance No. 45 of 1962). This new Ordinance places more work on the Commission (still without its own headquarters and still sharing the tiny curator’s office in the museum). The Commission now has the task of examining articles and issuing permits where necessary to would-be exporters. Items newly-made especially for tourists such as wooden carvings and Bundo masks are granted permits. [MRC 1963:2]

Works of art or craftworks of “indigenous origin . . . made or fashioned before 1937” or “used at any time in the performance, and for the purposes of, any traditional African ceremony,” on the other hand, were not generally to be allowed to leave the country (Sierra Leone 1962:A120). As if to demonstrate the efficacy of the new stringent regulations, the MRC report further notes, “Twenty-five *nomoli*, found in the luggage of an Austrian at the [Queen Elizabeth II]

Quay, were seized, confiscated, and subsequently presented to the museum” (MRC 1963:2).

Although Massie-Taylor’s collection brought about a change in Sierra Leonean law relating to the export of ethnographic articles, and thus played a role in stemming this migration of material culture, the collection, in its diasporic context, continued its onward migration. This was a migration of form, function, and ownership, as well as of location. A significant part of the collection was, for many years, loaned to Newcastle University, where the museum ethnographer, Heiner Meinhard, used it to teach anthropology classes. In 1980, the collection was brought together again, alongside Massie-Taylor’s photographs, in a major temporary exhibition at Glasgow’s Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum entitled “Art of the Mende from Sierra Leone: The Guy Massie-Taylor Collection” (Gower 1980; Willett 1981). Finally, after Massie-Taylor’s death, and in accordance with his wishes, the collection was purchased in 1985 by the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, where several pieces remain on display.

OBJECT DIASPORAS, REMITTANCES, AND THE REANIMATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

As John Pepper has recently argued, to consider African art “from the perspective of diaspora, as objects in motion,” allows us to move beyond “colonial categories based on a false sense of fixed ethnicities and static geographies,” and instead understand how objects can “articulate between and across disparate cultural histories and the cultural zones of others” (2005:339–340). Having approached dispersed collections of Sierra Leonean material culture from such a perspective, and traced something of their historical migrations, we might ask what “articulations” this object diaspora could perform?

On the one hand, it is clear that object diasporas, such as those of Sierra Leone, have often been entangled in the networks, flows, and, above all, power disparities of colonialism. As such, by exposing and narrating the diasporic nature of their cultural histories, we can see how these collections can mediate the experiences of separation and entanglement, of “living” here (in the global museumscape), while “remembering” other places and social contexts (the communities, for example, that originally made, used, and gave meaning to these objects) (cf. Clifford

1997:255). Seen in this light, as “victims” of more or less forcible displacements at the hands of colonial agents—albeit with an array of motivations—it is understandable that a dominant postcolonial response should be to demand restitution in the form of repatriation. This is the museological equivalent to a diasporic return movement, which insists on the static isomorphism of people, culture (including material culture), and place, and which sees return as the only response to rupture.

On the other hand, however, as the lessons of human migration have taught us, there are alternative ways of conceptualizing the relationship between diasporas and their erstwhile homelands: ways that acknowledge the equivocal multiplicity of motivating forces behind dispersal and that recognize that diasporic populations “connect and disconnect” with their cultural histories “in complex, strategic ways” (Clifford 1997:259). Seen in *this* light, the historical trajectories materialized in the dispersal of these collections become vital cultural resources for individuals and groups to draw upon as they themselves “migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic ‘projects’” (Appadurai 1991:191). This diaspora of objects can thus serve a growing diaspora of Sierra Leonean people who, through war, poverty, lack of educational opportunity, and other factors, often have only limited knowledge of or exposure to their own cultural heritage.

Such an approach leads Peffer to argue that it is the responsibility of scholars and curators to be attentive to the cultural biographies of African artifacts in Western museums, and to ensure that this sometimes unsettling “history” is kept “in the forefront of . . . African Art history,” not obscured by aesthetic contemplation or formal analysis (2005:355). This interpretation reminds us of the need to make explicit the “politics” implicit in any object collected in one place and transported to another, particularly in contexts of colonial domination. But the diasporic location of these collections also reminds us that such objects exist in a space between one sociocultural context and another—they mediate across the different worlds encompassed in their biographies. This mediation might be regarded as the “social” or “cultural work” of the object diaspora. And here I return to the notion of diaspora as a relational entity: the object diaspora is not only a product of historical

relationships (social, spatial, and temporal), but, by dint of this historical web of relationality, it has the capacity to “reactivate” these connections and generate new relationships.

At the most basic level, dispersed collections create relationships between communities (between museum professionals, different audiences, and source communities, for example); they generate networks of exchange that entail obligations and responsibilities. Here, then, we might begin to see the value, for originating communities, of maintaining objects in diasporic contexts rather than insisting on their return—for the object diaspora, precisely by virtue of its diasporic location, is potentially invaluable as a resource. Returning to my earlier discussion, it might be said that object diasporas open up “remittance corridors” along which different kinds of value can be transmitted. Thus, such museum collections generate research and lead to transcultural collaborations and knowledge exchange initiatives. They provide a rationale for museums to offer capacity-building support, training, and sponsorship to colleagues in partner institutions. More generally, material culture displays in museums can act as a corrective to the often distorting lens of the news media and positively shape public perceptions of other societies. Furthermore, diasporas of objects have the potential to play an important role for corresponding diasporas of people, acting as vehicles for cultural identity construction and expression. As with other forms of symbolic capital, the value of such cultural work may also translate into economic value, not least in cultural tourism development and the cultural industries. I suggest that these transactions may all be understood as examples of remittances flowing from the object diaspora.

Culture and heritage have remained low priorities for successive governments in postcolonial Sierra Leone (Basu 2008). As a result, institutions such as the National Museum of Sierra Leone have rarely had the wherewithal to safeguard or properly care for the collections for which they are responsible. Such facts do not alter the principles that underlie calls for the repatriation of collections dispersed in the world’s museums. However, in the Sierra Leonean context—and in many other similar contexts—these diasporas of collections have been the very forces behind the creation and maintenance of new

partnerships and collaborations. Thus, through its Africa Program, the British Museum has been providing much-needed resources, training, and capacity-building support to the National Museum of Sierra Leone, while contributing to the development of new Sierra Leonean cultural policies aimed at long-term sustainable solutions for the sector. Similarly, the British Museum, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, and Glasgow Museums are partners with the National Museum of Sierra Leone in the development of an Internet-based resource that will provide digital access to Sierra Leonean collections and associated knowledges held by an expanding number of museums throughout the world.

This digital access project, entitled “Reanimating Cultural Heritage,” also involves collaborations with other Sierra Leonean partners and seeks to literally reanimate objects that have become divorced from their original social and cultural contexts by juxtaposing them in the digital resource with specially commissioned video documentations showing the objects in use, in the process of being made, or being discussed.¹¹ In this way, by transcending the global museumscape and entering the global mediascape, Sierra Leone’s object diaspora is making remittances beyond the narrow museum sector itself and is supporting transferrable information technology and media skills training initiatives in youth-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs), fostering inter-generational dialogue, and encouraging young Sierra Leoneans, whose cultural heroes are more likely to be New York rap artists or Manchester United footballers, to recognize that Sierra Leone, too, has a rich cultural heritage and that it is theirs to draw upon. Internet access in Sierra Leone is currently limited, but the project is also supporting educational initiatives and other outreach projects that will benefit directly and indirectly from the resource. And, of course, access to the resource is not restricted to those currently residing in Sierra Leone but is open to all, including those of Sierra Leonean origin or descent dispersed throughout the world and communities of scholars and curators. Each user group is differently situated in relation to the collections and their historical trajectories; each is a different node in an expansive knowledge network, which can be connected through “low tech” outreach activities as well as the exploitation of Web 2.0 technologies.

By reactivating the social, spatial, and temporal relationships materialized in the Sierra Leonean object diaspora; by transforming historical trajectories into contemporary remittance corridors; by reanimating the collections of Alldridge and Massie-Taylor, for example, in the global mediascape; and by experimenting with ways of supporting related cultural initiatives in Sierra Leone, the hope is that these dislocated objects may be appropriately relocated in a dynamic diasporic space and thereby provide a constructive resource for the rehabilitation of Sierra Leone as it emerges from an era of political and economic crisis. By reanimating Sierra Leone’s object diaspora, the aspiration is that this diaspora will contribute to the reanimation of Sierra Leone itself.

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NOTES

1. The most recent significant exhibition of these ivories, “Ivoires D’Afrique,” was curated by Ezio Bassani and Aurélien Gaborit at the Musée du quai Branly in 2008 (see Mark 2009).
2. Sherbro, a coastal district south of the main Sierra Leone Crown Colony, had long associations with European trade—including the slave trade. It was formally ceded to the British in 1861.
3. Alldridge subsequently sold Sierra Leonean material to the London-based dealer, W. O. Oldman. It is estimated that between 1906 and 1911, this amounted to some 260 items. Although Oldman kept careful records of everything he bought and how much he paid for them, he unfortunately did not keep records of who he sold them to. I am grateful to Bill Hart for this information.
4. Garrett was invalided out of the colonial service in August 1893, and he died soon after in a Liverpool Hospital (Royal Geographical Society 1893:377). Alldridge, who published excerpts of Garrett’s private log book in his 1910 volume *A Transformed Colony*, suspected that Garrett “never

thoroughly recovered” from an arduous four-month mission he undertook in 1890 to negotiate with Samori (Alldridge 1910:295).

5. Alldridge was a member of a number of learned societies, including the Royal Geographical Society and the Zoological Society of London. It is interesting to note that Alldridge’s collecting practices were not confined to ethnographica: in 1888 he presented a live chimpanzee from Sierra Leone to the London Zoo (*Times*, December 20, 1888, p. 6).
6. Museum Sub Committee Minutes, December 15, 1899. I am grateful to Harriet Hughes, Curator of World Art at the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery for these references.
7. I am grateful to Bernhard Gardi, Head of the Africa Section of the Museum der Kulturen, Basel, for his advice regarding these collections. Much of this section is drawn from his article in the *Jahrbuch der Geographischen Gesellschaft von Bern*, 1980–1982 (Gardi 1982).
8. According to Gardi (1982:55), these objects were dispersed as follows: Bern, 200 items; St. Gallen, 76; Basel, 30. The Volz family retained 44 pieces.
9. Glasgow Museums, accession numbers A.1985.1.3.t, A.1985.1.3.u, and A.1985.1.3.v.
10. This information is gleaned from some notebooks and loose typescripts held by Glasgow Museums. I am also particularly grateful to Vivien Scarth for providing biographical information about her father.
11. The project is funded by the United Kingdom’s Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of its Beyond Text program. Please see the project website for further details: <http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org>.

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