

## **Culture behind glass**

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Responding to “Role of museums as soft power”, the beginning of a long winded process of restitution and repatriation of the “Colonial Legacy” in European museums is discussed. Based on theoretical viewpoints expressed in Stephen E. Weil’s article ‘Being about Something to Being for Somebody...’ (1999) and Claudia Augustat’s key note address at the ICH Conference (2018) ‘The humanistic turn in museum anthropology’ in Kelaniya, this study on the offer of repatriation of selected objects from the Reijksmuseum, Amsterdam (The Netherlands) to the National Museum, Colombo (Sri Lanka)

The key object of this selection is the “Canon from Kandy” which seems to have been a gift from Lewke Disava to the King of Kandy in 1745/46, and subsequently looted by the Dutch during the attack on Kandy and finally arrived in the Reijksmuseum, Amsterdam in 1885.

At the ICAS Conference in Leiden 2019 (The Netherlands), the discussion on repatriation of cultural objects in the process of “Decolonizing the Museum” was opened arguing that transferring of objects from one museum to another does not necessarily mean that the troubled object history of the past will necessarily “restitute” the lost heritage of the colonized, lost due to looting by the powerful colonizer. In other words, the objects are transferred from one museum to another to be gazed behind glass. This will not lead to any understanding of very complex relationships of the past and present.

Although information regarding the canon has been published by R. L. Brohier (1960) and most recently on line, the other objects that may be in the future sent back to Colombo are not known. The choice of objects is debatable. Power of the two museums is not balanced. Nevertheless, they can be seen as a “soft power” that could play a more active role in cultural diplomacy, if understood and implemented in a sensitive manner.

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