

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

EASA2020 – P120: **The Futures of Visual Restitution**. Convenors: Rodrigo Lacerda (CRIA/NOVA FCSH, Lisbon, Portugal) and Renato Athias (Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil). <https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2020/panels#8693>

**Thursday 23 July, 08:30-10:15 and 11:00-12:45 (Lisbon/London time)**

This panel reflected on the intersection between the restitution and repatriation debates and the use of visual images, specifically since photos and film footage represent special artefacts due to their indexical quality as signs, which makes them both illusorily transparent and full of details that resist signification and provide new ways of thinking about and accessing the past. The session was successful in demonstrating the diverse uses of visual images and methodologies in restitution and repatriation processes, and their potential for anthropology, visual anthropology, history and decolonization.

The first paper by Katja Müller (Halle University, Germany), entitled “Digital Archives: Postcolonial takes on circulating Indian photographs,” analysed how online archives have become a means of visual restitution and presented a comparative study based on three examples. The author concluded that community-based archives are the most successful in generating online interactions, encounters and emotional involvement. However, this is not easily achieved, since archiving software is available, but there is no manual for creating an engaged audience.

The paper “Dislocation and performance in the Makonde’s response to visual archives,” by Catarina Alves Costa (CRIA NOVA FCSH, Lisbon, Portugal), assessed the process of making her film *A Journey to the Makonde* (2019), which is based on the reaction of contemporary Makonde living in Maputo (Mozambique) to photographs and film footage of this ethnic group shot by Margot Dias, wife of the ethnologist Jorge Dias, in the north of the country between 1958 and 1961. She reflected on how the camera, both for her and Dias, instigates dislocation that produces changes in visual and social perspectives and new kinds of knowledge.

Renato Athias’ paper presented yet another way of using images in restitution processes. In “Virtual restitution of photographic archives and ethnographic objects of the Upper Rio Negro Indigenous Peoples: issues and problems,” the anthropologist, who has considerable experience in this ethnographic region, reflected on the experience of showing present-day communities photographs of objects collected by missionaries and travellers since the 19th century and stored in European and North American museums. This process was a way of informing the communities of the whereabouts of their heritage and initiated reflection and discussion that may (or may not, depending on ritualistic and shamanic issues) lead to requests for restitution and demands for how museums display the objects and who is allowed to see them.

The paper “Film screening of mythical times: Clashes of temporalities and nostalgia in a Papuan Village,” by Roberto Costa (Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia), examined the experience of a public screening of historical footage in an Asmat village. This event produced feelings of nostalgia, both by recalling memories in an attempt to find visual evidence of mytho-historical pasts in which ancestors were stronger, bigger, healthier, and braver, and also in the emerging moral critique of the modern state, leading to reflections on the future.

Finally, due to technical issues, Kaylee Good (Damsko International Theatre Academy, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) presented her paper “Performing Arts as Visual Restitution of Missing Cultural Artifacts” as a pre-recorded video. She explored the use of film and photos as a “replacement” for cultural artefacts and, based on her research on Emma Hamilton’s

work, examined whether performing art, as a form of visual representation, may be a way of replacing the spirit of a missing object.

The panel showed that visual restitution is an emerging and diverse arena which, for better or worse, has not yet been fully embraced by states, museums and other institutions but is eagerly pursued by the source communities and their allies, such as anthropologists, filmmakers and artists. Visual restitution is a process that challenges the old structures of oppression and is a source of knowledge, power and healing for the heritage stakeholders as well as a catalyst for new relationships, both within communities and between communities, institutions and states. By reassessing memory, it provides these various actors with new ways to think about the future.