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INTRODUCTION

As an undergraduate student sitting spellbound in my first architectural history survey course at Bryn Mawr College in 1993, I wondered where—beyond the pyramids of Giza shown in slide lectures—the storied, bustling, dynamic home of my youth, the African continent, could be found. Fifteen years later, as I labored to create syllabi that reflected the diversity of the world’s architectural production, I scoured image databases and websites, desperately scanned blurry images from textbooks and historical postcards, and even borrowed photographs from Lonely Planet travel guides. Again and again, in my search of the image databases from which my colleagues sourced their exquisite photographs of grand Athenian temples or exuberant Catalan *modernisme*, I came across images of individual components of African buildings now housed in museum collections. Today, even specialists are unaware that museum collections hold a good number of African architectural works—from the more familiar symbolic and ornamental elements like plaques and friezes to structural members like verandah columns and ridge beams. Many of these objects now exist as decontextualized pieces of art or ethnographica in glass vitrines or dark storage vaults, and their status as built works has been almost entirely effaced. African architecture, it turns out, was a direct victim of colonial collecting.

This book explores the dismemberment of African buildings and the dispersal and transformation of their disembodied parts into discrete museum artifacts. It argues that the fragmentation and museumification of African buildings is, in part, responsible for silences at the heart of scholarly and popular understandings of histories of African architecture. As such, the book reveals an additional layer of loss experienced by African societies as an outcome of the western colonial practice of collecting—not only the loss of works of artistic expression and material culture, but also the eradication of built environments.

Africa's Buildings: Architecture and the Displacement of Cultural Heritage revisits the age-old question of the definition of architecture and the African continent's contributions to architecture's histories, and participates in ongoing discussions about the role of scholarship and architectural design itself in restitution and repair.

Defining African Architecture

For many experts, there is no doubt about what historical African architecture is and is not. Nevertheless, my experiences as a teacher, scholar, and African have made it clear that stereotypes still dominate lay and popular perceptions. Below, to set the stage for uncovering the hidden history of the displacement of African architecture to Europe and North America, I problematize these stereotypes about African architecture.¹

Africa is not a country. It is the second largest continent, and it contains more countries than any other continent. Thus, it is simply not possible to have a single, unified architectural history for all fifty-four countries. While “European architecture” was once a common subject of study, a frequent book title, and an image in popular imagination, we rarely hear that phrase today. Instead, we think in terms of national or ethnic categories, chronological designations, important political, economic, social, or cultural moments, or some combination thereof. Why should the African continent be treated any differently? One could argue the usefulness of “African architecture” as a heuristic: it is an artificial construct that allows us, by unspoken agreement, to generalize about what we know to be a vast and complicated array of forms, practices, and understandings spanning the continent today, yesterday, and in the deep past. The problem with taking “African architecture” as an analytical concept is that the line between heuristic and reality is easily blurred. As Senegalese critical theorist Felwine Sarr has explained, there is an inherent tension in references to “Africa”—between essentialism on one hand and a resort to diversity on the other hand—that makes it impossible to stake singular powerful claims.² When I refer to “African architecture” throughout this book, I do so with reservation, bearing in mind that there are many African architectures and multiple histories thereof.

African architecture is not about sub-Saharan or “Black Africa.” To claim otherwise is to claim that something specific characterizes the cultural production of people with darker skin tones. If, as literary scholar Geraldine Heng explains, “practices of generalization, through which the personality of a sin-

gle individual becomes transcoded into the character of a collective totality of peoples,” exemplify “race-thinking and racialization,” then to suggest that there is something distinctive ipso facto about the architecture of sub-Saharan Africa is to do the work of race through architectural history.³ Many writers have suggested, for example, that one thing that unified architectural production south of the Sahara desert was its apparent harmony with nature. The recent fixation on sustainable and green building practices in relation to historical and contemporary practices and forms on the continent is an expansion of this problematic conflation between Africa and nature. Whether we are discussing specific historical traditions or more recent practice, however, designers and builders across the African continent have learned from nature just as much as any other peoples. Furthermore, if by “sub-Saharan” or “Black Africa” we are referring to culture rather than biological essence, it is patently clear that numerous cultures flourished, waned, and new cultures have emerged across the African continent. As a cultural form, architecture in this region must be equally manifold. Following Kenyan political theorist Ali Mazrui, architectural historian Nnamdi Elleh has suggested that the continent’s triple heritage of Indigenous, Islamic, and European influences is a helpful framework for conceptualizing African architectural histories.⁴

African architecture is not ethnographica. In the nineteenth century, practitioners of the newly formed science of anthropology understood the designed structures they encountered on the African continent as embodiments of the continent’s multitude of cultures. Applying ethnographic methods to architecture, dress, weapons, and other cultural forms, anthropologists sought to unlock the key to each specific culture, making it legible to western eyes.⁵ To support this pursuit, they collected examples of material culture including entire structures and parts of buildings. But rarely did they distinguish buildings as a unique category of material culture. By placing it on par with spoons and spears, anthropologists like Georg Schweinfurth obscured the built status of African architecture.⁶ Since the 1970s, some academically trained art and architectural historians in the United States and Europe have followed aspects of this colonial model by using ethnographic methods in their research.⁷ While this approach is useful, it assumes continuities between the present and the past and privileges architecture’s symbolic aspects over building technology and aesthetics.

African architecture is not building. Building, of course, has long been understood as the antithesis of architecture. As architectural historian Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoğlu pointed out many decades ago, architecture in general is almost always understood as a binary and what stands outside architecture is

as important as what is contained within its limits.⁸ Building is seen as architecture's poor cousin because it appears intuitive rather than intentional. Likewise, the balanced presence of ornament in relation to the structural logic of a building has been understood as a defining feature of architecture contra mere building. Today, architects, scholars, and laypeople alike readily employ the assumption that African architecture is building. One recent publication problematically explained that African architecture is "so closely intertwined with life and the daily routine that no language or complex system of thought has developed around it."⁹ Such ideas are at play in discussions about African architecture that automatically characterize it as vernacular or traditional. Here, "vernacular" refers to architecture that is owner- or community-built and has a "direct correspondence with the immediate local contexts of cultural and social tradition, climate, and material resources."¹⁰ These claims about African architecture resonate with the "enduring myths of African art" that art historian Suzanne Preston Blier debunked in the 1990s: ideas about its timelessness, proscription by place, communitarianism, tribalism, intuitiveness, and primitivism.¹¹ As an illustration of the double standard to which African architecture is still subjected today, architects design only a small percentage of what gets built in the United States with builders, contractors, homeowners, and other actors responsible for most of the built environment.¹² Certainly, the lack of reliance on professionally trained architects today and in the past is not unique to African histories.

African architecture is not art. At the end of the nineteenth century, some works of African material culture that had been collected by travelers and anthropologists and translocated to museums and private collections in Europe and North America were selectively transformed into objets d'art. Avant-garde artists in Europe took notice of what they perceived as strange and wonderful works. They found in them inspiration for their own challenges to European artistic conventions. It was their style, especially their approach to expressing human form, that was of interest rather than their meaning, context, use, history, or even the aesthetic values assigned by their creators.¹³ Among these works of material culture reclassified as African sculpture were architectural elements: "wooden columns, plaques in wood or metal, decorative roof pinnacles, doors, doorposts, doorframes, and locks."¹⁴ Long presented as works of art, these objects constitute forgotten subjects of architectural histories of the African continent.

As a subject of popular interest or specialized study, the history of African architecture is in decline. Significant gaps exist in our understanding of the continent's architectural histories, making it difficult to communicate its importance. This book fills some of these gaps.

Architecture and the Restitution Debate

In 2018, Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr and French art historian Bénédicte Savoy published, at the request of French president Emmanuel Macron, a report advocating the unconditional restitution of the vast quantity of African art objects held in French national museums. Recounting the violent colonial origins of some of the more famous groups of objects in France, they placed the French case within the larger context of European colonial collecting on the African continent and reiterated the shocking statistic that 90–95 percent of sub-Saharan Africa’s material cultural heritage now resides outside the African continent. As Sarr and Savoy explain, “the absence of cultural heritage can render memory silent” and creates difficulties in the “construction of a political community and a project for the future.”¹⁵ The report spurred a variety of reactions. Those who oppose restitution have sounded the alarm about a mass exodus from western museum collections, defended the paradigm of the universal museum, made allegations about protectionism and the reimprisonment of African objects beyond the reach of Europeans, voiced warnings about the death of Africanist art history, pointed out the contradictions inherent in returning African artifacts to oppressive African regimes, and filed lawsuits defending the rights of the descendants of enslaved Africans to access African heritage in the United States.¹⁶ By contrast, the report has led some African governments to relaunch restitution campaigns; has instigated successful restitutions by national governments, museums, universities, and private individuals in Europe and North America; and has led to creative reappropriations by contemporary artists on the continent.¹⁷

It is important to note, however, that restitution requests did not start recently. In 1872, Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia wrote to Queen Victoria requesting the return of just two of the hundreds of items taken from his father’s citadel and a nearby church in Maqdala when the British destroyed them in 1868. Only one of the two was returned and the majority remain in England today.¹⁸ Decades later, in 1947, Ethiopia’s peace treaty with Italy, signed on the occasion of the Allied Powers’ victory, specified the restitution of all cultural property. Nevertheless, Italy continued to hold Ethiopian heritage hostage.¹⁹ Many Africans had given up on restitution by the 1980s in the face of authoritarian regimes and economic decline on the continent. One prominent exception was Germany’s return, in 2000, of the missing half of a soapstone bird spirited away from the monumental and sacred site Great Zimbabwe at the end of the nineteenth century. It was only in 2018, with the publication of the Sarr and Savoy report, that the movement to reinstitute Africa’s material heritage gained new momentum.

Almost two decades of researching and teaching histories of African architecture allowed me to recognize the large numbers of African architectural works still hidden in plain sight in western collections. In their report, Sarr and Savoy make only one offhand reference to “architectural ornaments” in a list of the genres of objects obtained by western museums as spoils, scientific samples, gifts from private collectors, and through illicit trafficking.²⁰ But noted historian of African architecture Labelle Prussin had pointed out this phenomenon as early as 1974. As I do in this book, Prussin compared the dislocation of architectural works from sub-Saharan Africa to earlier removals from Egypt, and referenced textiles as an underrecognized category of African architecture and a prominent genre of collectible.²¹ *Africa’s Buildings: Architecture and the Displacement of Cultural Heritage* picks up the trail where Prussin, Sarr and Savoy, and others left it. The book reveals that in addition to works of art, religious paraphernalia, and objects of everyday use, westerners appropriated elements of African architecture and components of the built environment. Unlike some of the previously mentioned categories, architectural works were not inherently portable and their dislocation—especially from intact buildings—often required an entirely different scale of effort and level of violence. Likewise, their removal created an entirely different type of injury. *What does it mean to recognize that what was taken was not “merely” art but also the very structures we inhabited and the floors we walked on?* Acknowledging this crime adds further moral strength to demands for restitution. It reveals an additional layer and scale of loss. As I combed through the many examples I found, identified patterns, and started to pose questions, it became clear that a history of African architectural works in western collections is a crucial part of the history of African architecture. To examine African architecture in museums is to raise many of the questions raised in other investigations of the subject: What is architecture? What constitutes ornament in relation to architecture? What is structure? How do materials and construction technologies function? However, approaching the African architecture from this angle also offers unique insights: it bypasses purely ethnic, national, geographic, and chronological surveys in lieu of a comparative approach that situates architecture firmly as a player in complex historical, political, economic, and social developments.

Concepts

Throughout this book, I frame the pattern of the dispossession and displacement of African architecture to western museums through the concept of dismemberment. The martial, physiological, and legal definitions of dismember-

ment capture the nature of an injury to architecture, as well as the processes through which African architectural objects were continually broken down into smaller parts as they were traded by auction houses, collectors, and museums, and dislocated across vast distances. Inspired by insights in studies of transatlantic enslavement and of African politics and philosophy, I argue that the concept of dismemberment captures the violence of the initial and ongoing physical removal of these works, as well as the trauma of their continued display and circulation.²² Dismemberment emphasizes process over outcome and subject over object. In doing so, it forces us—museum visitors and scholars alike—to step out of our comfort zone as neutral observers and consumers of violently and problematically appropriated works of African cultural heritage.

“To dismember” is “to deprive of limbs or members . . . to divide into parts or sections, so as to destroy integrity; to cut up, cut to pieces, mangle, mutilate . . . to cut off, separate, sever, from the main body: chiefly in reference to a country or region . . . to cut off from membership.”²³ In its most literal sense, dismemberment concerns the removal of limbs from a living body. Though it may happen accidentally, it is often understood as an intentional act of rending an organism asunder. Dismemberment is the central concept and metaphor in Kenyan writer and academic Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s 2009 manifesto *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. He argues that dismemberment was the “absolute act of social engineering” central to colonial practice.²⁴ He identifies three phases of the dismemberment of the African continent: (1) the separation of (diasporic) Africans from their continent, labor, and sovereign being; (2) the subsequent fragmentation of the continent among European powers and associated alienation of Africans from their land, body, and minds; and (3) the severing of the colonial subject’s memory from her individual and collective body: “The head that carries memory is cut off from the body and then either stored in the British Museum or buried upside down.”²⁵ It is well known that in the first and second phases, the corporeal dismemberment of Africans was common practice sometimes codified into law in both the Americas and on the colonized continent. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s focus is on the theft of language, which serves as a communication system and carrier of culture through its function as a tool and repository of memory (via the head). Human remains are still found in many colonial collections today, making museums complicit in dismemberment. This book shows that African environments were also brutally assaulted, creating what Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe labels as longstanding necropolitical conditions.²⁶ Furthermore, the appropriation of African material culture, which itself serves as a repository of memory and storehouse of knowledge, has also been crucial to inducing “amnesia” among the formerly

colonized.²⁷ This latter action has been the primary mode for museums' collusion in the dismemberment of the African continent.

In European architectural traditions, buildings have long been analogized to the human body, the decomposition of the building to physiological dismemberment, and the dismembering of the building's body to museumification. French architect and theorist Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy criticized the French spoliation of Italian art and architecture during the revolutionary wars, arguing that to "divide is to destroy" because "artworks become incomprehensible when removed from their place of origin and lifeless when decontextualized into the arbitrary orders of the museum."²⁸ Indeed, the exhibition of architecture always stems from an act of destruction.²⁹ Arguably, the decomposition of buildings starts long before they become fragments in a museum. Though we often assume otherwise, the building goes through a process of degradation, decay, and decomposition from the moment of completion if not from an earlier moment when construction begins. It is "transformed by nature or artifice, causing the fragment, however infinitesimal, to emerge."³⁰ Dismemberment fuses this understanding of fragmentation with the idea of taking away life and dispersing its constituent forces.

Dismemberment is also particularly apt when thinking about the specific processes and impacts of forcibly removing African architecture into collections. Historically, in some parts of the continent, buildings were also anthropomorphized. Among the Dogon people of contemporary Mali, the Tamberma of Togo, the Imazighen of Morocco and Algeria, and in the historical kingdom of Danhomè as well as in the city of Timbuktu when it was part of the medieval Mali and Songhai empires, important building components were identified with elements of the human body or the uses and perceptions of a building were linked to human characteristics.³¹ Arguably, in these worldviews, to remove parts of such buildings could have been equivalent to attacking and dismembering the human body or human life. Indeed, architectural destruction—a form of iconoclasm—has deep roots both on the African continent and in Europe. In the early 1800s, the Friday Mosque of Djenné was deliberately destroyed as part of an effort to impose a more strident form of Islam on the city. Because of a prohibition against directly attacking the mosque, its drains and gutters were blocked to accelerate its decay. In Danhomè, not only was construction linked symbolically with the human body and understood as the first step in the establishment of a new kingdom, but the destruction of a person's home, or what Blier calls "architectural death" was tied conceptually and linguistically to military destruction and denying a people its present, future, and past.³² Beyond iconoclasm, we have no information to suggest that dismemberment or the violent excision and dispersal of building parts was a widespread practice on

the continent. When historians discuss the contents of the treasuries of historical African kingdoms, they make no mention of collections of other people's ornamented ceilings, roof finials, structural columns, door assemblies, door panels, floor tiles, or even complete buildings. While architectural death has been a common military and political strategy across many places and periods on the African continent and beyond, dismemberment as a systematic and sustained form of architectural death seems to be unique to non-European-European relations.

There is nothing new about seeing architectural remains in the museums of Europe and North America. Architecture was exhibited in imperial Rome in the form of reliefs and other sculptures that had once been integrated into buildings but were removed by victorious generals and taken back to Rome to be paraded, displayed, and/or reused in public and private buildings. Architecture was thus first exhibited in Europe and in the Islamic world in the form of "spolia," in the narrow meaning of the term as architectural objects stripped violently from an opponent, and in the broader meaning of building parts bought, handed down, found, or otherwise obtained from a previous structure. In any case, spolia retains its original Latin semantic association of war booty stripped and taken home by the conquering state where it became a monument to the victors and (later) served as evidence of the conqueror's cultural hegemony. Roman law itself considered spoliation to be problematic: it prohibited the destruction of buildings in Rome specifically for the purpose of collecting spolia and placed legal constraints on where and when spoliation was permitted.³³ While the reuse of spolia gradually went out of fashion in Europe in the gothic period and after, existing spolia continued to be valued in, among other places, museum collections. When the museum of architecture proper was born in eighteenth-century France and then England, spolia along with models, plaster casts, and drawings were its primary content.³⁴ Indeed, as I argue throughout this book, though the term has been abandoned by all except art historians, spoliation continued unabated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but with a different geography—the geography of European imperial expansion across Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Australia.

These days museums rarely label architectural objects in their collections "spolia." Instead, at some point the phrase "architectural fragment" came to be applied to these deracinated works.³⁵ According to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), an architectural fragment is "an object formerly part of a built structure, intended to be part of a built structure, or representing a structural element of a building."³⁶ While a reflexive understanding of "fragment" implies breakage, fracture, damage, brittleness, and fragility, as well as violence, accident, loss, and absence, the use of the term does quite the opposite in museum

settings.³⁷ It emphasizes the outcome of an unseen process and effectively neutralizes the violence (natural or human-created, organic or intentional) that led to the presence of the object in the museum's collection. To borrow an analogy from the world of film, we can say that "fragment" freezes the frame. Rarely do museum labels and wall text discuss the human actions, events, and processes that brought and continue to bring these large-scale items into their hands. Even in the current period of heightened critical reflection on the injustices perpetrated by the 1897 British massacre in the Benin kingdom and the theft of the kingdom's material goods, for example, institutions like the British Museum and the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin carefully phrase their labels in a passive voice and use euphemisms in order to abrogate responsibility for the violent removal of material heritage and the ensuing trauma.³⁸

Museologists and historians have developed several terms to describe how museums have acquired African objects. "Collecting" is the term most frequently used of these. But it elides the many complexities of acquisition processes including the frequent use of violence and other forms of pressure, and it focuses attention on the benefit to the acquirer rather than the loss to the original owner and context. The term implies a passive rather than an active and intentional practice, thus neutralizing the agency of the acquirer. By contrast, "translocation" offers a way to think about processes of appropriation and dislocation that focuses not only on material objects and their histories, but also on "the actual phenomenon of the transfer itself, with all its traumas, discourses, actors, gestures, techniques and representations."³⁹ Similarly, "diaspora" offers a conceptual framework for what translocated objects become and how they are transformed by their experiences. Art historian John Pepper suggests that approaching what is typically called traditional African art through the lens of diaspora accomplishes two things. First, it highlights historical links between African cultures within the continent and thus transcends false colonial narratives of static identities and fixed geographies. Second, it embraces the distribution of African material cultural heritage outside the continent and replaces the previous fixation on identifying the original social and cultural contexts of objects with an analysis of their motion and the ways in which they "articulate" between and across diverse peoples and places.⁴⁰ Like African peoples themselves, African objects have experienced traumatic migrations and have developed shared identities of displacement within host countries at the same time that they have profoundly influenced them.⁴¹ While this idea of objects-as-diasporas has been used as justification to retain African material culture in western collections, it also helps clarify the mediating role these objects can play in transforming existing relations between African societies and western nations.⁴²

Language and its use in the writing of African architectural histories is therefore an important theme in this book. Beyond challenging the terminology applied to describe the processes through which African architectural objects came into the possession of western museums, I also point out the limitations of the words that museums and scholars use to describe specific objects. For instance, “post” and “pillar” are commonly used instead of “column” to describe a vertical structural element in a historical African building, and many sources use “roof ornament” instead of “finial” and “door panel” where what is being described includes most of the structural components that allowed a door to function. As a consequence of these language choices, parts of African buildings have rarely been understood as true architectural elements. Rather, they are seen as ornamental elements or as diminutive, inferior versions of western building elements. To challenge this tendency, I have replaced such diminutive terms with now accepted architectural terminology. Instead of “door panel,” for example, I use “door assembly” or “doorframe,” depending on which structural door components were removed and collected with the actual door panel. Likewise, the art historical term “sculpture” replaces the peculiar word “carving,” which is only ever applied to African objects. Throughout the book, I also identify and employ, as far as possible, the terminology used by the original makers of the objects. Thus, when discussing the ever-popular monumental Swahili door assembly or *milango*, I refer to the *taji* (lintel), *tarabe* (inner doorframe), *mfaa* (center post), and so forth. And my discussion of the numerous examples of beautifully sculpted wood doorframes from western Cameroon now in museums in Europe and the United States invokes the original names of their components, such as *bom dye* (doorpost) and *te ken dy dye* (lintel). Ultimately, by reclaiming African terms and, when English language is used, by using standardized architectural terminology, I aim to overturn the historical and contemporary erasure of the original ownership and function of African architectural objects and to highlight implicit bias.

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter of the book begins with a provocation that directs the reader toward the main idea and, in some cases, to the specific term or concept around which the chapter’s argument revolves. These provocations are followed by in-depth case studies of translocations of African architectural objects.

Chapter 1, “Museums and the Architecture of Restitution,” links the future of the African heritage scene with the violent colonial past. Focusing on the infamous case of the nineteenth-century British theft of material cultural

heritage—including art *and architecture*—from the Benin kingdom (present-day Nigeria), it discusses new museums built to house African objects repatriated from Euro-American museums. Two case studies are explored: the recently opened Musée des Civilisations Noires (MCN) in Dakar, Senegal, and the proposed Museum of West African Art (MOWAA) in Benin City, Nigeria. The chapter places these museums in the tradition of the antimuseum while identifying them as a new decolonial subgenre. It highlights the role of architecture as both a victim of translocation and a tool in restituting African societies for the trauma that has been inflicted on them.

Chapter 2 begins the work that is at the core of the book: identifying and categorizing the reserve of African architecture within western collections, and tracing the wider pattern of dispossession and displacement that they represent. Appropriating the title of Viennese architect Adolf Loos's famous essay "Ornament and Crime" (1908), I call attention to arguably the largest category of dislocated African architectural objects—seemingly ornamental or decorative works. I focus on three out of numerous possible examples: the Dendera zodiac discovered during Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and removed to Paris in 1822, the infamous soapstone birds from Great Zimbabwe translocated to Germany and British South Africa, and the lesser-known brass snakes and birds removed from the roofs of the royal palace in Benin City. I ask what it means to classify these works as ornament in architectural contexts where they served multiple overlapping functions and in cases where originating communities understood them otherwise.

At the center of Chapter 3, "Structure and Destruction," is another large group of African architectural elements in western museums: structural components like columns, beams, and doorframes. I argue that the degree of decontextualization and erasure for these items has been so great that scholars, curators, and the public alike have failed to recognize their structural significance, and to consider the catastrophic consequences of their removal. Rather than selecting a few items in specific museums, this chapter identifies four corpora that have been obsessively collected. Using the famous papyrus capital columns from Alexandria built into the Egyptian Hall at Gottfried Semper's 1871 Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, I highlight the large number of ancient Egyptian structural components dispersed across Euro-American museological sites. Second, the chapter investigates the now ubiquitous wood columns built by the Dogon people of Mali through examples in Chicago, New York, Paris, and the Netherlands. Anthropomorphic columns sculpted in the Yoruba-speaking regions of West Africa make up an equally large body of work in European and North American collections. Through an analysis of columns removed from the royal palace at Ketu, République du Bénin and the Agbeni Shango Shrine in

Ibadan, Nigeria, I make the case for the loss of structural integrity that occurred when columns, beams, and other structural members were removed from African buildings. The chapter ends with a discussion of relief-carved doorframes from the Grassfields region of Cameroon. A recent exhibition at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin that assembles examples from the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum to form a ghostly townscape reveals, for the first time, the extent of Cameroon's architectural loss.

The final chapter, "'Anonymous Has a Name': Unspecified Building Parts in Western Collections," takes its title from a seminal publication by art historian Roslyn Adele Walker, which is also the generic label used in some museum collections to designate African architectural objects.⁴³ This chapter discusses a range of examples from across the continent, including door and window components, woven screens and walls, floor tiles, and large-scale architectural furniture. I explain that the seeming anonymity of these objects can be traced to the processes of dismemberment associated with western collecting. Through examples from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Egypt, Cameroon, and Tanzania, I illustrate that this phenomenon encompasses the entire continent, transcending divides and challenging assumptions and stereotypes.

The book ends with some suggestions for the future. Given these new insights on African architecture in museum collections, I ask: What exactly is restitution? How does it relate to the larger movements for reparation and decolonization? And what can scholars, museum curators, and architects contribute? The information uncovered in this book offers some strategies: knowledge of and access to African architecture in European and North American museum collections can help reconstruct memory and knowledge, stimulate new imaginaries for contemporary African architectures, and inspire new possibilities of restitution.

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