

Fetissoes by Kialy Tihngang

Glossary

Fetissoes

This is an Old Portuguese word meaning religious objects such as masks, statues, and staffs made by African people, who believed them to have magical powers. This is meant in a derogatory way because the Portuguese compared the African fetisso rituals to idol worship, and they believed that to be immoral in comparison to Christianity.

Fetishes

This is the English word for 'fetissoes', inanimate objects worshipped for their supposed magical powers or because they are considered to be inhabited by spirits. This is the origin of the word fetish in a sexual context, when sexual desire is strongly linked to an inanimate object.

Speculate

To speculate is to be deeply curious about a subject, and to deeply imagine about that subject. In Kialy's artistic practice, she uses speculation to re-imagine colonial histories, creating alternate worlds that question these structures. Kialy is also interested in speculative fiction, which can mean any genre that is different from realism, but is generally used to mean genres that involve supernatural or futuristic elements, such as fantasy.

Periscope

This is a nautical device made up of a long tube attached to a set of mirrors that allows underwater viewers, such as passengers on submarines, to see above water, seeing things that are otherwise out of sight.

Deity

This is a god or goddess, particularly in polytheistic religions (religions that worship more than one god).

Ritualistic

A ritual is a religious ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed in a particular order. Something done according to a ritual is done in a ritualistic way.

Prototype

A prototype is an early version of a product, built to test out how well the design works. Prototypes are used in all areas of design, and are particularly important in nautical design, where human safety is greatly affected by risk of drowning. Digital 3D modelling is used in most industrial prototypes today.

Repatriate

To repatriate an object is to return it to its country of origin. Today, many African countries are asking for their stolen fetishes and artefacts to be repatriated from British museums.

The Middle Passage

The Middle Passage was the stage of the transatlantic slave trade in which millions of enslaved Africans were transported to the Americas as part of the triangular slave trade. This journey could take 1-6 months depending on weather. It was the most deadly part of the journey, with millions of enslaved people dying of disease due to the violently inhumane conditions.

The Zong Massacre

This was a mass killing of more than 130 enslaved African people by the crew of the British slave ship Zong in 1781. The slave traders had taken out insurance on the lives of the enslaved Africans as cargo, which was common practice at the time. When the ship ran low on drinking water following navigational mistakes, the crew threw enslaved Africans overboard. 10 enslaved African people, in a display of defiance at the inhumanity of the slavers, chose to commit suicide by jumping into the sea. When they reached land, Zong's owners made a claim to their insurers for the loss of the enslaved Africans. The insurers refused to pay; this led to a court case concluding that the murder of enslaved Africans was legal and that insurers could be required to pay for those who had died. This decision was later appealed, and the horrors of the Zong massacre became fuel for the abolitionist movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Reimbursement

The action of repaying a person who has spent or lost money.

Ambiguous

Open to more than one interpretation, or not having one obvious meaning.

Diasporic

A diaspora is the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland. The descendants of African people enslaved and transported to the Americas make up part of the African diaspora. When something or someone is from a diaspora, it becomes diasporic.

Traditional African Religions

This is a general term for the wide and complex range of traditional African beliefs, many of which pre-date colonialism and are based around animism: the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spirit. These traditions are typically orally passed down from one generation to another through folk tales, songs, and festivals, rather than written down. They usually include beliefs in spirits and multiple gods, ancestor worship, magic and traditional African medicine.

Mami Wata

Mami Wata is a popular water spirit worshipped across Africa and its diaspora. Mami Wata is often described as a mermaid-like figure, with a woman's upper body. In

Cameroon, Mami Wata is said to cause the strong undertow that kills many swimmers each year along the coast.

Looted

To loot is to steal, and particularly to steal a very valuable object. Loot can also refer to one or more stolen objects.

Chain messages

A chain message is a letter, email, text, or social media message that aims to convince the receiver to send it on to more people. Chain messages sometimes say a good thing will happen if you pass it on, which is common in Christian chain messages. Sometimes, however, they say that something bad might happen if you don't pass it on. They can also spread fake news and false information.

The Flying Africans

This myth arose after a group of enslaved Igbo (an ethnic group mainly present in modern-day Nigeria) people were transported to Georgia in 1803 and enacted mass suicide by walking into a creek and drowning. In Gullah (an African-American ethnic group present in lowcountry U.S.) myth, the Africans grew wings and were able to fly back home across the Atlantic.

Memes

An Internet meme is a culturally significant image that is spread via the internet. Memes are designed to be shared widely via email, social media, and messaging apps. If they achieve significant popularity, they are said to 'go viral'. When a meme has been screenshotted and shared multiple times to the point that it is pixelated, it is said to be 'deep fried'.

The Benin Bronzes

The Benin Bronzes are a group of several thousand metal plaques and sculptures that decorated the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin, in modern-day Nigeria. They were created from the 13th century by artists of the Edo people. Most of the bronzes were looted by British forces during the Benin Expedition of 1897, and are now held in art collections across the world, most significantly in the British Museum.

Drexciya

Drexciya was an American electronic music duo from Detroit, Michigan, consisting of James Stinson and Gerald Donald. It is also the name of an underwater country imagined by the duo: Drexciya is populated by the unborn children of pregnant African women who were thrown off a slave ship, who adapted to breathe underwater in their mothers' wombs.

Nollywood

The Nigerian popular film industry, based in Nigeria's capital, Lagos. The name is a combination of Nigeria and Hollywood. Nollywood became popular in the 1980s and

1990s, with films made using home recording equipment and sold on video tapes. Nowadays, Nollywood films are often made with large budgets and released in cinemas and online.

Colonialism

When one country invades another country and takes control of some or all of it, creating a colony. The colonisers gain access to free/cheap labour and precious resources, which they can use to make their home country richer and more powerful. Portugal was the first country to create a colony in Africa, but during the 19th and 20th century the British Empire was the largest empire in history, with colonies on every continent except Antarctica.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

This involved slave traders transporting enslaved African people to the Americas on a mass scale between the 16th and 19th centuries. The slave ships were built in Europe, and shipped European goods to West Africa (then known as the "Slave Coast") to exchange for slaves to sell in the Americas, where the ships were filled with American goods to sell back in Europe - this was also known as the triangular slave trade. The main countries that profited from this trade were the United Kingdom, Portugal, and France. For over 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were the victims of the transatlantic slave trade.

Euro-Christian

This word is a combination of European and Christian. Euro-Christian is the most common identity description in the world's most developed countries. These countries, which span Northern America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, make up Global North, or the Western world. People in the Global North are more likely to have European ancestry and identify more closely with Christianity than other world religions. They are the nations that have profited the most from colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade.