ACADEMIC LECTURE • RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP CLOSING

African Cultural Futures and Decolonial Archives

Reconfiguring Angolan Public Collections as Epistemic Infrastructures within Transnational African Visual Histories

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ANGOLA • AFRICA • TRANSNATIONAL VISUAL HISTORIES

Who produces knowledge about African art?

Archives and collections preserve objects — and the decisions that make them historically legible.

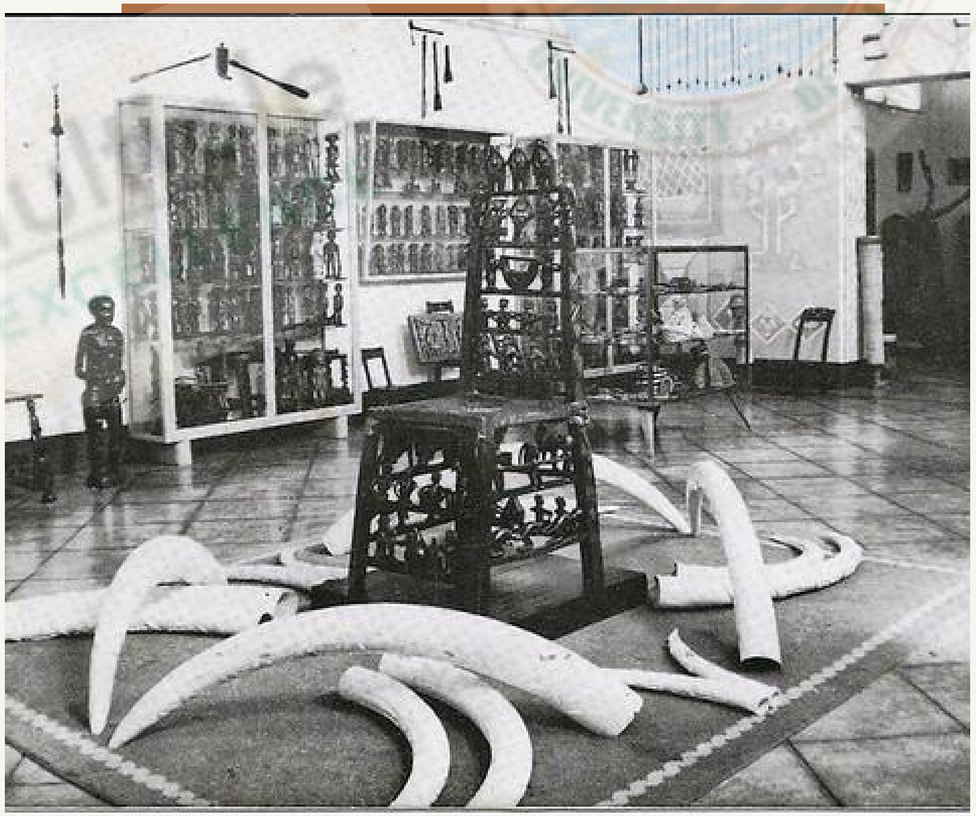
- Who organises and describes collections?
- Who interprets the records and objects?
- Whose knowledge is authorised, circulated and remembered?



Why rethink African art histories?

The issue is not a simple opposition between African and non-African scholarship.

- Art history intersects with anthropology, ethnology, archaeology and museum studies.
- Colonial categories often privileged ethnicity, ritual function and social typologies.
- Interpretative authority has been unequally distributed.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Archives, epistemic agency and African visual histories

01 | ARCHIVES, POWER & HISTORY



Ann Laura Stoler
Along the Archival Grain (2009)

Michel-Rolph Trouillot
Silencing the Past (1995)

Achille Mbembe
"The Power of the Archive and its Limits" (2002)

02 | EPISTEMIC AGENCY



Linda Tuhiwai Smith
Decolonizing Methodologies (2021 ed.)

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni
Epistemic Freedom in Africa (2018)

03 | MUSEUMS, AFRICAN ART HISTORIES & DIGITAL FUTURES



Chika Okeke-Agulu
Postcolonial Modernism (2015)

Annie E. Coombes
Reinventing Africa (1994)

Roopika Risam
New Digital Worlds (2018)

Ciraj Rassool
Museum, heritage and decolonisation scholarship

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

From archives as repositories of memory to collections as epistemic infrastructures for African Cultural Futures.

Theoretical references informing the research — selected works.

Three institutional histories — distinct chronologies

Each institution must be studied through its own provenance and documentary context.

- IICA — research, documentation and institutional knowledge.
- Museu do Dundo — collecting, research, exhibition and documentation of cultural life.
- Museu Nacional de Antropologia — collections, records and documentary classification.

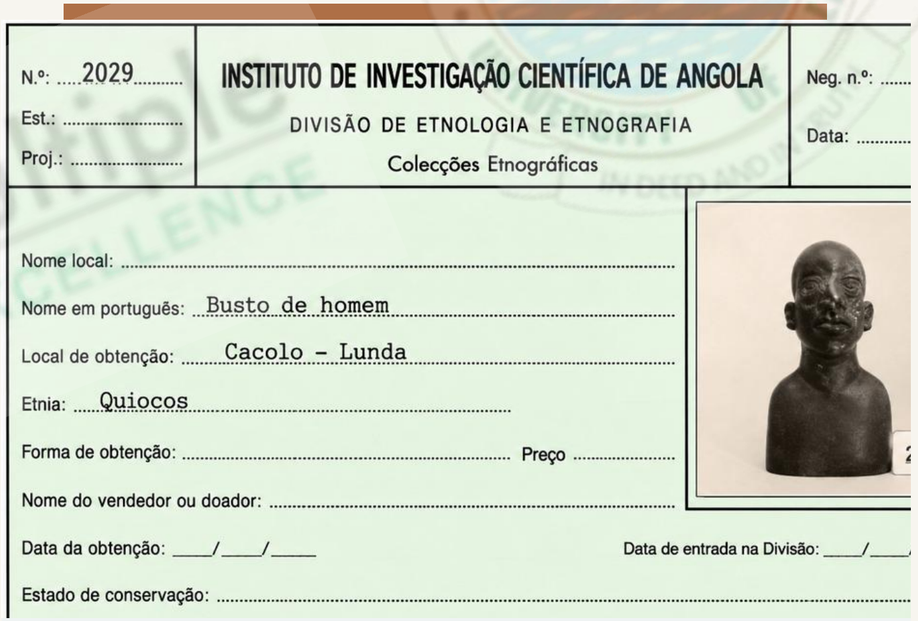


The map indicates places, not a single institutional lineage. Each history requires its own chronology and provenance.

The colonial archive is not transparent

A classification fiche is evidence of documentary practice — not a neutral description.

- Read fields, terminology, omissions, producing unit, date and provenance.
- Do not generalise from one document to an entire institution.
- Reconstruct post-1975 transformations; do not presume continuity.



N.º: 2029
Est.:
Proj.:

INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO CIENTÍFICA DE ANGOLA
DIVISÃO DE ETNOLOGIA E ETNOGRAFIA
Colecções Etnográficas

Neg. n.º:
Data:

Nome local:
Nome em português: Busto de homem
Local de obtenção: Cacolo - Lunda
Etnia: Quiocos
Forma de obtenção: Preço
Nome do vendedor ou doador:
Data da obtenção: ____/____/____
Data de entrada na Divisão: ____/____/____
Estado de conservação:

IICA — Division of Ethnology and Ethnography
Ethnographic Collections fiche

FIELDS | TERMINOLOGY
OMISSIONS | PROVENANCE

Ethnographic Classification Record No. 2029 — Institute for Scientific Research of Angola, Division of Ethnology and Ethnography. Ethnographic Collections. Object identified as “Male Bust”, originating from Cacolo, Lunda.

African researchers as knowledge producers

Decolonial work is more than digitisation or replacing one authority with another.

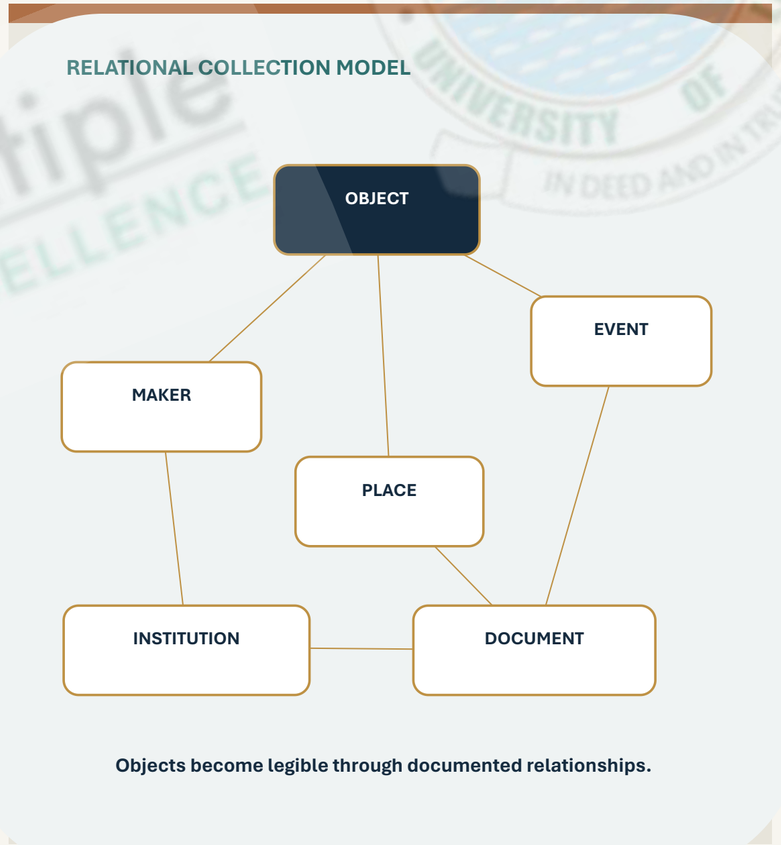
- Recognise African researchers, institutions and communities as interpreters.
- Make plurality and disagreement visible; avoid a single homogeneous “African perspective”.
- Build consent, attribution, cultural rights and differentiated access into research.



From object records to relational collections

A practical sequence for reconfiguring public collections.

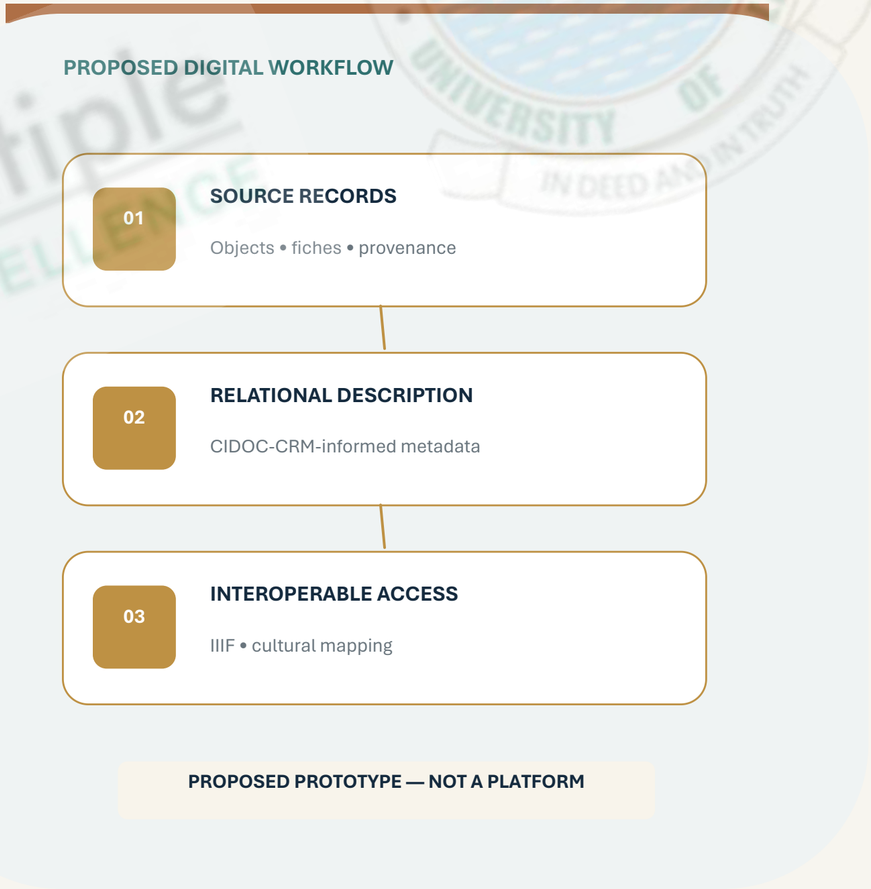
- Reconstruct institutional and object histories.
- Analyse documentary categories and silences.
- Connect objects, makers, places, events and communities.
- Support ethical, plural interpretation.
- Experiment with CIDOC-CRM, IIIF and digital cultural mapping.



From records to connected knowledge

Technology can support relationships and access; it cannot decolonise knowledge by itself.

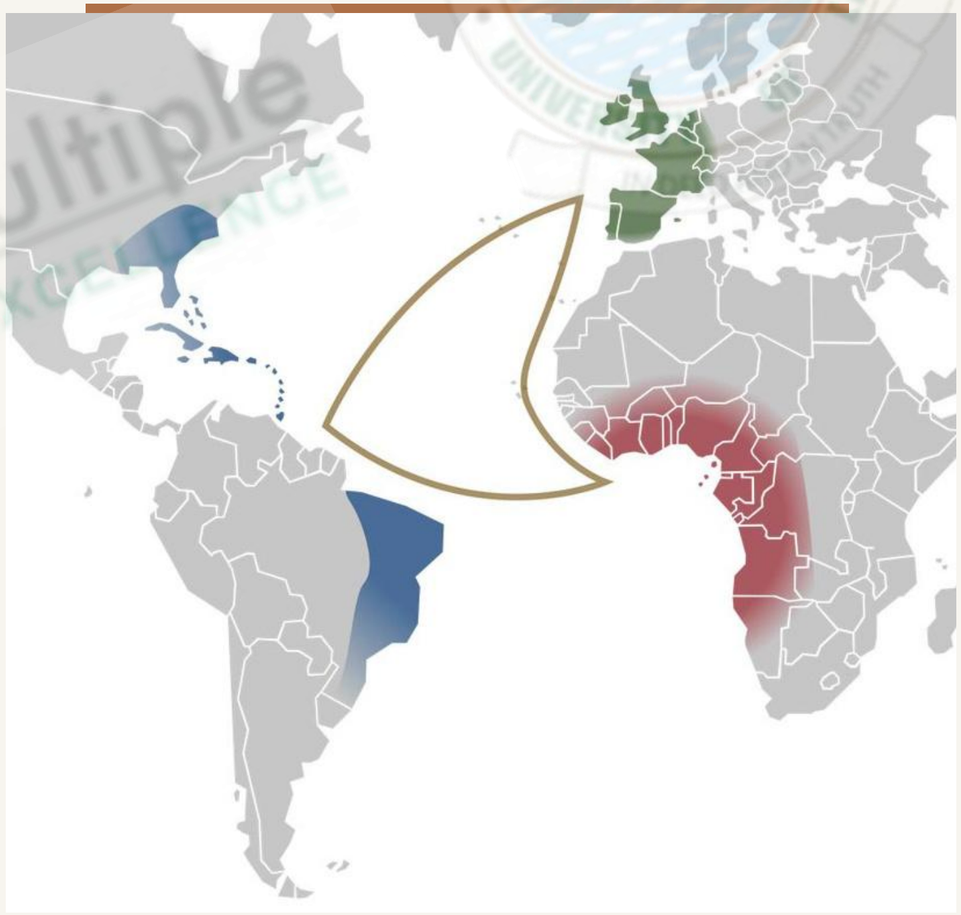
- CIDOC-CRM: model relationships among objects, people, events, places and institutions.
- IIIF: support interoperable delivery and comparison of digital images.
- Digital cultural mapping: a proposed prototype, not a completed platform.



What do we mean by African Cultural Futures?

The capacity to produce, organise, preserve, interpret and circulate knowledge.

- Connect local historical specificity with wider African and global debates.
- Trace intra-African connections, the Atlantic, Brazil and diasporas.
- Strengthen African research infrastructures and intellectual authority.



Why Lagos? The IADS / AMRC contribution

Angola remains the empirical focus; Lagos is the space of critical exchange.

- An interdisciplinary setting for reflection and transregional dialogue.
- Bring Angolan institutional experience into wider African debates.
- Open possibilities for seminars, joint publications, exchange and collaborative research.



From Angola to Nigeria: a Pan-African conversation

LUANDA / ANGOLA

Lusophone histories
Public collections
Archives
Art education
Cultural policy

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LAGOS / NIGERIA

West African intellectual traditions
Museums
Archives
Universities
Artistic networks

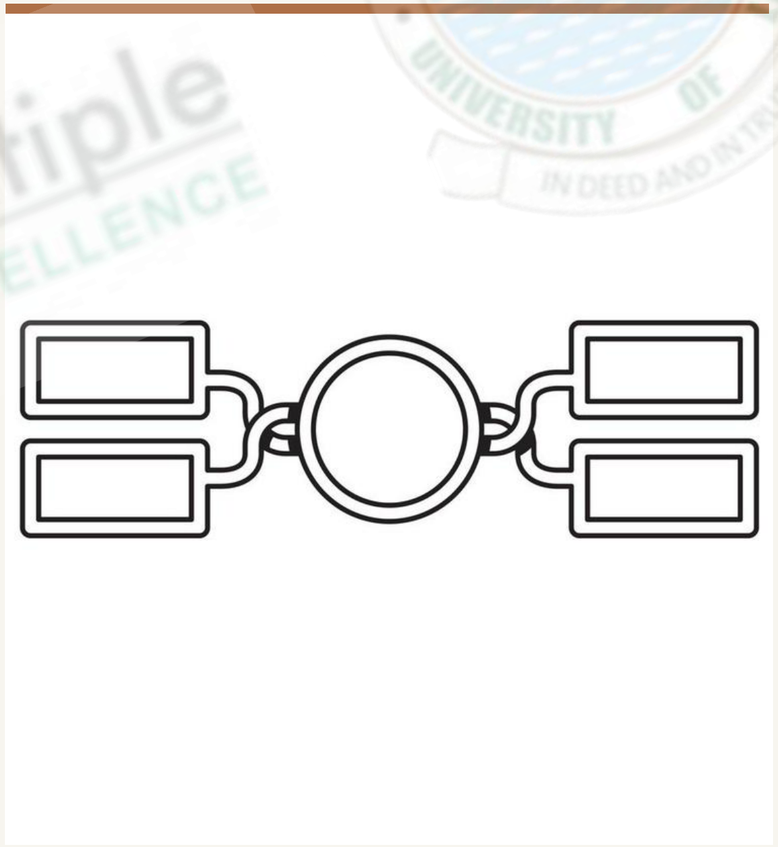
LAGOS AND LUANDA AS CO-PRODUCERS OF AFRICAN ART HISTORY

Multiple African centres of knowledge production — connected, not competing.

What this research contributes

A connected conceptual, empirical, methodological and prospective contribution.

- CONCEPTUAL — public collections as epistemic infrastructures.
- EMPIRICAL — connected study of IICA, Museu do Dundo and Museu Nacional de Antropologia.
- METHOD — institutional history, documentary analysis, relational metadata and ethical interpretation.
- PROSPECTIVE — South–South cooperation and new African visual histories.



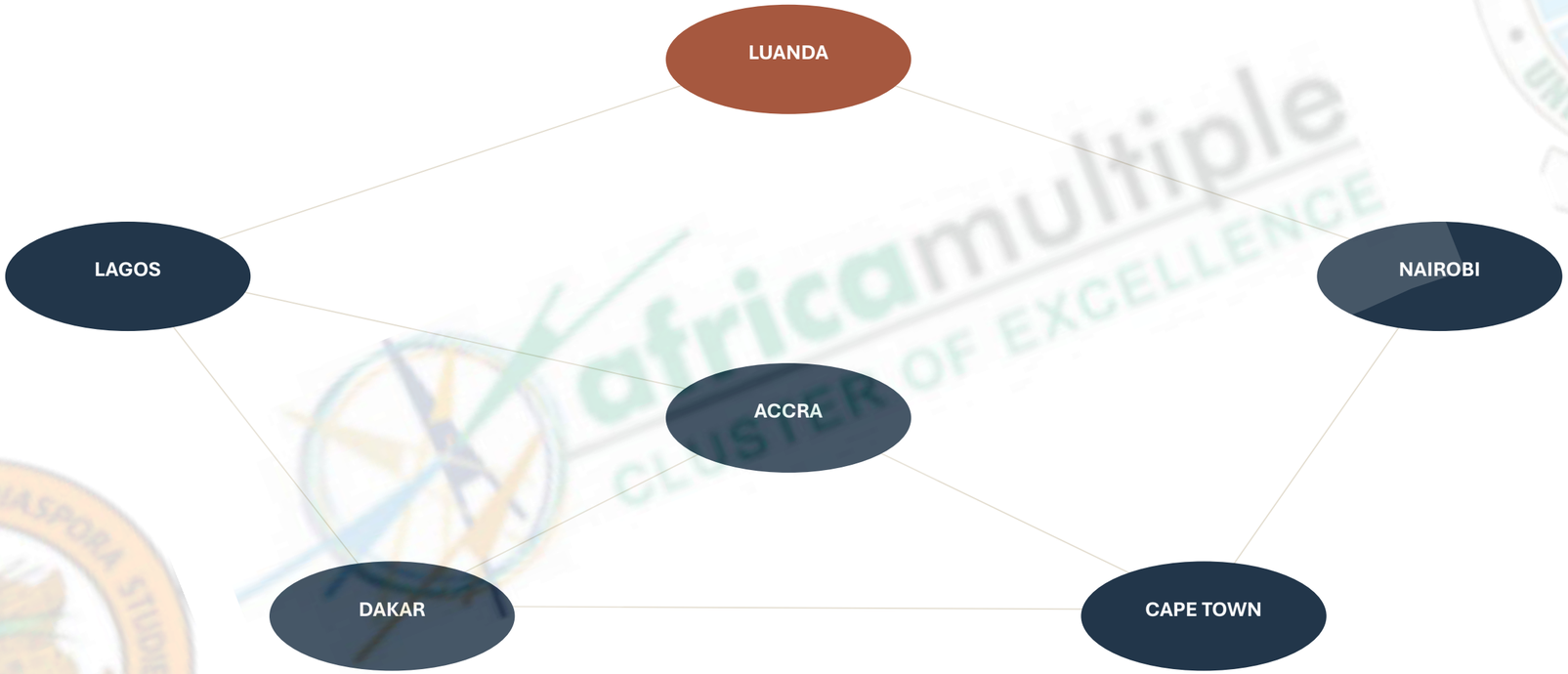
Preservation is necessary — but not sufficient

Reconfiguration requires attention to provenance, classification, interpretation and authority.

- African collections are resources for researching and shaping the future.
- African art histories must also be produced through African intellectual agency.



From centres and peripheries to networks



Multiple centres. Distinct histories. Shared knowledge networks.

What needs to change?

01	OBJECTS	→	RELATIONSHIPS
02	ARCHIVES	→	EPISTEMIC INFRASTRUCTURES
03	REPRESENTATION	→	AFRICAN AGENCY

The question is not only how Africa is represented, but who produces the categories.

The future is shaped by the infrastructures through which the past becomes available



If collections become accessible, relational and plural, the archive can become an instrument of future-making.

CLOSING • IADS / AMRC

Thank you

“African art histories should not only be histories about Africa; they must also be histories produced through African intellectual agency, institutional capacity and plural ways of knowing.”

AFRICAN CULTURAL FUTURES • EPISTEMIC AGENCY • SOUTH–SOUTH KNOWLEDGE

Jorge Gumbe | University of Lagos | 2026