

# Cultural patrimony and cosmopolitanism

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



Cultural Patrimony and Cosmopolitanism Art reflects the true character of any civilization at a certain stage. It is natural to find that the material emblems of architecture and sculpture should give the best example of the ideals which our ancestors held. 1 In chapter eight of his book, titled *Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?* Appiah points out to the fact that some museums in the west parts of the world have massive collections of artifacts which were stoles from poor countries during colonial eras. For instance, in 1801 Lord Elgin appropriated the classical period sculptures from the Parthenon on the acropolis. They became the property of British 15 years later, and centuries later, the Greek government formally asked their return and opened a museum in Athens to house the sculptures. 2 There is a t tag of war on whether to return the sculptures to Greece or let them remain in London. Kwame Appiah has given us an approach to this dilemma and this paper analyzes the case of the Parthenon Sculptures in Britain museum using the two concepts by Kwame; the cultural patrimony and cosmopolitanism. The point is that these artifacts should be returned to Greece because Greeks have an inalienable right to their cultural heritage. The first problematic case, that faces debate on the repatriation of the Parthenon sculptures to Greece, is based on the ideology of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is an ideology that all, human ethnic groups, live as a single community anchored on a common morality. Kwame Appiah has it that cosmopolitanism inheres in a situation where individuals from varying locations establish relationships of mutual respect despite their differences in beliefs. 3 In this case, one would argue that the Parthenon sculptures can still remain in Britain. According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism has two parts; first, we have obligations to other

people beyond those who are close to us such as; our kin and compatriots. Secondly, we should take an interest in the lives, beliefs and practices of others. In this respect, Greeks have the obligation to the other parts of the world by relinquishing their effort to reclaim their artistic heritage, but whatever obligation that they might have to the foreigners, that obligation should not supersede the obligations they have to those people most familiar to their land. It is from this premise that the Greek art should be housed in Greece, and not in a far land where common Greeks cannot access them. The Greek artists had an obligation for the future generation when they sculptured their artifacts, and their first obligation was to give a heritage to their immediate descendants, not the foreigners in the far land. The second point in this case lies in the controversy on who owns the Parthenon sculptures. This is where the case of cultural patronage in the Parthenon sculptures emanates. Scholars, who are for the Britain museum maintaining the Parthenon sculptures, argue that the modern nation states have unfounded connection with the ancient cultures they claim to represent. Kwame Appiah analyzes that cultural patronage does not reside at the culture and people from whom they were taken, and thus, if the artifacts have potential value to all human beings they should belong to all humanity. Further, Kwame Appiah eludes that if we assume that art belongs to cultures that give it significance it deserves, the most art does not belong to a national culture at all. 4 Kwame Appiah argues that, there is the value when cultural heritage belongs to all human being, as in the Nok sculptures in Nigeria. 5 However, this argument is subjective when we consider the case of Greek sculptures, which do not benefit Greeks from the London Museum.

Even if these artifacts belong to the bigger world, the people of Greece should not be denied their first-priority right to experience their cultural values. In arguing this point, Kwame Appiah has it that artistic property belongs to the states with its cultural patrimony, and from where outsiders can appreciate it. <sup>6</sup> This way, the sculptures should be returned so that, other people from the rest of the world will appreciate Greece artifacts and culture; when expressed from Greece soil and by Greek's initiative. <sup>7</sup> In conclusion, the fact that globalization should not be allowed to constrict homogeneity defends the point that Britain should release the sculptures and let other people view them from their cultural patrimony. The obligation that Greece has for the foreign countries must not go beyond a disservice to the Greeks. The Parthenon sculptures' nationality has been alienated and ignored because they are considered as belonging to another nationality. Therefore, there is no need of a sculpture residing in a country where it is threatened or endangered by the idea that it is not a proper part of their cultural heritage. Notes