

GRIFFMUN 2024

Ethics of Foreign Artifacts in National Museums

*UNESCO I (SUSTAINING
CULTURAL IDENTITIES
THROUGHOUT
EXPLOITATION)*

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2024

Head Chair
Ally Hatakeyama

Vice chair
Emma Lee

Legal
Roshan Rajalingam



Committee: UNESCO

Topic: Sustaining Cultural Identities Throughout Exploitation

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Please send your position papers and any questions to

unesconovice1griffmun24@gmail.com by January 28th, 11:59 pm!

Committee: UNESCO

Topic: Sustaining Cultural Identities Throughout Exploitation

Committee Description

The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, is an international body of the United Nations that strives to contribute to universal peace and security by utilizing education, culture, and science in an effort to promote “knowledge sharing and free flowing of ideas to accelerate mutual understanding and a more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives” (UNESCO). UNESCO aims to cultivate a culture of respect and cultural diversity throughout the world, aiming to foster intercultural dialogue and sustainable development in line with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda. In respect to the exploitation of certain cultural identities and cultural appropriation, “the UN agency emphasizes the importance of complying with copyright law, but also not perpetuating the negative stereotypes of certain groups” (Stancescu).

The main focus of this committee is to understand, discuss, and expand on methods of protecting diverse cultures from misappropriation and exploitation. Throughout the development of a clear consciousness for the origins and implications of cultural appropriation, as well as its prevalence in modern-day society, the dias hopes that delegates will approach this topic in an academic and objective manner at GRIFFMUN 2024.

Chair Introductions

Head Chair: Ally Hatakeyama

Hello delegates! My name is Ally Hatakeyama, and I am thrilled to serve as your head chair for GRIFFMUN 2024! As a junior and the Undersecretary of Communications for Los Alamitos High School’s MUN program, I am extremely appreciative of the valuable skills and

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memories MUN has provided me with. My experience in the program has led to the development of a continuous passion and excitement to immerse myself in the realm of current, global issues and learn about constructive debate, effective collaboration and communication, and efficient research in creating solutions. It has provided me with the breadth and opportunity to learn more about myself and the world around us, and it's truly an enlightening experience.

Outside of MUN, I love being able to channel these "MUN" skills in giving back to the community through service as the president of the LAHS Emerging Leaders club, as well as actively engaged and on the boards of the Asian Culture and CSF clubs on campus. My favorite pastimes include reading, watching Chinese dramas (feel free to share recommendations!), and eating sushi. As an introvert and more on the quiet side myself, I understand how collaborating with other delegates or improvising speeches can be intimidating, so I find it important to not only come prepared, but to also believe in yourself and your solutions! Confidence and preparation shine through during committee, and we're excited to meet all the delegates, fostering a welcoming, engaging environment to encourage thought-provoking debate and collaboration. I'm looking forward to a wonderful conference with everyone; best of luck!

Vice Chair: Emma Lee

Good (Morning) delegates! My name is Emma Lee, I am deeply excited to attend as your vice chair for this year's GRIFFMUN conference! MUN has been extremely beneficial for me personally, by growing my self-esteem in public speaking, opened my perspective on global affairs, and has ultimately helped blossom my confidence. Aside from MUN, I am the junior class president of the Associated Student Body (ASB) for Los Alamitos High School, in addition I am on the board of directors for the LosAl Snow club, and the LosAl Care club. Outside of

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school, I train in the Martial Art Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and in my spare time I love surfing early in the morning, as well as, my extreme passion for reading. I understand that today some of you may be a little nervous but I encourage everyone to have confidence and allow yourself to savor this experience. I am thoroughly excited that all of you are here today and I look forward to a memorable conference. Wishing you all the best!

Legal:

Hello delegates! I'm Roshan Rajalingam, and I will be your legal for your 2024 GriffMUN. I am currently a junior at Los Alamitos High School and this is my first year in MUN. MUN has provided me with many opportunities and skills I'll carry for the rest of my life. I would like to think that MUN has expanded my skills in communication through the numerous speeches and unmods which I was extremely unprepared for but still managed somehow. MUN has also given me the opportunity to meet many people I couldn't imagine meeting otherwise and people who I genuinely enjoy spending time with. I have also been fortunate enough to travel with MUN to such places as New York and Berkley which have provided me with many cherished memories.

In addition to MUN, I am the vice-president of the Los Alamitos STEM Ed Club. On weekends I enjoy playing video games with friends. Most recently we have been playing "Last Train Outta' Wormtown" and "Lethal Company" (great games). I also enjoy spending time with my family and especially my dog. I hope that we can give you guys an amazing GriffMUN experience and I look forward to meeting you all!

Background

As the sustainability of cultural identities finds itself to be a broad topic, this year's UNESCO committee focuses on its multifaceted connection with cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation, characterized by the uptake of elements from a culture without adequate understanding or respect, has regrettably become a normalized phenomenon, particularly when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical manner. First used in the 1980s within various academic circles, the term has permeated mainstream discourse and media, contributing to a lack of societal awareness and consciousness surrounding the true implications of this issue. It has been categorized as a form of neo-colonialism, drawing significant parallels as both emphasize power imbalances, economic exploitation, cultural erasure, and stereotyping or exoticization. The exploitation subcategory finds itself to be the most relevant throughout today's society, with examples of such cultural appropriation appearing in clothing, music, artifacts, religious symbols, and more relating on a different level. It is rooted in a profound, historical imbalance of powers between minority and majority groups, with traces of what is now considered cultural appropriation and exploitation found since colonial times.

Throughout history, an extremely insensitive yet prominent example lies in the use of the Swastika and the Hakenkreuz. The Swastika, originally the Sanskrit word for "that which brings health and prosperity," is often used as a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; it has been used in several religious contexts and iconography, spanning not only religions but also countries, including India, Japan, China, and Mongolia. Although this symbol represents a positive, peaceful symbolism within these cultures, in 1930, a version of the Swastika was appropriated by the German government as its party insignia. Since then, it has become a

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well-known and identifiable mark of the Nazi Party and its horrific history and atrocities. The Sanskrit symbol and the German word, Hakenkreuz, which means a crooked cross, were used as a flag and symbol for the Nazi dictatorship and beliefs, leading to a respected cultural and religious symbol being horribly misrepresented on a global, influential scale. The appropriation of the Swastika serves as an intense reflection of the disrespect and cultural erasure that can result from such appropriation.

Unfortunately, significant demonstrations of this phenomenon still appear in the 21st century. Another notable, infamous example represents an imbalance of power dynamics and sensitivity in the case of the Washington Redskins National Football League Team. The mascot of the team is a Native American wearing a headdress, and as Native American populations have a long history of being mistreated and abused, the name "Redskins" and the mascot serve as a harsh, insensitive reminder of the oppression and mistreatment suffered by Native Americans. A growing public awareness has fought for changing the name, yet it was only in 2022 that protests could sway the franchise into renaming the team as the "Commanders." This example represents a startlingly current example of how cultural appropriation spans diverse sectors and implications in today's world.

With economic factors impacting indigenous groups and groups prone to exploitation, the discussion of economic compensation and reciprocity becomes prevalent. Current frameworks and movements to protect cultural heritages and prevent appropriation in sustaining the identities of diverse minorities have occurred locally, nationally, and internationally. However, although legal considerations such as intellectual property laws, trademark laws, cultural heritage protection laws, and corporate ethical guidelines and responsibilities aim to encompass cultural appropriation, the international community lacks the capacity for enforcement and action. While

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intellectual property laws can protect cultural expressions, designs, and symbols with trademarks, copyrights, or patents, the limiting factor is a concrete definition of cultural appropriation and its consequences. Likewise, copyright law protects certain "products of creativity," but other forms of creativity, like songs, stories, or designs, fall outside the scope of such laws. It is challenging to trace origins in an effort for compensation as many appropriators, individuals, or organizations have an advantage over the cultural minorities that they appropriate or exploit, and many cultural minorities lack the power to respond to such cultural disrespect appropriately.

While it is imperative to focus on the multifaceted aspects of cultural appropriation, it is also vital to centralize an approach toward efficacy and respect. In cultivating a diverse, inclusive world, it must be taken into consideration that current measures remain constrained and ineffective. As cultural appropriation becomes increasingly mainstream, it is essential to foster a more extensive breadth of awareness and growth, developing a commitment towards respect and appreciation of our world's diverse cultural expressions.

UN Involvement

The United Nations plays a significant role in the fight for justice and respect amongst diverse cultural groups. Several actions have been put into place in advocacy for cultural preservation and appreciation, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the OHCHR Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the Intellectual Property Organization Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore (IGC), and countless others.

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However, one of the most notable of these efforts was the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which took place on November 14, 1979, in Paris, France. This convention aimed to recognize that the illicit transportation of cultural property is an influential means of exploitation and disrespect, contributing to the widespread issue of cultural appropriation. The convention provides a common framework for its state parties to discuss the implications of illicit imports and exports of cultural property, delving deeper into the material and physical aspects of the issue. Another UN convention, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, focuses on human rights and the necessity for awareness and international cooperation. This convention proposed the creation of a committee to promote its objectives, providing guidance and recommendations on the best methods to safeguard cultural heritages.

These efforts are coupled with a global movement of indigenous groups and individuals advocating for the United Nations to make the practice of cultural appropriation illegal. While a grueling fight, the World Intellectual Property Organization worked in Geneva, with 189 countries, aiming to target brands that profit off of the styles, words, symbols, and overall culture of minority groups. The proposed committee has been in the works, with advocates avidly fighting to protect intellectual property and cultures, hoping currently to create effective criminal and civil enforcement laws or procedures that can prevent the appropriation of cultural identities.

While the United Nations has several fronts aiming to target this issue, there is a necessity for a more centralized, focused approach. The several conventions and committees represent an avid group of individuals who are passionate about the ban on cultural appropriation, yet the United Nations and the world need to take collective, unified action.

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Without uniform methodology and planning, sustaining cultural identities and fending cultural appropriation have a smaller chance of providing adequate, sustainable support.

Possible Solutions

In terms of the severity and prevalence of cultural appropriation and related issues in modern society, it is crucial to consider both short-term and long-term approaches to ending misrepresentation. To reach the general population, solutions involving education and awareness programs are especially effective in spreading crucial information that can help ordinary citizens do their part in respecting global culture. This may help people consider their purchasing options in terms of fair trade and ethnic economic significance, thus helping the victims of an increasingly normalized practice of cultural theft. From a more central perspective, addressing the abuse of cultural identity can be raised to the government level: through forms of legislation and policy, corporations and similar culprits can be targeted for misrepresentation, forcing them to face sanctions and similar consequences.

Additionally, affected cultures may be assisted through compensation mechanisms and supportive funding to preserve the most damaged aspects of their livelihoods. In this increasingly modern age, abuse of technology has become a significant issue, and cultural appropriation is not exempt from the multitude of injustices committed against people around the globe. Thus, appropriate use of technology should also be addressed when considering the spread of information relating to individual cultures and their characteristics. The main objective of this committee is to curb cultural appropriation while preserving the histories and livelihoods of each piece of the world's diverse cultural landscape, moving towards ending misrepresentation and misinformation in today's society. In your approaches, consider previous successes and failures

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in global approaches to protecting indigenous cultures; this includes governments, non-government organizations, nonprofits, and the United Nations itself. When discussing UNESCO and the specific topics of this committee, remember to "zoom out" and view the value and subsequent abuses of culture on a global scale, keeping in mind individual country policies and approaches to appropriately represent the cultural, political, and social identity of each nation.

Bloc Positions

- African Bloc: Due to the many diverse and long-lasting cultures of the African continent, African countries are highly concerned with the preservation and protection of indigenous cultures. African cultures are also frequently exploited and misrepresented throughout the world due to prevailing stereotypes that have been reinforced by modern media. African countries have taken actions such as mapping cultural relations to promote public image and connecting with historical roots (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) as a method of promoting both foreign policy and nation-building. Institutes supporting the preservation of individual cultural identities have also been promoted and widely supported. Regional cooperation and interaction are also encouraged due to the sheer number of indigenous cultures scattered across the continent, and collective efforts in the name of preservation are also underway. Fairtrade and other sustainable economic measures are used to ensure the livelihoods of certain native groups, and culture is becoming an increasingly crucial piece of identity for nations in the African Union.
- Asian Bloc: The hundreds of indigenous cultures across the Asian continent have attracted more attention in recent years as cultural awareness has taken on a greater role

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in modern society. In Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia especially, cultural appropriation has become a major concern of citizens and their governments, respectively. Southeast Asian countries alone are some of the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse nations in the world. Recognition of smaller indigenous communities has also become an issue, as they are often overlooked. Individual aspects of culture have also become increasingly popular in Western society, leading to a fuzzy line between appropriation and appreciation. However, some Asian nations have formed ties with European and other foreign nations to create bonds that prevent misinformation through a two-pronged approach. In short, nations in the Asian bloc have become increasingly concerned with cultural preservation and protection from misrepresentation as well as exploitation by external parties.

- **Eastern European Bloc:** Like the nations of the western half of the continent, Eastern Europe is not especially known for cultural awareness or distinction. Though there are some culturally distinct groups and traditions, the majority of the nations in Eastern Europe are not highly concerned with cultural appropriation or abuse, as it does not pose a major threat to their livelihoods. Economically, socially, and politically, culture is not considered a major issue outside of its practicality in international disputes. In this sense, the governments of the Eastern European bloc are not heavily inclined to improve the cultural awareness of their citizens.
- **Latin American Bloc:** Latin America is known for its high diversity levels due to a prevalence of indigenous peoples; this has led to strong suppression of native identities and other injustices against native cultures. The nations of Canada, Peru, Belize, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Mexico are working to reintroduce cultural preservation, especially in

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areas that are heavily dependent upon culture-based sources of income. These nations are using legislation and other new approaches to renew interest in indigenous ancestry and cultural inheritance, hoping this will spark cultural awareness and respect for non-indigenous and indigenous peoples alike.

- **Middle Eastern Bloc:** Though the Middle East has a rich cultural heritage, cultural appropriation, and related topics are not a primary concern. As culture is not necessarily relevant to the economic prosperity of the region, many do not consider it a pressing matter, and misinformation is not widely considered a threat to Middle Eastern life as a whole. Abuse of cultural reputation, especially religion, may hold some relevance due to the harm it causes to many nations' public images, but cultural misrepresentation as a whole is not exceptionally relevant to the nations of the Middle East.
- **Western Bloc:** The nations of the West, with the exception of the United States, share relatively low levels of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. As such, in this region, indigenous peoples are not a primary concern; however, in the U.S., there has been increasing awareness in recent years towards revitalizing and protecting native peoples as well as their cultures. Due to the "Westernized" global culture of today, rather than protecting an indigenous culture of their own, the majority of the Western nations make alliances with other blocs to use their resources for the sake of preserving other cultures and preventing appropriation in other forms.

Questions to Consider

1. Is your country extremely affected by cultural appropriation or similar issues? If so, what are current efforts being made to improve protection for citizens?

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2. Is it the state's responsibility to protect the indigenous cultures of their country? If so, to what extent?
3. Should other countries within the United Nations intervene if the country affected cannot provide for their people?
4. How can you change or advance your country's view on the protection of cultural identity and inclusivity? How can you approach destigmatization related to cultural or social norms?
5. What entities (schools, social services, etc) should be most involved in addressing the spread of cultural information and educating the youth?
6. Should schools be mandated to provide education focused on cultural awareness, and if so, how could countries with religious or cultural stigma approach this?

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