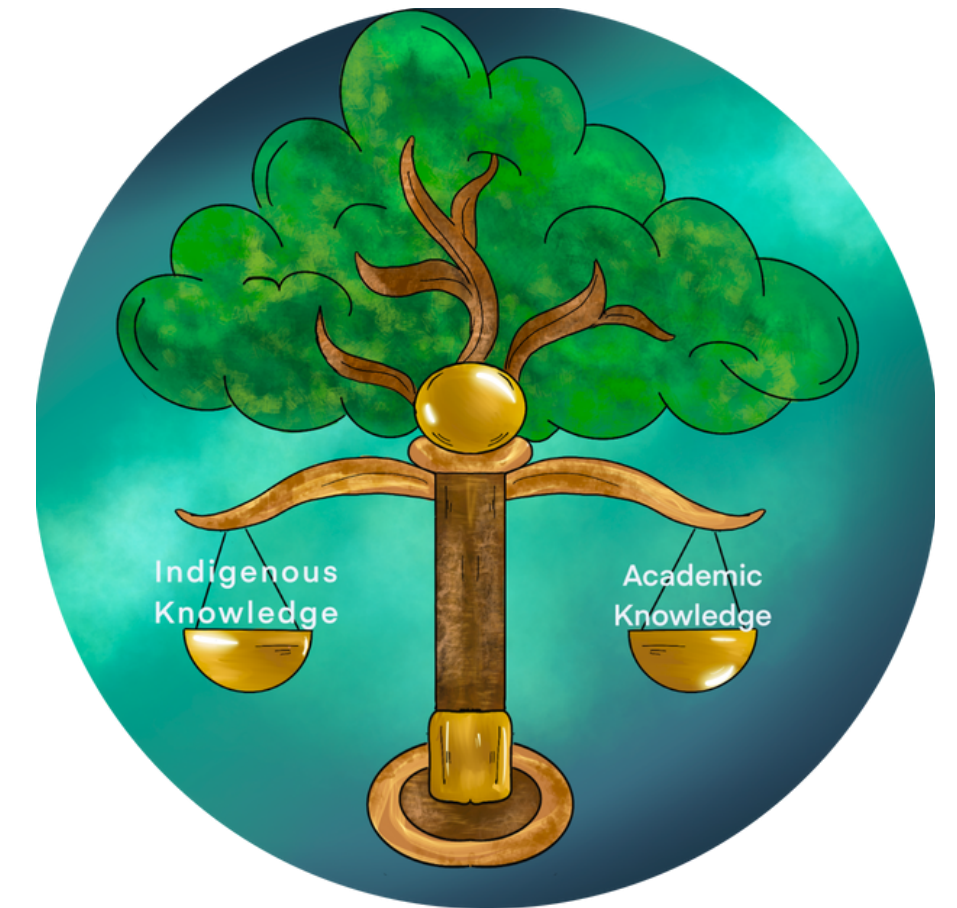


# DECOLONIZING NATURE

## Virtual Exhibition

ROYAL MUSEUM FOR CENTRAL  
AFRICA TERVUREN, BELGIUM

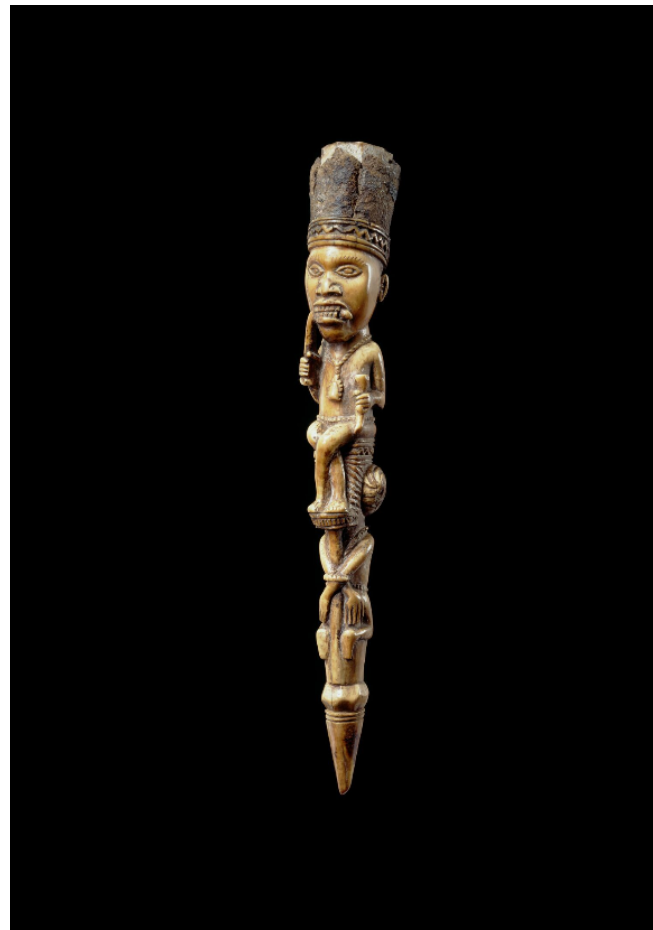


**AFRICA**  
museum

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## **ABOUT THE EXHIBITION**

The Decolonise nature student team of the Honours Programme TDI KUL invites you to participate in the Decolonise nature Virtual Exhibition, an online exhibition intended to not only question Western views on nature but also reclaim indigenous knowledge. With a group of eleven students from different disciplines and education levels at KU Leuven in Belgium, discussing nature beyond current scientific models which too often neglect and marginalise traditional/indigenous models of defining and approaching nature, has been the central focus of this project. This exhibition explores their reflections on selected indigenous Congolese artefacts from The Cultural Anthropology and History Departments of the Royal Museum of Central Africa Tervuren and how these artefacts and object embody the concept Decolonize Nature. By re-evaluating these object through the lens of decolonizing nature, these students reflect on how indigenous communities respected and co-existed with the natural world. This exhibition gives an insight into the (history, origin and cultural value of these specific objects as well as the?) reflections from the student that have been involved in this project over the last six months.





Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo,  
late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1

Alena Clark  
Reflection

Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo,  
late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1

I love this mask of the Queen of the Termites, and wanted to include it with some of the termite nests that the museum has in storage (Tine showed me). I felt that it would really represent the challenge in having both the mask and the natural reference side by side, as well as a brief description of how the masks were used, what purpose, etc. The connection between culture and nature reflects the challenge to me because of how they both rely on and participate in one another, and that we need this collaboration to survive both physically as well as mentally. Our connection to nature, and nature's connection to us is the biggest key to restoring the land and improving our lives.

Mathijs Geerts Danau  
Reflection

Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo,  
late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1

To represent this need of new/other thinking I would have loved to exhibit a mask that is called 'the queen of the termites' because in my opinion it is a good representation of the closer connection to nature that is/was present in those societies.

Additional information->

## Additional information

This mask is made from carved wood, pigment, plant fibre, cotton, and weaving, and was collected from the Kwango region in Congo. The mask is 90 x 40 x 45 cm in dimension, weighing 1,975 kg. The mask is linked to the Nkanu culture and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. The mask was acquired by the museum through purchasing it from Mon Steyaert on 1990.02.28. The mask has been exhibited from 1992.11 – 1994.08 on the exhibition "Masken" - Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt am Main, German, and, from 2015.07.12 – 2015.09.13 on the exhibition "Insecta" - Royal Palace of Brussels, in Brussel, Belgium.





Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo, late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1



Ivory sceptre depicting a chief chewing on a munkwisa root. Kongo. DR Congo, 19th century.  
EO.0.0.43708



Wangari Wambui  
Reflection

Ivory sceptre depicting a chief chewing on a munkwisa root. Kongo. DR Congo, 19th century.

An image that I would choose to represent the concept is the ivory sceptre depicting a Congolese local leader chewing the munkwisa root (herbal plant). This is because in those days (19th through 20th century), the chief authority was a commitment to the people and land he was ruling. The sceptre was in his possession to remind him of so. Passing on this and other kinds of wisdom is a way of decolonizing nature for me.

Additional information ->

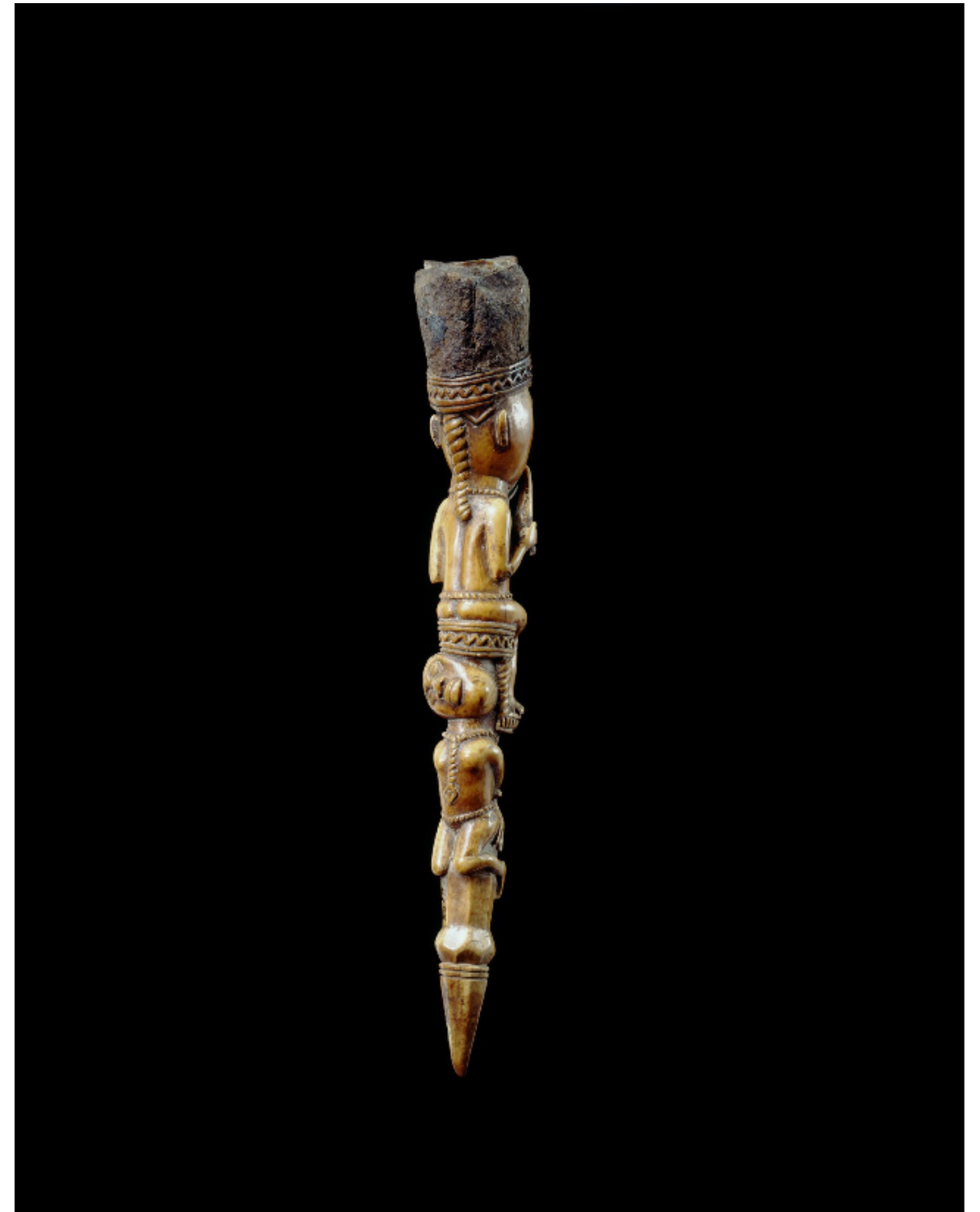
Céleste Maes

Ivory sceptre depicting a chief chewing on a munkwisa root. Kongo. DR Congo, 19th century.  
EO.0.0.43708

Congo power figures, in the act of biting a munkwisa root, symbolizes the power of life and death a chief wields over his followers. For me, this is an illustration of how, for Congolese people in the 19th century, nature is woven into every aspect of human life, including the political. The symbolic value given to natural objects is in stark contrast to the predominantly economic-instrumental value that the West attaches to nature.

## Additional information

This scepter is made from carved elephant ivory and was collected from the Sundi region in the 1930's in Congo. The object is 29 x 3,5 x 5cm and weighs 0,25kg. The scepter was produced by the Kongo in the first quarter of the 19th century, and is linked to the Yombe. The scepter has been shown in numerous international exhibitions and publications and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. The object was acquired by the museum on 1946.07.31 from Joseph Seha.





Ivory sceptre depicting a chief chewing on a munkwisa root. Kongo. DR Congo, 19th century. EO.0.0.43708



Proverb potlid depicting a crab without pincers.  
Woyo. DR Congo, early 20th century. EO.1951.7.3



Proverb potlid depicting a foot trampling a tree.  
Woyo. DR Congo, first half 20th century.  
EO.1956.88.12

Matthias Van Ongevalle  
Reflection

Proverb potlid depicting a crab without pincers. Woyo. DR Congo, early 20th century.  
EO.1951.7.3

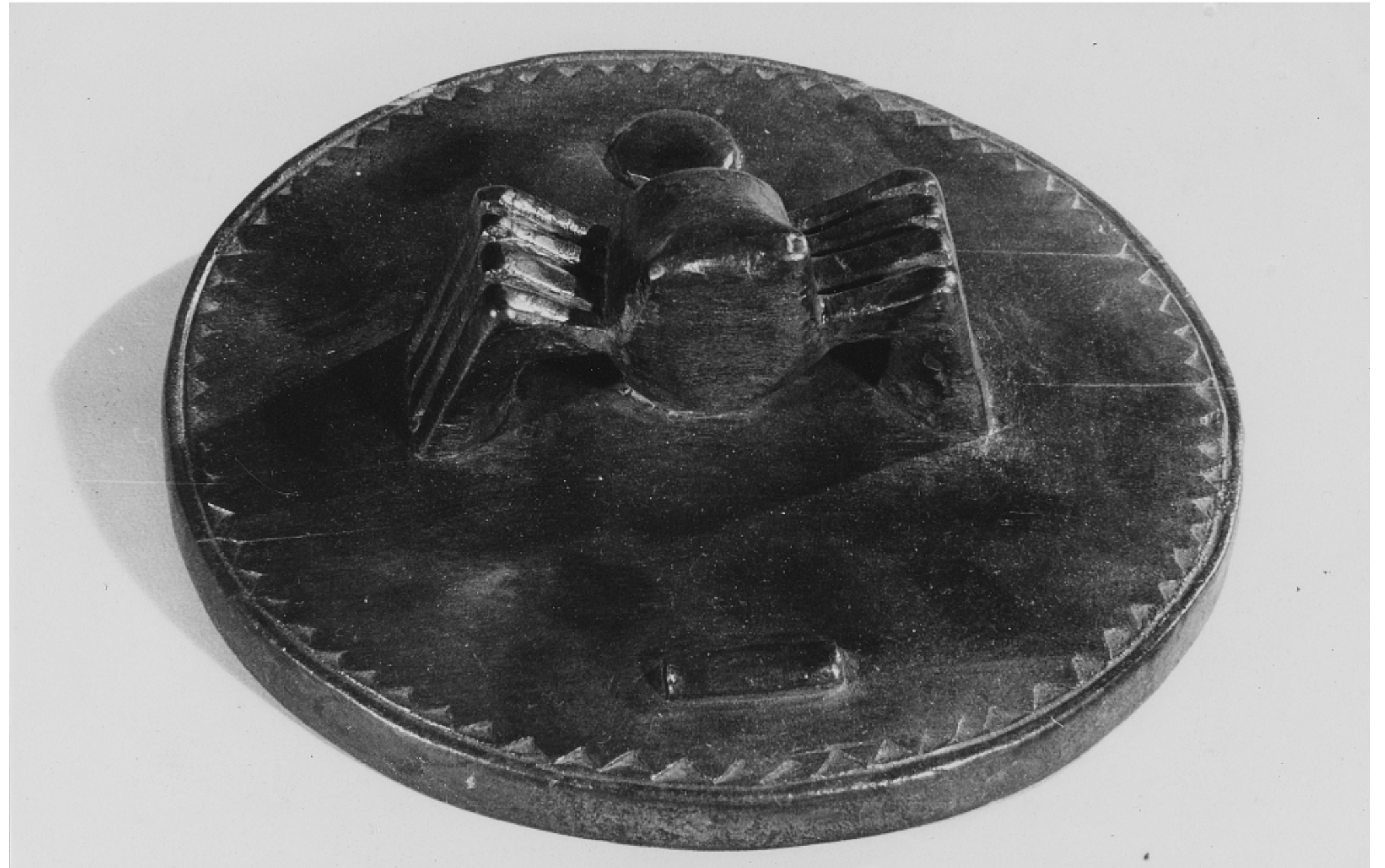
Proverb potlid depicting a foot trampling a tree. Woyo. DR Congo, first half 20th century. EO.1956.88.12

A type of objects which was completely new to me however before joining the Decolonising Nature group is those of ivory figurines and even carved-out potlids depicting proverbs originating from Congo. Such tradition of using figurines as mnemonics was very new to me. And although I have not figured out yet what meaning they carry, they are in my eyes at least essential to be exhibited to you, the visitor, as a perhaps less-obvious-thus-even-more-interesting part of indigenous cultures.

Additional information ->

## Additional Information

This proverb pot lid depicting a crab without pincers is carved from wood and is decorated with various elements which represent proverbs. This disc shaped object is 5,7 cm x 17,3 cm in size and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. This object is linked to the Kakongo and was collected in Tchinzaze, Angola. It was exhibited from 2014.10.19 to 2015.01.18 in the Museum of Contemporary Arts of the Wallonia- Brussels Federation (HORNU) on the exhibition "The curious world museum." The pot lid was purchased on 1951-02-05 by the museum from G. Dehondt.



## Additional information

This proverb pot lid depicting Proverb potlid depicting a foot trampling a tree is made from carved wood with colouring. The lid is 6 x 18 cm and weighs 0,3 kg. The lid was collected from Cabinda, Angola and is linked to the Woyo. It was later donated to the museum by I. Mesmaekers on 1956-11-23 and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. It was exhibited from 2014.10.19 to 2015.01.18 in the Museum of Contemporary Arts of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (HORNU) on the exhibition "The curious world museum" and from 2018.12.08 it became part of the Africa Museum's permanent exhibition: Languages and Music.







Fishing net. DR Congo, 20th century.  
EO.0.0.40474

Sofie Ulrix  
Reflection

Fishing net. DR Congo, 20th century. EO.0.0.40474

I chose the object fishing net. DR Congo, 20th Century. EO.0.00.40474 to represent my view on decolonizing nature, i.e., endorsing 'I am because we are' within our way of interacting with nature and society in general. To clarify this, I am citing an example of Professor T.R. Ottervanger: "Market forces make sense as long as there is a market: if frozen fish producers are fiercely competitive, using high-tech equipment to empty the seas more efficiently, there will eventually be no fish." To avoid complete depletion of natural sources which are vital for people

Additional information->

## Additional information

This fishing net is made from plant fiber, netting and twigs and is 68 x 42 x 61cm, weighing 0,2kg. There is little information regarding this object entered into the museum's archive. It was however collected from Central Africa and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. This fishing net was exhibited from 2010.04.27 to 2011.01.09 in the Africa Museum's "Congostroom-Fleuve Congo" exhibition.





Mask (monkey). Boia DR Congo, first Half 20th century. EO.1951.31.92



Kyunde mask (Buffalo). Tabwa. DR Congo, early 20th century. EO.1971.67.1

Sondre Løcka  
Reflection

In terms of objects that I wanted to portray I was thinking of the face masks. And especially the ones portraying animals. I would of course need better understanding of their meaning, but from my interpretation it is masks capturing animal spirits and powers. It is the opposite of killing an animal and hanging it on the wall for showing off "great" hunting accomplishments. Instead it is the spirit captured and used for purposes. It could be a nice way of explaining object vs relational thinking.

Additional information ->

## Additional Information

This mask representing ape-like features, is made from wood, pigment, plant fiber and feathers. It is 30 x 19 x 16 cm, and weighs 0,527 kg. This mask is culturally linked to Boa, was collected from Haut-Zaire, Congo, and, was purchased by the museum on 1951.05.23. The mask has been exhibited and mentioned in numerous publications and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department.



## Additional Information

This carved wooden face mask depicts a life-size buffalo head of 28 x 68 x 38 cm, weighing 3,35 kg. The nostrils seem to quiver in the square muzzle in which are fixed a pair of small eyes under a powerful forehead surmounted by a pair of gigantic horns. A cross in red copper nails adorns the forehead. The mask has been exhibited and mentioned in numerous publications and forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department. The mask is culturally link to the Tabwa and was produced in the 1st quarter of the 20th century. The mask was purchased from Vve Jean Verheyleweghen on 1971.12.21.







Kyunde mask (Buffalo). Tabwa. DR Congo, early 20th century. EO.1971.67.1



Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo,  
late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1



Mask ('queen of the termites'). Nkanu. DR.Congo,  
late 20th century. EO.1990.12.1

Zheng Zhou

Reflection

Medicine containers and medicine baskets can be a good example of indigenous knowledge. Throughout history, similar containers have been used in various countries around the world, and in some countries such containers are still in use. They represent the ways of nature, reflect human ingenuity and are very representative.

Additional information ->

## Additional Information

This medicine container is made from gourd, plant fibre, and earthy material. It is 15 x 8 cm and weighs 0,129kg. The container was collected from Kwilu, Congo. The container is culturally linked to the Yanzi and was produced in the 20th century. It was identified and donated to the museum by Pierre Swartenbroeckx in 1948.05.14. It forms part of the museum's ethnographic object department and from 2018.12.08 became part of the Africa Museum's permanent exhibition: Rituals and Ceremonies.

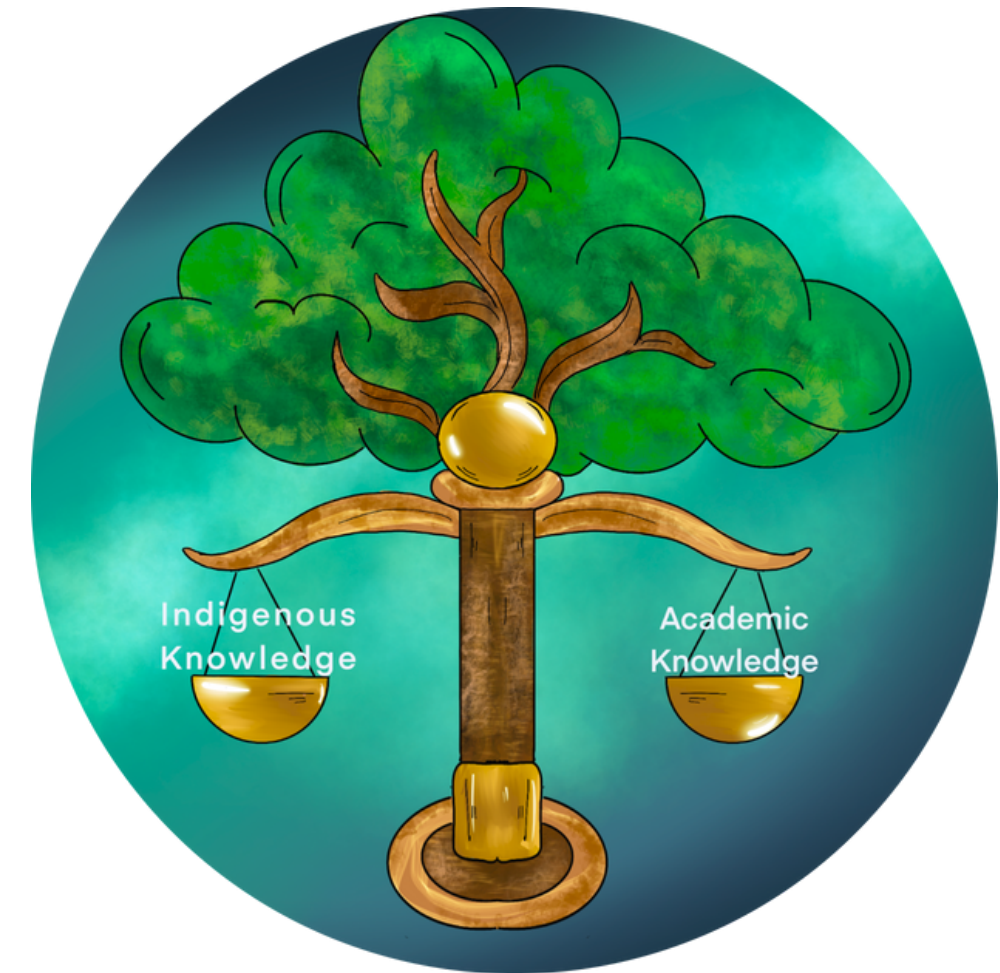


## Additional Information

This medicine basket is made from plant fibre and cloth through basket making and dyeing techniques. The basket is 8,5 x 20 x 13cm, and weighs 0,155kg. There is little information regarding this object entered into the museum's archive. It was however produced during the 19th century and collected from Boma, Congo. It was acquired by the museum in 1914.05.14 through an unknown acquisition method.



# AFRICA museum



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