

The Humboldt Forum and its »Cultural Heritage«

Panel 2

MODERATION
JÖRG HEISER

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From Mausoleum to Momentum. The Agenda of Artifacts in Humboldt's Forum***Performance-Lecture by Arlette-Louise Ndakoze***

In her performance-lecture, Ndakoze questioned (polylingual, and to the sound of a classic hip-hop loop) the Eurocentric concepts of time and history, as well as the corresponding concepts of modern science. To this day, students are told the famous anecdote of Newton, in which, while sitting under an apple tree, an apple fell on his head and he thus ›discovered‹ the law of gravity. What if we take into account in this story, which alludes to the biblical tree of knowledge, that the kingdom of Kush, which according to Genesis was part of the Garden of Eden, was located in today's Sudan? What if we find ideas of immortality in the cultures there that precede the Old Testament by a good millennium? How can we speak of conversations at ›eye level‹ when one side denies the other its own history?

Decolonisation and German Cultural Policy. Why it is so difficult to restitute colonial art***Thomas E. Schmidt***

In his lecture, Thomas E. Schmidt attempted to show how the belated debate on German colonial rule in Africa led to new questions being raised about the purportedly reliable policy for dealing with the past with regard to the Shoah. The focus on the aspect of ›art theft‹ also gave sub-Saharan societies a victim status from the outside. He thus opposes the strategy favoured by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, of a comprehensive and rapid restitution of cultural assets. He pleaded for a rejection of a blanket practice of restitution of artefacts in favour of a contextualised and individualised examination of each case. Otherwise, the opportunity would be missed to approach decolonisation as a comprehensive political project in order to deal with the consequences of colonial rule in a multidimensional way.

A Forum Without Dialogue? A Cabinet of Curiosities of the Failure of Multidirectional Politics of Remembrance***Sarah Hegenbart***

Hegenbart's lecture posed the question of whether ›dialogue‹ as a central aspect of a forum at the Humboldt Forum is implemented at all. Her analysis of the architecture, the curatorial concepts known up to that point, and the way the public was dealt with, suggested that the Humboldt Forum does not function dialogically but rather as a cabinet of curiosities driven by spectacle. In times of populism, such a refusal to engage in dialogue is

particularly problematic. There are, however, alternatives to the *Kunstkammer* (cabinet of curiosities) approach; the Museum of Vancouver, for example, has developed an exhibition of Haida artefacts together with representatives of the Haida indigenous peoples. Equally conceivable would be an open repository that offers transparency – The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, also in Vancouver, is exemplary in this respect. Here, thorough research, including the preparation of possible restitution claims, is enabled by the museum's website. A multi-directional policy of remembrance, such as that proposed by Michael Rothberg, can only be achieved in connection with museums if they work transparently and in active partnership with various communities.

DECOLONISATION AND GERMAN CULTURAL POLICY. WHY IT IS SO DIFFICULT TO RESTITUTE COLONIAL ART

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Thomas E. Schmidt

After decades of silence and non-disclosure, for the past several years a debate about the colonial past has finally been taking place in Germany. The debate is being conducted in an open and proactive manner, and for some time now it has been revolving primarily around the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, this large, ambitious museum project, which is about to open its doors and is intended to present Berlin's ethnological collections in a new way, including art from the former German colonies, especially those in Africa. The debate has been reinvigorated by the inventory report which the art historian Bénédicte Savoy and the economist Felwine Sarr prepared for the French government. In German, the report bears the programmatic title ›Zurückgeben‹ (Restitute) and makes a case for the complete restitution of all artifacts from the era of colonisation collected by museums in France and Germany.

Since then, the activities that revolve around decolonisation and claim the attribute ›postcolonial‹ seem to have one centre and only one direction. For the general public, decolonisation is largely identical with restitution, and since the necessity of coming to terms with European colonial history is no longer under discussion, there seems to be only one way to draw practical consequences from it, i.e. the restitution of museum holdings, the restitution of ›African heritage‹.

It is, however, not that clear and unambiguous, nor will it be any easier in the future. The moral aggravation of the topic with regard to museums and their willingness to restitute objects will ultimately not lead very far. It is difficult because, not only does one return something that was previously stolen, but also because, in reality, it is not so much about objects themselves but about the very act of restitution. It is a significant social act with consequences, which takes place under the eyes of the global public. The act of restitution and its circumstances are being monitored. It may find imitators, but it may also provoke resistance elsewhere. It is not only a moral act, but a gesture in the arena of international politics. In reality, the context of the problem encompasses much more than merely museum objects. More and different interests, other than ethical ones, thus come into play.

Since it is clear that the Humboldt Forum will not open in 2020 with empty display cases, no one seems to seriously expect a complete restitution of African art. In France as well, according to the impression of most observers, the process initiated by the president with great aplomb has lost momentum. Felwine Sarr bemoaned this in an interview with the German newspaper *DIE ZEIT* in late July. Why is it not progressing?

To answer this question, one could list a number of reasons. Many have been mentioned, including legal, administrative, domestic and foreign policy-related, and psychological motives. There is, however, an important factor as far as the German context is concerned, which is painfully situated in the decolonisation discourse itself, at least as it is currently presented to the general public, namely in its strong orientation towards social moral standards and its concentration on art and culture.

Savoy and Sarr are certainly familiar with all good and less good arguments, which make restitution a complicated and difficult matter. Strategically, their way out of the thicket of naysaying and delays was by all means resourceful – and, as far as mobilising

the public is concerned, effective, at least for a certain period. However, it also provoked unintended side effects.

Savoy and Sarr based their ideal of the practice of decolonisation on a model that already exists, namely the practice of the restitution of art expropriated during National Socialism to previous Jewish owners or their descendants. The restitution of ›looted art‹ is now institutionalised in Germany, i.e. it is indisputable and socially recognised; it has become an integral part of the German process of coming to terms with its past and – despite exceptions and setbacks – it actually works. As far as state ownership of art is concerned, there is no doubt that all looted art must be restituted. In the late 1990s, the ›Washington Principles‹ had already been transformed into a guideline for the course of action of all public museums in Germany. It is the hope of many activists today that, in the future, the same will be done with colonial art. The return of ›African heritage‹ should likewise be a matter of course.

The correspondences are, however, not very far-reaching. The reappraisal of National Socialism and colonialism are not congruent. Several differences are striking. After a difficult initial phase, the restitution of looted art in the Federal Republic of Germany has developed into a task for society as a whole. Even private art collections, although not legally obliged to do so, are under ethical pressure to trace provenances and, if necessary, to restitute looted objects. The view is that the gravity of the historical crime at the very least implies a responsibility for each individual German, which suggests that he or she should participate in this restitution practice. The ethical responsibility resulting from this unique historical constellation also justifies the encroachment on property rights. Formally, this applies only to museums, but indirectly, via the art trade – which is obliged to conduct provenance research – it also applies to private individuals when they wish to sell art suspected of being looted.

The situation in Africa is different. There, the regulation of the consequences of colonisation affects the relationship between states. The private possession of colonial art would not be affected by legal provisions requiring restitution, and for constitutional reasons it will not be in the future. Colonial regimes were essentially run by states, and although there was participation by the *white* population, it is not comparable to participation in Nazi rule. States are protected from mutual legal claims because they are sovereign, that is, they are considered immune in international legal relations. They can formulate and present demands on each other, i.e. express them politically or ethically, in which case the fulfillment of the demand is a concession or is done out of political expediency. Law is thus not enforced and is not created anew. For foreign policy, and not only for that of Germany, the European colonial regime and its consequences have been conclusively regulated by contract. In contrast to National Socialism, no one in this complex has demanded that legal concord be revoked at some point, that contracts be renegotiated, and that time limits be subsequently suspended. For these reasons, there is also no international agreement in the sense of ›soft law‹ that formulates similar intentions for ›African heritage‹ as expressed in the Washington Principles.

In other words, when it comes to restitution, as far as art and its ownership is concerned, the participating nations act in a symbolic, but not legal field. To make this

even clearer, there is no formal claim to the retransfer of property. The old colonial powers can, however, signal concessions with friendly gestures. The question is then whether this kind of gesture corresponds to a relationship at eye level from the perspective of African nations, or whether an old hierarchical relationship is reproduced in it.

The return of looted art from Jewish property represents the final chapter in the long history of compensation. It is not a matter of symbolism, but of claims for material compensation clearly defined under civil and international law. Such obligatory formulations are precisely what is missing when it comes to colonial art. It seems that the international community is not particularly inclined to agree on such legal or quasi-legal formulations.

Thus, when German cultural politicians claim that African countries can now legally assert their claims for restitution by submitting corresponding requests, this is only half true. For their claim is then merely a civil one and in no way affects the relationship between sovereign nations. Perhaps this explains why so few sub-Saharan states have so far made an official request for the restitution of their art. There is always a remnant of indignity in this, because – and no matter how you look at it – they will not shake off the role of a supplicant, even with a suit in a German court. Perhaps this role will even be intensified as a result.

A restitution of colonial art cannot therefore be derived from the restitution practice of looted art. One follows a firmly framed legal intention, the other remains for the time being a formally undefined project which, in France and Germany, has meanwhile at least attained the status of a governmental project. Any attempt to assert that both types of restitution are essentially identical leads to a dead end. It is precisely here, namely with art, that the desire to stimulate a significant decolonising practice demands a significant moral mobilisation. If international law does not provide an adequate solution, every effort must be made to scandalise the matter. And this, too, has recognisable consequences. The concentration on culture and its particular morality narrows, *a priori*, the prospect of how Europe could enter into a new relationship with sub-Saharan Africa in the future. The focus on art and ethics ultimately depoliticises decolonisation.

At this point, one must also critically ask why it is that works of art have shifted to the centre of our attention. The notion that art – whether as an aesthetic or ritual object – represents the identity of communities in an exclusive way; that it is essential for their self-image and their cohesion, is a very Western concept. One is forced to make a number of identity-political assumptions in order to arrive at the conviction that there is or should be a solid core in collective identities, and that this core consists above all of objects enriched with meaning, which release common memory and thereby create community. Many African societies derive their identities in quite different ways. There, the focus is more on the successful liberation from their colonisers. Their self-images are political and heroic, and the lament about an interrupted continuity of memory is by no means at their core. The focus on art theft unifies the national narratives and political realities of sub-Saharan societies. All of them are thus assigned the status of victims from the outside and on a blanket basis.

Savoy and Sarr would object at this point that their strategy is only a first step and must be followed by others. This strategy does, however, harbour a danger. With it, the issue is artificially elevated from the overall complex of decolonisation, and in the future it will be left to its own dynamics or non-dynamics as a particular cultural policy problem area. Provenance and individual case research will dominate the subject matter for years to come and administer it in this sense. This is already foreseeable. A politicised art history will then establish its own tenacious field, which will remain detached from a multi-dimensional Africa policy.

The opportunity would thus be missed to approach decolonisation as a comprehensive political project, including the foreign-policy, economic, scientific – and possibly also the previously tabooed – dimensions of international law. For the political routine of France or Germany the restitution of art does not represent a serious case of conflict. For the general public however, it is increasingly gaining an overwhelming significance. And there is no reliable and predetermined way that international politics, not even the common European one, will one day, due to public outrage, engage in concerted action merely to change the ownership of works of art. There are no signs of this, but rather only the obligatory symbolic gestures of clemency.

A new, comprehensive Africa policy is in the interest of almost all European nations – and it is also ethically necessary. In some areas, there are indeed minor new beginnings. Culture in the broadest sense must also be a component of a new Africa policy. Surprisingly, formats in which Africans and Europeans discuss with each other about the post-colonial situation hardly exist. Where they have been established, the public has so far hardly been welcome. In the future, their status could become more official, and thus also the scene of public debate. Within such formats, common standards for the restitution of art should also be developed.

The restitution of works of art should by no means be the focus of the postcolonial situation. Artifacts are not identical with ›African heritage‹. Norms derived from identity politics soothe the Western conscience, but they manoeuvre Africans into passivity. We, not they, then organise decolonisation. Such norms do not replace real politics. The post-colonial situation today is a political one.

Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow



Fig. 6: Christoph Schlingensief and Thomas Goerge, *Design for the Berliner Schloss*, 2009

Sarah Hegenbart

From the perspective of the *Löwenkämpfer* (Lion Fighter), we gaze out over the Lustgarten at a strange conglomerate: the dome of the Prussian City Palace rises above the façade of the Palace of the Republic. The palace portal consists of a mud hut, seemingly inspired by all sorts of Western stereotypes of ›Africa‹ and the architecture of this continent. Thomas Goerge designed this collage for Christoph Schlingensief as part of the architectural competition for the reconstruction of the Berlin City Palace. Schlingensief did not win with this proposal. Certainly not only because he did not adhere to the rigid guidelines that provided for a strong orientation towards the baroque palace designed by Andreas Schlüter. However, this draft does contain many elements that would be desirable for today's conception of the Humboldt Forum: an ironic handling of stereotypes that characterise Western thinking, references to Germany's own colonial history, an emphasis on the GDR's past as an essential part of the overall German historiography, and above all an ambiguity that calls for dialogue (not one, but several!).

This ambiguity arises from the juxtaposition of fragments from various cultures of remembrance: first of all, Albert Wolff's *Löwenkämpfer*, a bronze sculpture from 1861. As Volker Galperin has proven, this motif can be found in sculptures that were created at the same time by the Fon people in the city of Abomey in the West African kingdom of

Dahomey (today Benin).¹ This region was once the centre of the slave trade. While the motif of the lion fight (the strength of the human hero is all the more emphasised by the defeat of the dangerous animal) can also be found among the Sumerians, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in Greek antiquity, and in Persia, it takes on a new meaning in the context of the Altes Museum: the exoticisation of ›Africa‹, whose wild animals are defeated by the white rulers. This stereotype of ›uncivilised Africa‹ is carried to extremes by Schlingensiefel when, in his collage, he juxtaposes a mud hut as a stereotype of ›African‹ culture with Schlüter's baroque architecture. At the same time, Schlingensiefel recalls the history of the Palace of the Republic, which was completed in 1976 by a collective of the GDR's Bauakademie (Building Academy) on the site of the former City Palace and demolished only thirty years later in 2006. Since, in addition to the Volkskammer (People's Chamber) of the GDR, it housed a number of cultural spaces, it was a very popular building, the demolition of which, in the minds of many people from East Germany, was certainly tantamount to a literal act of levelling GDR history. This is all the more painful when one considers that post-colonial discourses in the GDR (as opposed to the FRG) were conducted much earlier.²

By connecting these strands of different cultures of remembrance, Goerge and Schlingensiefel establish a space for multidirectional cultures of remembrance. My thesis is that it is precisely this form of multidirectional remembrance politics that the Humboldt Forum lacks and thus prevents a dialogue – or rather dialogues in the plural. In my lecture, I would like to introduce Michael Rothberg's concept of ›multidirectional memory‹ and compare this with the Humboldt Forum's own self-image. I will then make some suggestions on how the Humboldt Forum's orientation could be made more multidirectional. The goal of such a multidirectional orientation is to enable a serious dialogue, which also expresses itself, for example, in acts of restitution.

The Concept of Multidirectional Memory

The concept of multidirectional memory is based on Michael Rothberg's publication *Multidirectional Memory, Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), the first book that brings together the results of Holocaust research and postcolonial studies to promote a change in thinking about collective memory and group identity. Rothberg is Professor of English and Comparative Literature as well as Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of California in Los Angeles and strives to critically examine whether and to what extent dominant narratives suppress or influence other cultures of remembrance in the formation of collective identity. He argues, for example, that the scarcity of resources (e.g., state funding) has led to a situation in which representatives of

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- 1 Volker Galperin, »Der Löwenkämpfer: Sumerischer Heldenmythos in Westafrika?«, in: *About Africa & the rest of the world*, 26 March 2015, URL: <https://www.about-africa.de/diverses-unsortiertes/470-der-loewenkaempfer-sumerischer-heldenmythos-in-westafrika#zitierweise> [last visit on 24 October 2020].
 - 2 See: Ulrike Lindner, »Neuere Kolonialgeschichte und Postcolonial Studies«, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 15 April 2011, URL: http://docupedia.de/zg/Neuere_Kolonialgeschichte_und_Postcolonial_Studies?oldid=125818 [last visit on 24 October 2020]. For further literature recommendations on the critical reappraisal of German colonial history in the GDR, see also note 49.

certain cultures of remembrance have had to compete with others in order to obtain resources. As an example, he cites the construction of the Holocaust Museum on the Mall in Washington, D.C., which was completed in 1993. This caused resentment among representatives of Black communities, whose injustices experienced through slavery had not yet been dealt with in a museum of equal prominence. This was to change more than twenty years later, when the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened in Washington, D.C. in 2016.

Rothberg warns against seeing cultures of remembrance as competitive and is more interested in showing the extent to which they are linked and influence each other. His multidirectional memory policy is linked to the demand of the ›multidirectional option‹, i.e. ›an ethical vision based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness and working through the partial overlaps and conflicting claims that constitute the archives of memory and the terrain of politics‹.³ How important such a demand is for the Humboldt Forum was revealed when Horst Bredekamp, one of the three founding directors, expresses his lack of understanding towards the (postcolonial) critics of the Humboldt Forum in an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* in 2017. According to Bredekamp, there were only ›thirty-four years of [German] colonial rule‹.⁴ However, he does not mention how closely the ideologies of colonialism are linked to the racism and anti-Semitism that made the Nazi dictatorship possible in the first place and thus how the colonial period continued during the Nazi era. After all, the first concentration camps were located in South Africa and Namibia. The renewed outbreak of *white* supremacy thinking, which manifests itself not only in the speeches of Donald Trump but also in the AfD (the political party ›Alternative für Deutschland‹), is also closely linked to the colonial era. Moreover, Germany still profits from the neo-colonial structures of capitalism, which would not have been able to function without an exploitation of the Global South. A remembrance of and confrontation with German colonial rule should therefore be high on the agenda of daily politics. Especially in a migration society, into which Germany is increasingly developing, there should be a need for a comparative, relational (instead of competitive) way of thinking that does not shy away from traversing borders of ethnicity and eras.⁵ A policy based on the ethics of multidirectional memory requires an idea of transnational, comparative justice that negotiates between conflicting, and at times also mutually exclusive demands.⁶ This is especially important in times when migrants in Europe are often confronted with the ghosts of the past and at the same time have to deal with the prejudices of the present.⁷ In classical antiquity, the meaning of the forum includes a platform for dialogue. In the Socratic

3 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, 2009), p.29.

4 Horst Bredekamp, »Humboldt Forum Berlin. Bredekamp: Alles bereits in Planung«, Horst Bredekamp interviewed by Anne Seidel, in *Deutschlandfunk*, 21 July 2017, URL: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/humboldt-forum-berlin-bredekamp-alles-bereits-in-planung.691.de.html?dram:article_id=391716 [last visit on 24 October 2020] [translated].

5 See: Rothberg 2009 (see note 3), p. 17.

6 See: *ibid.*, p. 22.

7 See: *ibid.*, p. 28.

sense, dialogue represents a process of *dialogesthai*, in which different actors critically question their own views through the exchange of conflicting perspectives and thereby possibly gain new perspectives. Has the Humboldt Forum so far succeeded in establishing such a culture of dialogue?

The Self-Image of the Humboldt Forum

The Humboldt Forum presents itself on its website as ›unique spaces for learning, encounters and cultural exchange in the very heart of Berlin.‹⁸ The experience-event vocabulary predominates here in a clarity that does not allow for Schlingensiefel's ambiguities. Visitors are to find ›surprising access to the collections‹ and are invited to ›Get involved!‹⁹ But in what?

The invitation sounds a bit hollow and simply boring, since visitors do not really know exactly what they are supposed to get involved in. In general, one wonders to whom this invitation is addressed. Certainly not to the descendants of those whose objects are now in the Humboldt Forum. For it is precisely these descendants who are forbidden to stay where their works of art and cultural objects have civil rights – as the former Minister of Culture and Tourism of Mali, Aminata Traoré, so aptly remarked.¹⁰ The description of the Humboldt Forum in a brochure, published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the installation of the post of German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, is also not without its problems. ›Humboldt‹ stands ›for the tradition of the Enlightenment, for the idea of a self-confident, equal rapprochement of peoples, and for the ideal of peaceful dialogue despite all differences.‹¹¹ Wait a minute, ›peaceful dialogue‹? Not a word about power structures that force the narratives to be told here? Not a word about the refusal to engage in dialogue with critics such as the coalitions: *AfricAvenir*; ›No Humboldt 2!‹; and ›Berlin Postcolonial‹? Nor a self-critical admission that Humboldt's name, whose research certainly also benefited from colonial power relations, immediately underscores the power dispositive that is set here. Why not Benin Forum, for example? Above all, not a word about Prussia, which is to be inscribed here again prominently in the identity of Germany through the City Palace. Not a word about Bernhard von Bülow, who also demanded ›a place in the sun‹ for Germany, and in whom the Prussian King and German Emperor Wilhelm II had high hopes. With the Humboldt Forum, Berlin wishes to present itself as a cosmopolitan centre with a museum and exhibition concept that has little cosmopolitan appeal, because no real dialogue is sought here. Why? In the following, I will use five examples to show signs of a refusal to engage in dialogue.

8 Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »What is the Humboldt Forum?«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/faq/> [last visit on 13 September 2019].

9 Idem.

10 See: Aminata Traoré, »So genießen unsere Kunstwerke Bürgerrechte dort, wo uns allen der Aufenthalt untersagt ist«, in: *No Humboldt 2! Dekoloniale Einwände gegen das Humboldt-Forum* (Berlin: *AfricAvenir*, 2017), pp. 170–5.

11 Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (ed.), *Im Bund mit der Kultur. Kultur- und Medienpolitik der Bundesregierung*, information brochure, Berlin, July 2018, p. 21 [translated].

Signs of a Refusal to Engage in Dialogue

1 Architecture and Urban Planning: Levelling Instead of Open Wounds

The aim is to close a ›wound‹ in Berlin's cityscape with the Palace, whereby this is historically linked to the period before the two world wars, namely the imperial era and the peak of colonialism.¹² Strands of memory are levelled here in order to close a wound that should continue to ooze until the causes for its emergence have been subjected to public criticism. In other words, not in an age in which a far-right political party comes close to winning a majority in various state elections.

The architecture itself counteracts a dialogue.¹³ By relating different cultures of remembrance to one another in his rendering, Schlingensief suggests that a new palace can only succeed in a multi-perspective way. Even though this collage may hardly be considered a serious realisation design, it has one thing in common with the submissions of other renowned architects. He does not adhere to the strict specifications, according to which three sides of Andreas Schlüter's façade must be taken on completely, and only one side may be designed independently. This raises the question of why the architecture does not already specifically promote a multi-directional remembrance policy? This could have been taken into account in the invitation to tender for the architectural competition. An example of this is a concept by the British architect David Adjaye, whose construction of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, is fundamentally characterised by an examination of African cultural history. While Kuehn Malvezzi's design, which only received the special prize, would have been much more dialogical and would have enabled organic development, Frank Stella's rationalist building with formal rigidity is the winner. To what extent a dialogue with the descendants of the formerly colonised is to be initiated remains questionable.

2 Cabinet of Curiosities Instead of Workshop

In his text *Die Wiedergewinnung einer Idee* (The Retrieval of an Idea), the art historian Horst Bredekamp justifies the necessity of displaying the ethnological collection in the former City Palace by referring to the *Kunstkammer* (art chamber) in the palace. The *Kunstkammer* emerged from the concept of the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*, in which various natural and cultural objects are brought together. However, this insinuates an exoticisation of the objects instead of a nuanced understanding based on a dialogical examination of them. Moreover, this is diametrically opposed to the original idea of the ethnological museum by Adolf Bastian, who wanted to arrange the objects in the form

12 See: dpa, »Berlins Stadtschloss: Eine Wunde wird geschlossen«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 April 2007, URL: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/berlins-stadtschloss-eine-wunde-wird-geschlossen-1434220.html> [last visit on 24 October 2020].

13 Although the art historian Peter Stephan insinuates that Stella thinks Schlüter's architecture further, I am sceptical about this. See: Peter Stephan, »Von Schlüters Schloss zu Stellas Forum«, in: *In Situ. Zeitschrift Für Architekturgeschichte*, vol. I, 1/2009, pp. 97–128, here p. 127.

of a scientific workshop in order to make it clear that, to be understood, they require an intensified dialogue.¹⁴ Bredekamp's concept is based not only on the exoticisation, but also on the aestheticisation of the objects, which for the most part, however, originate from an everyday-life context. And the exhibition of fifteen highlights hardly contributes to a better understanding of indigenous cultures.¹⁵ Rather, it is reminiscent of the *Schaukabinette* (cabinet of displays) that Adolf Bastian had already rejected. Instead, Bastian suggested that the objects should be dealt with as in a research workshop and that this blank space of knowledge about them should also be openly presented in order to encourage others to conduct further research. Instead, exhibitions such as *Vorsicht Kinder! Geschützt, geliebt, gefährdet* (Caution Children! Protected, Loved, Endangered) reveal a superficial arrogance that does not allow for a dialogue with the descendants. Instead, the objects are arranged arbitrarily for pseudo-societal themes. One alternative would be joint curating with descendants. One model could be the *Haida Now* exhibition at the Museum of Vancouver, which was developed in collaboration with the Haida Gwaii Museum and co-curated by the Haida curator Kwiaahwah Jones and Viviane Gosselin.¹⁶

Furthermore, it is essential to make the depot of the collections exhibited at the Humboldt Forum (especially the Ethnological Museum) accessible to the public. Viola König, for example, already demanded this in an essay in 2011 and repeated the demand in her lecture in the context of the lecture series »Perspectives in the Plural« at the Technical University of Munich in 2018.¹⁷ One model for this again comes from Vancouver, where the Museum of Anthropology makes its collection accessible in glass display cases instead of closing it off in the depot. This includes a digital disclosure of the holdings so that it is easier for descendants of colonised ethnic groups to assert restitution claims.

3 Cultural-Industrial Complex Instead of Expertise

The interconnection of the Museum of Anthropology with the expertise existing at the University of British Columbia could also serve as a model for the handling of the collections at the Humboldt Forum. There are already approaches in this direction, such as the newly founded Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage, which could be expanded. In addition, more staff at the Ethnological Museum would be needed to be able to deal more intensively with the origins and provenance of the objects and to enter into a dialogue with the descendants of indigenous peoples. Instead, however, the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH, whose managing director Lavinia Frey has already

14 See: for example: H. Glenn Penny, *Im Schatten Humboldts. Eine tragische Geschichte der deutschen Ethnologie* (Munich: Beck, 2019).

15 See: Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »Humboldt Forum Highlights«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/humboldt-forum-highlights/> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

16 See: Museum of Vancouver, *Haida Now. A Visual Feast of Innovation and Tradition*, URL: <https://museumofvancouver.ca/haida-now> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

17 See: Viola König, »Die Konzeptdebatte«, in: *Humboldt-Forum. Der lange Weg 1999–2012*. Baessler-Archiv. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde, ed. by Viola König and Andrea Scholz, Berlin 2011, pp. 12–62.

made some missteps, was the main recipient of financial support.¹⁸ While numerous new staff positions in the Ethnological Museum would be necessary for the conception of the collection and its reorganisation, such positions were only advertised for the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH. Although the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH no longer exists, since it was transferred to the Foundation in January 2019, the ethnologists remain understaffed. Dialogue is denied by a form of cultural industry that relies solely on spectacle and overwhelming instead of courageously opening up to multi-perspective scholarly debate. Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH propagated a politics of identity for German cosmopolitans, but this is expressed in little more than euphemistic gestures. A dialogue with critical perspectives is refused here in order not to disturb the event experience.

4 Lack of Transparency Blocks Fair Dialogue

Looking at the organisational chart of the Humboldt Forum published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2017, it becomes clear that a self-referential dialogue is taking place.¹⁹ The so-called ›Expert Advisory Board‹ has no voting rights, and it seems as if Black scholars have been included in the dialogue as stooges only at a late stage, but actually have nothing to say. Critical voices such as those of Kwame Opoku, for example, are not allowed to participate in the ›dialogue‹ or are only included relatively late. In this context, it should also be the task of feuilleton journalists to not only conduct interviews with the founding directors, but also to offer critics equal space for discourse. While Kwame Opoku publishes numerous essays on this subject in his own newsletter, critics like him have hardly had a chance to speak in public. On 15 September 2019, Niklas Maak once again pointed out the discrepancy in the funding structure between prestige buildings such as the Humboldt Forum and underfunded institutions such as Savvy Contemporary, which has everything ›that the Humboldtforum does not have in terms of post-colonial, intellectual, world-enlarging turbulence despite all the millions it has received.‹²⁰ More transparency of financial flows is called for here.

5 Restitutions as a Sign for the Beginning of a Dialogue

In September 2019, ICOM proposed a new definition of the museum that emphasises the importance of museums working in a participatory and transparent way in active partnership with various communities, guaranteeing ›equal rights and equal access to heritage‹ for all.²¹ This is precisely what the Humboldt Forum does not yet do. What

18 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »'Ganz nett', würden Besucher bei einem Provinzmuseum sagen«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 July 2017, URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/berliner-stadtschloss-gutes-muesli-schlechtes-muesli-1.3582470-0> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

19 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »Verstrickung als Prinzip«, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 November 2017, p. 11.

20 Niklas Maak, »Jenseits von Schloss und Scheune«, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 15 September 2019, p. 41 [translated].

21 ICOM, »Museum Definition«, in: *ICOM-international council of museums*, URL: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

kind of symbolic politics is it, for example, if a boat that was ›bought‹ from the island of Luf (at the time, German colonial territory) is walled in at the Humboldt Forum and could thus only be restituted if the Humboldt Forum were to be at least partially demolished?²² The Journalist Jörg Häntzschel has refuted the argument that the objects are better kept in German museums.²³

In order to determine possible restitutions, an even more intensive dialogue with communities in the former colonies and descendants in the diaspora would have to be sought than is currently the case with the Benin Group. This would help both the curators in Germany and indigenous communities, who have praised the fact that objects from their own cultures can still be studied today thanks to the efforts of German ethnologists.²⁴

Just as important would be targeted exchange programs with universities in the Global South for the mutual transfer of knowledge, possibly also including the Goethe Institut, as proposed for Humboldt in the context of the 250th anniversary celebration. Of immense importance would also be a reappraisal of the links between German colonial history and the racist ideologies that recur today. An exhibition analysing the connection between (neo-)colonial power asymmetries and migration movements would also contribute to a dialogue. However, instead of critically examining its own colonial past, the Humboldt Forum will open in 2020 with an exhibition on the indigenous OMAHA nation in North America.²⁵ OMAHA was never a German colony. Although the concept of partnership is being promoted here, partnerships would be relevant where it hurts most, namely with regard to restitution. There is a huge backlog demand here. A willingness to retribute would at least be a gesture that the much-cited dialogue at eye level is really taking place here.

Summary

At the moment, it seems as if the main actors of the Humboldt Forum are refusing to participate in a dialogue in order to stabilise a German identity seamlessly based on the Enlightenment. As François Jullien noted however, this one identity does not exist, but only fluid forms of identification or resources. The Humboldt Forum would benefit from a multidirectional dialogue that critically examines various aspects of German history from other perspectives (beyond the narrative of a pseudo-cosmopolitan German cultural policy): colonial history as the precursor of a perfidious racism that culminated in Nazi terror and its racial mania. This is particularly relevant in the age of newly emerging

22 See: Thomas Loy, »Das Südseeboot ist im Humboldt-Forum angekommen«, in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29 May 2018, URL: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/umzug-der-dahlemer-museen-das-suedseeboot-ist-im-humboldt-forum-angekommen/22619126.html> [last visit on 25 October 2020]. (13.09.2019).

23 See: Jörg Häntzschel, »Verseucht, zerfressen, überflutet«, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 9. July 2019, URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/ethnologisches-museum-raubkunst-1.4516193> [last visit on 25 October 2020].

24 See: Penny 2019 (see note 14), pp. 263ff.

25 Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss, »We are still here. The Omaha speaking«, in: *Humboldt Forum*, URL: <https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/events/we-are-still-here-the-omaha-speaking-en> [last visit on 13 September 2019].

right-wing radicalism fuelled by populist parties. Here, the Humboldt Forum could learn from Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional politics of remembrance. Only when various cultures of remembrance are juxtaposed in a multidirectional way can new readings of history, or rather histories, open up and allow for a more in-depth examination of these. Only then could different narratives of remembrance be placed in relation to one another, as in Schlingensiefel's collage. There is no doubt that ambiguity and friction would arise, but it is precisely these that enable the Forum to develop its actual function as a platform for polylogue.

Translation: Gérard A. Goodrow

Moderator Jörg Heiser

Jörg Heiser

In preparation, I noted two quotes, and I have the feeling that they now fit well into the discussion. The first quote is from the philosopher Achille Mbembe, stated in an interview in June 2019: »The risk is that by restituting our objects without giving an account of itself, Europe concludes that, with the restitution complete, our right to remind [Europe] of the truth is removed. If new ties are to be woven, Europe must honour the truth, as the truth is the teacher of responsibility.« What do you think about this?

Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

Yes, there's nothing to add. It's like this: my statement, the very essence of my performance, is to ask why it should even be a question. That is my point of view. Because it is obvious.

Sarah Hegenbart

Yes, I agree that there is little to add. Perhaps one could add however, that there is not the one truth, and they are always truths that are then shaped by certain subjects. I think it is really important to try to do what I have attempted to emphasise with my lecture, namely to seek dialogue. You don't give something back and say: »It's finished, now we no longer need to talk about it again; case closed«. You must really look and ask: »What have we done there?« You work it through. I was very shocked when I returned to Germany from Great Britain in 2017 and found that my students here were not even acquainted with the term »post-colonialism«. Maybe you can't even blame them, because it's not taught in schools. But you have to insist that it becomes part of the Western curriculum. And this can be initiated by restitution. But it should not be completed – it should be the starting point.

Thomas E. Schmidt

Yes, Achille Mbembe is, of course, absolutely right when he says that this whole fuss about restitution in Europe, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, has something incomprehensibly self-righteous about it, because the *white* woman, the *white* man, can, of course, use it to buy themselves a clear conscience by packing everything into a container and throwing it at the feet of the Africans, so to speak. Let me get more to the point. The problem that concerns us today are the »new ties«, that is to say the new relationships he wants to establish quickly. And we in Germany are indeed very late in doing so, because we have suppressed this colonial history or overshadowed it in favour of our coming to terms with the Nazi past. We are a long way from having this anchored in our curricula, and now time is running out for us. Africa is impatient, and we have, so to speak, no dispositives, no institutions, no articulate counterparts that can enter into a new relationship with Africa today. All that is still to come, and that is why I call for institutions that offer common ground. It doesn't matter to me whether they are called round tables, conferences, or whatever. But this civic cooperation between Europeans and Africans has yet to be institutionalised. A lot of imagination and a great deal of money is still needed.

Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

May I disagree with you briefly? Because I believe there is much that needs to be corrected. There are many articulate counterparts, but there are many that are muzzled and many where one still insists upon the right to interpret them. That's the first thing. I let one of these voices have its say in my performance-lecture: Fatima Sy, Head of Cultural Mediation at the Musée des Civilisations Noires in Dakar, Senegal, who can convey a great many perspectives. It is said that there is no debate, but while we discuss this, there are artists in Senegal who continue to create, and we want to enable them to do so. We want to give them this space. There are very many points of view, and it's just very encouraging because it helps to regain control. The second thing is, we are far from embedding this in our curricula. Why? You can simply do something. Institutions can act on their own accord. It's still the case in Germany that those who continue to shape certain institutions that convey knowledge, like the University of the Arts, are marked by a resistance to so many ways of thinking, as well as by the notion that thinking was created here.

Thomas E. Schmidt

May I make a small correction, so that no misunderstandings arise? The complaint about the lack of articulation was not directed at the African side, but rather at the German side, which, beyond universities, beyond art programmes, beyond the Goethe Institute, must also involve individuals from political practice who can conduct these discussions. This must not be an aesthetic discourse, so to speak, or a purely academic exchange conducted by individuals. I would like to see an institutionalisation and, as I said, also a politicisation of the whole thing.

Jörg Heiser

Since University of the Arts (UDK) was just brought up, I would like to mention that the Institute of Art in the context of the UDK has the working group ›Decolonise M21‹ (M21 stands for Module 21, a planned exhibition segment in the Humboldt Forum), supervised by my colleague Kristina Leko as a teacher, in which a large number of predominantly Latin American students participate. In an artistic way, these students deal quite resolutely with questions regarding the restitution of cultural assets and the decolonisation of museums against the background of Latin America's colonial history.

Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

I know Kristina Leko very well. She also explained to me how it came about that the Humboldt Forum did not assume that there was a faculty or institute where there were students who were ›non-whites‹. ›Non-whites‹ in the sense of those who redefine and question Western thinking. That wasn't expected. I also took part in the research, in the works; I also sat with the students and made comments, and had a conversation with Manuela Fischer, the curator of the South American collection of the Ethnological Museum, in which she did not understand much about the points I was trying to make. But we did indeed enter into a dialogue, and I think that is very, very important. So, something is in fact happening – not because of, but nevertheless.

Jörg Heiser

Yes, something's happening. And this brings me to the second quotation that I want to share and discuss with you. It comes from the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy for Emanuel Macron, which was published in 2018: Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. In this report, they oppose the concept of geo-cultural origin, knowing full well that this would by all means please European legal identities. »Hamady Bocoum, the director of the Musée des Civilisations Noires [Museum of Black Civilizations] in Dakar, is even of the opinion that the cultural heritage and legacy of African museums is not merely limited to African objects. Other civilisations must also be represented in African museums. Furthermore, as Benoît de L'Estoile has noted, the return of objects to Africa does not imply resigning them to a new form of an enslavement to a cultural identity, but rather bears the promise of a new economy of exchange.« This brings us, I believe, to the idea of multidirectional memory, that it is, of course, not a one-way street. Have I understood that correctly? Is it possible to interpret what Sarr and Savoy say here in reference to Bokoum and L'Estoile in this way?

Sarah Hegenbart

They always emphasise the concept of ›relational ethics‹, that is to say thinking very much in terms of relationships, dialogues and exchange, and in some cases, the idea of having something like ›shared heritage‹ has been toyed with, where it moves from one museum to the next, so to speak. But then again, the question is: is this fair? Yes, because I also see it more like this: If only ten percent of the cultural heritage is on the African continent, and your own youth cannot grow up with it, you first have to give it back and cannot say that we want to exchange it a little bit. Instead, you have to leave it there for the time being, and then you can consider Europeans asking politely whether they could borrow it back. But in general, I think the idea of exchange, dialogue, and relations is very important, which is greatly emphasised in the report.

Thomas E. Schmidt

I don't know; it goes without saying that European objects would then also be shown in the African museum. But this concept is – sorry – somehow very old, it's somehow post-war. Whether you call it multidimensional or not, the question is how to charge it with meaning. But the more consistently one thinks it through, the less relevant the question is as to where the property rights remain and why the property rights are such a fetish? So, to answer the question of who should own it: you can let the objects float, you can find intelligent solutions. I believe there are no limits to the imagination. That is why I don't see any conflicts of principle here. I believe that we can reach a pragmatic agreement.

Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

I would like to say something that is important to me. The views taken by Sarr and Savoy in their report are not new. Nor are the views on the concept of a museum new, and they are diverse. I mentioned briefly that there have been various speeches that have been made in institutions such as universities or forums, which have conveyed knowledge and thus also set the agenda. For example, there was a lecture by Edmund Husserl in

1935/36, when the Viennese Federation invited him to speak about the crisis in Europe. The lecture is ground-breaking, if one wants to understand what you said, that it would encourage the right-wing if one talked about a concept of culture that goes beyond regions or geography. Husserl's lecture is ground-breaking in helping to understand why European thinking was so strongly oppressive, and moving ever further in the direction of that one ›race‹, the ›white race‹. Husserl makes certain statements about what Europe is, and he says quite clearly that it is not necessarily located geographically, but rather mentally. There is Europe here and then there is the USA, and he excludes some of them.

Jörg Heiser

Eurocentrism, yes.

Arlette-Louise Ndakoze

Yes, but what I mean is that, now, it is not *geographically* set, but rather mentally. And you can look that up in Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of the mind. I wanted to say to what extent that which is called Europe is very much based on the ideology of a spirit, and if you want to open up today you should also open up what is sent out in spirit. You have to allow ideas from the outside, otherwise it won't work. To come back to the initial question: You can't just give something back and think that it's done; you have to really take in more perspectives.

Jörg Heiser

Thank you all for a very focused afternoon.

Translation: Gérard Goodrow