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'Africa' in Berlin's Humboldt Forum

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WORKING THROUGH COLONIAL COLLECTIONS.
'AFRICA' IN BERLIN'S HUMBOLDT FORUM

MARGARETA VON OSWALD
SOUS LA DIRECTION DE BÉATRICE FRAENKEL ET DE SHARON MACDONALD

Thèse d'Anthropologie préparée dans le cadre d'une cotutelle
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Abstract and keywords

This thesis takes the current transformation processes of ethnological museums in Europe as its point of departure to analyse how colonial legacies are grappled with in the present. It suggests the notion of 'working through' to argument how contending with the colonial past articulates in the museum. Its analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted within the Africa department of the Berlin's Ethnological Museum (2013 – 2015), and in particular, of the preparations for the new permanent exhibitions to be integrated in the much-contested Humboldt Forum, to open on the capital's Museum Island in 2020. How do the museum's colonial legacies articulate in the museum's everyday? How does museum staff deal with, relate to, and engage with the Museum's material and immaterial colonial legacies, as they progressively become ever more contested? The analysis of the Humboldt Forum's *making of* covers a particular period with regards to the negotiations of Germany's colonial past. In a national context which had long been described as 'amnesiac' in relation to its colonial past, the years from 2013 until 2019 have been characterised by a growing (political) acknowledgement, recognition, and subsequent funding and founding of projects and institutions aimed at addressing and working with the colonial project and its contemporary reverberations. The thesis thus shows how colonial legacies are identified, researched, and addressed within the museum. Whereas the thesis illuminates efforts and processes brought forward and fought for by museum staff to identify and publicly address the museum's colonial legacies, it focuses above all on the way in which staff struggle to find alternatives to the museum's disciplinary framings and orderings, professional conventions, and institutional hierarchies, with a view to their historical genesis. The thesis thus notably discusses the limits and boundaries which museum staff face when trying to work through the museum's colonial legacies. It points to the constant push and pull, as well as the risk of reproducing, stabilising, and legitimising the museum as colonial legacy: tensions which the working through of contested legacies more generally speaking entails. The thesis thus doesn't only analyse the Ethnological Museum in its quest to define its position and understand its relationship to its colonial past. Rather, it relates back to questions of the 'working through' of colonial legacies more generally speaking – the negotiation of Berlin and German identities, its politics of remembrance, and the relation between colonialism, racism, and identity politics today.

Keywords: Ethnological museums, colonial legacies and difficult heritage, postcolonial theory and critique, material culture studies, object biographies, ethnography and

museum practice, curatorial work, alterity and otherness, identity-politics, Berlin and Germany

Cette thèse prend comme point de départ les processus actuels de transformation des musées ethnologiques en Europe pour analyser comment les héritages coloniaux sont travaillés dans le présent. La thèse propose la notion de « working through » (travailler au travers de) pour argumenter comment le musée confronte le passé colonial. L'analyse s'appuie sur un travail ethnographique mené au sein du département Afrique du Musée Ethnologique de Berlin (2013-2015), et en particulier sur la préparation des expositions permanentes devant être intégrées dans le très controversé *Humboldt Forum*, qui ouvrira en 2020 sur l'Île des Musées de la capitale. Comment les héritages coloniaux du musée s'expriment-ils dans la vie quotidienne de cette institution ? Comment le personnel des musées aborde-t-il les héritages coloniaux, tant matériels qu'immatériels, alors qu'ils sont de plus en plus contestés ? L'analyse de la mise en place du *Humboldt Forum* couvre une période particulière de la négociation du passé colonial allemand. Dans un contexte national longtemps qualifié d'« amnésique » quant à son passé colonial, les années 2013 à 2019 ont été caractérisées par une reconnaissance (politique) croissante, ainsi que le financement et le développement de programmes e td'institutions visant à traiter et à travailler sur le projet colonial ainsi que ses répercussions contemporaines. Bien que la thèse mette en lumière les efforts défendus par le personnel pour identifier et aborder publiquement les héritages coloniaux du musée, elle se concentre avant tout sur la façon dont le personnel s'efforce de trouver des alternatives aux cadres et ordres disciplinaires du musée, aux conventions professionnelles et aux hiérarchies institutionnelles,. La thèse traite donc particulièrement des limites et frontières auxquelles le personnel est confronté lorsqu'il tente de travailler sur l'héritage colonial du musée. Elle met en évidence l'existence de mécanismes constants d'attraction et de répulsion, ainsi que le risque de reproduire, de stabiliser et de légitimer le musée comme héritage colonial : des tensions qui découlent inévitablement du traitement même de tout héritage contesté. La thèse n'analyse donc pas seulement le musée ethnologique dans sa quête pour définir sa position et pour comprendre sa relation avec son passé colonial. Elle renvoie plutôt à des questions plus générales sur la façon dont les héritages coloniaux ont été « travaillé à travers » - les négociations d'identités berlinoises et allemandes, les politique de mémoires et finalement, la relation entre le colonialisme, le racisme et les politiques actuelles d'identités.

Mots clefs: Musées ethnologiques, héritages coloniaux et patrimoine difficile, théorie et critique postcoloniales, études de culture matérielle, biographies d'objets, ethnographie et pratiques muséales, le curatorial, altérité et politiques d'identité, Berlin et l'Allemagne

Anlässlich der aktuellen Transformationsprozesse ethnologischer Museen in Europa analysiert die vorliegende Arbeit den gegenwärtigen Umgang dieser Institutionen mit kolonialem Erbe. Sie arbeitet mit dem Konzept des „working through", Prozessen des Aufarbeitens oder Durcharbeitens, um zu zeigen, wie sich die Auseinandersetzung mit kolonialen Vergangenheiten in Museen artikulieren. Die Analyse basiert auf ethnographischer Feldarbeit innerhalb der Afrika-Abteilung des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin (2013 - 2015). Im Fokus steht die Vorbereitung der neuen Dauerausstellungen, die in das umstrittene Humboldt-Forum integriert werden sollen, das 2020 auf der Museumsinsel der Hauptstadt eröffnet wird. Wie artikuliert sich das koloniale Erbe des Museums im Museumsalltag? Wie gehen die Museumsmitarbeiter*innen mit dem materiellen und immateriellen kolonialen Erbe des Museums um? Wie beziehen sie sich darauf und wie setzen sie sich damit in einem Kontext auseinander, in dem dieser Teil der deutschen Vergangenheit immer kontroverser diskutiert wird? Diese Analyse des *Making of* des Humboldt Forums umfasst einen besonderen Zeitraum in Hinblick auf die Verhandlungen deutscher Kolonialgeschichte.

In einem nationalen Erinnerungskontext, der lange mit „kolonialer Amnesie " beschrieben wurde, waren die Jahre 2013 bis 2019 durch eine zunehmenden (politische) Anerkennung gekennzeichnet. Dies manifestierte sich in der Bereitstellung von Fördermitteln und der Initiierung von Projekten und Institutionen, deren Ziel darin besteht, das koloniale Projekt und seine zeitgenössischen Konsequenzen aufzuarbeiten. Diese Arbeit beleuchtet die Bemühungen und Prozesse, die von Museumsmitarbeiter*innen veranlasst und durchgesetzt wurden, um das koloniale Erbe des Museums öffentlich zu thematisieren. Dabei konzentriert sie sich vor allem auf die Art und Weise, wie die Mitarbeiter*innen damit ringen, Alternativen zu historisch gewachsenen disziplinären Rahmenbedingungen und Ordnungen, den beruflichen Konventionen und institutionellen Hierarchien des Museums zu finden. Die Dissertation diskutiert insbesondere die Hindernisse und Herausforderungen mit denen sich das Museumspersonal im Versuch, das koloniale Erbe des Museums anzugehen, konfrontiert sieht. Sie verweist dabei auch auf die Risiken, das Museum als koloniales Erbe zu reproduzieren, zu stabilisieren und zu legitimieren. Die Arbeit analysiert somit nicht nur das Ethnologische Museum in Berlin in seinem Bestreben, seine Position zu definieren

und seine Beziehung zu seiner kolonialen Vergangenheit zu verstehen. Vielmehr behandelt sie Fragen der Aufarbeitung kolonialen Erbes im Allgemeinen – einschließlich der Verhandlung von Berliner und deutschen Identitäten, von Erinnerungspolitik und dem Verhältnis von Kolonialismus, Rassismus und Identitätspolitik heute.

Schlüsselworte: ethnologische Museen, koloniales Erbe, postkoloniale Theorie und Kritik, material culture studies, Objektbiografien, Ethnografie und Museumspraxis, kuratorische Arbeit, Alterität und Andersheit, Identitätspolitik

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Introduction
Working through colonial collections

This thesis takes the current transformation processes of ethnological museums in Europe as its point of departure to analyse how colonial legacies are worked with and through in the present. Defined here as colonial legacies in themselves, ethnological museums have long been criticised for their attempt to both own and represent the world. Coinciding with the beginning of my fieldwork in 2013, the acclaimed anthropologists and curators Clare Harris and Michael O'Hanlon opened their article 'The Future of the Ethnographic Museum' by stating that 'the ethnographic museum is dead'. Reflecting voices from the field, they wrote that: '[The ethnographic museum] has outlived its usefulness and has nothing more to offer in pursuance of its historic mandate as a location for the representation of "other" cultures' (O'Hanlon and Harris 2013:8). The provocative 'The ethnographic museum is dead' reflected what characterised the field at this particular moment: the question how the museum was to face what was described as its 'identity crisis' (O'Hanlon and Harris 2013:9). Linked to the museum's constitutive relation with the European colonial project, the crisis included inquiries into the museum's role and mission, authority over representation, and ultimately, the collection as rightful property of European museums. The demands which people – not only in academia, activism and the field of art and cultural production, but also in politics – addressed to the museum were multiple. Inquiries included how the ethnological museum was to position itself within a broader museum landscape, what its mission could be, and who it was to serve. They also concerned how to claim and justify authority over representation, and in particular, the representation of 'cultural difference'. Finally, the question of how to legitimise the presence and ownership of such collections in Europe has gained momentum, especially recently.[1] With the attempt to address the museum's contested legacies, most of Europe's ethnological museums have entered processes of fundamental transformation since the late 1990s. These include name changes, the development and application of new curatorial concepts, the radical restructuring of

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[1] These dimensions of the 'crisis' had been identified, discussed, and responded to for at least 30 years. Seminal monographs and edited volumes which have significantly shaped my research include, for example, in relation to international case studies, Clifford 1988; Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp et al. 1992; Clifford 1997; de L'Estoile 2007; Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007; Kazeem, Martinz-Turek, and Sternfeld 2009; Byrne et al. 2011; Phillips 2011; Harrison, Byrne, and Clarke 2013; Golding and Modest 2013, and in the German context, see for example Berner, Hoffmann, and Lange 2011; Kraus and Noack 2015; Förster et al. 2018; Edenheiser and Förster 2019; Splettstößer 2019.

permanent exhibitions, and the construction of new buildings for their collections.[2] This research project focuses on how these questions are addressed from within one particular museum –Berlin's *Ethnologisches Museum* (henceforth: Ethnological Museum), and in particular, its Africa department.

In order to interrogate what it means to grapple with colonial legacies in the present, the thesis addresses the following questions: How do museum staff work and deal with collections which were collected in colonial contexts? How do the museum's colonial legacies articulate in the museum's everyday? How do museum staff relate to and engage with both the material and immaterial colonial legacies, as they progressively become ever more contested? Dealing with these questions doesn't only concern the Ethnological Museum in its quest to define its position and question its relationship to its colonial past. Rather, it relates back to questions of the 'working through' of colonial legacies more generally speaking. It points to interrogations of the definitions of a nation's identity. It permits the discussion of the politics of remembrance and of memory w ork, and their implications (restitution, repatriation, reparation). Ultimately, tackling how museums engage with their colonial legacies questions the if and how of a recognition and acknowledgement of the constitutive role of colonialism in the making of contemporary societies – both formerly colonised and colonising. 'Working through' colonial collections thus points to central questions which concern our contemporary societies more generally: the reverberance, echoes, aftermaths of colonialism in the

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[2] For an overview of the changes in ethnological museums, see, up to 2013, Pagani 2013, including the restructuring of the Dutch ethnological museum landscape, the opening of the Museum ann de Stroom in Antwerp, as well as the new permanent exhibition in Basel. Since then, in the germanophone context, beyond the Humboldt Forum, it is notably the following developments which have stirred debate: the appointment of Clémentine Deliss at the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt (2010–2015) with the introduction of a 'post-ethnological' museum mission, of Nanette Snoep at the State Ethnographic Collections (SES) Saxony (2015–2018), followed by her directorship of the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne, the replacement of Nanette Snoep at the SES by Léontine Meijer-van Mensch in 2018, the appointment of Barbara Plankensteiner at the Völkerkundemuseum in Hamburg and the subsequent name change of the museum to MARKK, as well as the name change, renovation, and opening of the new permanent exhibition in 2017 at the Weltmuseum Wien (World Museum). On an international level, the reopening of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (Belgium) in 2018 was the most awaited event, preceded by the release and handing over of the so-called 'restitution report' by Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr to the French president Emmanuel Macron in November 2018, which shifted attention to questions of restitution (Sarr and Savoy 2018; for an overview of the debates related to the report, see von Oswald 2018).

everyday in its epistemologies, representations, materialities, or even more concretely, the words, relations, and affects we deal with.

The Ethnological Museum will be integrated in the Humboldt Forum, a new cultural centre situated on Berlin's museum island, approved by the German parliament in 2002 and to open in stages from 2020 on. The Humboldt Forum will be situated in the partly reconstructed City Palace (*Stadtschloss*), selectively emulating the historical baroque architecture. The *Stadtschloss* was substantially affected by bombing in the Second World War, then demolished by the GDR government and replaced with the Palace of the Republic, to be finally rebuilt on the ruins of this demolished 'House of the People', as it was often referred to (*Haus des Volkes*). Characterised by the coming together and confrontation of the nation's different histories, or in Jonathan Bach's words, the 'incarnations of Germany's twentieth century' – imperial (until 1918), Weimar (1919–1933), National Socialist (1933–1945), a divided Germany (1945–1990), and a reunited Germany (since 1990) – the Humboldt Forum has progressively transformed into a condensed 'conflict zone' in which the question of how to deal with its diverse histories has taken centre stage (Bach 2017a:91). It is the combination of the so-called 'non-European' collections within the City Palace, which has arguably attracted most debate when it comes to the Forum's profile. This configuration represents the nation's grandeur in its honouring of the cultures of the world potentiated by the building's reconstructed royal façade. The debates around the Humboldt Forum thus relate to larger questions of collective memory (politics), diversity and difference, articulations of German and Berlin and European identity, and subsequently, suggestions of a common 'we' in Germany.

An anthropology of colonial legacies: analytical positioning
'Working through colonial collections', the title of this thesis, condenses its methodological, analytical, and theoretical approach, and structures its argument. I first came across the notion of 'working through' in a conversation with the curator, scholar, and head of the Research Centre for Material Culture in Leiden, Wayne Modest. Wayne Modest coined his understanding of the museum as a 'space for the process of working through', where, as he stated,

> the objects sit in a space of contested, entangled relationality. 'Working through'
> implies that one has to question, debate, to feel uncomfortable; to box and fight

about the objects and their meanings in the present (von Oswald, Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Modest 2017:15–18).

The major development related to ethnological museums, and to the Humboldt Forum in particular, has been the resurgence and negotiation of the role of European colonialism and its legacies in the societies in question. That this thesis would concentrate on the working through of colonial legacies also stems from the considerable developments in the field. My interest in ethnological museums derived from the many contestations these organisations raise and only crystallised in the course of writing into a focus on the colonial. In Berlin, initiated and sustained by activists, artists, and scholars, this debate has come to the fore particularly since the Forum's cornerstone ceremony in 2013. Covering the period from 2013 till 2019, negotiations around Germany's colonial legacies in relation to the Ethnological Museum's collections – both inside and outside of the museum – show a gradual shift of attitude in regard to how public organisations, politics, and the public debate have positioned themselves towards Germany's colonial past. This shift is orientated towards recognising and accepting Germany's colonial past as part of the nation's histories, as well as the aim to establish a moral consensus when it comes to how this past and its symbolic and material implications are publicly dealt with. The collections are thus not in themselves colonial but rather have been considered under and somehow limited to this attribution, due to their mode or the period of acquisition, production, and appropriation in 'colonial contexts', both in the colony and metropole (German Museums Association 2019:20–33). Debates related to the Humboldt Forum reflect and condense international developments, where rising international calls for the decolonisation and diversification of Western organisations – crucially including museums[3] – parallel the normalisation of nationalist rhetoric and even populism, as well as the re-emergence of racist crime.

German colonialism and 'Africa'
I entered the Ethnological Museum's Africa department because I had been interested in the genealogies of and current grappling with representations of the continent, and the black body in particular, in art and museum organisations. Scholars such as Achille

[3]New York's 'Decolonize This Place', the Dutch #decolonize this museum, or the Belgian noname collective are just few examples of groups which temporarily or regularly protest against the museum's authority to own, order, and represent the collections. Regarding academia, it is notably the developments around #RhodesMustFall which attracted most debate, initiated at the University of Cape Town, which spread to and in different institutions in South Africa, as well as to universities in Great Britain, including Oxford, and the USA, including Harvard Law School.

Mbembe have argued, based on Hegel's accounts of Africa, that the continent has historically been constructed as the 'ultimate sign of the dissimilar, of difference and the pure power of the negative' by Western scholarship and popular discourse (Mbembe 2017:11). The interest in representations stemmed from my former research in the field of contemporary art,[4] during which I understood that many of the imaginations, constructions, and narratives I encountered originated in or had been co-produced by anthropology and its museums – and that some of them continue to do so. At the same time, debates related to German colonialism have concentrated on Africa, reflecting Andreas Eckert and Albert Wirz's observation that colonialism and Africa have become 'almost a synonym' in Germany (Eckert and Wirz 2013:508). This was for instance reflected in the German contemporary art field, and cultural production more generally speaking, which I followed closely. Established and upcoming artists and curators have made questions concerning Africa in the German cultural landscape very visible, notably in regard to discussion of the colonial project and its afterlives – both concerning German colonies and colonialism in Africa more generally.[5] Finally, and crucially, contestations around museum collections in relation to colonialism were almost exclusively focused on collections from the African continent. In Germany, and the Humboldt Forum in particular, this was notably reflected in the negotiation concerning particular objects and human remains,[6] but also in regard to the concentration of

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[4] My former research projects included an ethnography of the exhibition *La Triennale: Intense Proximity*, with the artistic director Okwui Enwezor, which centrally interrogated representational tropes in relation to anthropology, modernism, and colonialism (von Oswald 2016).

[5] Both pioneering curators, such as Okwui Enwezor or Simon Njami, as well as a younger generation of curators, such as Alya Sebti, Yvette Mutumba, Gabi Ngcobo, or Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, have contributed to and have been supported to institutionalise contemporary cultural production and art from Africa in Germany's cultural landscape. Okwui Enwezor, the first non-Western curator to curate *documenta 11* in Kassel (1998–2002) was a pioneer, whose importance in Germany was institutionalised by his becoming Munich's Haus der Kunst first non-European director in 2011. The interest in Africa, which often goes hand in hand with a postcolonial sensitivity and the addressing of colonial pasts, has been confirmed by the recruitment of the Moroccan curator Alya Sebti as the new director of the institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) in Berlin. Savvy Contemporary, a project space which received substantial funding from Berlin's Senate in 2017, founded and co-directed by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, has had a programmatic focus on postcolonial Africa. The media platform and journal Contemporary&, founded and directed by Yvette Mutumba and Julia Grosse, has become one of the central organs to communicate and inform on 'issues and information on contemporary art from Africa and its Global Diaspora'. Public funding from the ifa or the Bundeskulturstiftung des Bundes, some of it explicitly devoted to Africa (TURN fund), has supported these projects sustainably.

[6] Examples of particularly contested objects include the so-called Benin Bronzes, confiscated in 1897 by British colonial forces, located in today's Republic of Nigeria. Berlin's museum acquired a significant

expertise and interest concerning 'Africa' in German ethnological museums and academia.[7] What is meant by 'Africa' here is quite particular, as definitions usually explicitly or implicitly concern 'sub-Saharan' Africa, a seemingly regional depiction which continues to circulate despite virulent critique.[8] The division between the Northern and Southern parts of Africa is, however, above all a racialised one. It results from colonial imaginations of Africa as consisting of a 'white' North, to which European colonial powers granted a certain degree of culture and history, opposed to a Southern part, to which the West denied any history and culture, also problematically depicted as Black Africa (*Schwarzafrika*) in Germany.[9] The thesis's focus on 'Africa' thus relates back to particular representations which have been at the heart of the construction of a

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number of these objects at auction in London. Christine Howald and Felicity Bodenstein have depicted these objects as 'proxies' (*Stellvertreter*) for objects acquired in colonial contexts (Bodenstein and Howald 2018:533). For the negotiations on human remains and their return, see Chapter 1,

Another key object has been the throne of King Njoya from the Kingdom of Bamum, located in today's Republic of Cameroon, whose status is all the more contested as the throne has been described as a diplomatic gift from Njoya to the Emperor Wilhelm II. For instance, both objects were part of a poster campaign by AfricAvenir: see http://www.africavenir.org/de/projekte/projekte-deutschland/dekoloniale-einwaende-gegen-das-humboldt-forum.html, consulted 2 August 2019.

[7] In relation to academia, anthropology in Germany is Africa-focused. Several institutes devoted to the art histories and anthropology of Africa exist in Germany (Kunst Afrikas, Freie Universität Berlin; Institute of African Studies and Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, Bayreuth), as well as specific regional conferences. Within ethnological museums themselves, curators with a focus on Africa have recently been appointed to director-positions in ethnological museums, with Barbara Plankensteiner in Hamburg (since 2017), Nanette Snoep in Saxony (since 2015–2018), who replaced the Africanist Klaus Schneider at Cologne's Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in 2018, Christine Stelzig being the former director of the Ethnological Museum in Munich (2011–2017), and Clémentine Deliss (2010–2015) in Frankfurt. Most of these curators have recently dealt explicitly with their organisations' colonial entanglements, and have focused on Africa, in particular in their programmatic focus, in exhibitions such as *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)* (Frankfurt, 2014) (Deliss, Mutumba, and Weltkulturen Museum 2014), *GRASSI invites: #1 Fremd* ('foreign'), co-curated by Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Anke Dyes, and Anna Jehle (Leipzig, 2016); *Erste Dinge. Rückblick für Ausblick* ('First Things. Looking back to look forward') (Hamburg, since 2018); and Cologne's permanent exhibition.

[8] Most prominently, and recently, this concerns the recently published 'restitution report'. The report was released and handed to the French president Emmanuel Macron in November 2018 by the scholars Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, and concentrated solely on archives, collections, museums, and concerns in relation to what the authors depicted as 'sub-Saharan Africa' (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

[9] For analysis and discussion on the concepts of *Schwarzafrika* and *Schwarzer Kontinent*, see Arndt et al. 2004:204–208, and for racist terminology in the German language more generally speaking, see Arndt and Ofuatey-Alazard 2011; Arndt 2012.

Western self and an opposing Other, allowing for the interrogation of the relation between colonialism, racism, and identity politics today.[10]

The Ethnological Museum, and its Africa department in particular, thus form the thesis's point of departure to interrogate how a nation's colonial history is dealt with in both an intimate and a public manner. These developments raise questions beyond colonial histories *stricto sensu*, but rather point to how the renewal and remaking of public organisations, cultural diversity and difference making, 'inclusion' and 'integration', and national identity very broadly speaking are negotiated in a contemporary Germany.

Working through contested pasts
In Germany, possibly more than in other contexts, the notion of working through (*aufarbeiten*) implies, even if only tacitly, references to dealing with contested pasts and trauma more generally speaking. In particular, it makes reference to the way in which Germany's National Socialist and, later on, socialist past has been dealt with. The notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, commonly translated as 'coming to terms with the past', stands in for the necessity to tackle one's own history.[11] Nuancing a 'coming to terms with the past', the notion of 'working through' refers to ongoing and inconclusive work: work which a dealing with contested pasts and their deployment and implications in the present comprehends. Working through entails dealing with something that is difficult or unpleasant, to manage a problem that has many parts step by step, or to go through a process of understanding and accepting.[12] With that, it alludes to the laborious, lengthy, and repeated efforts that working through the past involves, as well as to the multiple forms of difficulties, denials, resistances, and refusals to do so.

An analogy with Siegmund Freud's concept of 'working through' (*durcharbeiten*) would be all too easy to make here. For Freud, the process of working through consists of two phases: a resistance to remembering, articulated in the patient's sickness, followed by a recognition of the resistance, which, in turn, articulates in an overcoming of this resistance, and a process of healing. Ultimately, for Freud, the process of working through turns into a will to recover and, thus, a will to remember. However, and beyond

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[10] Adopting this regional focus from the field might create blind spots and risks reproducing colonial orderings and imaginaries. For an analysis of museum politics related to North Africa, see for example Kamel and Gerbich 2014; Azoulay 2019.

[11] For a discussion of the different English translations and significations of the term, see Macdonald 2009:9.

[12] Online dictionaries consulted on 1 July 2019: Merriam-Webster, Oxford, Cambridge.

the critique of why the application of psychoanalytical concepts to institutions, societies, or nations is difficult to maintain,[13] this understanding would decomplexify the manifold ambivalences, nuances, and contradictions the process of working through colonial collections in the museum entails. It would turn the process into a progressive and somehow causal one, denying at once the many precursors, as well as relapses, recurrences, and reproductions the process implies.

The museum as colonial legacy

I situate the analysis within the research field of an *anthropology of colonial legacies*. The anthropology of colonial legacies has been concerned with researching the different kinds of *relationships to the colonial past in the present*, and has in particular interrogated the *persistence* of colonial epistemologies. Ethnological museums offer themselves as potential subjects for an anthropology of colonial legacies. Both in their material and immaterial dimensions, they are a blatant example of colonial violence, as they played a crucial role in the colonial system of appropriation and alienation. At the same time, the relations between colonialism, anthropology, and its museums have been shaped by ambivalence. As Benoît de L'Estoile highlights, colonial relations are characterised by 'a multifarious process of appropriation rather than by the sheer negation of the colonised'. These processes of appropriation, roughly situated between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries, have historically adopted different forms and modalities, but have often been predominantly shaped by violence, domination, and conquest. For de L'Estoile, '[a]lthough generally asymmetrical, this process of appropriation entailed, to some extent, a mutual aspect' (de L'Estoile 2008:268). This concerns the discipline of anthropology in particular. If one scrutinises the politics of anthropological research at the time, it both takes place in complicity with colonial regimes of domination, appropriation, and racist misrepresentation but also crucially reveals an interest in and defence of cultural difference, exchange, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism.[14] As the situation was complex in the past, it is equally contradictory in the present: ethnological museums, in their attempts to transform themselves, have both researched, addressed,

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[13] See for example Macdonald 2013:11; Rothermund 2015:13–15.

[14] For examples, see Pels 2008:283. When it comes to museum collections, this aspect of mutuality articulates for example in the fact that not all the objects acquired in colonial contexts were looted, robbed, or acquired in dubious circumstances, and that there are proofs of diplomatic gifts, of trade and the early formation of an art market including the negotiations of and adaptation to styles, tastes, and prices, or the mockery of the colonised through pictural depictions of Europeanness. For examples concerning German East Africa, see for instance Weber 2005:120–130; for Central Africa, see for example Schildkrout and Keim 1998; and for depictions of Europeanness, Lips 1937.

and problematised their much-criticised mission to own and represent Otherness, whilst risking glossing over, legitimising, and reproducing epistemologies, representations, and inequalities conventionally associated with ethnological museums' coloniality. Working through these ambivalences, contradictions, and complexities of how the colonial presence articulates in the museum's present is what an anthropology of the museum as colonial legacy attempts to illuminate and understand.

Employing this broad definition of the colonial, the understanding of a 'legacy' departs from its characteristic to relate. More particularly, a legacy creates relationships in the double meaning of to 'share', to divide and to have in common (de L'Estoile 2008:270). This definition of a legacy reflects understandings of the museum as 'relational', such as suggested by Chris Gosden, Frances Larson, and Alison Petch. Inspired by actor-network theory (ANT), they defined the museum as a 'dynamic entity, made up of a shifting mass of people and things', in which museums don't only create relationships through people and things, but also between the far and the near, the past and the present (Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007:7).

> The Museum then, is a site where distant places are transformed, re-presented, and studied from afar through some of their material products. 'Big' ideas about the world are held together by sets of 'small' things. (Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007:7)

This description of the museum as legacy, then, assigns a central role but doesn't reduce it to its material dimension – and in particular, the collections as a material manifestation of colonial relations. It also includes the practices, processes, and imaginations which museum work entails, reflecting the respective contemporary value systems. Situating the museum in its colonial relations, the colonial project was backed up with ideologies, imaginations, knowledge systems and production, in short, a mindset. This mindset justified the coloniser's mission by virtue of his alleged superiority, beyond its actual colonisation – meaning the occupation of a territory and a society. As literary research has shown, 'colonial fantasies' and 'imperialist imaginations' were as much part of German colonialism as the exercise of rule. These imaginations and mentalities preceded, accompanied, and lingered long after actual German colonisation (Zantop 1997; Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop 2001; Ames and Gilman 2005). As Sharon Macdonald, Henrietta Lidchi, and I summarised it,

[e]thnographic museums, then, carry a colonial legacy not only in terms of objects acquired during specifically colonial periods and not only, indeed, in terms of the objects themselves. Questions of potentially wrongful acquisition of objects, as well as the issues of ownership to which they lead, are undoubtedly important, but they are only one aspect of the complexity of this legacy …. Important too in considering the extended legacy of colonial relations are questions about particular knowledge formations and modes of knowledge making, the nature of the ethnographic museum and to whom it orients itself, and access to the collections and involvement in shaping their futures, in both the past and the present. (Macdonald, Lidchi, and von Oswald 2017:97)

The research interrogates ways of relating to the colonial past in two modes which I mark as distinct but which relate to each other. I elaborate these modes in the following two sections. On the one hand, the analysis deals with identifying and analysing the *explicit* negotiation, use, and mobilisation of the colonial past. On the other, this ethnographic approach to colonial legacies interrogates 'the past as it lives now', as Benoît de L'Estoile defined it with reference to Bronislaw Malinowski (de L'Estoile 2008:272). It focuses on how colonial presences articulate, sometimes in uncontrollable and unpredictable ways, and how these past presences are dealt and 'lived with' in the museum's everyday.

The use and mobilisation of the past

An anthropology of colonial legacies entails how German colonial history is explicitly dealt with through the debate on ethnological museums and their collections.[15] Sharon Macdonald's concept of 'past presencing' is helpful here, as it is concerned 'with how the past is related to at specified moments or stretches of time' (Macdonald 2013:16). It concerns the way in which 'Germany's colonial past and history' – defined differently by the different agents involved – is 'related to'. This means in particular how the colonial past is mobilised, negotiated, downplayed, or neglected in regard to the Ethnological Museum's collection in manifold ways – or to name even more nuances, how it is addressed, suppressed, silenced, censored, made invisible or visible, etc.

It was only during my fieldwork (2013–2019) that the Ethnological Museum's collections were progressively, publicly, and widely defined as 'sensitive', and thus, contested, in

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[15] The notion of an 'anthropology of colonial legacies' has been used by Benoit de L'Estoile, but is extended and nuanced here (De L'Estoile 2008).

Germany (Lange 2011: 19).[16] In a national context which had long been described as 'amnesiac' in relation to its colonial past (Kößler 2006; Zimmerer 2013:9), it has arguably been through the mobilisation of the Ethnological Museum's collection, and in particular, the collection's 'provenance', that German colonialism has been addressed in Germany.[17] In regard to German colonialism, the Humboldt Forum has been described as a 'catalyst of critique' and 'discursive nodal point' in critical scholarship – which was rapidly appropriated by cultural politics – to pin down how the Forum functioned as a prism to problematise Germany's colonial past (von Bose 2017:127; Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters, quoted in Ringelstein 2018). Convergences between scholarship, cultural production, the media, and, most importantly, activism, encouraged the addressing of German colonialism. The Humboldt Forum has served as one of the prime references, if not indeed *the* prime reference, explicitly used and levelled against. While the Forum progressively took shape, the collections which had long been considered as unproblematic, scientific, and naturally part of European museums by museum officials and in cultural politics, became 'contested', 'awkward' and 'unsettling', as Sharon Macdonald describes some of the characteristics of 'difficult heritage' (Macdonald 2009:1). Whereas the constitutive relationship between colonialism and anthropology had for some time been acknowledged in scholarship, both concerning ethnological museums in general and in Berlin's specific case, the Ethnological Museum was only progressively constructed and perceived as a remnant of colonialism during the period of my fieldwork in the public debate.[18] The collections subsequently became subject of 'ongoing conflicts of interest and differences of view' (Macdonald 2009:19). The thesis thus covers a period of time in which the discussions on German colonialism via its national ethnological collections shifted significantly – discussions whose outcome are unclear at the time of writing in mid-2019.

The past as it lives now
Unlike the past's explicit 'mobilisation', such as for political means or financial reparations, an anthropology of colonial legacies looks at 'the past as it lives now' in the

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[16] See for instance the exhibitions and research projects *Sensitive Heritage: Colonial Traces to the Present Day* ('Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart', Hanover, 2016–2017), see also von Poser 2018; and *Difficult Heritage: Colonial Objects – Postcolonial Knowledge* ('Schwieriges Erbe. Koloniale Objekte – Postkoloniales Wissen', Stuttgart/Tübingen, 2018–2019), see also Grimme 2018.

[17] For a discussion of the developments around questions of provenance, see Förster 2019.

[18] For an extensive literature review, see Chapter 1 of this thesis, and as prominent examples concerning Berlin's case, see Zimmerman 2001; Penny 2002.

museum's everyday. It is thus concerned with the 'grappling with' or 'living with' colonial pasts in the present. This entails grasping and situating the different forms in which colonial presences articulate in and act on the present – not necessarily immediately identifiable or identified as such – including the sometimes scarcely obvious, historically grown, and possibly transformed manifestations of colonial modes of knowledge production or representations.

In order to identify and work through that which remains from the past, or put inversely, 'the deep imperial genealogies of the present' (Stoler 2016:4), it is necessary to relate historical and ethnographic analysis. As such, the anthropology the museum as colonial legacy is distinct from, but closely related to literature subsumed under the category of 'anthropology of colonialism', which centrally interrogates the relationship between the colonial history and present of anthropology. The anthropology of colonialism, as defined by Peter Pels, consists in the analysis of the historical relations between anthropology and colonialism in relation to the present.

> The anthropology of colonialism is also always an anthropology of anthropology, because in many methodological, organizational, and professional aspects the discipline retains the shape it received when it emerged from – if partly in opposition to – early twentieth-century colonial circumstances. (Pels 1997:164–165)

The ethnological museum being an anthropological organisation, the analysis of its historical modes of knowledge production and, more generally speaking, epistemologies is thus a constitutive part of the analysis of what constitutes its contemporary working. It contributes to an analysis of the contemporary museum, as, 'instead of trying to resolve the "crisis of representation" by more and other representations, [the anthropology of colonialism] turned to the work of representation as an historical object instead' (Pels 1997:165). The ethnological museum has figured as one very prominent subject of analysis to identify, deconstruct, and analyse both past and present representations, in anthropology itself, but also cultural studies and museum studies more generally speaking.[19] Furthermore, the anthropology of colonialism puts anthropology's intellectual roots, tools, and methods at the centre of its inquiry. In the present work, this

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[19] See Chapter 2 for an extensive literature review on (ethnological) museums, representations, and the colonial. Seminal examples include Clifford 1988; Karp 1991; Macdonald 1998; Schildkrout and Keim 1998.

doesn't only concern my own position as researcher, but also the curatorial work I was engaged in. An anthropology of colonial legacies thus necessarily works hand in hand with an anthropology of colonialism in order to situate these present phenomena within their historical genealogy.

I use the phrasing an 'anthropology of colonial legacies' here despite the fact that this phrasing is not necessarily agreed upon when it comes to the ethnographic interrogation of the presence of the colonial past in the present.[20] Ann Laura Stoler for instance, whose work this thesis substantially builds on, has advocated that 'an anthropology of colonial legacies' lacks analytical potential to depict and analyse how colonial histories matter, notably in contrast to the notions of 'duress', 'debris', or 'ruins and ruination' which she has herself established (Stoler 2013; Stoler 2016). It is, however, exactly this lack of conceptual precision and an evocative argument, and, thus, the potential for an open description and analysis of what happens on the ground, which makes me use the term 'legacy' here. In contrast to Stoler's description of the remnants of the past, often implying the shattered or the broken, the Ethnological Museum as colonial legacy seems relatively intact, even if contested. It is rather the notion of 'working through' which stands in for the thesis's argument here, as it refers to the analysis of how contending with the colonial past articulates in the museum.[21]

Coming back to this thesis's central research question of how the museum as colonial legacy is grappled with today, I approach this question via an ethnography of museum practices and in relation to the collection's entanglement with the German colonial project and its broader handling in German society today.

The museum as fieldsite: methods and ethics

> Colonial pasts, the narratives recounted about them, the unspoken distinctions by
> which they continue to 'cue', the affective charges they reactivate, and the implicit

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[20] Objections to the term have been voiced, for example in Dias 2008:307 or Stoler 2013:7.

[21] Related reflections on and analysis of the persistence of the colonial in the present are subsumed in other intellectual traditions, which feed back and which I refer to in the course of the thesis. These include what has been referred to as postcolonial studies with such prominent scholars as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, or Homi K. Bhabha, those subsumed under the concept of 'coloniality' and 'decoloniality', with scholars such Aníbal Quijano or Walter Mignolo, or the Caribbean tradition of *créolisation et créolité*, with Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau. For an overview and comparison of the 'decolonial' and the 'postcolonial', see Bhambra 2014.

'lessons' they are mobilized to impart are sometimes so ineffably threaded through the fabric of contemporary forms they seem indiscernible as distinct effects, as if everywhere and nowhere at all. (Stoler 2016:5)

It is via an ethnography that I approach the black box of the 'everywhere and nowhere at all' of colonial legacies in this thesis. Whereas postcolonial critique has been accused of establishing quick links and making causal assumptions between the colonial past and its continuity in the present, I try to identify and understand the ways in which people – including myself – approach the museum as colonial legacy through an ethnographic account of the museum's everyday and the museum staff's concrete practices.

I started to do research in the Ethnological Museum Berlin in October 2013. As the recipient of a scholarship from the State Museums Berlin,[22] my key interests consisted in first, a focus on the material culture and in particular the past, present, and future lives of objects of the Africa collection which I would select during fieldwork, and second, an ethnography of transformation processes in the ethnological museums.[23] I announced the research project as a combination of historic and ethnographic research to one of the two 'Africa' curators of the Ethnological Museum, Paola Ivanov, herself an anthropologist.[24]

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[22] The three-monthly scholarship took place within the framework of the 'International fellowship programme for sabbatical leave and research residencies at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin' (*Internationales Stipendienprogramm für Arbeits- und Forschungsaufenthalte an den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*), https://www.smb.museum/forschung/stipendienprogramme/internationales-stipendienprogramm.html, consulted 20 February 2020.

[23] To be able to trace and narrate these 'histories of becoming', the concept of 'object biographies' has been progressively used as an analytical and narrative tool to understand the social and cultural life of things, first coined by Igor Koyptoff and Arjun Appadurai in the 1980s (Kopytoff 1986; Appadurai 1986). Despite criticism that the notion of 'biography' might mislead to an understanding of the objects' biographies as linear, or as attributing the object intentional and individual agency (Hahn 2015; Joyce and Gillespie 2015), the concept served as a progressively popular point of departure **to** trace and analyse relationships between people and things over time, and to depict the socio-material networks they're enmeshed in and show how long-lived things extend beyond different systems of understanding (Joy 2009), including their museum lives. Used in anthropology and archaeology alike, numerous examples of object biographies now exist. For literature reviews and discussions related to object biographies, see for example Hirschauer and Doering 1997; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Hoskins 2006; Brower Stahl 2010; Chua and Salmond 2012; Samida, Eggert, and Hahn 2014, for monographs and edited volumes dealing with particular object biographies see for example Daston 2000; Bonnot 2002; Daston and Galison 2007; Tythacott 2011; Bonnot 2014; Förster and Stoecker 2016.

[24] Paola Ivanov was well acquainted with the museum. She had been a 'Volontär', a museum apprentice, in the 1990s, working in the Africa department with its curator, Hans-Joachim Koloss. After acquiring a PhD

We agreed that my archival and field research would focus on the museum practices related to the new permanent exhibition, which was to include the museum's Africa collections for the Humboldt Forum.

Whereas museum ethnographies have become more prominent since pioneering examples at the end of the 1990s, they still remain the exception in relation to how the museum has been approached and analysed. [25] Research projects on museums deploying ethnographic methods have usually concentrated on only one particular aspect of museum work.[26] In my case, through the curatorial entry, doing an ethnography of the making of the future permanent exhibition meant doing an ethnography of the museum as a whole. I accessed the museum's different departments and activities. [27] In the library, archive, museum storage, conservation, as well as digitisation, we worked with museologists, exhibition designers, archivists, restorers, museum store managers and many more. As the recipient of a scholarship, I was given the privileges of a museum apprentice, a 'Volontär': I paid staff rates at the museum canteen, got access to internal email communications, worked at my own desk and computer, and most significantly, gained access to the museum's collection by having keys to the museum's storage as well

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in anthropology (Ivanov 2000), she then worked on and co-curated the Art from Africa permanent exhibition in the Ethnological Museum, together with Peter Junge, who had been appointed as curator of Africa in 2001, replacing Hans-Joachim Koloss. The exhibition was on display in the Ethnological Museum from 2005 till the museum's closure in January 2017. After several years at the university, and completing the research for her habilitation (Ivanov 2013), Paola Ivanov was appointed the second curator of the Africa department in 2012. I thus started to work with her a year after she had taken up her post.

[25] Pioneering examples include Handler and Gable 1997; Katriel 1997; Macdonald 2002.

[26] In a text co-authored with Sharon Macdonald and Christine Gerbich, we review the literature on museum ethnographies extensively, which I rely on in the following. Examples include a focus on exhibition-making (Macdonald 2002; Yaneva 2012; Morgan 2013; Bunzl 2014; Franklin 2014; Shannon 2014; Bouquet 2015; Jung 2015; Kreplak 2017; Marsh 2019), analysis of how museums present and communicate about themselves, notably via exhibitions, and how their role is perceived and negotiated by others (Butler 1999; Price 2007; Torres, Andrea Meza 2011; von Bose 2016; Porsché 2018), how they are used by their publics or how museums try to engage these publics (Roberts 1997; Bhatti 2012; Schmitt 2012; Morse and Munro 2015; Knudsen 2016; Debary and Roustan 2017; Kendzia 2017; Sabeti 2018). They include ethnographies of processes of conservation, archiving, and digitisation (Geismar 2013; Domínguez Rubio 2014; Beltrame 2015), and of community work and collaborative projects (Hendry 2005; Krmpotich and Peers 2013; Schorch, McCarthy, and Hakiwai 2016), and finally, of collecting practices, both contemporary and historical (O'Hanlon 1993; Förster and Stoecker 2016).

[27] Limits included that the opportunity to attend meetings, for example, was dependent on whether or not the people I worked most closely with – Paola Ivanov and the department's museum apprentice Verena Rodatus in particular – thought of inviting me and subsequently informed me about times and places. I was not 'naturally' part of internal email communication.

as receiving authorship rights for the museum's database. Even if this research's entry point has been via the exhibitions of a particular museum, it covers and is organised along the museum's different practices – from communicating, to exhibiting, researching, and storing and conserving.

In the position of an assistant to Paola Ivanov, I considered myself an ethnographer of an exhibition. However, my privileged position of working amongst the museum staff gave me the opportunity to co-curate the exhibition *Object Biographies*, two months after I started fieldwork, together with the museum apprentice Verena Rodatus. Within the framework of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, which funded and framed the *Object Biographies* exhibition, I continued to work as the organiser of two conferences in order to fund my research. The employment as curator changed my position in the field from 'participant observation' to 'observant participation'.[28] I further analyse this shift as the 'being affected' by the field – a methodological approach which implies both an emotional engagement with museum work, to be used analytically, and to deliberately affect the field, and thus, to participate and contribute to the field's developments.

The museum as 'peopled organisation'
While the museum is certainly centred on its collections, my observations and participation in the museum work permit the argument that the museum can crucially be understood as a 'peopled organisation' (Morse, Rex, and Richardson 2018:116). Seeing the museum as peopled counters understandings of the museum as homogeneous, faceless, and anonymous. It rather emphasises how museum staff contribute to, resist, and produce the museum. It is common in museum histories to foreground the role of the museum's founders and significant collectors for the museum's constitution. However, those who work 'behind the scenes' in tasks considered mundane and even boring, such as the storage manager, database manager or conservator, are generally left unnoticed and undocumented. In the thesis, by depicting their personal, passionate engagement with the collections, I highlight the crucial role that individuals and their subjectivities play in the museum's constant processes of becoming, countering their usual role as 'footnotes of History' (Miller 2010:50). The focus on people and their practices was also necessary insofar as the museum's recent history, as a result of a lack of

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[28] Being asked to curate the exhibition *Object Biographies* also changed my research trajectory. Initially planned as a comparative study between three museums in restructuration – in Berlin, Geneva, and Tervuren – my focus changed to Berlin. I did work at the Royal Museum for Central Africa from June to December 2015, but this experience would not be taken into account for the final version of this thesis.

documentation, can only be recorded and analysed as an oral history today. Organisational knowledge is thus not documented, but rather incorporated by the people working in the museum, some of them for several decades. It is only by working with museum staff that I was able to comprehend, trace, and document these histories – histories which crucially shape the organisation, but which are also subject to rapid change in the context of organisational restructuring. Ways of knowing and being in the museum are passed on and constructed through personal interaction in the organisation, and are thus only graspable via an ethnography of its practices and long-term engagement with its employees. Finally, an ethnographic approach shows that *the* Ethnological Museum doesn't exist. Whereas in the media and public perception of the Ethnological Museum, it is presented as an entity, within the museum, a whole range of opinions, theoretical convictions, professional practices, and life experiences interact and are reflected in the particular ways of doing the museum. In appropriating and defining their specific role in the Forum's and museum's constellations, museum staff contribute significantly and deliberately to the progressive and ongoing making of the museum, no matter at which level of governance they are positioned.

Comparative involvement and para-ethnographies
Besides my own efforts to grasp, understand, and analyse the museum and its practices, including comparison via a six-month research stay at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium, a research trip to Benin and Togo, as well as numerous official interviews and informal exchanges with curators and directors in European and American ethnological museums, it is researchers and guests at the 'Making Differences' project at CARMAH who have accompanied and enriched my research project substantially.[29] The project mirrored my methodological approach in its essence, and has consistently helped to think through our respective projects, in particular with regard to the fieldwork's 'fuzzy boundaries'. Designed as a multi-ethnographer, multi-sited ethnography of Berlin's museumscape, [30] 'strong collaboration' – collaboration in researching, thinking, writing, and presenting – were at the core of the project, similar to the principles of the

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[29] See the Annexe for a list of CARMAH guests and interviews.

[30] These ranged from different national museums and their politics (Larissa Förster: Ethnological Museum; Christine Gerbich: Museum for Islamic Art, Katarzyna Puzon:Museum for European Cultures; Chiara Garbollotto and Tahani Nadim: Natural History Museum; Sharon Macdonald: City Museum), to project spaces and contemporary art (Jonas Tinius: SAVVY Contemporary, Institute for Foreign Affairs, Galerie Wedding; Hannes Hacke: Schwules Museum), to research projects focused on alternative archives and public memorial sites (Nazli Cabadag: alternative queer archives; Christoph Bareither: Holocaust Memorial; Duane Jethro: street renaming practices).

Matsuake Worlds research project (Choy et al. 2009).[31] The particular constellation of researchers enabled what Christine Gerbich and I have understood as comparative involvement. It allowed observations and reflections on the field's developments to be shared, in particular with regard to affect and ethics, to comparatively analyse Berlin's museum landscape shaped by overlapping politics, players, and organisations. Reflecting together also entailed to disentangle understandings of anthropological reflexivity. In close exchange with colleagues, discussing notions of cooperation, 'co-laboration' (Niewöhner 2016), or the 'anthropologist as sparring partner' (Tinius 2020) helped to theorise the researcher's position in the field. The field was characterised by a situation in which, to put it in Annelise Riles's words,

> [A] once productive distance ethnographically maintained, implicitly or explicitly, purposefully or not, between ourselves and our objects of study, between the things studied (the data) and the frames we used to study them (the analysis), between theorizing and describing, has now definitely collapsed. (Riles 2006:3)

Collapsing distances complicate the question of who was acting in, translating from, but also interpreting the field. Interpretation was at the heart of my interlocutors' practice, as they commented on, analysed, and interpreted the field's development constantly and recurrently. It is in particular the omnipresence of anthropologists themselves which introduced a para-ethnographic dimension to the ethnography (Marcus and Holmes 2010). Using the prefix 'para' qualifies the ethnography as 'at or to one side of, beside, side by side'. The methodological approach neither refers to researching up nor researching down, but defines a shift from defining one's interlocutors as 'informants' and 'others' to 'intellectual partners in inquiry', as Dominic Boyer has put it (Boyer 2008:40). My own role then can be described as documenting and summarising, situating, contextualising, chopping, and selecting the information which museum staff provided to me through their specific practices, analysis, and interpretations of and in the

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[31] Examples include articles (Macdonald, Lidchi, and von Oswald 2017; Macdonald, Gerbich, and von Oswald 2018), joint presentations and panels (with Christine Gerbich 'On Collaboration and Critique', Ethnographieren Workshop, Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Berlin, 11 March 2017; with Larissa Förster, 'The "Restitution Report": What's at Stake?'; conference: 'Sensitive Heritage – Ethnographic Museums and Material/Immaterial Restitutions' GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 11 December 2018; co-convenor with Jonas Tinius, 'The Future of Anthropological Representation: Contemporary Art and/in the Ethnographic Museum', conference: 'Art, Materiality, and Representation', Royal Anthropological Institute, British Museum), and edited books (with Jonas Tinius: *Across Anthropology*, Leuven University Press, to appear in 2020).

field. This process of selection included a reflection on what to disclose and what to hold back, negotiating the gap between how the Forum presented its seemingly shiny front stage and the Ethnological Museum's – sometimes messy – backstage in a politically charged atmosphere with heightening attention to the Forum's developments.

Ethics, impression management, and tact in the field

In his classic ethnography 'Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change' (1963), Gerald D. Berreman employs Erving Goffman's concept of 'impression management' in order to conceptualise and reflect on the relationship between the ethnographer, her interlocutors, and the construction of the research field. Goffman's impression management is based on a 'dramaturgical' approach. He analyses social systems as being divided between a 'front region' and a 'back region'. For Goffman, the backstage serves to *prepare* a performance, with controlled access policies, whereas the front stage serves to *present* the performance. Generally speaking, the Humboldt Forum could be understood as the field's research front stage, a front stage whose representatives attempted to keep up the image of a mastered, ordered, and well-planned cultural project despite recurrent public controversies.[32] The work routines which I got access to at the Ethnological Museum could then be understood as the field's backstage, where exhibitions and research projects for the Humboldt Forum were developed, prepared, and implemented.

At the same time, however, the ethnographer and her interlocutors 'are both performers and audience to one another', as Berreman writes, and backstages might turn into front stages in the course of fieldwork (Berreman 1993:xxxiii). The division between front and backstage is not clear cut, but rather depends on the 'function that the place happens to serve at that time for the given performance' (Goffman 1956:77). As described above, the roles I adopted during my stay at the museum often switched. From stipendiary, to Paola Ivanov's research assistant, to curator, to ethnographer, to conference organiser, my position changed. The role which I adhered to myself, however, was that of the ethnographer: I didn't stop taking fieldnotes and documenting the process.

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[32] These concerned, for example, its continuous lack of concept despite turning management and leading positions, its chaotic and opaque organisational structure, or its lack of dealing with the progressively contested histories of German colonialism. Concerning the critique of the Forum, see for the lack of provenance research and dealing with German colonialism No Humboldt 21 ! 2013; Artefakte//anti-humboldt 2013; the opacity and misfunctioning of the Forum's organisational structure Häntzschel 2017a; Häntzschel 2017b; and the lack of concept and critique of leadership positions Walde 2016; Häntzschel 2018; Mangold and Timm 2018.

This exact role as ethnographer, however, sometimes slipped out of focus for the interlocutors because I was working in the museum on a daily basis and for a consistent period of time. I was – from the beginning – fully integrated in the work processes by Paola Ivanov to foster what Gerhard Spittler has called 'thick participation', and, additionally, changed status by becoming myself co-curator of an exhibition after only two months of fieldwork (Spittler 2001). Still, the role of ethnographer was also explicitly referred to and negotiated. Sometimes, people explicitly said not to note or document particular information, or they let me document by accentuating that they didn't want to be mentioned by name. At other moments, and not too rarely, I was taken aside to talk, or explicitly told to note particular, and in that case, usually 'hot' information. Museum staff shared their experience with me in order to integrate it into my analysis, as they sometimes felt unable to express particular critique or analysis themselves with regard to their professional position, but wanted it to be revealed as part of the work processes I was involved in. As such, and from the very beginning of my fieldwork, I knew that the negotiation of what to reveal and what to conceal from the front and backstage would be a delicate one, as the access I was given was based on trust and the museum staff's belief in my honesty, scientific accuracy, integrity and ethical know-how as a practicing anthropologist. As Berreman writes:

> The ethnographer is likely to evaluate his subjects on the amount of back-region information they reveal to him, while he is evaluated by them on his tact in not intruding unnecessarily into the back region and, as rapport improves, on his trustworthiness as one who will not reveal back-region secrets. There are likely to be mutually contradictory bases of evaluation. (Berreman 1993:xxxiii)

It is thus the ethnographer's evaluation of *tact*, or a 'sense of what to do or say in order to maintain good relations with others',[33] which was at play here. This was particularly difficult to evaluate, as the Ethnological Museum, and the Humboldt Forum in particular, were publicised and particular organisations.

Subsequently, the anonymisation of some research interlocutors was difficult but also undesirable to maintain, as their specific agency contributed in particular ways to the development of the field. Some had also profoundly shaped the museum during life-long careers, and wanted their history and role within the museum to be documented.

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[33] Definition from Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, consulted 10 September 2019.

Whereas exceptionally, I have chosen to anonymise or summarise and fictionalise particular accounts (see Chapter 2), generally speaking, interlocutors appear with their name. When they do so, they have read and we have negotiated the way in which they are quoted. I relied thus on recent ethical guidelines of German and British anthropological associations, in which the aim for reciprocity, the option of feedback, as well as maintaining the transparency of the research process form the research's ethical core (DGSKA 2009; ASA 2011).

At the same time, the reflection on ethics included interrogating whether or not it was important to render transparent, or at least partly comprehensible, what was happening at the museum at the time: the everyday of museum work in the context of heightened public attentions towards the museum's colonial legacies, its entanglement with the political process and negotiation of remembrance work concerning German colonialism, and finally, the making of a major public organisation, the Humboldt Forum. These considerations concerned established organisations (SPK – Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, SMB – State Museums Berlin, Ethnological Museum) and an organisation in the making (Humboldt Forum), all of which were public and tax-funded. These organisations were arguably also highly contested *because* of the inaccessibility of information or even mis-information communicated by its representatives (such as on contested collections or most, recently, on the situation of the museum's storage),[34] or the inaccessibility of the Forum's representatives to public debate and positioning (see Chapter 1). The decision on how to respond to, assess, and evaluate this situation was thus one where 'the weight of responsibility for adherence to good ethical conduct is on the anthropological researcher' (ASA 2011). I hope that my sense of *tact* has been sensitive enough to negotiate the different demands and interests involved in this thesis.

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[34] In early exchanges between activists from the associations Tanzania Network, Berlin Postkolonial, and UWATAB and the SPK, the SPK denied the existence of human remains in the SPK's collections (Prosinger, Mboro, and Kisalya 2013; Kathmann 2014). Only after insisting on the existence of a collection of human remains in Berlin's State Museums in an open letter, did the activists receive a second response by the SPK's president, Hermann Parzinger, in which he acknowledged the existence of human remains in Berlin's Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Prosinger and Mboro 2014; Parzinger 2014). The most recent example consists in disclosures on the state of the Ethnological Museum's storage depots. Whereas the journalist Jörg Häntzschel vividly exaggerated and thus wrongly represented accounts of the museum's storage spaces, describing how museum employees sometimes needed to wade through 'ankle-deep' water in the museum storage cellar spaces, the State Museum Berlin's vice-director, Christina Haak, denied the existence of any museum storage in the museum's cellar, information which was simply wrong, as the East Africa collections have been stored there (Häntzschel 2019; Peitz 2019).

'Working through' then literally and methodologically translates in a focus on *work*. The contribution this thesis attempts to put forward thus includes a methodological one, as it discusses and analyses the anthropologist's shifting roles, her position in the field as 'observant participant' and its accompanying ethics, and finally, the affective dimension this working through and with colonial legacies entails. Whereas this kind of approach was possible during my fieldwork between 2013 and 2015, I have followed with more distance the period from 2016 till 2019, a period marked by the collections becoming ever more contested.

As this short introduction to my research trajectory and methods shows, one characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork are the shifts and turns the research questions and foci take when undertaking this work. In my case, my interests, in sync with the developments in the field, evolved towards a focus on German colonialism and its negotiation, on the one hand. Paola Ivanov's interest in provenance research with regards to the collections stemming from the former German colony German East Africa, her grappling with postcolonial theory and interest in making colonial histories accessible to large audiences, as well as my own curatorial work on *Object Biographies* further consolidated this focus. On the other hand, my interest also evolved from focusing on the Ethnological Museum towards attributing the Humboldt Forum a more important role in my analysis.

Museum ethnographies tend to be described as studies of closed-off and isolated societies, comparable to villages, dominated by the the researcher's interest in the organisation's 'total social life' (Handler and Gable 1997:10; see also Gable 2013). In my case, the village feel was literal as the museum was situated at the underground stop *Dahlem Dorf* (Dahlem village), and potentiated by the fact that the Ethnological Museum was located in Berlin's suburbs, approximately 10–15 kilometres from the city centre and usually deserted. However, and in contrast to understandings of museums as villages or islands, the fieldwork in Berlin's Ethnological Museum allowed me to see how 'the local is negotiated into being in relation' (Macdonald 2009:5). As Sharon Macdonald, Christine Gerbich, and I discussed in an article on methodological approaches to museum ethnographies, organisations such as museums 'are, inevitably, entangled in multiple networks of various kinds, usually involving some degree of distributed governance' (Macdonald, Gerbich, and von Oswald 2018:140) – being confronted with organisational and political change with regards to the Humboldt Forum which did not

seem controllable from within the museum. As such, this research project situates itself at once as an ethnography of a process of an organisation in the making with uncertain futures – the Humboldt Forum; as well as of an established organisation shaped by rules and regulations, routines and habits but in transformation – the Ethnological Museum.

Organisations in transformation: the Ethnological Museum and the Humboldt Forum in Berlin's *Schloss* (1990–2019)

The framing provided by the Humboldt Forum changed consistently during the period from 2013-2019. The conditions which shaped the core of my fieldwork, from 2013 till 2015, subsequently took place in acutely different circumstances from those that obtain now.

Planning the Humboldt Forum: encapsulating the national and the global

Centred on the question of which ruins to keep and which monuments to build or rebuild, controversies around the Humboldt Forum reflected how Germany's different histories were dealt with, notably on a political level. Two central controversies have succeeded one another since the fall of the Wall: the debate on the reconstruction of the *Schloss* versus the keeping and renovation of the Palace of the Republic centrally evoked questions on the role of the public remembrance of GDR heritage, and was followed by discussions on what the *Schloss* would be about and what it would include. This debate shifted the perspective towards controversies around Germany's Prussian and colonial past, almost entirely eclipsing and replacing the preceding debates on Germany's socialist past. The history of the making of the Humboldt Forum finishes with an inquiry into the kind of organisation the Forum is becoming, shortly before its opening.

Based on the recommendations of an expert commission appointed to imagine and design Berlin's 'historical centre' (*historische Mitte*), the reconstruction of Berlin's City Palace was decided on by the German parliament in 2002, after more than a decade of debate (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin 2002). The City Palace, built and developed as the residency of the Hohenzollerns since 1443, was destroyed in 1950 by the GDR government after heavy war damage. In 1976, the Palace of the Republic was inaugurated in order to host the GDR People's Parliament and serve as a venue for cultural events and activities for GDR citizens. A landmark of GDR architecture, it had been closed since 1990. Advocates had begun to rally support for reconstruction shortly after the fall of the Wall. The suggestion of the demolition of one palace in exchange for the construction of another raised the question of which national

history and memory was being valued in what was being progressively constructed as the 'historical centre' (*historische Mitte*) of Germany's capital.[35]

The parliamentary decision opened a debate, on the one hand, on how, in a unified Germany, the government dealt with GDR history, memory, and its traces. Framing it as a central place for lived experiences and social memory of GDR times, the Palace of the Republic's advocates interpreted its demolition as a public erasure and devaluation of those specific memories. As such, the conflict regarding the *Schloss* was interpreted by many as an East–West conflict, symbolic of the difficulties surrounding the process of reunification (Binder 2013:106).[36] On the other hand, the replacement of one palace by another triggered debate on whether the period before 1918 would be established as 'the actual identity-establishing moment for Berlin' (Philipp Oswalt, cited in von Bose 2013). As Jonathan Bach has argued, the reconstruction sought to recreate the 'Prussian aura', an aura which he depicts as 'ambiguous' insofar as it stood for tolerance and cultural enlightenment, as well as for discipline, obedience, and, crucially, violence in Germany's colonial wars (Bach 2017a:115).

The expert commission's concept supported and integrated the palace's advocates' arguments, not only by suggesting the name 'Humboldt Forum' but also by recommending a narrative for the Forum which would highlight Prussian accomplishments in education and cultural policies at the beginning of the nineteenth century, establishing this period as a reference point in German history. Players in the Forum would include the collections of the Humboldt-University and Berlin's Central Library as well as the so-called 'non-European' collections. Most of Berlin's museum collections, including those of the Ethnological Museum and the Museum for Asian Art – are part of the SPK – the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (*Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz*). The SPK consists of a large conglomerate of cultural organisations, including, amongst others, the State Museums of Berlin (SMB), the State Library, the

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[35] The advocates of the *Schloss* presented the area around the palace – the Schlossplatz – as abandoned from an urban policy perspective, a centre that needed to be re-established. As the years passed by, they radicalised their argumentation. The advocates 'presented the castle as the key to the genetic structure of the city, to its spirit and culture', as Jonathan Bach puts it in his compelling chronology of the debate (Bach 2017a:110).

[36] The debate concerning the position of the remembrance of the GDR has taken another direction through the debates around the 'Einheitswippe', a monument commemorating Germany's reunification. The monument, designed by the office Milla & Partner, had to be voted for twice in the Bundestag, and was last confirmed in the summer of 2017 (Peitz 2017; Fröhlich 2018).

Secret State Archive, as well as several research organisations. Employing more than 2,000 people, it is Europe's largest cultural organisation (Häntzschel 2018; Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2018). Beyond the obvious link between the library and the university to the Humboldt brothers, the Forum's concept was centred on 'the dialogue between European and non-European (*außereuropäischen*) cultures' (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin 2002:22), and based on a proposal by the then director of the SPK, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann.[37]

> Centred on the notions of encounter, openness and cultural experience, the Humboldt Forum is designed as a space for reflection, in which the national is stabilised in a globalised world and speaking at the same time about tolerance and openness of the German nation. (Binder 2013:114)

As Beate Binder pointedly argued in 2013, the recommendations reflected the political ambition for the Forum to be perceived as a representation of the national through profiling itself as cosmopolitan.[38]

The SPK representing the Humboldt Forum (2013–2015)
My fieldwork in the Ethnological Museum started a few months after the Humboldt Forum's foundation stone ceremony in the summer of 2013. In December 2013, the conservative politician Monika Grütters was named Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media – the German equivalent of the position of Minister of Culture[39] – in a grand coalition of CDU and SPD under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel. Monika Grütters adopted the Forum as her central political project. She aimed at making the Humboldt Forum 'a house all of a piece' (*ein Haus aus einem Guss*) and the 'nation's business card' (*Visitenkarte der Nation*), which would include organisation building and central recruitment decisions, both of which would shape the

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[37] For a reproduction of Lehmann's suggestions, see König and Scholz 2012:21–26.

[38] Temporary occupation of both the palace and, after its destruction, the lawn, allowed for artistic and cultural projects to take place, transforming it into a 'Fun Palace' (Misselwitz, Obrist, and Oswalt 2005), and giving space for projects such as the private initiative of the Temporäre Kunsthalle (Temporary Art Gallery) (2008–2010), see also Bach 2017b:120–129.

[39] In Germany, according to the principle of the cultural sovereignty of the *Bundesländer* (Federal States), there is no Ministry of Culture at federal level. The position of named Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media was created in 1998 by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD). The Commissioner is Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor and at the same time head of a supreme federal authority (*Oberste Bundesbehörden*).

Forum's profile consistently (Richter 2017; Mangold and Timm 2018). In what follows, I chronicle the most central developments concerning the Ethnological Museum and the Humboldt Forum – most of which were accompanied by controversies.

In 2013, no official representative for the Humboldt Forum was yet in place. In the museum, the protagonists linking the museum with the Humboldt Forum consisted firstly of its director Viola König and her team.[40] The Swiss cultural manager Martin Heller was commissioned in 2010 to lay out a concept for the 'Agora' – the Forum's programme – as well as several temporary exhibition spaces, and was named the Humboldt Lab Dahlem's artistic director (2012–2015). The Lab, equipped with a sizeable budget by the Federal Cultural Heritage Foundation (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*), had been set up to 'provide impulses for the exhibition planning … for the future Humboldt Forum' (Humboldt Lab Project Archive–Humboldt-Forum 2015).[41] Finally, Hermann Parzinger, president of the SPK, had taken on the role of speaking in the name of the Humboldt Forum in public.[42] The Ethnological Museum was one of the seventeen museums of the SMB, directed since 2008 by Michael Eissenhauer. The museum work was dominated at the time by what was usually referred to as the SPK's 'structures' by the museum's employees, as it was to the SPK and the SMB that the museum's director Viola König and her team needed to report back their plans for the exhibitions.

The Humboldt Forum as an independent organisation (since 2015)
Monika Grütters, since her appointment in December 2013, however, was invested in building the Humboldt Forum as an independent organisation. Her first important intervention in the Forum's organisational structure was to nominate the Founding Directorship (*Gründungsintendanz*) in April 2015. The Founding Directorship would be the first official representatives of the Forum employed to develop its 'common vision', bringing together the Forum's different players, consisting since early 2015 of the 'Site Museum' (Museum des Ortes), the Humboldt University, and, in place of the City

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[40] During my fieldwork at the museum (2013–2015), the *Konzeptgruppe* (concept group) consisted of the museum's director, Viola König, and Peter Junge, co-curator for the African collections, replaced by Monika Zessnik at his retirement in late 2014, and Markus Schindlbeck, curator for the Oceanic collections, and was responsible for reporting and communicating the museum's developments to the SPK and the SMB.

[41] 4,125 million euros were at the project's disposal to realise exhibitions, talks, symposia, workshops, etc. (Humboldt Lab Dahlem 2015).

[42] That Hermann Parzinger adopted this role is testified, for example, by the publications he authored in its name (Flierl and Parzinger 2009; Parzinger 2011).

Library, an exhibition about Berlin as well as the 'non-European' collections.[43] The Directorship consisted of Hermann Parzinger, representing the SPK, the art historian Horst Bredekamp, representing the Humboldt University, and Neil MacGregor. The nomination of Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, was celebrated as a diplomatic coup by the press, as 'Chancellor Merkel's preferred candidate'. This positioning justified that he took the lead in what was often referred to as 'the triumvirate' (dpa 2015). The Ethnological Museum's exhibition plans were in their final stage at the time of the Founding Directorship's nomination. Neil MacGregor's intervention in the exhibition plans were pronounced,[44] and logistically supported and financially realised by the company Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH (2016–2018), a firm created explicitly for the purpose. In December 2017, the Founding Directorship was replaced when the organisational and administrative structure of the Humboldt Forum was introduced.[45] Monika Grütters created and appointed two further leadership positions: the 'Director of Collections' (*Sammlungsdirektor*), merging the directorship of the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art; and the 'General Director' (*Generalintendant*). Both described as 'managers' rather than 'creatives' in the press, the recruitments were internal – the new Director of Collections, Lars-Christian Koch, was formerly curator and interim director at the Ethnological Museum, the General Director, Hartmut Dorgerloh, the former director of the Prussian Palaces and Gardens. Their recruitment was interpreted as an emergency solution to the Forum's organisational constellation, which was repeatedly characterised by museum staff and the press as 'lacking in transparency', 'hierarchical', or 'paralysed' (Häntzschel 2017a; Häntzschel 2017b; Häntzschel 2018).

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[43] The exhibition about Berlin was headed by Paul Spies, former director of the Amsterdam Museum, since September 2015 (Brockschmidt 2015). Spies was responsible for the exhibition for the Humboldt Forum and became the director of the Stiftung Stadtmuseum (City Museum Foundation). The Humboldt University exhibition was artistically directed by Gorch Pieken from April 2018 on, temporarily employed to create the first exhibition for the Forum's opening (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2018).

[44] About a third of the plans for the Ethnological Museum's and Museum for Asian Art's changed, permanent exhibitions were transformed into temporary ones, allowing Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH to release funds, exercise control, and provide expertise (Häntzschel 2017b; Häntzschel 2018). The company with its newly recruited staff would integrate the future owner and operator of the *Schloss*, the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss (Humboldt Forum in Berlin's City Palace Foundation), in early 2019.

[45] It consisted of a leadership system of 'four pillars' plus the directorate (*Generalintendanz*): 'Administration', 'Collections' (including Museum of Site), 'Humboldt Academy' ('education'), and 'Programming' (responsibility of the Forum's *Intendant* (director), in cooperation with Land of Berlin) (Zawatka-Gerlach 2017).

As Germany's 'most important cultural project of the twenty-first century' (Parzinger 2011), the Forum was not going to become a museum organisation in the traditional understanding. As Monika Grütters stated in 2017, 'we don't want to do museum work, but rather use the items from the collections as a point of departure to work interdisciplinarily'.[46] Despite the central position attributed to the 'non-European collections' and recurrent comparison with other grand national organisations such as the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, the British Museum, or the Centre Pompidou (Parzinger 2011:6–7), the Forum's concept and organisation were arguably different from museum organisations, and notably in relation to budget distribution. In Paris, the restructuration of the museum landscape in connection with ethnological collections implied the inventory, digitisation, restoration, and new storage of its collections.[47] In Berlin, resources were only marginally devoted to the museums involved but rather to the Forum itself. The building's overall construction costs were originally planned to amount to 480 million euros, and were continually adjusted, for example to 595 million euros in 2015, and were finally predicted in November 2019 at a total sum of 644.2 million euros (Bundesregierung 2019:2; Schönball 2019). Additional resources were distributed to the programming, exhibition, and event sector of the Forum.[48] The plans for the relocation of the collections to the outskirts storage of Friedrichshagen were suspended in 2017, because financing had not been not secured. Instead, the idea of a 'research campus' (*Forschungscampus*) emerged in 2017. This would imply that the research collections would predominantly stay in Dahlem, distributed across the entire museum, including in the former exhibition halls (Ossowski 2017). At the time of writing, however, financing for the research campus is not officially published or even guaranteed.[49, 50]

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[46] Translated from the German: 'Wir möchten nicht museal arbeiten, die Sammlungsgegenstände sollen vielmehr der Anlass für eine interdisziplinäre Herangehensweise sein' (quoted in Häntzschel 2017b).

[47] See for example Nicoletta Tiziana Beltrame's ethnography of the process (Beltrame 2012; Beltrame 2015).

[48] In 2018, it was communicated that 350 people would be temporarily employed until the Forum's opening (Kuhn 2018). These posts would, however, be made permanent on 1 January 2019, when the subsidiary Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH was integrated into the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss. In contrast, it was communicated that 40 additional temporary recruitments were devoted to the museums (Ethnological Museum and Museum for Asian Art), mostly corresponding to the immediate need to restore and prepare objects for the move to the Forum (Kuhn 2018).

[49] Advances to support the research campus had been made: the Museum for Asian Art and the Ethnological Museum were co-directed by Christian Koch and Alexis von Poser as deputy director since

The structure of the thesis

Working through thus stands in for the relations between that which remains and that which changes in processes of transformations. The thesis shows how colonial legacies are identified, researched, and addressed within the museum. It illuminates efforts and processes brought forward and fought for by museum staff to identify and publicly address the museum's colonial legacies, as in an explicit mobilisation of the past. Whereas the thesis chronicles, describes, and analyses these processes, it focuses above all on the way in which museum staff struggle to find alternatives to the disciplinary framings and orderings, professional conventions, and organisational hierarchies, with a view to their historical genesis. The thesis thus notably discusses the limits and boundaries which museum staff face when trying to work through the museum's colonial legacies. It points to the constant push and pull, as well as the risk of reproducing, stabilising, and legitimising the museum as colonial legacy: tensions which the working through of contested legacies more generally speaking entails.

The grappling with the colonial unfolds in four chapters. With a focus on practices, the thesis's chapters span the activities and tasks the museum is supposed to fulfil, based on the classic definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). ICOM, since its creation in 1946, roughly defines the museum's task as the *acquisition*, *communication*, *exhibition*, *research*, and *conservation*, of the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity (ICOM 2007). This definition has been repeatedly challenged, most recently by ICOM itself (ICOM 2017; ICOM 2018; Sandahl 2019; see also Small 2019). Nevertheless, ICOM's definition seems to still hold true, at least concerning the Ethnological Museum as part of the State Museum Berlin (SMB). The SMB is a conglomerate of museums which continues to profile itself as 'one of the largest "universal" museums in the world', which 'preserve, display, and publicize art and cultural treasures from throughout human

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July 2019. A potential analysis was released including architectural plans (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2019a).

[50] In contrast, in 2016, the yearly budget for the future Humboldt Forum was calculated and estimated at 50 million euros. It is only in comparison that the dimensions of the Forum's funds can be grasped. Whereas some large international museums have comparable annual budgets, such as the Musée du Quai Branly with 54 million euros in 2016 (AFP 2016), others are dealing with budget cuts despite recent reopening and refurbishing, such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (Belgium) with an annual budget of 16 million euros (2018) (Lismond-Mertes 2019:27). In comparison to other cultural organisations in Berlin, however, the Humboldt Forum will receive substantially larger funding: the 2015 Federal State budget devoted to the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, the Berliner Festspiele, including the Martin-Gropius-Bau, as well as Berlin's film festival Berlinale, came to 29 million euros (Fahrun 2016).

history'.[51] Collecting, as one of the museum's central tasks, is not extensively discussed in the thesis: the museum collected only exceptionally during the time of my fieldwork, primarily as a result of a lack of budget. (Non-)collecting could of course have been extensively discussed here, but since collecting or buying things was of so little concern during my stay at the museum, and didn't form an important part of the museum's everyday at the time, I devote little attention to collecting (see Chapter 2, for example). The thesis thus addresses different professionals, work areas and fields of expertise, and locations in the museum. It concentrates on how the museum communicates about its contested legacies, how it exhibits its collections, how it researches their provenance, and how the collections are stored and conserved. In order to grasp and situate the museum's legacies, the different histories related to the museum's practices are introduced in each chapter: the *exhibition* history of the Africa department, the history of *inventory* and *digitisation*, as well as the history of *storing and conserving* objects in the museum. The thesis thus covers discussions related to the digital, the material, the archival, and the curatorial – all of which are reviewed via the relevant literature in the respective chapters. In addition to the focus on practices, each of the chapters works with one particular metaphor which allows me to think the observed processes and practices outside of their usual frames of references. The metaphors of *haunting*, *repair*, *the avatar*, and *toxicity* allow me in particular to shift the focus on how temporalities, agency, and affect articulate and are challenged in the museum.

The first chapter is concerned with the struggles accompanying processes of *communicating* about the museum's collection, a collection which was only gradually perceived and constructed as problematic in the period under investigation (2013–2019). Haunting articulates as a means here to describe the lingering presence of the colonial past and, in particular, to grasp its affective and intimate dimension: the discomforts, uncertainties, and malaises which the working through of difficult heritage entails. Problematising working from within an organisation often associated with and once complicit of colonial governance, the chapter argues that engaging with colonial legacies centrally includes the risk of reproducing colonial asymmetries and legitimising the museum as 'colonial instrument' (Boast). It does so by identifying the developments relating the collections and the negotiations of the role of Germany's colonial past on different political and organisational levels, in a chronological manner. *Object Biographies*, the exhibition I co-curated with Verena Rodatus, forms the chapter's point of departure. It serves as a means to chronicle how public organisations labour to negotiate claims for

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[51] See https://www.smb.museum/en/research/profile.html, consulted 26 May 2019.

the recognition of difficult pasts, and the German colonial past in particular, struggling to define a stance in a politically and diplomatically undefined terrain. The chapter situates the negotiations related to the museum's collection not as a consequence, but as a constitutive part of negotiation and approximating a moral standard and political standpoint towards Germany's colonial past more broadly. The chapter serves at the same time to introduce key aspects addressed in this thesis: With regards to how Germany has dealt with its colonial past, it situates current developments and debates within a broader history. It introduces the research's methodological approach of 'being affected' to take into account the affective dimension of museum work. Finally, it positions the museum as colonial legacy. Via a virtual exhibition tour through *Object Biographies*, it details the collection's histories and constitution with regards to their colonial entanglement, and furthermore discusses the implications, reverberations, and challenges such an understanding of the museum as colonial legacy involves in contemporary museum practice.

The thesis's second chapter concerns the practice of *exhibiting*. The chapter centrally argues that contemporary curating in anthropological museums is above all practised as an attempt to *repair* the legacies of representations identified as colonial. The analysis thus focuses on how the curator tackles these representations, histories of exhibiting, and, importantly, the legacies of the *critique* of these representations in order to develop and implement counter-narratives. After unfolding the ambitious curatorial approach aimed at counteracting these representations, the chapter continues by examining the process in which the future permanent exhibition slowly took shape. The analysis of the process shows how the way of producing exhibitions in ethnological museums – depicted here as the 'curatorial culture of the ethnological' – can thwart curatorial efforts to challenge representations. This 'curatorial culture' is characterised by being research-based, authoritative, and collection-centred. Focusing on how these characteristics articulate in the exhibition-making process, the analysis shows how the curatorial culture contributes to the re-establishment of the exact modes of representations the curator attempts to tackle. It argues that the curatorial culture persists despite recurrent critique because of how it interplays and is interwoven with the organisation's 'structures', structures which render change within the organisation difficult or even impede it.

Following the process of *researching* provenance in the third chapter allows me to analyse the museum's infrastructures which frame this process – the database, the inventory, the archive, and the ordering of collections. These infrastructures, I argue, foster knowledge

production in which *past* conceptualisations of colonial difference are reproduced via the museum's *present* infrastructure. The identification and deconstruction of colonial epistemologies – and in particular, of modes of ordering, specific names, and categories – in the museum's database shows how their unstable, provisory, and fragile character is continually solidified, materialised, and perpetuated within the database. In contrast to an argument questioning provenance research as a method, this chapter rather points to the struggles which accompany and result from working with infrastructures and epistemologies which stem from and rely on colonial practices and knowledge production. Beyond the research and disclosure of colonial histories, this chapter focuses on the struggles with the very words, categories, and place-making which depict, order, and differentiate museums and collections, and also world-makings more generally. It discusses the difficulties of being caught within such epistemologies and taxonomies, the seeming impossibility of not reproducing them, whilst acknowledging the museum staff's efforts of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2010). Thinking of these digital presences as avatars not only allows me to reflect on these material inscriptions of the past in the present infrastructures, but concludes with a reflection on the database's potential to introduce 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo) to the museum.

The inquiry on *storing and conserving* collections breaks down the interrogation of the museum as colonial legacy to the collection's materialities and physicality in the thesis's fourth chapter. Analysing the collections as a colonial legacy in their quality, and in particular, their overwhelming quantity, the chapter elaborates on the constitution, circulation, and past and present struggles of storing and conserving the department's collection. I work with the metaphor of toxicity in this chapter, and introduce the notion of Gift, in order to work through the ambivalent double-sidedness of the collection. 'Gift' alludes to the ambivalence of the act of gifting, requesting reciprocity, and more practically, resources and care for the transformation of unknown, and possibly problematic, things into museum objects, on the one side. On the other, Gift points to the poisonous character of the gift in itself, demanding protection, as *Gift* in German has the meaning of 'poison'. Being poisonous, then, puts the question of the objects' transformation of substance and agency at the centre. Objects change and turn into subjects as they poison those in interaction with them. The chapter thus describes the transience of the museum objects' status throughout their lives outside and inside the museum, as it discusses how the coming into being of a museum object transforms its material and physical substance as the result of the attempt to master its materiality: a

substance which continuously evolves and which shows how the objects are materially, and irreversibly, the product of their complex histories.

In the thesis's concluding discussion, I return to the main arguments by elaborating in particular on how an anthropology of the ethnological museum contributes to an anthropology of colonial legacies. I furthermore point out the doubts and questions the thesis opens up, indicating future areas of research and observation. The conclusion argues that the understanding of the museum *as* colonial legacy contributes an acknowledgement of the structuring role and its effects on contemporary lives and living together. In order to grapple with the remnants of the past in its everyday, the thesis thus concludes by suggesting that the museum best remain in crisis, and that we should continue to assume the ambivalence the working through of colonial legacies in the Ethnological Museum entails.

Chapter 1
Communicating contested collections: 'being affected' by colonial haunting

Introduction

In June 2013, the *Schloss* foundation stone was laid. Described as a 'little act of state' by the press, the ceremony included international representation. The national ministers and members of parliament present at the ceremony were joined with video congratulations from the British Museum's director Neil MacGregor, and the former US Foreign Minister Henry Kissinger (Haubrich 2013). The occasion was blessed with exceptionally good weather, and shouts of 'Bravo' for the *Schloss*'s most prominent initiators went along with praise for the Humboldt Forum as 'an opportunity for the whole of Europe' (MacGregor). A journalist assessed the situation as one where '…a new phase begins. The time of ideological struggles is over. Construction is underway, finally' (Schaper 2013). For some, more than two decades of dissent seemed to end with the beginning of construction work.

Contrasting the joyful event was the call for a moratorium, a request to end all plans related to the Humboldt Forum. It was voiced by the coalition of associations and individuals known as *No Humboldt 21!*, founded on the occasion of the foundation stone ceremony. They evaluated the Forum and its concept to be 'Eurocentric' and 'restorative', stating that these stand in 'a direct contradiction to the aim promoting equality in a migration society' (No Humboldt 21! 2013:21). The physical separation between the activists standing outside of the festive scene, protesting, and the celebration inside the construction site epitomises a binary between an organisation perceived as perpetuating colonial modes of conceiving the world, and those opposing them, a binary between 'the institution' and 'critique'.

At the time of writing in 2019/2020, this binary has decomposed. The debate has reached a momentum when it comes to the attention devoted to German colonialism reflected in large public interest, the national press, and political debates, position-taking and policy-making, after a period in which public memory in Germany had for a long time been depicted as 'amnesiac' in relation to its colonial past (Kößler 2006; Zimmerer 2013a:9). A few months from the Humboldt Forum's planned opening in stages in the fall of 2020, it seems as if there is a general agreement *that*, and sometimes even *how*, German colonialism should constitute a significant part in Germany's memory culture, and of the Humboldt Forum's programme. That German colonialism has been addressed via issues

related to museum collections stands out, and is materialised in a range of public statements and documents. Key events and examples include the government's coalition contract (January 2018) and subsequent political negotiations on a national level (official hearing in parliament; agreement by cultural ministers in spring 2019);[1] the application of public funds to provenance research and the subsequent establishment of a focus on colonial-era provenance research at the German Lost Art Foundation in 2019 (BPA 2019), as well as the recurrent public positioning of the SPK, the Humboldt Forum, and its representatives as supporting restitution, reconciliation, and partnership with the formerly colonised (Parzinger 2019; Dorgerloh 2019).

Departing from the process of making the exhibition *Object Biographies* between 2013 and 2015 within the framework of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem,[2] this chapter addresses how contentious material and immaterial legacies are negotiated and communicated about in museum and heritage settings, as part of a wider struggle to recognise difficult pasts and histories.[3] It discusses how colonial collections are deployed to trigger developments in memory politics, with regard to Germany's colonial past in particular. The exhibition *Object Biographies*, which I co-curated, serves as the point of departure here to chronicle how public organisations – the SPK, the Ethnological Museum - laboured to negotiate claims for the acknowledgement of German colonial past and to define a stance, working in politically uncertain terrain. It does so by concentrating on the period 2013 to 2015, a time characterised by a political insecurity about how to handle the rising claims related to German colonialism, which preceded the progressive public, political, and national acknowledgement of Germany's colonial past. An analysis of this period allows me to identify the differences of view and to point to the lines of conflict that processes of negotiation of contested colonial legacies involves, *before* reaching an apparent consensus. This involves an analysis of the questions, hesitations, and resistances – departing notably from my own position as curator of an exhibition addressing colonial provenance and violence. Focusing on the museum's tasks to 'communicate (…) about the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity', the chapter disentangles these processes of negotiation

[1] The political debate focused on 'colonial cultural goods', both reflected by a document authored by both the national and regional ministers of culture (Kultusminister Konferenz 2019), as well as an official hearing of experts in the German national parliament (Deutscher Bundestag 2019), initiated by parliamentary questions put forward both by the Green and the Liberal Party (Fraktion Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2019; Fraktion FDP 2019).

[2] The point of view expressed in this chapter is solely mine, even if I sometimes adopt the 'we' to describe Verena Rodatus' and my curatorial ambitions and approach with regards to *Object Biographies*.

[3] For an in-depth analysis of 'negotiating difficult heritage' with regards to Nazi past, see Macdonald 2009.

and situates how the position of the different players shifted, also with regards to demands for dealing with contested colonial heritage, repatriation and restitution, and reparations.

The chapter addresses the following questions: How can the recent acknowledgement of Germany's colonial past be situated in the longer histories of struggles for its recognition in Germany? How did working for a contested organisation articulate at this particular period of time – an organisation associated with and to a certain extent, originating from, colonial regimes of power? How did we, as curators, respond to the polarised context via our curatorial practice? What did we learn from this process and how has it been developed since 2015 in the museum?

Haunting and affect

In 2013, when I had just started my research in the museum, I was struck by the pervasiveness of emotions in the field. Different descriptions of the general mood and people's emotions frequently reappear in my fieldnotes: such as 'is enraged', 'feels desperate', 'describes as draining'. The programmatic directions the Forum would take, as well as who would define them, were not defined yet. 'No one wants to work for a project which is at the centre of critique', I noted. 'Museum staff lack identification with the Forum.'[4] I myself remember working in the museum and feeling awkward. I remember sitting at my desk and feeling as exhausted as never before. I felt that when entering the museum's gate, walking on its green lawn towards the reception to get my keys, something restricted my breath from flowing freely. And I couldn't grasp why exactly.

Reflecting about the reasons for this particular 'affective atmosphere' during the process of writing (Anderson 2009), I began to imagine the museum as a haunted space. I imagined how the curators engaged with all kinds of spectres, spectres of postcolonial critique, charged with critical expectations, and of colonial legacies, materialised in the collections and quotidian in the museum's practices, omni-present in the museum's everyday and yet absent from the museum's public positioning at the time. The haunted museum is a popular image, triggering imaginations of the museum's presumably dead 'objects' coming to life in order to trouble and confront the living in relation to unknown pasts and histories. Distinct from this image, this chapter relies on literature related to what has been depicted as 'the spectral turn', an array of analysis on literature, film, art,

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[4] Extracts from my fieldnotes, from 8 November 2013, 11 November 2013, 2 December 2013.

or architecture, building on and responding to Jacques Derrida's 'Spectres of Marx' (Derrida 1994).[5] Derrida proposes to question the being of haunting and haunting of being by fusing 'ontology' and 'haunting' as 'hauntology'. In French, *hauntologie* sounds almost like *ontologie*. One recognises the living and affective presence of something that seems to be no longer. Derrida developed the notion of 'hauntology' for the conference 'Whither Marxism?' (1993), trying to understand, position, relate, and finally, how to 'live with' Marxism's spectres against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's progressive disintegration. This chapter attempts to interrogate similar questions, but in relation to 'colonialism' in a complex German landscape of memory culture and politics.

In a conversation that I conducted with Nanette Snoep in 2016, then director of the Ethnographic Collections of the State of Saxony, she stated that 'it is not enough to talk a little bit about colonial history, put it in a small showcase, and that's it. The malaise stays.'[6] When one looks at definitions of haunting, it evokes ideas of the disquieting, habitually reappearing. A haunting fragrance stays around, it lingers and persists. *The malaise stays.* Feelings and emotions are one of the most noticeable indications of ghostly presence, of how hauntings are transmitted and received. Ghosts make people *feel* unsettled and uncomfortable. Ghosts raise doubts as they blur binaries and boundaries: of past and present, of object and subject, of the living and dead. Possibly most importantly with regards to the analysis of the working through of colonial legacies, hauntings question temporalities: Because '[t]he spectre stands for that which never simply *is*' (Peeren 2014:10, her emphasis), haunting addresses and challenges established relationships between past, present, and future, and notably the clear demarcations between them, alluding here to the effects, continuities, and reverberations of colonialism in the present. As the sociologist Avery Gordon states, 'that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence', building on Toni Morrison's argument (1989) that 'invisible things are not necessarily not-there' (Gordon 1997:17). As these uncertainties draw us affectively, hauntings allow the anthropology of colonial legacies to devote attention to its affective dimension.

In the museum, hauntings remind us of untold stories, materialised in the collections, and the people that are intrinsically linked with the objects: the objects' makers, collectors, museum staff, and visitors. Objects can be thought of as an 'aggregation of

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[5] For an overview of these studies, see Blanco and Peeren 2013.

[6] Retranscription of an interview with Nanette Snoep at Leipzig's *Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde*, 19 April 2016.

time; they remain when we are long gone' (Antje Majewski in Deliss and Mutumba 2014: 111), and thus retain and stock uncountable, yet unspoken stories, sets of diverse knowledges and practices. In direct confrontation with these histories, some of them reflecting the violence of colonialism, feelings articulate. In an article where the Africa department's curator Paola Ivanov and the researcher Kristin Weber-Sinn summarise their findings on war booty from today's Tanzania (formerly German East Africa), they report in a concluding personal note how working with the material traces of colonial violence – the written archives and collections – causes 'anger and shock'. Through the material traces, imagination was triggered, rendering tangible what they knew already as experts of German colonial rule. They describe their frequent encounter with what Andrew Zimmermann has called German anthropology's 'anti-humanism': in the archives, they were confronted with 'ignorance coupled with a barely tolerable arrogance and self-centredness' of those depicting the colony, with 'supposedly scientific collecting obsession' concerning objects, contrasting with the overwhelming negligence of the importance of human lives (Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018:120).

What this chapter is also concerned with, however, are possibly more subtle and ambivalent feelings, some of them paradoxical: These engage my own position when dealing with colonial legacies, and the unresolved question of how to appropriately address, discuss, exhibit, negotiate them in the present, while reflecting them from my personal situatedness and privilege of working from within the museum. Behaving appropriately is closely linked with questions of moral and consenting conduct, a question which imposes itself in a context in which the risk of repeating, reproducing, or reinscribing colonial mechanisms and power structures is high: relating to, working with, and addressing past injustices doesn't necessarily avoid reproducing similar injustices in the present. They engage thus with the hauntings' revenant character. Repetition, displacements, and duplication underline the hauntings' ambivalent physicality, highlighting the fact that the ghost is never identical to who or what it was when still alive. To analyse how past notions of interpretation pervade contemporary interpretative practices in the art museum, Cheryl Meszaros, for example, introduces the metaphor of the ghost to 'suggest how familiar traditions and assumptions from other eras are both absent (they are in the past) and present (they are kind of intellectual inheritance that continues to influence us to this day)' (Meszaros, Gibson, and Carter 2011:41). As the anthropologist Janet Carsten states, 'the presence of ghosts and uncanny hauntings suggests (...) circumstances in which those who bear them are *not resigned to giving up their attachments*" (Carsten 2007:13). As figures of return, hauntings indicate those

attachments - and mechanisms of control - which are difficult to resign to, the traditions, anthropological missions and museum practices which might be hard to let go of. Haunting thus not only reminds those working in the museum of past transgressions, they also point to present circumstances and contexts. Emotional reactions, then, equally don't articulate only with regards to the past, but rather link these histories to contemporary politics of representations, and as such, to present inequalities, discriminatory or racist structures, and power asymmetries.

This chapter tells the story of the ways in which the polarised dichotomies between 'activism' and 'the museum', between 'critique' and the 'institution' formed, and how they affected those working within these organisations associated with and, in that regard at times, limited to colonial collecting and violence. Whereas the chapter concludes with a chronology of how the binary decomposed, how the lines of conflict blurred, and how unexpected coalitions formed between 2015-2020, the chapter discusses the negotiations which accompanied the uneven, hesitant process which preceded the public recognition of German colonialism today.

Departing from my own research and curatorial trajectory working on the short term and experimental exhibition project *Object Biographies*, the chapter shows, firstly, how the working through of colonial legacies in Berlin and Germany articulated at that time, in relation to museum collections. It does so by situating the debate on German colonialism in its historical context, in order to highlight the long-term role of activist and scholarly engagement, which risks to pass unnoticed and unrecognised today. The chapter, secondly, proposes the methodological approach of 'being affected' in order to grasp the emotional dimension that accompanies museum work with contested collections. *Object Biographies* is introduced, then, not only to show how the exhibition co-curator Verena Rodatus and I tried to respond to the polarised context of the time, by insisting on 'shifting the gaze towards the institution' and unravelling the museum's complicity and entanglement with German colonialism. It also takes into account, in the analysis of the preparations of the exhibition, as well as of its evaluation, my own emotional stance, working through the practicability and challenges of representational politics at the museum. The chapter then serves as a frame and context for the rest of the thesis, as it introduces the political context, the methodological approach, as well as the museum's history with regards to colonialism, which constitute the point of departure for the thesis at large.

The metaphor of haunting is not intended here to function as a means to exoticise or mystify the victims – and perpetrators – of colonialism, nor to render ghostly or invisible those who fight for the recognition of colonialism in Germany. Rather, the metaphor is an attempt to handle and position the emotionally charged atmospheres, tensions, and dynamics in the field; and to problematise the ambiguities, discomforts, and apprehensions produced when working with these violent pasts and, notably, their reverberations, reproductions, and revenants in the present. As such, it serves as a metaphorical background to the chapter.

Berlin as postcolonial metropole: claiming recognition of Germany's colonial past and the Humboldt Forum (until 2013)

When I arrived in the museum in October 2013 to start my research, the atmosphere was tense. Since the Forum's founding stone ceremony in the summer, activists had organised a proliferation of public events, such as an exhibition[7] and conferences,[8] the publication of articles and edited volumes.[9] Whereas the activists had put the negotiation of German colonialism on the public agenda via their call for a moratorium on the Forum, it was recurrently described as 'frustrating' b y outsiders that it was unclear what was going on within the museum in the autumn and winter of 2013.[10] With regard to the Forum's positioning in relation to the museum's colonial past, but also its concept more generally speaking, no response of the SPK, nor the Ethnological Museum had been voiced or published so far. The work in progress in the Humboldt Forum was kept behind the scenes, despite a provisional three-storey exhibition space, the Humboldt

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[7] The exhibition 'Anti-Humboldt-Box' was organised by *Artefakte//anti-humboldt* (Brigitta Kuster, Regina Sarreiter, Dierk Schmidt) and *AFROTAK TV cyberNomads* (Michael Küppers-Adebisi) in cooperation with Andreas Siekmann and Ute Klissenbauer, and has been exhibited in different locations, such as in the August-Bebel-Institut (2013), the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (2013), Galerie Scriptings (2013–2014), the Villa Romana Florence (2015), the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg (2016), as well as in Berlin's Kronprinzenpalais during the Steirischer Herbst (2017).

[8] See the details on the organised events on the association's website, http://www.no-humboldt21.de/programme2/, consulted 25 April 2019.

[9] A special issue of the internet journal *darkmatter*, edited by *Artefakte//anti-humbolt* was released in October 2013. 'Afterlives' brought together discussions and scholarly analysis regarding the politics of representation, restitution, and historiography, all in relation to the Humboldt Forum.

[10] Several participants at a conference in Dahlem voiced this frustration (fieldnotes from 10 December 2013). Larissa Förster said on stage on 22 October 2013 at the Werkstatt der Kulturen that what was going on within the museum was not visible outside of it. The event was recorded and is available online, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEojPEqZDSY, consulted 30 April 2019.

Box, which was supposed to serve as a showcase for the different players and their future exhibition.[11]

Contrasting this atmosphere, in 2019, as this thesis is being written, comments proliferate which relate the recent acknowledgement of German colonialism directly to the Humboldt Forum, such as Germany's Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters, who stated that it is 'above all thanks to the Humboldt Forum that colonialism has been put on the political agenda', attesting that it has 'operated like a catalyst, even before its opening' (quoted in Ringelstein 2018). In this section, I will rather argue how the particular context of Berlin's academic, political, artistic, and activist landscape provided fertile ground, laboriously prepared for more than a decade, for the critique of the Humboldt Forum to arise and, later, to be taken up by politicians and representatives of the Forum itself. In particular, I will foreground the role of activism and cultural producers, as it was activist critique – often the result of unpaid, tedious, and risky work – rather than politics, which was involved in the 'laborious excavation work' of researching, addressing, and claiming Germany's colonial past, as the anthropologist Larissa Förster depicted the process.[12] I take the requests of the umbrella group *No Humboldt 21!* as a point of departure to trace how claims related to the recognition of German colonialism articulated. The group formalised and centralised critique expressed formerly in a dispersed manner. I will then elaborate on previous activism related to human remains, anti-colonial critique and contested cultural goods since 2004/2005, some of whom were since 2009 also loosely referred to as the 'anti-Humboldt movement'.

Voicing critique: No Humboldt 21! *and the Humboldt Forum moratorium*
In June 2013, the resolution 'Stop the planned construction of the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace!' was signed by 82 associations, most of them located in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany.[13] The specific objectives represented by these organisations differed. However, most of them have been engaged in de-colonial, anti-racist, and

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[11] The interest group was allocated the entry space in the Humboldt Box, which, notably, hosted a popular, handmade model of the 'city around 1900'. This space served, next to providing information about the future building and exhibitions, as a space for collecting donations for the *Schloss* façade and cupola, both of which are privately funded (Stiftung Berliner Schloss 2016).

[12] Discussion with Larissa Förster of an earlier version of this text, 5 April 2018.

[13] Seventy of the 82 associations were located in Germany, and of them 43 were Berlin-based. Twelve were internationally located. The list of signatories, as well as the resolution, can be consulted here: http://www.no-humboldt21.de/resolution/, consulted 5 May 2018.

feminist missions, some of which represent diaspora groups and their interests. In five points, *No Humboldt 21!* summarised their points of critique. First, they challenged the idea that museums, in this case, the Ethnological Museum, were 'the legitimate owners of their holdings'. Accentuating the colonial origins of the museum's collection, they called for the 'disclosure of the ownership history', an adherence to the UN resolution in favour of repatriation, as well as 'dialogue' with the 'descendants of the artists and the legal owners of the exhibits', notably highlighting the problematic status of human remains. Second, they accused the Humboldt Forum of 'redeeming Berlin's colonial past', and demanded that no objects acquired during colonial times should be exhibited in the City Palace. Third, they denounced the politics of representation, where 'the cultures of the world are discriminated against, being marked as "strangers" and "other"'. They highlighted the Forum's particular position on the Museum Island, opposing the 'classical collections' (Altes Museum, Bodemuseum, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Alte Nationalgalerie) with the 'Non-European' ones. Fourth, they criticised processes of knowledge production from the so-called 'era of discoveries' and from colonial times, linking this project to one of the Forum's eponyms, Alexander von Humboldt. In their opinion, Humboldt 'embodies colonial dominance' and was thus not 'an appropriate person to name an intercultural centre after'. Fifth, they focused on the politics of access, criticising the way in which cultural goods remain unequally available and accessible to populations around the globe. Stipulating a concentration of cultural goods in the Global North, they requested their permanent return to the countries of production. The moratorium and the ongoing contestations around the Humboldt Forum in the *Schloss* confirmed the focus of contestation concerning the discussion of Germany's colonial legacies. The debate on how to deal with Germany's socialist past, however, which dominated discussion notably at the moment of the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, vanished almost entirely from the public agenda.

The activists' engagement was backed up by opposition politicians of the green party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen[14] and the left party Die Linke,[15] starting inquiries within both

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[14] 'Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Clara Herrmann (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) vom 28. Juni 2013 (Eingang beim Abgeordnetenhaus am 01. Juli 2013) und Antwort (Postkoloniale) Auseinandersetzung mit dem Humboldt Forum', Drucksache 17 / 12 360, http://www.clara-herrmann.net/sites/default/files/AnfrageKolonialisierung.pdf, sent by Hermann, 28 June 2013, consulted 20 April 2018 (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin 2013b).

[15] 'Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Niema Movassat, Christine Buchholz, Sevim Dagdelen, Annette Groth, Heike Hänsel, Inge Höger und der Franktion Die Linke. Weiterer Umgang mit menschlichen Gebeinen aus ehemaligen deutschen Kolonien und anderen Überseegebieten',

the Berlin and the national parliament, questioning the colonial origins of the museum's collections, insisting on the status of human remains.[16] The forms and shape of critique, as well as its audiences, were thus from its beginning multifaceted. Articulated via local and national politics, academia, as well as nationally funded cultural projects organisations, such as the House of World Cultures (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, henceforth HKW), on the one hand, the initiative was grounded and personally entrenched with grassroots and localised activism, on the other.

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http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/000/1800010.pdf, published 23 October 2013, accessed 20 April 2018.

[16] Any action of *No Humboldt 21!* was documented and published on the initiative's website, and has thus become a sort of archive of the continued resistance to the project. They also published a chronology of the events in their common publication (No Humboldt 21 ! 2017).

Figure 1.1 Logo of the 'No Humboldt 21!' initiative
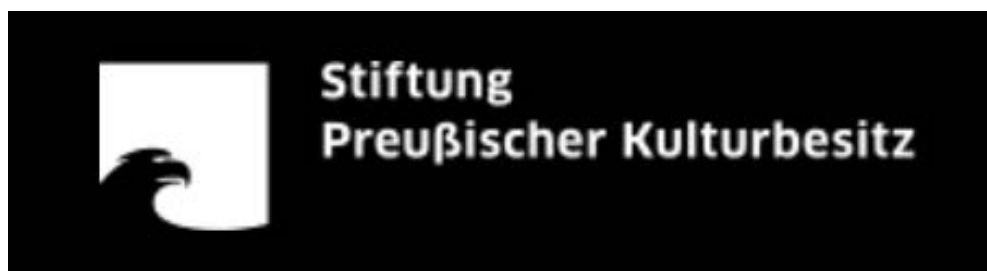
Figure 1.2 Logo of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 1.3 Logo of the Stiftung Berliner Schloss

The 'No-Humboldt 21!' logo implicitly specified their critique, as it brought together two other logos. First, that of the Foundation Humboldt-Forum in Berlin's Palace (*Stiftung Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss*), which had been initiated in 2009 in order to become the building constructor and subsequent owner of the *Schloss*. The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation was represented by the eagle, the symbol of Prussia. *No-Humboldt-21!*'s logo integrated the two organisations in its logo – and thus focalised their target of critique: The building (the *Schloss*), its content (the SPK – collections), and the combination of the two, including the project's name 'Humboldt Forum'. It is with the eagle's tears, which seemed to transform into blood, that the logo translated into a critique of the organisations involved.

With this logo, the activists, artists, and academics also excluded players from their critique: the Humboldt University with its collections, as well as, at the time, the public library, an exhibition space which will now be occupied by what has been referred to as the 'Berlin exhibition'. This target would intensify and specify with time. More and more attention would be publicly devoted to the Ethnological Museum, and in particular its Africa department, and their grappling with the museum's colonial past, eliding the Museum for Asian Art, as part of the State Museums Berlin (SMB) collections, as well as the Humboldt University and later on, the Berlin exhibition. The activists' logo also allowed the personification of the critique's target: the *Schloss*'s realisers, the museum's and the SPK's representatives (curators, director, president), and the Humboldt Forum's leadership, then still represented by the SPK's president, Hermann Parzinger.

The Humboldt Forum's public positioning towards colonialism
The Humboldt Forum was at the time an easy target for postcolonial critique. Positions so far expressed by the Forum's representatives relativised the impact of colonialism on the collections: German colonialism was often exclusively framed in comparison to other European colonial powers, which seemed to implicitly underplay its impact. In 2001, official communications about the Forum stated that '([i])n contrast to the typical colonial countries Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, etc. where selected objects reached the European motherlands as spoil, German collectors and scientists developed systematic and – in an astonishingly modern way – large databases in Humboldt's tradition' (quoted in König 2013:33). In 2010, Hermann Parzinger confirmed that 'concerning the collection's genesis, Germany has – fortunately, one has to say – a colonial past, but not like other European powers' (Hermann Parzinger (2010) quoted in König 2012:56). It was also claimed that only a small part of the collections was

actually concerned with colonialism, but that the collection bore a rather 'precolonial' character, in reference to Berlin's Royal Cabinet of Curiosity, whose contested politics of acquisition and representation were left unproblematised (von Bose 2016:128–129). This understanding denied Germany's long implication in the colonial project beyond formal rule, and simply disregarded the fact that important elements of the collections were acquired in colonial contexts, such as approximately 64 per cent of the Africa collections.[17]

In the absence of a clear statement of the Forum's concept, the brochure entitled 'The Humboldt Forum: "To Be in Touch with as Much of the World as Possible". The Goal and Significance of Germany's Most Important Cultural Project at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century' served as the official representation of the Humboldt Forum.[18] Authored by the SPK's president Hermann Parzinger in 2011, the brochure was *de facto* understood, read, and used as the Forum's 'concept'. For the Forum's critics, quoting the brochure extensively, it mirrored a general position of the SPK,[19] centralising the concept around the Humboldt brothers as explorers (18–19); claiming the global through the confirmation of the national, such as when positioning the future Forum as counterpart to the British Museum or Paris's Musée du Quai Branly (6–7); or reinforcing processes of othering by recurrently distancing 'European' collections from 'non-European' or 'world art' collections, notably by highlighting the collection's position as 'inspiration' for (male) European artists (28–29). Finally, it re-inscribed an attitude which downplayed the role of German colonialism in the museum's and the collection's constitution, and relativised its impact by asserting the scientificity of its collection and research practices (31–32).

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[17] The figure of 64 per cent stems from the following calculation: between 1884 and 1914 (German colonial rule), the African collections grew from 7,388 objects to 55,079 objects (Krieger and Koch 1973:106). Given that today's Africa collection is estimated at 75,000 objects, the difference constitutes approximately 64 per cent (website Ethnological Museum, https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/sammlung.html, consulted 16 April 2019).

[18] The German title is 'Das Humboldt-Forum. "Soviel Welt mit sich verbinden als möglich." Aufgabe und Bedeutung des wichtigsten Kulturprojekts in Deutschland zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts'. The brochure was available in German and English, https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/newsroom/media-library/documents/document-detail/article/2013/11/27/media-the-humboldt-forum-to-be-in-touch-with-as-much-of-the-world-as-possible.html, consulted 23 May 2019.

[19] Beyond the moratorium, examples of the critical discussion and quotation of the brochure include (Ha 2013) and (von Bose 2013), as well as an expansive discussion of the brochure at the event 'Prussian Cultural Heritage? …)' (October 2013) by Kien Nghi Ha.

These kinds of positionings bypassed the academic state of the arts on German colonialism. They also overlooked an important existing and growing number of studies analysing the inherent and constitutive relations of colonialism and anthropological museums in general,[20] and more specifically, concerning Berlin's collections.[21] However, the SPK's leadership and, thus, the Forum's representatives didn't only seem to neglect academic research and the critique directly addressed at the museum by activism; they also didn't respond to advice and expertise from within its walls. Museum staff, and the Africa department's curators in particular, defined colonialism as a central topic of their research and exhibition plans, such as in their specific exhibition statements.[22] Similarly, the International Advisory Board – in its first constellation in April 2011 – alerted the museum staff and the SPK's leadership to the need to address colonialism in different dimensions. As they highlighted, colonialism should not only be approached as restricted colonial rule, but also as a larger endeavour, with far-reaching, contemporary repercussions (Heizmann and Parzinger 2012). Reported on by Hermann Parzinger himself, the Advisory Board meeting, however, had little to no repercussions on the way that the SPK positioned itself publicly. On the contrary, the Advisory Board, which had criticised the museum's positioning in a fundamental way, was not sustained in its original format, despite interest expressed by some of its members. The results of the subsequent constellations of the Advisory Board, then, would not, unlike those of its first version, be published or communicated publicly.[23]

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[20] Examples of precursor and key literature on the relationship between museums and colonialism include (Clifford 1988; Thomas 1991; Karp and Lavine 1991; Coombes 1997; Clifford 1997; Gosden and Knowles 2001).

[21] Concerning Berlin's collections, notably the monographs by historians Andrew Zimmermann and Glenn Penny analyse the relation between colonialism, anthropology, and the museum (Zimmerman 2001; Penny 2002). They were preceded and complemented by articles and dispersed research, focusing on academia and museum institutions (Krieger and Koch 1973; Essner 1986; Bergner 1996; Penny and Bunzl 2003), or particular collectors and museum staff (Gothsch 1983; Fabian 1998; Stelzig 2004; Fischer, Bolz, and Kamel 2007; Ruggendorfer and Szemethy 2009).

[22] In plans for the Africa department exhibition as early as 2008, colonial war booty and the installation of visible storage was indicated (König 2012:24). The earliest concept of the permanent exhibition by Paola Ivanov from 2012 already mentions that colonial history will occupy a central role in the exhibition, a position which is published in the common exhibition plans by Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov in 2015 (Ivanov 2012; Ivanov and Junge 2015).

[23] A second Advisory Board was called in at a later stage of the process, and became particularly known when Bénédicte Savoy resigned from it in 2017. A third generation, in which some of the members from the former constellation remained, was split up into a 'Programme Advisory Board', which was supposed to 'give advice on the core direction of the Humboldt Forum programme' (Hans-Christian Pape, Martin Grötschel, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann, Maria Gazzetti, Andrea Wulf, Dieter Kosslick),

Challenging Germany's 'colonial amnesia'

The perceived lack of attention devoted to the museum's colonial past at the time was related to the fact that the conditions for remembering colonialism in Germany had for a long time been perceived and phrased as 'colonial amnesia' (Kößler 2006; Zimmerer 2013b:9). 'Amnesia' implies a 'forgetting' of the colonial past in Germany: an inability to recall this time period and its larger, encompassing structures and mechanisms. I myself had not learnt about German colonialism in school. Before I started my research, I was unaware that Germany had governed colonies. In what follows, I thus summarise what I needed myself to understand, chronicle, reflect on, and assemble in order to sustain my arguments and follow the empirical developments in and histories of the field.

Germany's unrelatedness to its colonial past can partly be explained by the conditions for remembering and writing histories of colonialism in Germany, in particular with a view to other European countries. Germany's status as a nation without colonies was shaped earlier than that of other European nations because it lost its colonies during the First World War. Those who lived through and remember German colonial rule first hand, then, belong to a different generation from those who lived under colonial rule in other European colonies. Concerning Germany's public memory culture, small groups were engaged in continuous attempts to commemorate German colonialism up to 1945, efforts which however dispersed in the public sphere after the war. The year 1968, Britta Schilling argues, marked 'the most visible and lasting caesura with Germany's colonial past in the West'. The destruction of several colonial monuments during 1968 student revolts, in solidarity with decolonisation movements and nations in the Global South, left blank spaces in several cities' public spheres, facilitating that public discourse on German colonialism was 'laid to rest after 1968' (Schilling 2014:10). Concerning the historiography of German colonialism, German colonialism has only recently been defined as a valid topic to be researched in German academia, encouraged by a focus in history departments on national histories, excluding transnational and global dimensions of these histories (Möhle 1999; Reinhardt and Reinhard 2018). The fact that Germany's immigration politics was characterised by contract-based labour immigration and unrelated to its colonial histories has had an impact on who writes the histories of

https://www.humboldtforum.com/en/pages/programme-advisory-board/, consulted 26 April 2019, and an 'International Team of Experts' to 'support the general director and may later form an academic advisory board for the Humboldt Forum' (George Abungu, Anthony Appiah, Rita Eder, Jyotindra Jain, Chor-Lin Lee Neil MacGregor, Natalia Majluf, Nazan Ölçerm Wei Hu), https://humboldtforum.com/en/pages/international-experts/, consulted 26 April 2019.

(German) colonialism in Germany: pioneers in the 1980s and 1990s in academia and public life had worked on rendering the question of German colonialism and its remembrance in Germany more prominent, most notably an emerging Afro-German movement.[24] Regardless of such exceptions, histories of colonialism have only partly been shaped and enriched by former colonial subjects, their descendants and diasporas in Germany. At the same time, and significantly, German historiography and memory politics focused on coming to terms with the Holocaust and the German *Sonderweg* (Eckert and Wirz 2013:508; Zimmerer 2015:22).

Despite the fact that these different factors contribute to what has been termed an 'absence of the colonial past in German remembrance culture' (Lutz and Gawarecki 2005:10) and, more particularly, on a political level, as a 'gap in memory politics' (Bauche 2010), the term 'colonial amnesia' has been challenged. On the one hand, recent research has shown that private colonial remembrance always continued (Schilling 2014), as well as that debates and controversies on colonialism in the historiographies of both the FRG and the GDR resurged after the Second World War (Bürger 2017). On the other hand, the term 'amnesia' denies memorial space and agency to those who suffered from colonial rule as well as to their descendants, who, even if not publicly recognised and with little space accorded to them in Germany's memoryscape, kept and continue to recount memories and histories of German colonial rule. The established use of the term 'amnesia' also discredits the work of activists, academics, and cultural producers who have been engaged in rendering Germany's colonial past visible, continuous efforts which intensified in particular in the years 2004 and 2005.

Addressing German colonialism: 2004/2005 as pivotal 'anniversary' years and the beginning of a 'social movement in memory politics'

In activism and research, the years 2004/2005 have been described as pivotal and as turning points concerning the public remembrance and awareness of German colonialism. These years marked several anniversaries, giving the opportunity both in Germany as well as in the former colonies to request public remembrance. In 2004 came the 120th anniversary of the so-called Berlin Conference of 1884 – also known as the Congo Conference – which confirmed the distribution of territory and trade rights on the African continent amongst European colonial powers. More importantly, 2004

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[24] This includes the formation of 'Initiative of Black Germans' (ISD) as well as the 'Black German Women' (ADEFRA e. V.) in 1986, and the publication of the seminal work 'Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte' (Ayim, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1987).

coincided with the 100th anniversary of the genocide committed on the Herero and Nama in Namibia (Zimmerer and Zeller 2003; Böhlke-Itzen 2004) and 2005 coincided with the anniversary of the Maji Maji war in Tanzania (Becker and Beez 2005). Of major importance in both Tanzania and Namibia, these events were officially remembered in the former colonies (Becker 2010; Förster 2010). However, within Germany, no official commemoration ceremony took place, but was rather relocated abroad.[25]

In view of the active silencing of German colonialism in German politics, a 'social movement in memory politics' started (Bauche 2010). This movement was supported and sustained by a growing and expanding number of research projects related to German colonialism, concerning both its histories,[26] as well as its contemporary implications in Germany, such as language;[27] popular culture and education;[28] remembrance and *lieux de mémoire*.[29] These developments were closely linked to each other, in the sense that activists were themselves academics or that academics were aware of and fostering the political aspect of their work. In 2010, Manuela Bauche described members of this 'movement' or 'scene' as consisting mainly of black and white Germans 'predominantly educated in a Western academic way, many of whom are historians, who sometimes

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[25] During their visits to Namibia, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder avoided any kind of public apology out of fear of being confronted with claims for financial reparations. It was only the Federal Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, in an act of 'personal courage' (Kößler 2005:23), who publicly apologised for '[t]he atrocities of that time [which] were what would today be called genocide' (quoted in Eckert 2007:37). Immediately sanctioned by the responsible ministry, the minister's reaction was framed as an 'emotional outburst' which 'could cost tax payers billions' (Böhlke-Itzen quoted in Eckert 2007:37). The minister's apology excluded a juridical responsibility which would have possibly and eventually translated into valid repatriation claims from the Namibian side (Eckert 2007:37). In contrast to the genocide in Namibia, the remembrance of the 100th anniversary of the Maji Maji war in Tanzania hardly attracted any public media attention in Germany.

[26] It was thus around and after the time of the parliamentary vote confirming the Humboldt Forum that research regarding German colonialism more generally speaking, both concerning the memory of German colonialism and specific historic case studies (Eckert 1999; Zeller 2000; Heyden and Zeller 2002; Böhlke-Itzen 2004; Hoffmann 2007), as well as more comprehensive, usually edited, volumes (Lutz and Gawarecki 2005; Hobuß and Lölke 2007; Perraudin and Zimmerer 2011; Conrad 2012; Habermas and Pzyrembel 2013), became more prominent.

[27] See for example for language Arndt et al. 2004; Arndt and Ofuatey-Alazard 2011, and in particular controversies around the N-word in 2013, Zimmerer 2013b:22–25; Albrecht 2017.

[28] See for example Bechhaus-Gerst and Klein-Arendt 2003; Kundrus 2003; Bechhaus-Gerst and Gieseke 2006; Langbehn 2010.

[29] See for example Zeller 2000; Heyden and Zeller 2002; Förster 2010; Zimmerer 2013.

share experiences as workers in memory sites remembering national socialism; others come from anti-racism work' (Bauche 2010).[30] In different German cities, associations which engaged with the call for the recognition of German colonialism were founded.[31] The activists tried to render knowledge about German colonialism public, knowledge that was scientifically 'acknowledged by specialists' but 'hardly present in public conscience' (Kößler 2005:23). Berlin played a particular role in this context, as it allowed convergences of activism with different other fields to take place. These convergences, in turn, provided fertile ground for the protests against the Humboldt Forum to take place.

Berlin as postcolonial metropole

Building on the above-mentioned research and activism, the intellectual and physical proximity of politics, academia, activism, and cultural production, and, in particular, contemporary art in Berlin allowed the agents' shared interests in colonial legacies as well as in postcolonial theory to converge.[32] The two foci of the Berlin-based postcolonial activism – material culture and heritage – related to claims later addressed at the Humboldt Forum. They enabled artistic and curatorial agents to link with, on the one hand, the call for restitution and repatriation, and notably the return of human remains. On the other, they addressed the representation of colonial histories, both in their absence, such as in organisational narratives, as well as in their unsituated or unacknowledged presence in Berlin's everyday as former colonial metropole (Heyden and Zeller 2002; Heyden and Zeller 2005). The most active associations – *Berlin postkolonial*, *Tanzania-Network*, *Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD)*, *AFROTAK TV cyberNomads*, as well as *AfricAvenir* – confirmed the focus on German colonialism in Africa, encouraged by the fact that Berlin is home to Germany's largest

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[30] These accounts nuance the argument put forward by Thomas Tiemeyer, who stated that the resurgence of the colonial past can above all be linked to a general diversification of German society, leading to an 'ethnological' or 'cosmopolitan remembrance culture' (Thiemeyer 2016). In contrast to other European nations, in which the former colonial subjects and their descendants have been challenging national remembrance cultures, those who actively seek for colonial pasts to be remembered in Germany have very different profiles.

[31] *Freiburg postkolonial*, linked to the organisation *Informationszentrum Dritte Welt*, remains a precursor in this context, as it established a digital platform in 2006, based on local research but also collecting sources on German colonialism in general, which has turned it into one of the most frequently consulted databases on the subject, praised for its efforts in archiving colonial histories (Bechhaus-Gerst 2017:50). Other associations were founded and continue their work in Munich, Hamburg, Dresden, Leipzig, Cologne, Augsburg, and Dortmund.

[32] These reflections, and in particular the notion of 'convergences', are based on discussions with Jonas Tinius and Larissa Förster.

African diaspora, both of German and international nationality (Diallo and Zeller 2013:12).

The activist claims for the repatriation of human remains from Germany's former colonies related those claims to the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the SPK. Berlin's significant collections of human remains were not stored in the depots of the Ethnological Museum, but in the Museum of Prehistory and Early History (*Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte*) since 2011 (Heeb and Jöbstl 2017). [33] The relocation of the human remains in 2011 from the Charité to the Museum of Prehistory and Early Historyturned the SPK into a central interlocutor of the activists. Whereas several returns of human remains were negotiated, the repatriation of human remains to Namibia in 2011 from the Charité was particularly contested, stirring debate and encouraging further activism, as German politicians didn't follow diplomatic protocol (see Stoecker, Schnalke, and Winkelmann 2013). The claims for repatriations went hand in hand with the request for the recognition of and claims for (financial) reparation in relation to the colonial war and genocide committed on the Ovaherero and Nama peoples between 1904 and 1908. The genocide was recognised by the German government in 2016, but the government excluded any possibility of financial reparations (see Kößler 2015).[34]

Whereas the claim for repatriation was related to the Humboldt Forum in terms of its links to the SPK's collections, another of the activists' targets consisted in challenging established modes of representation. This concerned both the deconstruction of colonial imagery, nomenclature, and monuments in Germany's everyday, as well as (the lack of) histories of German colonialism. In Berlin, activists such as Tahir Della, Christian Kopp,

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[33] Even though they were not stored at the museum, the historic relationship of the collection of human remains and the Ethnological Museum was tight. The anthropologist and custodian for Africa and Oceania Felix von Luschan (1885–1910) actively put together a collection of human remains, including 6,300 skulls (Heeb and Jöbstl 2017). At the same time, human remains were still an important of the Ethnological Museum, as many objects included human tissue, hair, or teeth, as a simple search in the database would quickly reveal. See here for example the list of human remains identified by *Berlin Postkolonial* via the Ethnological Museum's public and online database (No Humboldt 21 ! 2014b).

[34] Even though the genocide was officially recognised as such by Germany in 2016, the right to claim reparations was officially excluded. The government's representatives argued that they were using the term genocide in a 'historical-political' and not in a 'juridical' way, meaning that 'no legal consequences result from this historical-political use of the term "genocide"'. This decision was disputed by the representatives of the Ovaherero and Nama people; a request reached the UN Council in January 2017 and remains open (May 2019).

Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, Manuela Bauche, Israel Kaunatjike, Kwame Opoku, and Joshua Kwesi Aikins deployed different methods to make colonial histories visible in the first place, as well as developing counter-narratives. The activists' used, first, the format of guided tours, focusing on the remains of colonial buildings and representations within the city, such as in Berlin's 'African Quarter' (*Afrikanisches Viertel*), in order to remind audiences of the 'everyday' and 'everywhere' of colonialism in Germany's cities. Furthermore, they intervened in the city's landscapes through the creation of information and memorial plaques,[35] or by protesting against and changing street names honouring colonial staff and events.[36] Joshua Kwesi Aikins, one of the initiators and protagonists in changing Berlin street names, has depicted the strategy as a 'reversal of perspective', enabling memory politics to establish a resistant perspective (Aikins quoted in Kopp et al. 2018:42; see also Jethro n.d.). And finally, narratives have been challenged at exhibitions addressing German colonialism, and there have been interventions in already existing exhibitions, in museums and independent project spaces.[37]

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[35] Until today, there is only one official memorial plaque in Berlin commemorating the atrocities of German colonial rule in Namibia, on the Neuen Garnisonsfriedhof in Berlin-Tempelhof. The plaque is just next to the so-called Herero Stone, which was constructed to remember the voluntary service of German *Schutztruppen* in Namibia in 1904–1907, which is regularly visited and honoured by right-wing and veteran groups. The plaque was installed in 2009 (Habermalz 2018). In 2012, different postcolonial associations succeeded in installing an information and memorial plaque in Berlin's so-called African Quarter (*Afrikanisches Viertel*) (Kopp and Krohn 2012).

[36] One of the initiative's major successes consisted here in changing the Gröbenufer or Groebenufer, named after a military officer engaged in the transatlantic slave trade in Berlin, to May-Ayim-Ufer, named after a feminist Afro-German poet, intellectual, and activist in 2009/2010. Ongoing is the fight in Berlin concerning the Mohrenstraße in Berlin-Mitte. A recent success of the initiatives has been the agreement to change the streetnames Lüderitzstraße, Nachtigalplatz, and Petersallee in Berlin's so-called African Quarter (*Afrikanisches Viertel*) (DECOLONIZE BERLIN 2018).

[37] Exhibitions addressing German colonialism in particular include for instance the exhibition *Namibia–Deutschland: Eine geteilte Geschichte*, curated by Larissa Förster and Clara Himmelheber, Deutsch-Historisches Museum, 2005; the touring exhibition *Freedom Roads. Koloniale Straßennamen. Postkoloniale Erinnerungskultur*, curated by H. M. Jokinen and Christian Kopp (August Bebel Institut, Berlin; Münchner Stadtmuseum; Kunsthaus Hamburg 2010–2013); or the touring exhibition *What We See: Images, Voices, and Versioning. Reconsidering an Anthropological Collection from Southern Africa*, curated by Annette Hoffmann (South Africa, 2009; Switzerland, 2009; Austria, 2011; Germany, 2012; and Namibia, 2013 (for more information see Binter 2014). A precursor in German museography was the intervention *Colonialism in a Box* (*Kolonialismus im Kasten*), put in place in 2013, which allowed visitors to listen to an alternative tour concentrating on German colonialism, addressing the gaps and lacks in the German Historical Museum's permanent exhibition. The tour was based on critical guided tours, and developed by the historians Manuela Bauche, Dörte Lerp, Susann Lewerenz, Marie Muschalek, and Kristin Weber: see https://www.kolonialismusimkasten.de/, consulted 3 May 2018.

The activists' focus on museums and heritage allowed the borders between fields to blur. One central moment of convergence was the organisation of the two-day event *Anti-Humboldt: An event for the Humboldt Forum's selective deconstruction* in 2009.[38] The conference took place on the occasion of the exhibition *A Different Approach to the World: The Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace. A glimpse at the work in progress*.[39] The exhibition was announced as a preview of the 'making of' the exhibitions to be integrated in the Forum. A year after the Palace of the Republic had been completely demolished, the exhibition was located in the Alte Museum just opposite the de-/construction site. Subsumed under the name *Alexandertechnik*, a group of scholars, activists, and artists criticised what they understood as the lack of recognition of European colonialism, accentuated by the Forum's politics of representation. The event was also the occasion on which the collective *Artefakte//anti-humboldt* was founded, which continued to publicly oppose the Forum.[40] *Alexandertechnik* accused the leaders of the Humboldt Forum of 'ontologising Otherness', 'demonstrating openness to the world as a self-proclaimed nation of culture (*Kulturnation*)', 'presenting the "Golden Age" of Prussia … as a post-1990 fill-in' and of 'exploiting non-European arts and cultures' through their recontextualisation on the museum island (Alexandertechnik 2009). Beyond the claim for the recognition of Germany's colonial past, the different agents and initiatives in opposition to the Humboldt Forum shared an interest in the implementation, translation, and reflection of postcolonial theory in Germany, which had hitherto received marginal attention in German academia.

Whereas the 2009 event allowed Berlin's different scenes and fields to overlap and to solidify critique, the extent to which colonial legacies have been addressed in Berlin has since amplified with the significant number of (international) artists, curators, academics and other cultural producers who have opted for Berlin as their home town or temporary city of residence. Encouraged by Berlin's central role in the field of contemporary art, curators and artists have multiplied the perspectives and theoretical and practical

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[38] Translated from the German: *Anti-Humboldt. Eine Veranstaltung zum selektiven Rückbau des Humboldt-Forums*.

[39] Translated from the German: *Anders zur Welt kommen: Das Humboldt-Forum im Schloss. Ein Werkstattblick*.

[40] The group repeatedly organised events and put their protest on a wider agenda, such as in November 2011 in Paris's Bétonsalon and Musée du Quai Branly, http://www.betonsalon.net/spip.php?article362, consulted 24 April 2019. They prepared a special issue of the publication darkmatter, which would be released in late 2013 (Artefakte//anti-humboldt 2013).

approaches to colonial legacies, by pointing to the memory gaps hitherto rarely addressed within Germany,[41] not only in exhibition projects or conferences, but also in the establishment of archives.[42] Colonial legacies within the contemporary art world were often negotiated with direct reference to the Humboldt Forum and the critique associated with it (see also von Oswald and Tinius 2020).[43]

Establishing a dichotomy: disarranging it
The ever-hardening dichotomy was subsequently situated in its historic genealogy and national and political context, opposing those perceived as the representatives of the

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[41] The number of exhibition and discursive programmes addressing (German) colonialism in Berlin since 2013, the beginning of my fieldwork, is considerable and only examples are named in the following. The three-year programme at the gallery of the Institut für Auslangsbeziehungen in Berlin, 'Untie to Tie' (2017–2020), curated by Alya Sebti, or the programme of SAVVY Contemporary since 2009, a project space co-directed by Elena Aguido, Antonia Alampi, and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, as well as the ongoing encounter with colonial legacies in Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, directed by Bernd Scherer. Prominent exhibitions include Kader Attia's solo show *Repair* in Kunstwerke, 2013, the exhibition *Odarodle – An imaginary their_story of naturepeoples*, 1535–2017 (Schwules Museum Berlin, 2017), curated by Ashkan Sepahvand, or the *10th Berlin Biennale* (2018), curated by Gabi Ngcobo. An example of a collaboration between academia, activism, and the arts was the exhibition *The Dead, as far as [ ] can remember* at the Tieranatomisches Theater (2018-2019), curated by Felix Sattler. A permanent exhibition on Berlin's first colonial exhibition – *'Looking Back' (Zurückgeschaut)* - is part of the permanent exhibition at Museum Treptow, curated in cooperation with the *Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland* and *Berlin Postkolonial* (since 2017). Examples of discursive programmes include the conferences *Colonial Heritage* curated by Wolfgang Kaleck at the Akademie der Künste, with three major conferences from January to June 2018, or the *Thinking Together* workshops and conferences at Berlin's annual *MaerzMusik* festival (since 2017). See also the discussion of the exhibitions in Sieg 2018.

[42] One example is the project space SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin with its project *Colonial Neighbours*. The project has focused since 2011 on the collection of colonialism's everyday, focusing not on 'collecting items, but "interviews, and stories associated with these objects" in an attempt to capture the sociality embedded within them' (Tinius 2018:142).

[43] Representatives of the Humboldt Forum or Humboldt Lab Dahlem were invited to events. Examples are the participation of Paola Ivanov at the conference accompanying the exhibition *Wir Sind Alle Berliner: 1884–2014* in 2015, or the participation of Agnes Wegner, manager of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, in the panel discussion *Blinde Flecken: Berlin*, which took part within the programme *Return to Sender* at the Hebbel am Ufer theatre, March 2015. In the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, the debate around the Humboldt Forum was frequently taken up, such as by hosting the exhibition *Anti-Humboldt Box* (2013) and thus publicly legitimising the critique in a major cultural organisation. The Ethnological Museum hosted parts of the *8th Berlin Biennale*, and addressed colonialism both in discursive and exhibition formats (2014). The discursive series of four panels, *Crawling Doubles. Colonial Collecting and Affect*, was organised by Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc in cooperation with Lotte Arndt and Catalina Lozano. The exhibition *Double Lives* was curated by Natasha Ginwala in cooperation with the curator Paola Ivanov.

Humboldt Forum and its various opponents. A seemingly insurmountable opposition was constructed: an 'inside' versus an 'outside' the museum, a 'good' versus 'bad', a homogeneous Humboldt Forum versus a group of seemingly homogeneous activists. I entered the museum with ideas and critique of the Forum and its public representation similar to those of the activists, sympathising with their claims. Immediately, however, the binary opposition was disturbed. Working within the museum complicated any kind of black-and-white-approach. Repeatedly, museum staff themselves criticised the Forum. The brochure, which the critics repeatedly quoted as their main reference for the Forum's concept was not even known to some of the museum staff. Neither 'the' Humboldt Forum', 'the' SPK, nor 'the' Ethnological Museum existed as such, but were rather composed of numerous, more or less powerful, audible, and visible players with diverging opinions and positions.[44] Within the museum, the Manichean view opposing those dissimulating and those addressing the colonial past, the goes-along and the goes-against the Humboldt Forum, the postcolonial and the neocolonial, could not be sustained.

Conceiving *Object Biographies* in politically uncertain terrain:
methodological reflections on 'being affected' by a polarised field (2013 – 2014)

In the Werkstatt der Kulturen on 22 October 2013, the audience was composed of approximately 200 people. Members of the associations critical of the Forum were present, but also some staff from the museum. As an introduction to the discussion, the plans for the Humboldt Forum were described by the moderator Arnim Massing and panellist Kien Nghi Ha as 'particularly uninspired and unimaginative', 'revisionist', and 'lacking any kind of sensibility when it comes to dealing responsibly with one's own colonial history'.[45] Frequent ironical laughter from the audience accompanied the discussion, and people murmured when the moderator introduced Peter Junge as the

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[44] Multiplicity also existed on the activists' side. Christian Kopp and Mnyaka Sururu Mboro from *Berlin Postkolonial* became particularly and sustainably visible with time, representing *No Humboldt 21!*, but other scholars and activists also continued to be engaged in the opposition to the Forum.

[45] All the following quotes are transcriptions from the video recording of the event *Preußischer Kulturbesitz? Postkoloniale und entwicklungspolitische Perspektiven auf das Humboldt-Forum – Zum Umgang mit Kulturgütern und Human Remains aus der Kolonialzeit* (*Prussian Cultural Heritage? Postcolonial Perspectives and Perspectives from Development Policies on the Humboldt-Forum – Dealing with Cultural Assets and Human Remains from the Colonial Era*) at the Werkstatt der Kulturen, 22 October 2013, organised by members of *No Humboldt 21!*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEojPEqZDSY, consulted 20 February 2020. Quotations are from Arnim Massing and Kien Nghi Ha, translation from the German: '… vollkommen fehlenden Sensibilität für einen verantwortlichen Umgang mit der eigenen Kolonialgeschichte'.

fourth and only invitee to accept the invitation to be part of the panel. Hermann Parzinger had declined an invitation to this event due to a 'lack of time', publicly stating that 'we [the SPK] don't explicitly look for dialogue, but we also don't block it' (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin 2013a:26). The curator Peter Junge, visibly and for good reason nervous, tried to explain his position. Expressing his gratitude for being invited and highlighting the need for dialogue, he foregrounded the discrepancy of what was communicated about the museum by the Forum's communication department and what was actually done within the museum. The latter, he said, involved 'breaking with the colonial past'. In preparation for the event at the museum's canteen, Peter Junge claimed that 'we have everything they want: collection history, contemporary art, visible storage'. The exhibition concepts were to include sections on European colonialism and the museum's constitutive relationships with colonialisms.[46]

> I am representing the Africa collection here, I am not the representative of the SPK. If you want to criticise them and the brochure's author Hermann Parzinger, address them! I understand your criticism but the reality is different. We want to break with the colonial past in the museum; this has not been opposed by the SPK's leaders. I think you overestimate Hermann Parzinger's position on colonialism. I can't participate in these very general discussions, because they don't represent my personal position. I am working very practically on exhibitions in the Humboldt Forum, not on the dimension of political formats of a political project.

However, as the anthropologist Larissa Förster commented during the same event, the museum was a blackbox for those outside of it.

> You know the collections and its histories best, the problematic as well as the unproblematic parts. Where is your expert's voice correcting the cultural politics you are criticising? Why don't you take the chance to position yourself in the debate, taking the controversies as an opportunity?

Peter Junge rather responded in an apologetic way, juggling his professional positions by foregrounding the work done in the department, rejecting to take a critical stance. Peter

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[46] In 2014, the two Africa curators published their exhibition concept touching in large part on German colonialism and collection histories, in particular concerning Cameroon and German East Africa (Ivanov and Junge 2015).

Junge occupied a position which bridged the Ethnological Museum and the Humboldt Forum, being both a curator and responsible for the Humboldt Forum's planning schedule. He was thus aware of the professional role he could adopt, and which one he couldn't, in a highly departmentalised and hierarchical organisational setting.

The next day, in the museum's canteen, other staff laughed at Peter Junge, claiming that he had been 'spiked' (*aufgespießt*) by the museum critics. He denied angrily: 'I wouldn't ever let myself be spiked!' Despite his attempt to establish distance, he represented the SPK for those in the audience: an organisation difficult to disentangle from the outside and perceived as a single organisation standing in for Germany's colonial violence. 'This event was about unmasking (*Entlarvung*), not about dialogue. It's like in 1968, but', he sighed and continued, '[s]till, it is important not to tick off (*abhaken*) these kinds of events. Even if they are only a minority, and even if this kind of event arguably puts us in a bad mood' – the others seated at the table laughed again and seemed to agree – 'we have to continue the dialogue. These are the only people who are interested in the Forum, next to those conservatives who are engaged in rebuilding the *Schloss*! Ten years ago, no one doubted the origin of the objects. Today you are asked about it at every guided tour. That's why these people are important.'

Despite the curator's attempt to distance himself from the larger Humboldt Forum endeavour, the kind of emotional distress described above would recurrently reappear, being bound to a work process which was not concerted with nor controllable from within the Ethnological Museum. How to position oneself in such a context and endure the emotional distress of being associated with an organisation perceived and described as 'colonial' – both historically and at present? In the following section, I suggest the methodological approach of being affected in order to research contested and controversial heritage settings and constellations. I depart from the binary which had established in Berlin between the seemingly monolithic 'inside' and 'outside' of the Humboldt Forum. I elaborate on how working as part of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem allowed me to adopt an analytical stance towards exhibition making with contested, and more particularly, colonial collections from *within* the museum, going beyond these exact one-sided dichotomies. I argue for the analytical contribution that participation, rather than sole observation, can have in a field shaped by polarised dichotomies. While I deliberately adopt a subjective position – being myself confronted with struggling to speak on behalf of the Ethnological Museum or the Forum, and the difficulties of taking

a stance as a participant in this constellation of organisations - I nevertheless insist on the possibility of critical engagement with the field, despite 'being affected' by it.

Delegating critique to the Humboldt Lab Dahlem

After approximately two months of research in the museum in December 2013, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem directorate approached Verena Rodatus, the museum apprentice (*Volontär*) working in the Africa department, and later myself, to curate an exhibition about what they subsumed under the term 'looted art' (*Beutekunst*).[47] At the time, the Lab was perceived as the window onto *the making* of the Forum, and worked as its immediate showcase. Publicly funded with a budget of more than 4 million euros, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem consisted in exhibitions and discursive formats which were intended to accompany the preparations of the Forum, fostering 'experiments'.[48] Parallel to the wave of critique addressed at the Humboldt Forum, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem had opened its first 'rehearsal stages' (*Probebühnen*) in March, June, and September 2013.

The Lab had not started well. Substantiated by bad press,[49] the Lab had been undergoing an evaluation process by external experts,[50] whose critique of ignoring or inadequately addressing the demands raised for ethnological museums in general, and the Forum's critics in particular, started to seep through (Mörsch et al. 2014). This reception was furthermore encouraged because the Lab was directly associated with the Humboldt Forum. Most public commentators neglected the fact that the responsibility for the Lab's contents only partly lay in the hands of the directors of the Museum for Asian Art and the Ethnological Museum.[51] Finally, the Lab's projects had been met with hostility even

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[47] Using *Beutekunst*, a colloquial term for the official term used for 'looted art', namely, *Raubkunst*, suggested the proximity, often translated in explicit or implicit reference, to debates concerning art which had been confiscated during National Socialist rule; links to Cornelius Gurlitt and the Schwabing Art Trove and subsequently, debates on 'provenance'.

[48] The German Federal Cultural Foundation, a public funding body, initiated the project, which involved in-house curators as well as external artists, designers, curators, and researchers, http://www.humboldt-lab.de/projektarchiv/index.html, consulted 30 April 2019.

[49] Examples include Pataczek 2013; Fuhr 2013. However, whereas the exhibitions received relatively little, local, and mostly factual attention, some reviews were also positive and encouraging (Wulff 2013; König 2013).

[50] The evaluation was done by Carmen Mörsch, Nora Landkammer, Anna Chrusciel, and Catrin Seefranz concerning the period from March to September 2013. The evaluation failed insofar as only selected chapters circulated internally.

[51] The Humboldt Lab's artistic director Martin Heller, the project's manager, Agnes Wegner, as well as the directors of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Klaas Ruitenbeeck) and the Ethnological Museum

by museum staff, some of whom criticised the Lab's initial projects as 'appropriating the objects for a second time'.[52]

The coming into being of Object Biographies

In this environment in late 2013, the Lab was faced with the urgent need to showcase critical voices, or as one could also phrase it, to adapt to the current state of the art in academic literature on the topic. Verena Rodatus and I were thus asked to respond to a request made to the larger structures of the SMB and the SPK, but were, however, in a kind of insider–outsider position: We would both be temporarily engaged, we were new to the field, and not structurally integrated and representative of the Ethnological Museum as such. As one of the Lab's leaders explained to us, however, the dilemma was that it was 'obvious to everyone' that the question of provenance needed to be addressed, but that no official 'proactive positioning' concerning contested collection was to be expected in the near future, both concerning human remains and cultural artefacts. No resources, from the point of view of personnel and funding, were available from the museum and the SPK themselves to meet these demands, as the museum's curators were in the final stages of handing in their object lists for the Humboldt Forum already. The Humboldt Lab, in contrast, had important funding at its disposal.[53]

We were unsure whether to accept the offer. Sympathising with the Forum's opponents and identifying with their claims, we doubted that the museum or the SPK could either easily distance itself from the critique due to our temporary employment, limit the project's critical scope, or appropriate the project in order to legitimise the organisatios' positions without changing their general stance (see also Boast 2011; Oswald and Rodatus 2017). Working within the organisation, and being associated with the Humboldt Forum would change the way in which we could position ourselves. Passing from one side – myself as the 'anthropologist working on museum practices' and Verena Rodatus as the 'museum apprentice'– to the side of 'curator' with an identified and public authorship, felt like putting ourselves at risk, and created a feeling of insecurity, and possible exclusion from those that we considered our immediate peers. As we noted in the accompanying project management brief later, one of our apprehensions consisted in being 'discredited in the critical field because of the institutional affiliation' (April 2014).

(Viola König), had the first say on the projects, which were then confirmed or rejected by an international board of museum experts.

[52] Fieldnotes from 23 February 2013.

[53] Fieldnote from 11 December 2013, with the request not to be directly quoted.

These apprehensions were not unjustified, as others in the Humboldt Lab Dahlem had reported similar experiences.

Working in the Humboldt Lab was experienced as risky and emotionally challenging. A curator who was temporarily employed for a project at the Lab finished a discussion on the envisioned project by stating that 'I'd better do a good job so as not to lose my friends.' Another person recounted how she had been publicly confronted with 'overt hostility, simply because I was working for the Humboldt Forum.' One person reported crying on the open street when a former friend refused a greeting. 'It's not nice when everyone turns away, like that', another one explained.[54] In view of the insecurity, people were troubled when publicly representing the Humboldt Lab, such as in guided tours of the temporary exhibitions on view. In a rather defensive fashion and anticipating critique, some tours of the Lab's representative then focused on the project's 'experimental' approach, highlighting that 'many things so far didn't work out', and that 'we have already learnt a lot'.[55]

Despite our doubts, we accepted the offer. We hoped to be able to contribute to changing the museum and the SPK from within, as well as to establish our own position in the debate. The exhibition was developed in conversation with the Africa department's curators Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov. One point of departure for the exhibition project was provenance research, which we already conducted for the Humboldt Forum under Peter Junge's and Paola Ivanov's supervision as part of our individual research tasks – me within the framework of my PhD research, and Verena Rodatus as one of the tasks of her apprenticeship.

Sketching the concept of Object Biographies

To transform our research findings into an exhibition narrative, we adopted the research focus of object biographies as the exhibition's conceptual framework. We thus drew on analytical perspectives that emphasized objects' trajectories and their social and cultural lives (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) in order to narrate the relationships and entanglement between people and objects over time, and to show how long-lived objects extend beyond different systems of understanding (Hoskins 2006; Joy 2009). We wanted to rotate the visitors' gaze toward the museum itself, directing it to its histories,

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[54] Personal communications and conversations, with the author, with the request not to be directly quoted, fieldnotes from 23 February 2013, 17 March 2014 and a conversation in 2016.

[55] Notes from a guided tour with a German curatorial master programme in January 2014.

networks, and practices by addressing the little-known and sometimes problematic stories of the objects. Our aim was to scrutinise the problem of provenance in general, and of violent colonial appropriation in particular, and of museum categorisations and collecting policies that have characterized the limited Western view toward Africa and its artistic and cultural productions. Finding those stories, however, required provenance research. This meant not only looking at when, how, and from where objects came into museums and what they once signified, but also trying to unveil and analyse the specific historical circumstances under which museum collections and related bodies of thought came into existence. It required trying to reconstruct the organisational, disciplinary, and personal contexts in which museum collections have taken form. In this way, and extending the collection's potentials to the contemporary, we hoped to use the collection to generate new relationships, introducing topical perspectives into the museum via collaborative formats of research.[56]

From participant observation to observant participation

With the decision to co-curate the exhibition, my position in the field changed from being a scholar and recipient of a research stipend to a curator, or put differently, from 'participant observant' to 'observant participant'.[57] Changing roles implied to be concerned by the emotional distress I had observed beforehand. Becoming a 'participant' also changed the way in which I could conceive 'distance' and 'scientific objectivity' in the field.

It is Jeanne Favret-Saada's theorising of her fieldwork on witchcraft and the 'being affected' of the field which has helped me to think through the particularities of my fieldwork (Favret-Saada 1977). The field of museum anthropology is obviously very different from, and possibly less dangerous than, witchcraft in France – the risk of getting killed, for example, is relatively small in museums. Still, Favret-Saada's concept of 'being affected' challenges the role of and relationship between 'observation' and 'participation' in a way somewhat similar to my field. Favret-Saada claims that accounts of witchcraft were usually written from the perspective of anthropologists who were interested in observation, rather than participation. She recalls that academics had long reduced their analysis of witchcraft to 'accusation', depicting it as 'a medicine for the

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[56] One part of this paragraph (from 'We thus drew…' till '…via collaborative formats of research') is an almost identical extract of the co-written article 'Decolonizing Research, Cosmo-optimistic Collaboration? Making Object Biographies' (von Oswald and Rodatus 2017:213).

[57] For a discussion of the debate around 'observant participation' and 'participant observation', see Bastien 2007.

illiterate and ignorant people' (Favret-Saada 2012). In contrast, in her own experience in the field, she describes that the people she encountered wanted her to become a 'partner'. They would only communicate with her once she too had been, as she phrases it, 'taken'. She describes this feeling of participating in the field as 'being affected', without knowing whether or not she was actually bewitched herself.

Being affected and affecting the field

Despite the fact that metaphors of being 'taken' were not absent from my field – the former museum director Clémentine Deliss once publicly asked me if I had been 'turned' by museum anthropology, turned like a zombie[58] – the field of ethnological museums, and the way it was described and perceived when I entered it, was shaped in terms of binaries, as in Favret Saada's description of her field. As elaborated above, the rising opposition to and activism against the Humboldt Forum created an atmosphere in which an *outside* of the museum was levelled against its *inside*. The 'reduction to accusation' that Favret-Saada describes seemed to dominate the field with regard to the Humboldt Forum and, in particular, those who worked at the museum. These impressions mirrored what Andrea Witcomb described as a particular kind of 'climate', 'in which museums were depicted as hegemonic institutions, deeply embedded in colonial relations, tramping on the rights of minorities and protecting the status quo' (Witcomb 2015:132). *Being affected* implied a different emotional engagement with the field, which could be used analytically.

The 'being affected' or being 'taken' is interrelated with the role of *affect* in the field. Taking affect seriously, as Yael Navaro-Yashin has argued, enables an 'analytical approach that allows sensing as a method to understand and conceptualize one's surroundings'(Navaro-Yashin 2012:20). The understanding of affect employed here implies attention to 'affect as an expression, reflection and enactment of specific relations within some form of relational configuration' (Anderson 2010:10). An analysis of affect focuses on relationality, and thus, on how affect manifests as both generative and as a response to particular constellations of artefacts, places, and beings. To affect and to be affected are then expressed in the emotional practices which emerge out of these constellations and networks (Reckwitz 2012; Scheer 2016).

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[58] Discussion of the author's presentation of her PhD project at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac within the framework of the seminar 'Ecologie des collections', 7 May 2017.

Working on my own exhibition, I was able to further understand and analyse this atmosphere in terms of its reasons and embeddedness, grasping the organisational, political, and cultural dimensions the above-mentioned descriptions of the atmosphere pointed to. Favret-Saada distinguishes the feeling of 'being affected' from empathy. Empathising with the aim to produce knowledge differs from 'being affected' in two ways. First, empathy implies distance, when defined as an 'experiencing by proxy' the feelings of another. Being affected, however, translates into being oneself in the position of the person the anthropologist is ultimately writing about. Second, in the sense of *Einfühlung*, an emotional communion, empathy helps to understand the feelings of those people in the field. Being affected, on the other side, as Favret-Saada claims, tells the researcher about her own feelings, and not necessarily the feelings of those who are the subject of research (Favret-Saada 2012; Favret-Saada 1977). 'Being affected' meant personally, physically experiencing the curators' 'life-world' and thus *feeling myself* what they felt.

Apart from working within a polarised field, *being affected* also implied becoming an observant participant, and subsequently, to deliberately affect the field. This means that the researcher participates in and contributes, even co-produces, developments in the field. My analysis, I hoped, would contribute to the field insofar as it would decompose the binaries further, and blur the black and white dichotomies into multiple shades of grey. Beyond the scholarly contribution in the university context, in the case of *Object Biographies*, the contribution consisted in an attempt to take further and to take a stance with regards to the debate on German colonialism: It was the Ethnological Museum's first exhibition that, in the tradition of institutional critique, put the violent histories of looting and dispossession during German colonial rule at the exhibition's centre (von Oswald and Rodatus 2017).

Preparing and opening Object Biographies *in politically uncertain terrain*
Accompanying the preparations and opening of *Object Biographies* between December 2013 and March 2015, the perceived binaries shifted, but hardened, rather than decomposed. The negotiations concerned colonial collections from former German East Africa in particular, notably with regards to human remains and the exact conditions of the collections' acquisition. Since December 2013, activists from the associations *Tanzania Network*, *Berlin Postkolonial*, and *UWATAB* requested access to and information about the museum's collections, and thus shifted their focus away from the organisation of public events towards collection work (Prosinger, Mboro, and Kisalya 2013). In a back

and forth of letters between the SPK, consulting the responsible curators at the Ethnological Museum, and the activists,[59] the different representatives met for the first time in May 2014 around a common table in the SPK's president office. They agreed to organise a public event at the state-funded, and critically acclaimed HKW, planned for December 2014. With the public exchange envisioned, the ongoing protest against the Humboldt Forum decreased during 2014. The event was to consist of a panel of the SPK's president Hermann Parzinger and the Africa curator Peter Junge, representing the Humboldt Forum, and the academics and activists Grada Kilomba, Prince Kum'a Ndumbe III, and Joashua Kwesi Aikins. However, Hermann Parzinger and Peter Junge cancelled the event a week before it was supposed to take place. The move was interpreted as a 'refusal to dialogue' by *No Humboldt 21!*, and the umbrella organisation published the SPK's press department's cancellation. The SPK had accused the organisers of 'phrases of accusation, defamation, and unbearable populism' in their announcement of the event (No Humboldt 21! 2014a). Ten days after the SPK's cancellation, *No Humboldt 21!* released a press release (No Humboldt 21! 2014b). It included a list, and particular numbers, of human remains and what was referred to as 'war booty' (*Kriegsbeute*), which the activists had researched by accessing the museum's online database SMB-digital via keywords, as well as via archival research.

A month later and two months before the opening of *Object Biographies*, in January 2015, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters proclaimed that 'the government, such as the SPK, defended the approach that no unlawfully acquired objects should be kept within the collections of the State Museums Berlin, independent from the time period from which they stem', in response to a parliamentary claim from deputies of the green party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Özcan Mutlu). Monika Grütters thus officially guaranteed that every object displayed in the Humboldt Forum would have gone through provenance research procedures and that

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[59] In the first response in mid-January 2014, the SPK's director of the presidential department responded briefly and without detail in an email, neglecting precise questions concerning the collections' origins and denying the existence of human remains in the SPK's collections (Kathmann 2014). Only after contesting the vague answers and insisting on the existence of a collection of human remains in Berlin's State Museums in an open letter (and thus, after publishing the entire correspondence online), did the activists receive a second response by the SPK's president, Hermann Parzinger (Prosinger and Mboro 2014; Parzinger 2014). In the letter, he gave a more detailed and nuanced account of the state of research on the collections, acknowledged the existence of human remains in Berlin's Museum of Prehistory and Early History, and invited representatives of the associations to a conversation as well as to a visit of the storage spaces at the Ethnological Museum.

this research would be 'made transparent' (Deutscher Bundestag 2015:2–3). The statement took the museum staff by surprise. Until this date, responses to parliamentary claims had been negotiated in consultation with the museum. Monika Grütter's response needs to be seen in the context of the press release including a list of human remains and war booty *No Humboldt 21!* entitled 'Germany must return human bones and spoils of war from Cameroon, Togo, Tanzania and Rwanda'. When discussing Monika Grütters's statement, one curator desperately affirmed that 'phrased as such, we can basically just close the museum', while another one laughed, saying, 'Well, it is certainly much cheaper and less time-consuming to just pack objects boxes and send them away than to do provenance research.'[60]

Both the statement by Monika Grütters in early January 2015, as well as the publication of the list of human remains and war booty by *No Humboldt 21!* in December 2014 encouraged the need for the SPK to position itself. Moreover, *Object Biographies* would put one obvious example of colonial war booty in the exhibition's focus - a pair of figures looted in 1905 by the German colonial officer in the kingdom of Kom, Cameroun – which left no doubt on its acquisition in violent circumstances. However, positioning a public organisation was not self-evident in a political context in which German diplomacy had at least since the beginning of the 2000s neglected or circumvented its colonial past and related crimes. It was only two years later, in the summer of 2016, that the German Federal Republic recognised the Namibian genocide as such, stating that 'the war of annihilation [against the Nama and Herero people in colonial German South West Africa] … from 1904 to 1908 was a war crime and genocide' (Bundesregierung 2016).[61] Additionally, an official position was difficult to establish from a legal point of view. The museum's established position certified that the collection had been *legally acquired* in the context of contemporary international (colonial) law, that most of the objects had been acquired legally in the context of buying, lending, or gifting contracts, and that the cases were largely statute-barred in any case. It was the collection's *legitimate* status of ownership, however, which was increasingly put in question and which the Foundation needed to respond to.

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[60] Fieldnote from 7 February 2015.

[61] The recognition would only be partial because 'retrospective legal claims' would not apply. As the government stated, 'notions of "reparation" and "reconciliation" (*Wiedergutmachung*) would not apply to this context'. This position has been challenged by representatives of the Nama and Herero before the UN and is ongoing (as at April 2019).

As the question of legitimacy became more prominent, the absence of the SPK's public positioning was experienced as progressively difficult by those representing the Humboldt Forum and Humboldt Lab. During one public event in March 2015, for example, the Lab's manager Agnes Wegner needed to take a stance with regards to restitution and ownership, despite a lack of an official position by the SPK – seated below several 'No Humboldt 21!' posters asking 'Have you already contemplated looted art today?'[62], a situation she experienced as 'troubling'. In order to prepare the communication in view of the objects' colonial provenance with regard to *Object Biographies*, and to provide 'leeway to the two curators [Verena Rodatus and Margareta von Oswald]', she explained her difficulty arguing in favour of the collections – a position which she was not herself in favour of, but which she felt institutionally bound to. Asking for advice and legal consultation, she stated that 'I oftentimes reach my limits, and words fail me [in relation to the justification of war booty].'[63]

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[62] 10 March 2015. The event was entitled 'Blind Spots: Berlin' (*Blinde Flecken: Berlin*), and followed the performance 'Black Bismarck Revisited' with Alexander Karschnia, Bonaventure Ndikung, Simone Dede Ayivi, Agnes Wegner, and Kwesi Aikins, https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/programm/pdetail/gespraech-blinde-flecken-berlin/, consulted 2 May 2019.

[63] Email addressed to the museum's *Justiziariat* in March 2015, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem's manager Agnes Wegner expressed 'being troubled'.

Figure 1.4 Have you already contemplated looted art today? Poster by No Humboldt 21!, *www.africavenir.org/de/projekte/projekte-deutschland/dekoloniale-einwaende-gegen-das-humboldt-forum.html, consulted 4 May 2019, © Creative Commons Licence*

Figure 1.5 Prussian Cultural Heritage? Poster by No Humboldt 21!,
www.africavenir.org/de/projekte/projekte-deutschland/dekoloniale-einwaende-gegen-das-humboldt-forum.html, consulted 4 May 2019, © Creative Commons Licence

The struggle to position the Foundation became furthermore evident when, ten days before the exhibition's opening, we received the exhibition's heavily redacted wall texts by the SPK's communication department. Based on the argument that the exhibition texts were scientifically accurate, major amendments were reversed. The difficulty to take a public stance with regards to the Ethnological Museum's colonial collections, and in relation to that, issues of ownership and restitution, thus clearly concerned different levels of governance, affecting notably those who were working with the collections most intimately.

'Being affected' as a shift in analytical positioning

Affecting and 'being affected' by the field's unexpected twists and turns included a shift in my analytical perspective more generally speaking. Given that I had myself been confronted with the difficulties of making an exhibition in the context of a particular organisation and political constellation, with all its limitations, I would look at the work of museum curators differently. To put it very simply, I wouldn't solely focus on deconstructing their work by trying to identify 'mistakes', an approach commonly referred to as 'bashing' in the field (in both German and English), and which always seems to be implicitly involved when looking at exhibition making, in ethnological museums in particular. The questions I asked shifted, or rather, became more complex and open to contradictions. I myself needed to find explicit solutions regarding how to face the museum's collection, their histories, and the limitations imposed by those controlling them – in a constellation of political and marketing interests, decision-making processes, legal rules, and professional convictions.

Object Biographies: **Exhibiting the museum as colonial legacy past and present (2015)**

Despite the preceding negotiations, *Object Biographies* opened in March 2015 without any noteworthy public attention. It was well received in a scholarly context, as the exhibition – in four different sections – touched upon some of the major claims addressed at ethnological museums, if defined as colonial legacy: the explicit problematisation of violent collection histories and how they had been grappled with in the museum's history; the problematic relationship between anthropology, colonialism, and collecting practices; the objects' routes through museum and market contexts after they arrived in

Europe; and finally, collaborative research modes of engaging with the collection. Backed up with further research which was not necessarily visible in the show, I will guide the reader through the exhibition in the following section. In what follows, three of the four exhibition sections are discussed and thus, part of the tour.[64] I focus on how the research for the exhibition, and the curatorial and methodological choices we adopted, contributed to conceiving the museum as a colonial legacy.

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[64] The 'Luba' section is left out, as it was often the case during public tours at the Museum, encouraged by the fact that the object is subject to chapter three.

Figure 1.6 Exhibition design sketch of Object Biographies, ©*ADDITIV / Descloux Engelschall*

Object Biographies*: The museum as colonial legacy*

Located on the Ethnological Museum's first floor, we had deliberately situated the exhibition just in front of the permanent exhibition *Art from Africa*. The exhibition frame was a triangle, with diamond-shaped windows allowing the visitor to view and establish relations between the different exhibition sections. Despite the exhibition architecture's openness, our intention had been that the visitor would direct himself or herself towards the introductory text, where we would always start the exhibition tour.

> TOUR: One of the main aims of *Object Biographies* is to raise the museum visitor's awareness on the collection's histories via the particular biographies of three object groups. The question of absence and presence is central to *Object Biographies*. This concerns the absence of narratives, voices, as well as the absence or lack of objects in the places they had been taken from, contrasting the overwhelming presence of objects here in Berlin. The exhibition's main questions are thus: Where do the objects come from? How did they arrive in Berlin? How did they change hands – through barter, sale, looting or as gifts? How were they finally received in Berlin, described, handled, and exhibited?

With the aim to make these absences visible in the first place, our attempt was also to introduce new presences into the museum – such as the histories of collecting, or voices from experts outside of the museum. If there was one thing that we wanted the visitor to understand while strolling through the museum, it was the fact that the objects on display in the museum had not arrived here in a self-evident, single fashion. We rather wanted to visualise the histories that the objects had gone through, in order to 'make explicit the "politics" implicit in any object collected in one place and transported to another, particularly in contexts of colonial domination' (Basu 2011: 37).

Addressing museum and collection histories critically and collaboratively was not a novel approach. Object routes had been made accessible in museums through exhibitions or films since a few decades already.[65] At the time that we began our own work, however, German ethnological museums only rarely adopted community-based research

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[65] One prominent example of a fictious object biography is Susan Vogel's film *Fang: An Epic Journey* (2003). With regards to institutional critique, the exhibition history of the Musée d'Ethnographie in Neuchâtel is exemplary, such as in exhibitions like *Collections Passions* (1982), *Temps perdu, temps retrouvé - Du côté de l'ethno* (1985-1986) or *Musée Cannibale* (2002-2003), see their extensive archive, https://www.men.ch/de/expositions/anciennes-expositions/black-box-depuis-1981/, consulted 25 February 2020.

approaches and processes, and histories of German colonialism were rarely explicitly addressed. In the museum's department of collections from Africa, the collections' coming into being in complicity with colonial rule had not been focused on as part of their exhibition histories, and the department's curators did not systematically involve communities in exhibition-making and only consulted with them as an exception.[66,67]

Museum historiographies and colonialism

We had situated the introductory text opposite the pair of figures from the historic kingdom of Kom, in today's Cameroon. The pair and its trajectories to and within the Ethnological Museum stood in for how it had dealt with its colonial histories so far. Central to this side of the triangle was a slideshow in which the documentation of its looting, its assumed maker, and its long and acclaimed exhibition history in Western museums succeeded one another.

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[66] The collection's co-curator, Peter Junge, had been engaged in discussions with regards to collections from the Kingdom of Berlin, and had collaborated with diaspora groups in Berlin, but representatives of these groups were not involved in the exhibition making process.

[67] One part of this paragraph (from 'Object routes had been made accessible…' till '…with them exceptionally') uses extracts of the co-written article 'Decolonizing Research, Cosmo-optimistic Collaboration? Making Object Biographies' (von Oswald and Rodatus 2017:213).

Figures 1.7-1.8 Exhibition view of the section 'Kom' in Object Biographies, *photograph by Jens Ziehe, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 1.9 This photograph was taken by a person described as 'Langhof' in January 1905 in Laikom, Kom, Western Grassfields, Cameroon. The photograph is subtitled with the description 'Carved Fetish Images' (Geschnitzte Fetischbilder). The photograph is conserved by the Koloniales Bildarchiv (Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main)

TOUR: In contrast to the vast majority of objects in the museum, links to and photographs of the assumed maker Fon Yuh exist (1830–1912, reigned 1865–1912). Moreover, a staged photograph documented the object's acquisition through colonial loot, evidencing the palace's seizure by the German colonial officer Hans Gaspar zu Putlitz in 1905. It was only later revealed that Fon Yuh succeeded in hiding the most significant royal possessions in the forest. They stayed in the forest until the Germans were driven out of Cameroon in 1919 (Nsom Albert 2005:62).[68]

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[68] I thank Verena Rodatus for providing me with her research resources concerning the object pair.

Figure 1.10 Fon Yuh behind one of his hand-carved thrones (Laikom, Kom, Cameroon Grasslands, around 1905–1910), © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz

TOUR: Which stories are told, which ones are silenced in the museum context? We decided to use a slideshow to show how none of these histories had been prominently addressed in the museum context. Projecting these two images next to the long and acclaimed exhibition histories of the pair in international, Western museums, the slideshow suggests how the pair's value and originality had been crafted and constructed with the help of the museum.[69]

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[69] In the exhibition *Art from Africa*, the permanent exhibition of African collections curated by Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov, the history was mentioned, but only on a small label on the ground next to the figures.

With the attempt to go beyond provenance research as the tracing of the objects' itineraries, we asked the Cameroonian art historian Mathias Alubafi to comment on the objects' absence in Cameroon. An exchange with Mathias Alubafi had been possible as he was a post-doctoral fellow in Berlin at the time. The text was placed below the figures in order for visitors to read Mathias Alubafi's statement. Recounting how the figures had been immediately replaced and reproduced after the palace was taken over by Hans Gaspar zu Putlitz, Mathias Alubafi questioned notions of authenticity and value; he opposed the figures which were now derogatively referred to as 'copies' in the Western context with interpretations in Kom, where the different objects dispersed in Western museums were not recognised as 'authentic' given that they were not in use. Alubafi thus argued that

> the scramble for the return of Kom figures from the West seems to rest on the legality, or the means through which German colonial officer Hans Gasper zu Putlitz acquired them, rather than in their authenticity or usefulness in the local context. Authentic Kom figures, as understood in Kom, are in Kom rather than in the West.[70]

The statement stood in juxtaposition to the slideshow depicting the pair's prominent exhibition history in Western museums. As the slideshow started with the documentation of the objects' looting, this part of the exhibition intended to address the museum mechanisms of both material and symbolic appropriation, to problematise the historiographies of the collection and the museum, and ultimately, to challenge the museum's legitimacy to own and use these objects.

Relating anthropology, collecting, and colonialism
Passing from the section on Kom objects towards the inside of the exhibition's triangular architecture, we had decided to dedicate one section to the 'Depot'. Situating the depot at the exhibition's centre was no coincidence, as we presented it as the museum's 'heart', both literally and symbolically: The section discussed the constitutive entanglement between colonial rule, collecting practices, and the discipline of anthropology, with reference to the Ethnological Museum Berlin and its Africa department in particular. The topics of our exhibition tour in the triangle – which notably dealt with object abundance, 'collection mania', and anthropological discrimination – contrasted the

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[70] For the entire quotation, see Alubafi, Rodatus, and von Oswald 2018.

relative emptiness of the triangle's interior. This contrast contradicted what we wanted to transmit, and would later be one of the main points of critique of the exhibition.
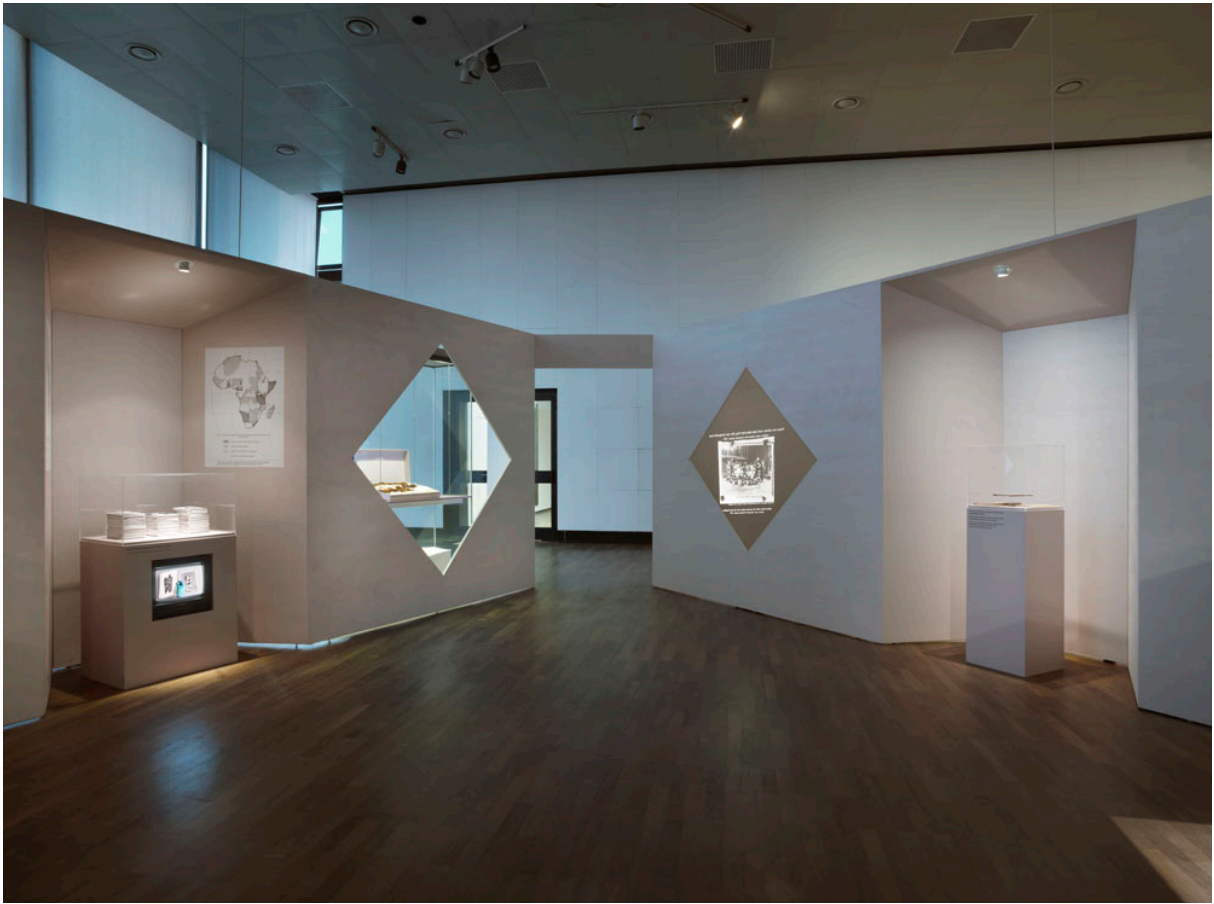
Figure 1.11 Exhibition view of the section 'Depot' in Object Biographies, *photograph by Jens Ziehe, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Collecting and colonialism: displaying 'collection mania'

In order to address colonialism's material dimension, and what the department's co-curator Paola Ivanov frequently phrased as the 'collection mania' (*Sammelwut*) of museum anthropologists and colonial staff at the time (Ivanov 2005:43; Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018), our initial intention had been to reconstruct parts of the Africa storage within the triangle. Complicated and costly from a conservationist point of view, we displayed stacks of object photographs instead, accompanied by a video we had produced. The video showed a seemingly endless succession of the object photographs, in which a museum-gloved hand sorted the images from one stack to another.

> TOUR: As the introductory text to the section reads: 'The depot is at the heart of the museum' and this heart, one could argue, exists in its present form because of the colonial enterprise. 'Colonialism was profoundly material', argue the scholars Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth Philipps (Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips 2006:3). The materiality of colonialism didn't only concern the extraction of 'resources' (gold, rubber, human resources, etc.). The – sometimes violent – acquisition of material culture in the colonies was equally a constitutive part of the colonial enterprise and governance. Colonial collecting allowed the coloniser to research, control, and disempower societies by seizing their material culture, both in the colonies and imperial centres (Abonnenc, Arndt, and Lozano 2016; Bennett et al. 2017). This included not only a mere material seizure, but also a spiritual disempowerment, such as in the context of war: some objects were deliberately taken because they were of spiritual importance to those resisting colonial conquest (see for example Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018). Colonial collecting usually went hand in hand with the establishment of colonial archives, or put differently, the collecting of material culture was part of constituting the metropoles' archives of colonial rule. These archives supported the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of knowledge from and about the colonies (Basu and de Jong 2016). How museum staff used both these archives and collections – in exhibitions and research – often encouraged the justification of the colonial mission and supported the contemporary conviction and narratives of European and white superiority in the imperial centres. Objects became principal players in the

construction of narratives about the colony and confirmed the role of collecting as central, not marginal, to the colonial project.[71]

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[71] For case studies and examples which trace and interrogate the interrelatedness between museums, the colonies, and the metropoles, see for international examples Thomas 1991; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips 2006; Bennett et al. 2017, and for German case studies Essner 1986; Gothsch 1983; Zimmerman 2001; Penny 2002; Weber 2005; Förster and Stoecker 2016; Brandstetter and Hierholzer 2017; Förster et al. 2018; Reyels, Ivanov, and Weber-Sinn 2018; Splettstößer 2019.

Figure 1.12 Screenshots from the video addressing 'colonial mania' © Anna Lisa Ramella

Figure 1.13 Exhibition view of the section 'Depot' in Object Biographies, *photograph by Jens Ziehe, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Colonialism and anthropology: the mapping of 'complete' collections
Above the showcase with the video, two maps were attached to the wall.

> TOUR: On the right is the reproduction of an original map designed by the
> department's curator, Bernhard Ankermann, in 1911 (Figure 1.14). The map
> reflects contemporary ideas of the museum's collections, in which 'a culture', a
> 'tribe', or a particular 'region' could be represented through 'its' material
> production. On the left, there is a map of Germany's colonies on the African
> continent (see Figure 1.15). Via their juxtaposition, the maps reveal the strong
> impact that colonisation would have on the acquisition policy of the museum: all
> of those areas which are marked in dark shading – indicating 'complete or almost
> complete collections' – are almost identical with the German colonies.
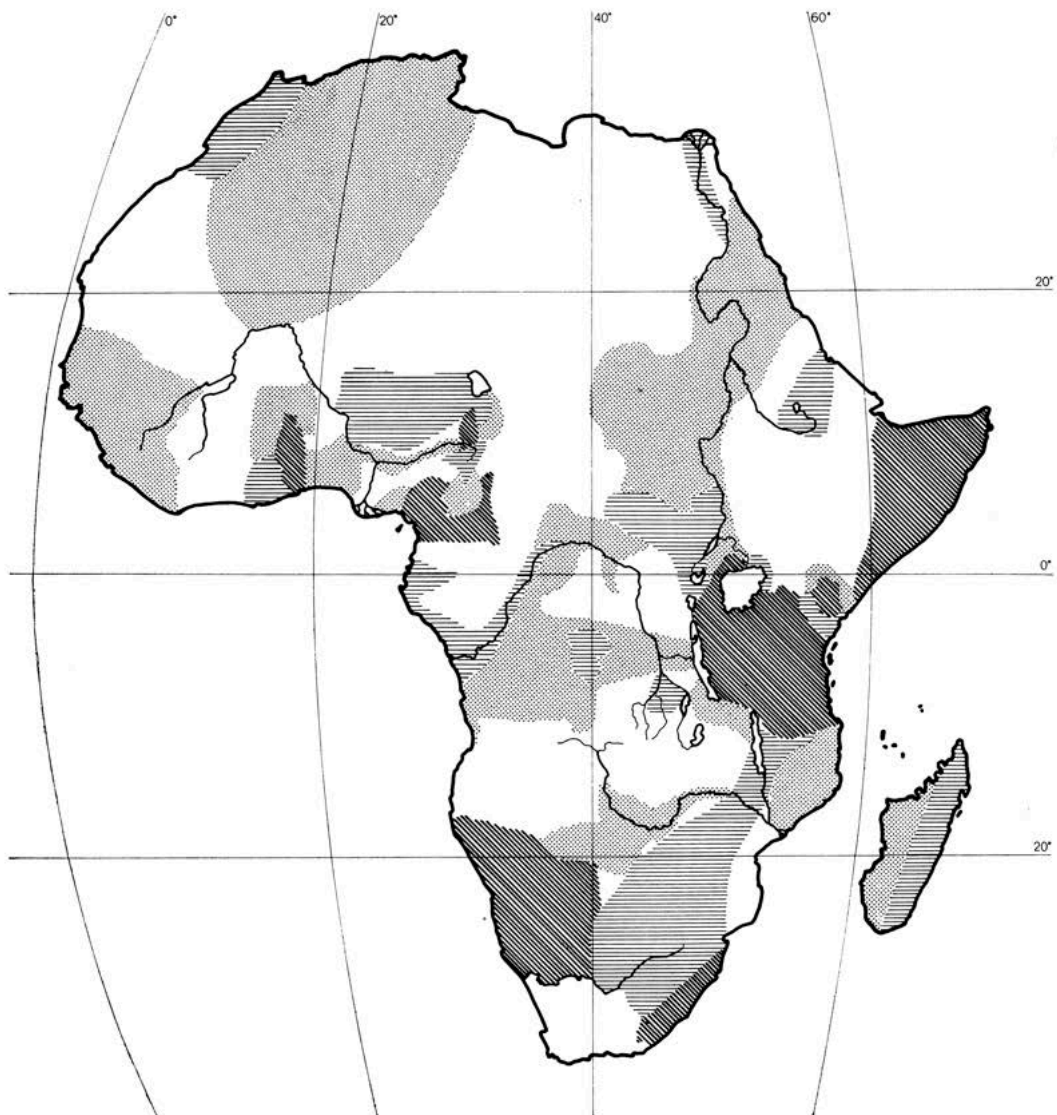
Abb. 37. Karte mit Angaben über die Sammlungsbestände der Abteilung Afrika
im Jahre 1911:

 ganz oder nahezu vollständige Sammlungen

 ziemlich gute Sammlungen

 schlechte, sehr lückenhafte Sammlungen

 keine oder fast keine Sammlungen

Figure 1.14 'Map with Indications on the Collections of the Africa Department in the Year 1911' (created by Bernhard Ankermann, Krieger and Koch 1973:112)

> *Dark – 'complete or almost complete collections'*
> *Dark grey – 'rather good collections'*
> *Light grey – 'bad, very fragmented collections'*
> *White – 'no or almost no collections'*

Deutsche »Schutzgebiete« in Afrika, 1884/1885–1919
Map listing German "protectorates" in Africa, 1884/1885–1919

Aktuelle Staatsgrenzen in Afrika
Contemporary national borders in Africa

Figure 1.15 Map of contemporary national borders and German 'protectorates', designed and used for Object Biographies *exhibition*

TOUR: The understanding of disciplined collections reflects Sharon Macdonald's definition of collections as 'a set of objects conceived to be meaningful as a group', in which 'objects take on additional significance specifically by dint of being part of the collection' (Macdonald 2006:82). Indeed, conceptions of 'tribes' and indigeneity were defined by drawing on collections which were constructed as the materialisation of otherness, and in particular of 'savageness' and 'primitiveness'. In exhibition, the objects were used as representative of particular kinds of otherness, as fragments of cultures. These exhibition and display modes as well as the objects themselves would have implications for the ways in which notions of 'culture' were normatively employed, as well as used in social management regimes in the metropole and colonies. The collections are thus a proof of colonialism's materiality; they constitute one of colonialism's tangible manifestations. How collections were used, then – in exhibitions and research – reveals how contemporary colonial ontologies were substantiated with the help of anthropology, and in particular its museums.

1880	3 361 catalogue numbers
1884	7 388 catalogue numbers
1887	11 058 catalogue numbers
1890	12 723 catalogue numbers
1893	14 246 catalogue numbers
1896	17 107 catalogue numbers
1899	25 105 catalogue numbers
1905	36 241 catalogue numbers
1910	48 845 catalogue numbers
1914	55 079 catalogue numbers
1925	60 182 catalogue numbers
1945	66 953 catalogue numbers

Figure 1.16 Documentation of the Africa collection's growth between 1880 and 1945, in catalogue numbers (Katalognummern) *(Krieger and Koch 1973:106)*

TOUR: In relation to the Africa collections, objects arrived in overproportional numbers from the German colonies, namely what was then Togo, Cameroon, German East Africa, German South West Africa (Ivanov 2005:42). Between 1884 and 1914, the African collections grew from 7,388 objects to 55,079 objects (Krieger and Koch 1973:106). The Berlin museum's position as 'Central Museum' encouraged the steady growth of collections, as the Berlin museum claimed the right of ownership of all collections arriving from the German colonies.[72] About 64 per cent of today's Africa collections, consisting of approximately 75,000 objects, stem from what has been defined as 'colonial contexts', whether governed by German or other European colonial powers (German Museums Association 2018:16–23).[73] Ethnological museums thus played a crucial role in the colonial system in which 'comprehensive collecting [articulates] as a form of domination', as Mieke Bal pointed out (Bal 1992:560).

Collecting and anthropology: Anleitung für ethnographische Beobachtungen und Sammlungen

To address the relationship between collecting and anthropology, we exhibited several editions of the 'Instructions for Ethnographic Observation and Collections' (*Anleitung für ethnographische Beobachtungen und Sammlungen*) from 1899, 1904 and 1914 in a showcase. The publication reflected the museum founders' mission, and alludes to the

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[72] The extensive collecting of material culture was facilitated by the Federal Council's decision (*Bundesrat*) in 1889 to define Berlin's museum as the 'Central Museum' when it came to the acquisition of collections from German protectorates. This decision implied that all collections acquired under publicly funded expeditions would be the property of Berlin's museum, which could then decide to keep the collections, send them back to the colonies, or to send or swap doubles, so-called *Doubletten*, with other German museums. For further explanation and contextualisation, see for example Stelzig 2004:39; Ivanov 2005:41–42.

[73] This was different, for example, from scientific expeditions in colonial contexts which focused not only on *owning* but also on *knowing* the people by means of their material culture, reflected then in the collection's detailed documentation. French museums, unlike Berlin's Africa department, acquired a significant part of their collections via scientific expeditions. For details of the different modes of acquisition concerning the Musée de l'Homme, see Sarr and Savoy 2018:42–52. Sixty-four per cent stem from the following calculation: between 1884 and 1914 (German colonial rule), the African collections grew from 7,388 objects to 55,079 objects (Krieger and Koch 1973:106). Given that today's Africa collection is estimated at 75,000 objects, the difference constitutes approximately 64 per cent (website Ethnological Museum, https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/sammlung.html, consulted 16 April 2019).

kind of collecting the Ethnological Museum pursued.[74] The instructions put forward the aim to collect 'systematically', 'to give a preferably exhaustive image of the respective tribe's culture' and 'to raise an inventory, as it were, of the complete cultural heritage' (Ankermann and Luschan 1914:9).[75] At the same time, the fact that there was a need for the instructions *tout court* pointed to the lack of documentation of the collections. In the Berlin museum, collections were not the result of 'scientific' but mainly of colonial collecting.[76] This means that, in contrast to other museums which would send scientific expeditions to the colonies, the collections were mainly provided by colonial staff situated in the colonies who served as suppliers of material culture for the museum. It is subsequently both the collections as well as the lack of information and documentation about them which constitute the museum's legacy.

[74] The work was first published in 1899 by the curator of Oceania and Africa Felix von Luschan, republished in 1904 in an extended version by the same author, and reformulated in a last edition by Bernhard Ankermann, Luschan's successor, in 1914. It was designed like a questionnaire, with questions on one side of the page, and blank spaces to fill in information on the other.

[75] Translation from the German by the author: 'Wo es sich aber nicht nur um die Beschaffung einzelner Gegenstände handelt, da sammle man systematisch, d.h. so, dass die Sammlung ein möglichst erschöpfendes Bild der Kultur des betreffenden Stammes gibt. … Diese sind also in erster Linie zu sammeln; es ist gewissermaßen ein Inventar des gesamten Kulturbesitzes aufzunehmen.'

[76] In my personal archival work, as an example that is however not representative, Felix von Luschan constantly asks the collectors to provide information on the gifted objects, such as in his correspondance with Werner von Grawert, I. 23. 1903. The notion of 'scientific' collecting is put in quotation marks here, as practices defined as 'rational', objective, and scientific at the turn of the century were in themselves deeply shaped by colonial imaginations, such as Johannes Fabian's monographs on early ethnographies in Africa convincingly show (Fabian 2000). The Dakar–Djibouti expedition (1931–1933) headed by the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule is probably the most famous example of such a 'scientific' collecting mission. The observations of Michel Leiris on this mission equally challenge accounts of 'scientificity' of the mission (Leiris 1988).

Figure 1.17 Cover of 'Instructions for Ethnographic Observation and Collections', Bernhard Ankermann and Felix von Luschan, 1914

Figure 1.18 Exhibition view of the section 'Depot' in Object Biographies, *view of the showcase displaying different editions of the 'Instructions', photograph by Jens Ziehe,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

TOUR: As colonialism, anthropology was profoundly material, in particular in its constitutive phase, which coincided with the heyday of European colonial rule (1884–1914). As in other European anthropology departments, the progressive institutionalisation of anthropology in Berlin was closely linked to Berlin's Ethnological Museum and its collecting policies, then as the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*. From the museum's foundation in 1873 on, its co-founder and director Adolf Bastian aimed at establishing anthropology on the basis of the natural sciences. In that context, the collection would serve as the point of departure for research, Adolf Bastian being convinced that 'the monstrous mass [was] necessary to sufficiently represent in a systematic, methodological order the ethnological provinces of the earth in their full extent' (quoted in Zimmerman 2001:186). For Bastian, in contrast to the natural sciences, categories in anthropology had not yet been established, but would result from and be developed out of the totalising gaze of the collections. Bastian attempted to create a 'universal archive of mankind' in order 'to provide a real basis for the study of ethnology' (Bastian 1872:iii).[77] Defining anthropology as a 'comparative' and thus 'statistical' discipline, 'completeness … is the first and most important desideratum'. In the tradition of a salvage anthropology, Bastian described this desideratum of completeness as 'eternal' (*für immer*), as in 'impossible', because he started from the postulate that 'many tribes (*Volksstämme*) are irretrievably and forever lost' (Bastian 1872:iv–v).[78]

Next to the video displaying the succession of objects, a window in the exhibition wall revealed a showcase with an archival box containing objects wrapped in silk paper. Not

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[77] For further information on Adolf Bastian and his 'universal archive of humanity', see Fischer, Bolz, and Kamel 2007.

[78] Extracts quoted from the German: 'Die Ethnologischen Museen sind eine Schöpfung der Neuzeit und der Gedanke zu ihrer Anlage, um dem Studium der Ethologie eine thatsächliche [*sic*] Grundlage zu gewähren, konnte überhaupt erst dann gefaßt [*sic*] werden, nachdem bereits die Entdeckungsreisen den Blick über die gesammte [*sic*] Erdoberfläche erweitert und neben der historischen Entwicklung unserer eigenen Cultur [*sic*] noch eine große Zahl selbstständiger Cyclen innerhalb der Menschheitsgeschichte in den Geschichtskreis eingeführt hatten' (Bastian 1872:iii). 'Da die Ethnologie, als zu den comparativen Wissenschaften gehörig, statistischen Regeln zu folgen hat, bleibt, wie in jeder Statistik, Vollständigkeit der thatsächlichen Daten, auf den sie ihre Aussprüche zu begründen hat, ihr erstes und wichtiges Desiderat, und leider, wie es scheint, ein Desiderat für immer, da auf jemalige Erfüllung dieses Wunsches wird verzichtet werden müssen' (Bastian 1872:iv–v). For documentation and analysis of Adolf Bastian's position and work, see for example Penny 2002; Fischer, Bolz, and Kamel 2007; Penny 2019.

visible from the section's 'main' side, the display was intended to point to the politics of access in the museum, and to allow a literal representation of the museum's 'behind the scenes'.

Researching collaboratively[79]

We usually finished the exhibition tour with the section on the 'Bocios' which would touch most upon contemporary questions. In this section, we wanted to problematise the idea of research in ethnological museums itself – namely by raising questions of public authority and access as regards museums and collections, and how to do so collaboratively. We initiated a collaborative research project with our colleague Romuald Tchibozo, an art historian at the University Abomey-Calavi in Benin, who in 2013 to 2014 was Fellow at the 'Art Histories and Aesthetic Practices' at the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin. We thus wanted to use the depots – with their many under-researched objects – to reflect upon the objects' hidden 'affordances' (Basu and de Jong 2016) in order to question the museum's politics of access and knowledge production. The objects had been bought from the collector O.A. Jäger, as part of a larger group of objects from Benin, in 1967, but had never been exhibited. We exhibited the acquisition documents next to a video installation, aligned by the covered objects. Conservation standards prevented us to take actual objects to Benin and we had to rely on hi-res photographic reproductions. To broach the issue of the objects' immobility, we displayed the objects' photographs alongside the archival box with the actual 'stored' objects. We always introduced this section by recounting how the collaboration with Romuald Tchibozo had taken shape.

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[79] The entire section 'Research and collaboration' (from 'We initiated a collaborative research project…'till 'authenticity of information') uses extracts from the co-written article (von Oswald and Rodatus 2017:214–216). Some paragraphs are identical reproductions of the original article.

Figures 1.19-1.20: Exhibition views of the sections 'Depot' and 'Bocios' in Object Biographies, *photograph by Jens Ziehe, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

TOUR: We started working with Romuald Tchibozo in May 2014, inspired to do so partly by his statements about 'the decolonisation of research.' He and Verena Rodatus had already established a working relationship and the fact that he was based in Berlin at that time meant that we could regularly spend time together in the collections. With a long research experience in Germany, there was a history to Romuald Tchibozo's relationship to the Ethnological Museum, namely that he had previously tried to work on the collections but had been denied access to do so at the end of the 1990s. Together, we traced a group of eight objects from the collection back to their original site in Benin. In doing so, we were accompanied by Tchibozo's student, David Gnonhouévi, and filmmaker Anna Lisa Ramella. Our aim was to document the process of developing images for the exhibition. This drew on provenance research that we had already conducted, which had included visiting the depot several times. There, Tchibozo was particularly drawn to figurative objects Vodun practices known as Bocios. These objects – whose name is thought to mean something like 'empowered (bo) cadaver (cio)' (Preston Blier 1995:2) – were created by the Fon people in the area of today's Republic of Benin, and were used as protective figures in the front of houses.

> TOUR: Romuald Tchibozo's interest in Bocios was not new. He told us that sometime before our visit in the Ethnological Museum's stores, his student David Gnonhouévi had tried to conduct art historical research on Bocios in Benin. This turned out to be quite difficult because Gnonhouévi couldn't identify a sufficient body of material and eventually gave up his research project. Such a lack of material in Benin itself was, said Tchibozo, a major obstacle to Beninese scholars who contemplated writing an art history of Benin. He then proposed that this issue of absence in Benin and presence in the museum could be explored as a central theme in the Humboldt Lab Dahlem exhibition project. We thus attempted to investigate the historic and contemporary reasons for the absence of the Bocios in Benin. A key element of our collaborative attempt to decolonise research, then, was to respect the multiple stakeholder's perspectives and interests – not only those of the Ethnological Museum but also, and especially, those of Tchibozo and his students, whose own previous attempts at research had floundered especially due to the colonial situation that had led to the absence of the objects in Benin and earlier restrictions of access imposed by the Museum.

The documentation of the research process in both Berlin and Benin resulted in a four-channel video projection by Anna Lisa Ramella, which focused on the different reasons

for the objects' absence in the Republic of Benin - colonial rule being only one of them. The video installation was composed of impressions of museum practice in Berlin's Ethnological Museum and different museums in Benin, extracts from conversations with experts, but also references to the Bocios' ritual use. Through the polyphonic voices of the different actors, the video installation offered different short extracts of contemporary interpretations of the historical and transcultural contexts in which the Bocios are embedded. The different channels problematised the multiple research contexts, including the critical dynamics of ethnographic fieldwork and issues of linguistic translation, establishing trust, and questioning the authenticity of information.

During and after the realisation of the exhibition, our collaborative project revealed to us some of the difficulties in representational and identity politics which museum practice is confronted with today. Despite the fact that the exhibition concentrated on *histories* of colonialism, the unravelling of historic circumstances of power asymmetries and violence was intrinsically linked, including through my own emotional responses, to contemporary politics of representation.

Evaluating *Object Biographies* and the exhibition's aftermath in the Ethnological Museum (2015-2020)

I myself often felt defensive and apologetic when working on and writing about *Object Biographies*. The process had been accompanied by a grappling with the history of institutional and representational critique, as well as the anticipation of future critique and confrontation, especially with activists. The anxiety articulated, in my understanding, in the fear both of being *perceived* as perpetuating (colonial) injustice and of *actually* perpetuating these structures, reinforced by working from within a contested organisation.[80]

Taking the three Ps – personnel, publics, programme – as a rough evaluation grid, the outcomes of *Object Biographies* have remained ambivalent. In terms of *programme*, the exhibition addressed key issues of colonial entanglement and provenance, institutional histories, and critique. With regards to *publics*, our anticipations and fears were left unjustified. Critique from peers in activist circles, or, at the other end of the spectrum,

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[80] Mary Elizabeth Moore describes her feelings with regard to white privilege in similar terms, fearing that her acting 'would be perceived as a racist act and could well *be* a racist act' (Moore 2019:254, her emphasis). I thank Patrick Wielowiejski, Aida Baghernejad, and Francis Seeck for indicating and discussing the issue of white guilt, tears, and fragility in this context, see also DiAngelo 2018.

from conservative voices within and outside of the museum, stayed out, or at least, were not voiced in our presence. Rather, the exhibition was received with little public response. Within the museum, curators seemed underwhelmed by the exhibition, as an internal evaluation summarised (Löseke 2017). Verena Rodatus and I did regular tours through the exhibition, usually with like-minded people related to academia, who responded, broadly speaking, in a positive and interested way (see for example Müller 2015; von Bose 2015). Whereas we didn't question that we had conceived the exhibition experiment for an academic audience, *personnel* was at the centre of our own evaluation of the project. This concerned in particular the composition of our team, and what has been phrased as the 'delegation of interpretative sovereignty' in museum practice (*Deutungshoheit abgeben*) and, more generally speaking, the politics of representation.

The closing section of this chapter evaluates the exhibition in its process and results, notably with regards to these questions of collaboration. I concentrate the analysis on the challenging and continuity of the museum's status as 'colonial instrument' (Boast 2011). Departing from an analysis of the exhibition's team infrastructures, I argue that the separation of personnel, programme, and publics works in theory only, and is rather interleaved in multiple ways. The section finally situates *Object Biographies* in a chronology of the Africa department's research and exhibition projects, with regards to the grappling with Germany's colonial past, which followed the Humboldt Lab Dahlem after 2015.

Politics of invitation and team infrastructures
We recurrently reminded ourselves and were made aware of our privileged role in the museum. Already while preparing the exhibition, during one of two evaluation workshops, the invited scholars Friedrich von Bose and Nora Sternfeld commented on our team structure. They highlighted that we needed to rethink and change the composition of our team in order to break with conventional modes of representation, notably with regards to anti-racist critique and scholarship.[81] Nora Sternfeld suggested:

> 'In your structure, you miss a third black person, critical of reproduction (reproduktionskritisch)', who addresses appropriation ('Aneignung') from a black, anti-racist and activist position. When does an exhibition form an appropriate appropriation (angenemessene Aneignung) of the object? A meaningful structural and organisational construction is a foundation for a successful exhibition project.

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[81] Notes from Workshop I, 19 June 2014, Ethnological Museum Berlin.

Reflections on our team structure had been dominant in our discussions of how to conceive the exhibition and we acknowledged the critique. Reasons for not changing our curatorial team structure included that the concept was already written and conceived, the exhibition was to open in a few months. The budget was set and distributed. The relation of the Humboldt Lab and the local activist scene was troubled. Finally, and most importantly, we had invited African scholars to respond to the absences and presences identified in the infrastructures and histories of the museum. We had adopted a particular understanding of collaborative museology for the project, in which the collaborator is defined 'as expert in a knowledge not present in the museum, and with a notion of the right to co-determination (…)' (Landkammer 2017: 278). We had invited two art historians – Mathias Alubafi and Romuald Tchibozo – whose academic experience and relation to the collections had determined our choice. The arguments we listed, however, the lack of time and budget, as well as externalising 'black' critique to international experts unaware and/or unacquainted with the local context, have been commonly criticised by activists, notably from Afro-German scholars.[82] No matter how to turn the arguments, and how to 'justify' one's curatorial choice, points of critique always remain and frictions seem to persist as long as one operates from within an organisation whose existence and history is so deeply rooted in colonialism. Will the decision to 'collaborate' and 'invite' not always remain in itself a patronising act, as long as it is voiced from *within* the museum and within the confines of the museum's structures and practices? Wasn't the decision to 'decolonise' the museum in itself a problematic gesture?

Collaboration and control

The recurrent discussions with our collaborator Romuald Tchibozo raised questions which were difficult to answer with regards to our positionality in the framework of what he phrased as a 'decolonisation of research'. We worked through and published on the different aspects of power asymmetries present in the project. These ranged from the opportunities to acquire a visa and travel, to access to the collections and the literature on the objects in question, the inability to move the objects beyond the walls of the museum and to rely upon images, and finally, to the control of authorship over the exhibition and its products which were defined from within and owned by the organisation – the distribution and control of the budget lay in our hands (Tchibozo 2015; Oswald and Rodatus 2017:218–219).

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[82] Personal presentation by Natasha A. Kelly during the workshop *Deutscher Kolonialismus – Spurensuche und aktuelle Debatten* with students, 17 March 2016. I present because I was myself speaker at the workshop.

However, the power asymmetry was kept and reinscribed not only because of the organisational parameters and structures. We as a curatorial duo were only partly committed to giving up our privileged position within the project and open up the process. Put in Bernadette Lynch's words, despite 'a commitment to the contact zone' in terms of both encounter and 'coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (Mary Louise Pratt quoted in Clifford 1997:192), 'we somehow continue to face the Other with fear, and work hard to exercise control' (Lynch 2014:6). Addressing and publishing about our desire for control helped to reflect on and address how colonial legacies reverberated in the present through exhibitionary format, but it also contributed to its reproduction.

> [I]t was us, as the temporary curatorial team, that initiated, enabled and framed the cooperation. By the time that Romuald Tchibozo was invited to enter the project, the exhibition's framework was set, the context given, and certain questions were predefined. We had already largely predetermined the kind of input that we wanted from him, specifically including him as one of a range of contemporary voices in the exhibition and film. Moreover, just how those resulted – the editing of the film material and the exhibition installation itself – was entirely controlled by German participants. Although this was partly for pragmatic reasons, we also feared losing control of the end product, including the content and look of the film (von Oswald and Rodatus 2017: 218)

The 'right to co-determination', as requested by Nora Landkammer, had only insignificantly been fulfilled in the project's development. The outcome of these kinds of reflections and the contribution of the project more generally speaking have thus remained uncertain. As we wrote,

> [O]ur ambition to open up the museum research processes was only limited in its realisation. In Benin, only a limited number of interlocutors took part in discussion about the decolonisation of research, and information from the project itself does not seem to have been taken up in any other ways since. In Berlin, by contrast, where the exhibition and associated events, such as tours and a conference were held, the question of decolonisation was vigorously discussed. While we might see this as a good outcome in that the collections served to generate new relationships, as 'remittances', beneficial to those represented in the museum (Basu 2011:37), one could also argue that the project served the Ethnological Museum and the Humboldt-Forum to affirm and

legitimise their positions as a national institutions devoted to 'multiperspectivity' (ibid.: 219).

Performative self-reflexivity

The quoted reflection ignored that this stated kind of reflexivity, the talking and publishing about the exhibition would also notably serve *us* as a curatorial team, and contribute significantly to how we could position ourselves in the academic and museum field in Germany – in particular with regards to the exhibition's aftermath and academic reception. Those who had contributed from Benin, however, and especially those who were unable to travel – such as David Gnonhouévi, Romuald Tchibozo's student who had organised the entire research trip in Benin – risked to not further benefit from the project. As Verena Rodatus and I concluded on the project, the leeway for reconceptualising and rethinking of collaboration needed to concern in particular thinking through and explicit curation of its infrastructures.

> Reflecting together with Romuald Tchibozo about how we could have expanded upon our project to move further in this direction, we agreed that long-term cooperation, trust, and the sharing and common distribution of research results would need to be instituted. Tchibozo's colleague Didier Houénoudé at the University Abomey-Calavi has likewise proposed an exchange of inventories between African and European museum collections, as well as the institutionalisation of cooperations amongst African museums, and the promotion of touring exhibitions (Houénoudé 2012: 517). Curatorial responsibility should thus comprise conceiving new (infra-)structures, in which cooperation can take place. In this context, we agree with Nora Landkammer who argues that 'decolonisation should concentrate on organisational development and on understanding community engagement as an all-encompassing practice for institutions (Landkammer 2017: 278).' This would include prioritising and institutionalizing the access to the collections and to the exhibition space for those who have been denied access, contribution and co-production in the making of the museum (ibid.:219).

I read our observations and positionings with ambiguous feelings. The depiction and writing about these processes is in itself problematic, because it is a highly performative act of self-reflexiveness, and as such, can be a means to discard oneself from responsibility. The friction and conflict remain – if only simmering in the background – because the consequences of such reflections are rarely, as I showed, followed through. What would the 'prioritising and institutionalising the access (…) for those who have

been denied access' mean? The argument's ambivalence lies in the fact that appropriation, the reflex to be defensive and apologetic, and positioning oneself as reflexive go hand in hand – whilst assuming to not let go of power. Is there a possibility to get out of these moments of paradoxical appropriation? Would the alternative be to *not* engage in these debates, leave one's place to others, or rather, to listen? Is there a possibility to stand in, endure, and own these moments of fragility?

These reflections describe the doubts the exhibition triggered in me, during and after its making of. They took place in a polarising political context in which debates on how to behave 'appropriately' with regards to the politics of representation, racial stress, and simply, the right to express one's opinion, have gone virulent. Debates on identity politics, representation, and appropriation in the field of cultural production, notably in the US-American context, thus boil in the background here. These have raised questions regarding who has the right to depict what and how, such as in the debate on Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2017), which depicted the dead body of Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955 by two white men, which caused considerable controversy around cultural appropriation and black pain; who can tell whose stories, such as in the discussions of Jeanine Cummins' *American Dirt* in 2020, a story of the flight of a mother and son from Mexico to the US; and most closely related to museum work, who should or shouldn't be appointed 'curator of African arts'. This discussion peaked, when in 2018 the Brooklyn Museum appointed the white art historian Kristen Windmuller-Luna as 'consulting curator', in the midst of discussions around the first black Marvel Comics super hero film *Black Panther*, which centrally addressed restitution and representation in museums presented as entirely white spaces.[83]

Whereas the questions raised are not new, the tone in which they are negotiated has sharpened significantly, enhanced by social media. In this tense discursive environment, the changes in Berlin's and in the German museum landscape have been significant since 2015. Many of the aspects which we reflected on in the evaluation of our project have been taken up and realised differently in numerous long-term and temporal collaborative exhibition and research projects. In the remaining sections of the chapter, I trace the development of the SPK's and Ethnological Museum's official position, whilst focusing on how curators responded to these positions in their exhibition and research projects. In

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[83] See e.g. for the discussion of *Open Casket* (Muñoz-Alonso 2017; Speidel 2017), for Jeanine Cummins' *American Dirt* (Gurba 2019; Sehgal 2020), and for *Black Panther* and the employment of Kristen Windmuller-Luna (Haughin 2018; Russo 2018; Salam 2018).

the chapter's conclusion, I finally chronicle the most recent developments with regards to the grappling with Germany's colonial past, characterised by a proliferation of measures and agents involved.

The SPK, 'shared heritage', and 'provenance' (2015)

Shortly after the opening of *Object Biographies*, in March 2015 and June 2015 respectively, the SPK published the long-awaited 'statements' (*Grundpositionen*) with regards to the 'treatment of human remains' and 'non-European collections' (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2015a; Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2015b).[84] These confirmed the SPK's focus on research in terms of 'provenance' and the deployment of the concept of 'shared heritage'. Discussing provenance research, the statement notably pointed to the difficulty and complexity of doing so with regards to the diversity of collections, the scarceness of documentation and archives, and thus, the possible lack of findings when researching provenance. Nuancing Monika Grütters' bold statement of not keeping, and thus not displaying, any 'unlawfully acquired objects', the SPK's official position rather highlighted that 'the declared aim of the SPK is to show only those objects [in the Humboldt Forum] whose provenance has been researched as far as possible' (Kathmann and Thielecke 2015:114). The statement can be understood as a kind of 'reality check' taking into account the practicalities of museum work. Provenance research often doesn't lead to reliable results (see chapter 3). The statement can also be read, however, as a sole political positioning without particular and binding outcomes, as there was no systematic way and medium to make research related to the collections accessible.[85]

The SPK's approach was further characterised by a focus on 'exchange with representatives of the societies of origin' (*Herkunftsgesellschaften*). Apprehending the concept of shared heritage around notions such as 'cooperation' (*Zusammenarbeit*), 'mutual agreement' (*gegenseitigem Einvernehmen*), 'conversation' (*Unterhaltung*) and 'open dialogue' (*offener Dialog*), it was defined in rather frictionless terms, implicitly encouraged

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[84] The SPK's statement on human remains was published in German and English in March 2019 (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2015a). It was based on the 'Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections' by the German Museums Association, to which representatives of the SPK had contributed (German Museums Association 2013; Kathmann and Thielecke 2015:112).

[85] In the context of propagating public interest in 'provenance', particularly due to the so-called Gurlitt Trove in 2012, the Foundation's definition of colonial-era research as 'a new systematic focus in provenance research' closely related it to NS-related provenance research. Not only did this suggest a parallel with NS-related loot, but also possible alignment of the crimes committed under colonial and NS rule, or at least a recognition of those crimes committed during colonial rule.

by circumventing question of returns: 'As a priority', the paper stated, 'ways will be sought to keep these objects in the scientific cycle and in a way that serves the general public by mutual agreement'. Restitution as such was mentioned solely and briefly at the end of the statement: 'In individual cases, it may also be necessary to arrange returns.'

No Humboldt 21!, in an immediate response to the publication of the statement, criticised what they interpreted as an avoidance of returns, or, as they put it, 'a dubious manoeuvre to preserve unlawful property'(No Humboldt 21 ! 2015). Subsuming the collections under the keyword 'shared heritage', as the SPK suggested, implied for them not only the circulation of knowledge and of the objects themselves, but most importantly, that the property rights remained with the SPK. In their critique of the statement, they emphasised how the SPK explicitly referenced ICOM's Code of Ethics, but that they bypassed the Code's demand to pro-actively address sensitive collections, as [the] 'museum should be prepared to *initiate dialogues for the return* of cultural property to a country or people of origin' (No Humboldt 21 ! 2015, their emphasis). In favour of *No Humboldt 21!*'s critique stands that, until this day, the statement has only been published in German (as in March 2020). Understood by further critics as a strategy of delay and distraction in relation to restitution,[86] both the focus on 'provenance' and on 'shared heritage' would be consolidated and propagated in 2015 and the years to come.[87]

Around the same time, Hermann Parzinger would publicly profile the Forum with the fact of dealing with Germany's colonial history for the first time. In the British Guardian, he announced that the Forum's permanent exhibition would deal with the Maji Maji war in an article headed 'Berlin's rebuilt Prussian palace to address long-ignored colonial atrocities' (Scaturro 2015). Announced as a 'collaborative project' a month later,[88] it would be the curators' task to put the abstract and undefined notions of 'shared heritage' and 'provenance' into practice, to refine them by filling them with content.

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[86] See for example Häntzschel 2018; Zimmerer 2019.

[87] The consolidation was supported by numerous statements and articles, such as Kathmann and Thielecke 2015; Parzinger 2015:16; Parzinger 2016a; Parzinger 2016b, but most importantly by the government's allocation of funding and the establishment of a focus on colonial-era provenance research at the German Lost Art Foundation in 2019 (Koalitionsvertrag 2018; BPA 2019).

[88] It was at the major conference *Positioning Ethnological Museums in the Twenty-First Century*, 21–23 June 2015 in Hanover, that the museum's director Viola König would profile the Humboldt Forum with such a claim, in front of a majority of Europe's museum directors of ethnological museums.

Articulating provenance, research, and restitution in the Ethnological Museum's Africa department (2015-2020)

Since 2015, in the Ethnological Museum's Africa department, the two curators Paola Ivanov and Jonathan Fine have respectively aimed at developing long-term collaborative research projects, which grapple with the collections from former German colonies. Whereas Paola Ivanov's projects departed from a find of war booty from the Maji Maji war in 2013 in the museum storage (Tanzania, formerly German East Africa), for which she acquired funding in 2015, Jonathan Fine started conversations on a project related to the Namibia collections in 2015 (Fine in Stienen and Bahr 2019).

Advertising in February 2016 for a tandem of researchers from Tanzania and Germany, Paola Ivanov's first project's aim was to do provenance research on the museum's Tanzanian collections of approximately 10,000 objects.[89] Funded by the Prussian Cultural Heritage Board of Trustees (*Kuratorium*), an association of leading German businesses, *Tanzania–Germany: Shared Object Histories* (2016–2020) focused on objects which were acquired 'through violent appropriation and colonial wars'.[90] Funded by the Federal Cultural Foundation's (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) programme TURN, the second project, *Humboldt Lab Tanzania*, intended to work through questions related to the war booty, together with artists, scholars, and communities in Tanzania (2016–2018).[91] These projects lead to the founding of the research network 'Collaborative provenance research on collections from Tanzania at the National Museum and House of Culture in Dar es Salaam and the Ethnological Museum Berlin', as well as to a university-based research project, which deals with questions of ownership and the 'affective and emotional foundation of transcultural norm conflicts over ethnographic collections in the Humboldt Forum' (2019-2022).[92]

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[89] Due to the organisational impossibility of recruiting and paying someone from a Tanzanian organisation the project was cut back to 1.5 positions. In the project catalogue, the project's initiators described this process as a 'disappointment' (Ivanov, Weber-Sinn, and Reyels 2018:28). The positions were eventually given to the German researcher Kristin Weber-Sinn and the museologist Hendryk Ortlieb, both familiar with the museum. Weber-Sinn had written her extensive master's thesis on the collections (Weber 2005a; Weber 2005b), Ortlieb had been employed as the Africa department's storage manager since 2012.

[90] https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/research/tanzania-germany-shared-object-histories.html, consulted 3 May 2019.

[91] https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/research/humboldt-lab-tanzania.html, consulted 3 May 2019.

[92] For more information on all of the projects, see https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/ag-projekte, consulted 23 February 2020.

With regards to Namibia, the department's second curator Jonathan Fine, in conversation with Jeremy Silvester, director of the Museums Association of Namibia, and the anthropologist Larissa Förster, initiated the project *Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures* (2017-2021), funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. The project engages with the research on, and artistic re-interpretation and re-activation of a selection of about 1400 objects from Berlin's Namibia collection. Based on a residency of Namibian scholars and artists in Berlin's museum in 2019, a selection of 23 objects will travel to Namibia and will be researched until 2022 on location (Stienen 2020). In Namibia, the project will unfold with workshops, the documentation of collections with the funding of a conservator and a documentalist at the National Museum of Namibia, as well as the transfer of 'research from the museum to cultural heritage communities', guaranteed by the funding of two postgraduate students (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2019b).

Collaboration and reinterpretation, provenance research, the crafting of outcomes (websites, exhibitions, research and publication projects), and debates on restitution, long-term loans, or 'circulating' objects go hand in hand in these projects. They explicitly aim at long-term cooperations, and thus, what Romuald Tchibozo called the 'institutionalisation of trust', guaranteed by the official partnerships between heritage organisations (Ethnological Museum Berlin - Museums Association of Namibia), or the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (University of Dar es Salaam and the SPK). With regards to the curation of infrastructure, the Namibian-German project is particularly innovative. The administration and thus, the sovereignty over the distributed funds could be transferred to the Namibian partners, an exception guaranteed by the project's funder, the Gerda Henkel Foundation. The project partners also explicitly negotiated the project's conceptual foci. This meant that it didn't only address contested colonial histories – *the* topic to be addressed in the German context, but also criticised as 'Eurocentric' – but rather used the objects to 'reactivate and document knowledge associated with the objects and other forms of immaterial cultural heritage, such as historical techniques and materials', ultimately contributing to a Museum of Namibian Fashion planned by the Museums Association of Namibia (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2019).[93] Paola Ivanov, for her part, succeeded in funding a binational research design, addressing the much criticised distance between academia and museums. The project links the developments around and research on the Tanzanian collections and the Humboldt Forum more generally speaking with topical theoretical anthropological debates – in this

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[93] Personal communication by Jonathan Fine and Julia Binter in the framework of a CARMAH research meeting, 15 January 2020.

case, 'affect' and 'property'.

Despite the curators' efforts, questions with regards to the museum's coloniality remain open. This concerns, for example, the projects' funding structures. Until this date, it has been the curators' individual commitment to acquire third-party funding which allowed the projects to take place. The long-term existence of these projects is thus not guaranteed. Additionally, funds usually need to be administered by the German project partners. This implies most often that it is also the German project partners who draft the projects and apply for funding (sometimes applicable in German only, such as at the German Lost Art Foundation). These kinds of guidelines risk to limit the collaborative aspect of project work consistently. Another point of debate remains that the SPK has not stated any official position with regards to restitution, and subsequently, no commitment to giving up ownership. The circulation of objects, for instance, is reduced to 'travel' in the collaborative project with Namibian organisations. With regards to the Tanzanian project, a most recent article was headed with the statement that 'we need to start talking about restitution' by the project partner Flower Manase, curator at the National Museum and House of Culture in Dar es Salaam (Noffke 2020). To sum up, many aspects of what is understood as progressive museum work have been taken up, but challenges remain prominent. Recurrent questions concern the 'politicisation' of collaborative projects by the Forum's and museum's communication department. This includes the risk of becoming 'ceremonial curators', a notion coined by Flower Manase in relation to the exhibition on colonialism at the German Historical Museum, and which stands in for being used as tokens.[94] Physical and digital access to the collections equally remains a point of discussion (Öffnet die Inventare! 2019), in a context where parts of the collections have not been inventoried, and public online access to the collections is highly restricted (see chapter 3).

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[94] Notes from the workshop *Curating Colonialism and Beyond?*, 9 November 2017. Paola Ivanov, Heike Hartmann and Kristin Weber-Sinn organised the workshop at the Ethnological Museum on the occasion of a three-week research visit of the curator of history Flower Manase and the director Achiles Bufure from the National Museum of Tanzania.

Conclusion

In a reflection on her project on war booty from the Maji Maji war (1905-1907, formerly German East Africa), Paola Ivanov attributed agency to the objects in their capacity to be 'resilient' or 'obstinate'. For her, 'from the depths of the depot, these objects called out to be remembered, as it were, after their long period of neglect, and to have their histories reconstructed and told (anew)' (Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018:120). Paola Ivanov's interpretation of the objects' role recalls understandings of hauntings, in the sense that, as Avery Gordon puts it, 'the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you that haunting is taking place'. Gordon goes on to state that:

> The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. (Gordon 1997:8)

Negotiations with regards to contentious colonial material culture contributed to a wider grappling with and, to some extent, to the public acknowledgement of Germany's colonial past. The objects had been one point of departure for this process of working through, or, put differently, they somehow forced the Ethnological Museum to provide a space for the legacies of German colonialism to be grappled with. This chapter thus focused on the story of a process. This story characterised, first, by its long, and often neglected, history of claiming recognition of German colonialism, which is, at least since 2004, strongly anchored in German academia and activism; second, by its seemingly sudden, but belated official recognition and addressing by Germany's politics since the mid-2010s, in close relation to the gradual coming into being of the Humboldt Forum; and finally, a current trend or fashion at play at the time of writing.

What the process of negotiations at this particular moment between 2013 and 2015 revealed were the attempts to manoeuvre, navigate, and make advances to identify and pin down a moral consensus in relation to German colonialism. Through this process, the SPK, as an organisation located between governmental and museum-related conventions, approximated this consensus. Its behaviour can roughly be characterised as reactive, rather than proactive, contrasting often with the Ethnological Museum staff's engagement. The chapter showed that a polarised dichotomy, which had established itself over more than a decade, started to decompose and has ever since invited convergences between activism, the arts and cultural production, politics, and museum practice to take place.

I focused my analysis on what it meant for me as a curator to be working within such a situation. Haunting figured here as a help to think through this process, as it enables ethical insecurity and moral imperative to be addressed, signalling the imbrication of the colonial within the postcolonial. Evaluating my own exhibition showed that asymmetries between the Global North and South were maintained and reproduced, despite efforts to address them explicitly, and despite the proclaimed aim to 'decolonise' research and exhibition making processes. *Revenants*, the French for ghosts, captures best the idea of ghosts as those who come back again, whilst never being identical to what they were in their previous existence. The analysis suggests that a haunting was taking place in the sense that we as curators had to deal with the reappearance, presence, and importantly, the effects and continuities of colonial past in our everyday practice and decision-making processes.

The development towards an official acknowledgement and addressing of Germany's role in the Western colonial project and the recognition of the Ethnological Museum's collection as constituted by colonial rule would have been difficult to imagine at the beginning of fieldwork in 2013, and even when *Object Biographies* closed in November 2015. Recent developments with regards to the negotiation of Germany's colonial past allow the argument that the exhibition and research projects in the Ethnological Museum contributed to, and were at the same time facilitated by, a politically favourable context, encouraged by international developments and requests for change and 'decolonisation'. To close this chapter, I thus chronicle key events which took place since my departure in 2015.[95] I do so from an outsider's position here, and cannot detail these developments ethnographically as I was not part of the Ethnological Museum's everyday anymore. Besides the central role of activism in putting German colonialism on the agenda, the political turn towards an acknowledgement of German colonialism is related to the further convergences between activism, cultural production, politics, and colonial collections; subsequently, to the proliferation of those engaged in the claim for recognition; and crucially, to international developments.

In 2017, the critique aimed at the Ethnological Museum and its central place as part of the Humboldt Forum sharpened and received wider academic and public attention with regards to the collection's colonial provenance. In April, the conference *Provenance research in ethnological collections of colonial period* (*Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen*

Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit) first brought together scholars working on provenance research across the fields of the NS and colonial period, putting the topic on a wider academic agenda. With regards to a broader public reception, Bénédicte Savoy, a French art historian based at Berlin's Technical University, left the Humboldt Forum's Advisory Board in July 2017, followed by a media furore which labelled the event as an 'escalation of the Humboldt Forum situation' (Kilb 2017). Harshly critical of the Forum's structure, policies, and programme, Bénédicte Savoy requested a focus on provenance research and its publicisation, implying the possibility and even need for restitution (Häntzschel 2017). By her demand that there should be an unveiling of 'how much blood drips from each artwork', Bénédicte Savoy implicitly referred to the collections acquired during colonialism or in colonial contexts (ibid.). A month after Bénédicte Savoy's resignation, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters, confirmed that Germany had 'cared little about colonialism for a long time'. She promised funding for research on colonialism, defining it to be a 'national task' in her understanding (Monika Grütters in Schaper 2017) – a claim that she would anchor in the new government's coalition contract in January 2018.[96] That this claim had been formulated earlier in the museum world was accentuated when the exhibition *German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present* (*Deutscher Kolonialismus. Fragmente seiner Geschichte und Gegenwart*) opened (October 2016 to May 2017). The pioneering exhibition was the first in its genre focusing on Germany's colonial history and its contemporary implications. It was showcased by and in the German Historical Museum, a national museum located just opposite of the Humboldt Forum's construction site. In November 2017, the French president Emmanuel Macron announced his wish to restore objects to France's former colonies in Africa in what is considered a milestone in the restitution debate and development today. He commissioned a report on the question to the scholars Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, which they would deliver a year later.

In 2018, the debate shifted from a focus on colonial provenance towards issues related to rightful ownership and restitution. In mid-2018, the German Museums Association confirmed the SPK's legal affirmation in its 'Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts' that '[t]he current legal [system] … does not provide suitable instruments for deciding ownership issues surrounding acquisitions from colonial

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[96] The coalition contract reflected these ambitions by, first, reinforcing cooperation with Africa, 'especially by working through colonialism as well as the construction of museums and cultural organisations in Africa' (Koalitionsvertrag 2018:154); second, by putting the remembrance of the SED dictatorship in the GDR, the NS reign of terror, and the German colonial history at the same level (ibid.: 166); and third, by prioritising provenance research concerning colonial museum collections in Germany (ibid.: 169).

contexts', and that it was 'very questionable' that the 'political will' both on the national and international level existed to conceive such legal instruments (German Museums Association, Thielecke, and Geißdorf 2018:71). As such, German and international jurisprudence have continued to assume that material appropriations in the colonial period are not justiciable (*justiziabel*), notably in the context of a lack of international legislation or soft law, such as provided in the case of NS-looted art with the 1998 Washington Declaration (Förster 2019).[97]

Published in November 2018, the restitution report, however, suggested exactly this kind of amendment of national legal frameworks. Entitled 'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics', Sarr and Savoy proposed to change the French *code du patrimoine* in order to circumvent the collection's protection by the principle of inalienability (Sarr and Savoy 2018:67). They also requested the reversal of the burden of proof: This means that the museums would be charged to evidence that the collections were acquired with 'consent' (*consentement*), and not the claimant parties being obliged to prove its illegal acquisition (Sarr and Savoy 2018:39–40). These suggestions opposed and contrasted the official positions voiced so far by most Western museums and caused controversy in both academia and the public debate.[98]

Juridical innovations appear in a different light since the report's publication. In Germany, suggestions to redefine national law seem more probable. This includes to introduce national laws to allow restitution to take place as 'a political project' (Schönberger 2018); to take into account local and historic law systems beyond colonial law (Förster 2018); or to redefine the colonial context retrospectively as an unlawful context, with binding consequences, similar to both the NS and GDR legal regimes which had been retroactively acknowledged as unlawful (Wolfgang Kaleck in Häntzschel and Zielke 2018; Theurer and Kaleck 2018). These proposals reflect what the director of Dakar's Musée des Civilisations Noires, Hamady Bocoum, stated as a response to the restitution report, that '[i]n European museums, inalienable works are protected by a law produced by the prince. If the prince changes, the law can change.' (quoted in von Oswald 2018). With the report and particularly, the French president's subsequent and immediate promise to return 26 objects to the Republic of Benin, the political and legal

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[97] The *Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art*, also referred to as the *Washington Declaration*, is soft law, and is as such also not justiciable, different from UNESCO conventions which are ratified. Thanks to Larissa Förster for indicating this to me.

[98] For an overview of the debates and reactions, see Oswald 2018.

argumentation in favour of restitution and reparation in Germany reached another legitimacy.

Whereas in the summer of 2018, it was still 'very questionable' whether the 'political will' for legal steps concerning restitution existed, such a political position was voiced on a government level a few months later only, in December 2018. The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, and the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, Michelle Müntefering, stated that

> Germany and Europe need to face their colonial history. The restitution of cultural artefacts is just the beginning', asking 'How can museums and collections justify having objects from colonial contexts in their collections, whose transfer to Germany contradicts our value system of today? (Grütters and Müntefering 2018)

Since the beginning of 2019, this exact political will in Germany has been reflected in an important number of political measures, publication of statements, the founding of organisations, and funding of projects and programmes related to colonialism and in particular, to museum collections. Governmental players have been getting so numerous that they risk competing, notwithstanding the non-governmental and activist initiatives. Amongst the most important governmental initiatives are the publication of the 'Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts' in July 2018, and in its revised version, in August 2019; the foundation of a funding branch devoted to colonial-era collections at the German Lost Art Foundation and the funding of provenance research (BPA 2019; German Lost Art Foundation 2019b); the definition of 'cornerstones' (*Eckpunkte*) of how to deal with collections from colonial contexts by both political representatives of the national government and the cultural ministers of the Länder in March 2019 (Kultusminister Konferenz 2019); the restitution of the whip and the bible of Namibia's national hero Hendrik Witbooi in February 2019 by the Land of Baden-Württemberg and the Linden-Museum Stuttgart and of the Stone Cross of Cape Cross of the German Historical Museum to the Republic of Namibia in May 2019; the commitment to the foundation of an 'Agency for International Museum Cooperation' within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with 8 mio euros for 2019 only,[99] with a focus on the nourishing on 'capacity building and improvement' within museums, the 'exchange of curators and objects', as well as, 'read between the lines, an acceleration of restitution processes', all with a regional focus on Africa (Zekri 2019); the institutionalisation of the

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[99] The *Bundestag* approved 5 mio euros for the subsequent three years for the Agency.

focus on 'collections from colonial contexts' (*Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten*) in unit K 56 (Referat K56) as part of the protection of cultural property of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters,[100] the founding of a *Contact point for collected items from colonial contexts* (Kontaktstelle für Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten) in October 2019, following up on the cornerstones agreed upon by *Bund* and *Länder*, 'aimed at persons and institutions from the countries and societies of origin' in order 'to provide access to information on collected items from colonial contexts in Germany' and, importantly, to 'facilitate restitution' (Bundesregierung 2019), and finally, the funding scheme by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the 'creative industry' in Africa with 15 mio euros, including the funding of 'museum work and especially the working through (*Aufarbeitung*) of the colonial past' (BMZ 2020). These national initiatives to publicly grapple with German colonialism have been supported by regional ones: Berlin's and Hamburg's cultural senators Carsten Brosda (*SPD*) and Frank Lederer (*Die Linke*) in particular have initiated and promoted projects on memory and heritage work with regards to the cities' colonial histories and their implications in the present.[101] Research has been fostered and funded in particular projects, or via the funding of permanent posts devoted to provenance.[102] The working group (*AG – Arbeitsgruppe*) *Colonial Provenances*, founded in 2018 as a result of the 2017 provenance conference in Munich, has listed over 40 projects of what they frame as 'postcolonial provenance research' online (as in March

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[100] See the Commissioner's organigramme from 12 November 2019. Unit K56 is part of the sub-section on *Basic questions of cultural politics, protection of cultural property, and monuments* (*Grundsatzfragen der Kulturpolitik, Denkmal- und Kulturgutschutz*)**,** https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/staatsministerin-und-ihr-amt/organisation/organisation-460174, **consulted 23 March 2020.**

[101] In Hamburg, an advisory board has been set up in April 2019 in order to develop a 'postcolonial memory concept for Hamburg', and to achieve a 'postcolonial change of perspective' via a 'participative approach, consolidating earlier initiatives which had been set up since 2014 (Behörde für Kultur und Medien 2019). In Berlin, a major funding scheme of 3 mio euros of both the City and the German Federal Cultural Foundation (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) will address colonial heritage broadly speaking – working together, and thus further institutionalising, the programme of activists in Berlin's case and funded with a total sum of 3 million euros (Barthels 2020).

[102] Examples include research projects in Tübingen/Stuttgart (2016-2018, see Linden-Museum Stuttgart 2016) and Göttingen (Georg-August-Universität Göttigen 2020). In Berlin's Ethnological Museum, four permanent positions working on the collections' provenance have been put in place in 2019.

2020).[103]

On a European level, France's clearly pioneered in initiating debates on restitution since 2017; the confederation of Dutch ethnological museums published a 'Principles and Process for Addressing Claims for the Return of Cultural Objects' in 2019 (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen 2019), and the European Parliament published a rather unnoticed statement in favour of restitution, in the context of the 'redress for past injustices and crimes against humanity - bearing in mind their lasting impacts in the present - against people of African descent' (European Parliament 2019). Nevertheless, Germany seems to have taken, in a relatively short time, a leading role in Europe in grappling with its colonial past, and notably via its colonial collections. The German long-term commitment can be compared possibly only with the private initiative of the American George Soros' Open Society who announced in December 2019 to 'strengthen efforts to restore cultural objects looted from the African continent' with 15 mio USD over four years, 'support[ing] networks and organisations working to return Africa's heritage to its rightful home' (Open Society 2019).

Since 2015, then, much has changed. However, as the cultural theorist George Shire put it in a recent conversation: 'Talking a lot about decolonisation doesn't necessarily mean that it is actually taking place.'[104] What kind of action will follow words and plans remains unclear, and in particular with regards to the Humboldt Forum. From those who followed developments, the suspicion and doubts remain prominent concerning how to evaluate the recent interest in and profiling of German colonialism in the Humboldt Forum, now prominent even at a ministerial level. As the historian and activist Manuela Bauche put it in an interview: 'My question is: Is this [development] now a success of the long activist demands? Or is it an appropriation, a kind of "postcolonialism mainstreaming" that has not been thought through to the end and is dangerous?' (Bauche in Kopp et al. 2018:50). Bauche's question has become even more interesting

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[103] The publication of the project list of the working group (*AG – Arbeitsgruppe*) Colonial Provenances of the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e.V. on provenance research projects in ethnological museums and ethnographic collections in German-speaking countries was announced on 28 January 2020, and is accessible on a separate website. https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/ag-projekte/, consulted 23 February 2020.

[104] Panel discussion 'Claims and Gains: The Translocation of Objects', at the Gropius Bau with George Shire, Antje Majeswki, Theo Eshetu, Felicity Bodenstein, and Margareta von Oswald, 17 May 2019, https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/de/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_282719.html, consulted 10 August 2019.

and complex recently. Some of the *parallel* developments depicted above as convergences, have further coalesced insofar as some of the activist associations – *Berlin Postkolonial, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD)* - have officially started to cooperate with German heritage and public organisations.[105]

The processes can be understood as a shift in attitude (*Haltung*), a process of organisational learning, or the success of long-term engagement on different fronts (activist, artistic, academic, curatorial) to publicly acknowledge Germany's colonial past. As the analysis of *Object Biographies* showed, however, museum practices also risk to ultimately sustain the museum's status quo as 'colonial instrument', contributing to the reproduction of existing knowledge systems and power structures – which have for some time been articulated around concepts such as the museum's 'transformism' (Sternfeld 2009), 'strategic reflexivity' (von Bose 2017b), 'diversity lite' (Lynch 2014), or 'neocolonial collaboration' (Boast 2011).

The recent and important political interest in and public funding of the 'working through' of German colonialism raises the questions of the why, the why now, and the how. Foci on museum and collection work as well as on 'Africa' have remained and been reinforced, but a broadening to memory and heritage work more generally speaking has also been taking place. Whereas the grappling with the history, German colonial past, and memory work seem to have become a common place, the implication of this work for the present remain open to this day. What are the political objectives in terms of the funding of research and projects, the establishment of collaborations and even the founding of new organisations? Who is involved and who is excluded? Do, and if so, how, diplomatic interests articulate?

Finally, and in comparison with Holocaust memory politics, I wonder what kind of consequences will be drawn, and what kind of links will be politically established between the grappling with the colonial past, and the current rise of both right-wing politics and racist terrorism. The acknowledgement of Germany's national-socialist histories also led to the protection of contemporary Jewish life - a seemingly taken for granted measure

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[105] Examples include the conference *Beyond Collecting: New Ethics for Museums in Transition*, conceived by Hamburg's ethnological museum *MARKK* and *Berlin Postkolonial*, funded by the Goethe Institute (March and Septemeber 2020), or the cooperation between Berlin's City Museum, the City of Berlin, and several NGOs, including *Berlin Postkolonial, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD), and Each One Teach One*, funded by the City of Berlin and the German Federal Cultural Foundation (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) (Barthels 2020).

which has most recently been challenged by the Halle synagogue shooting in October 2019. Will the analysis and addressing of colonial governance and ideology be used to counter structural racism in Germany today?

Chapter 2
Exhibiting as repair: curatorial cultures and the ethnological

Introduction

In 2012, a year before I would enter the Ethnological Museum to start my fieldwork, I attended a roundtable in Paris on the occasion of the exhibition *La Triennale: Intense Proximity*.[1] The exhibition, which addressed the relationship between art and the ethnographic, was the subject of an ethnography that I was doing for my master's thesis (von Oswald 2016). Okwui Enwezor, the Triennale's creative director, had recently been part of the Humboldt Forum's Advisory Board and commented on the role and futures of ethnological museums and their collections.

> I am of the opinion that ethnographic museums always get it wrong and therefore they are the most experimental museological spaces at this particular time …. How do objects signify things beyond the limited framework in which they are placed? I find ethnographic museums are really interesting places to think about the role and the nature of cultural objects and the possibility of experimenting curating or what I would call 'curatography' – theorising through curating.[2]

By problematising the role of the curatorial within ethnological museums, Enwezor raised two issues which form points of departure for the reflections and analysis pursued in this chapter. His expression 'Always getting it wrong' refers, firstly, to the decades of critique with which ethnological museums have been confronted, making these museums' representations possibly the most discussed and problematised exhibition genre in the fields of museum anthropology, art history, and postcolonial critique. Depicting them as 'limited frameworks in which these objects are placed', he alludes to the disciplinary and organisational framings which the objects are exposed to. Within these framings, the objects take on a particular significance of 'difference', defined by anthropological theory and ethnographic research, as they are part of an ethnological museum's collection and their exhibitions. Secondly, the quotation allows us to think about how to work and analyse the representations produced by and within ethnographic museums. Enwezor highlights that ethnographic museums are good 'to *think about* the

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[1] The exhibition took place in the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, April–August 2012.

[2] This is a quotation from the transcription of the conversation, initiated by Sinzania Ravini, which took place in Paris between Okwui Enwezor, Françoise Vergès, Mikela Lundahl, and Nicolas Bourriaud, then director of the École des Beaux-Arts, at Nicolas Bourriaud's apartment in the school, 21 April 2012.

role of curating'. This thinking about and the critique of representation have been at the core of the analysis of curatorial practices, and in relation to ethnological museums in particular. Whereas the critique of representation in regard to finished exhibitions, and thus, put simply, the *thinking* about past wrongdoings and possible futures has dominated the analysis of exhibitions, what curators actually *do* in ethnological museums has been taken into account less.

With a view both to histories of exhibiting and to their critical reception, this chapter addresses how curators position themselves with regard to the legacies of curating in ethnological museums. How are conventional tropes of representation in ethnological museums, closely related to colonial epistemologies, grappled with? How do they get challenged? Why and how are they reproduced in contemporary exhibition practice – despite this long history of representational critique? To approach these questions, I depart from intentions and plans – concept papers, public presentations, internal discussions – and processes of exhibition making – meetings, negotiations. The chapter thus focuses on the way in which the exhibition concept is theorised, imagined, and crafted, rather than on an analysis of the exhibition as product of this exact process of exhibition making. The analysis in this chapter thus is based on plans, concepts, and exhibition processes observed between 2013 and 2015, some of which changed substantially since the appointment of Neil MacGregor in May 2015 as Founding Director (*Gründungsintendant*). Looking at processes which *produce* representations – instead of analysing representations themselves – facilitates an analysis that disentangles broader issues of power through questions on access, voice, and authorship. Tackling the legacies of exhibiting meant that attempts aiming at representational change got thwarted by various factors. In particular, 'structures' and 'cultures' acted on the maintenance, or challenging, of conventional museal orders, confirming the Ethnological Museum's role as fundamentally concerned with the definition, demarcation, and representation of cultural difference and alterity.

Exhibiting 'Africa' in ethnological museums

Exhibition histories about 'Africa' in ethnological museums are usually characterised with a reference to 'the persistent and modernist paradigms of art and artefact', as art historian Ruth B. Phillips put it (Phillips 2007:98). Implicit in the shift between 'art' and 'culture' exhibitions are understandings of the museum's mission as well as the kind of research that is supposed to be put on display. These usually fall on one of two sides: either representing, reconstructing, and explaining 'culture' through 'context', and, thus, to

quote Henrietta Lidchi, mobilising a 'translation of difference', or valuing objects as 'art', with the ultimate aim to place anthropological collections on the same pedestal as Western art (Lidchi 1997:171). Whereas some scholars hesitate to discuss within the realms of these paradigms, 'art' and 'culture' have nevertheless remained one of the most, if not *the* most, prominent modes of thinking about how collections associated with alterity and difference have been exhibited, in particular within ethnological museums.[3] The back and forth between these paradigms points to another unresolved central quarrel, namely the debate around whether it is anthropology or (art) history that claims disciplinary authority over such collections.

Landmark exhibitions with long-lasting impact on the curation of ethnological collections include *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), curated by William Rubin at the Museum of Modern Art (New York), as well as *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in Paris. The reception of these exhibitions revealed how the exhibitions had mobilised and universalised Western understandings of art and culture. The exhibition's critics challenged essentialising and hierarchising categories attributed to the exhibited works and their producers ('modern', 'primitive', or 'tribal'). They questioned the exhibitions' method of juxtaposition, problematising notions such as 'appropriation', 'inspiration', 'influence', or 'affinity'.[4] With a view to the historiography and representation of 'Africa', exhibitions such as *Into the Heart of Africa* (Ontario, 1989), curated by Jeanne Cannizzo, as well as *Africa: Art of A Continent* (London, New York, Berlin, 1995), curated by Tom Phillips, stirred particular debate.[5]

Research on the representation of culture in museums confirmed and solidified the exhibitions as a subject of research more generally speaking, fostered and nourished through the progressive institutionalisation of gender, postcolonial, cultural, and

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[3] See for example the contributions of Clémentine Deliss, and Wayne Modest in von Oswald and Tinius 2020.

[4] Central critiques of *Primitivism* include Foster 1985; Clifford 1988; Danto et al. 1988; Price 1989; McEvilley 1992; Errington 1998. Central reviews of *Magiciens de la terre* include articles in two special issues of *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* and *Third Text* (1989), which feature texts by, amongst others, James Clifford, Rasheed Araeen, Sally Price, and Carlos Severi.

[5] A comprehensive summary of the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition and related debates are Shelley Butler's monograph on the exhibition (Butler 1999). On *Africa: Art of a Continent*, see Clarke 1997; Court 1999.

museum studies, informed by the dissemenation of postmodern thought.[6] In dialogue with these critiques of representation, exhibitions – notably those related to the contemporary art world – prominently challenged the classifications, categories, orderings, and attributions hitherto criticised, some of which have remained reference points until today. In art history, similar debates to those in anthropology concerning how to collect, conserve, and exhibit 'human diversity' and its cultural production have been prominent. Comprised within debates on the 'global turns',[7] debates centred on how to 'open up', 'diversify' or 'decentralise' the Western canon and how to question understandings of 'difference' and 'alterity'. Introducing and working with concepts such as the 'transcultural', or the 'transnational', 'multiple modernisms', or 'decanonisation', curators, their exhibitions and discursive programmes within this field have contributed to dealing with the ethnological museum's legacies in the context of globalisation.[8] These developments since the early 1980s facilitated further the emerging of the professional figure of the independent curator, as well as the possibility to think of the process of exhibition-making as a form of research itself.[9]

The Humboldt Forum as an incarnation of representational critique
Despite the analysis, critique, and ongoing reflexive and critical exhibition practice with regards to the representation of cultural difference, curatorial practices in ethnological museums have remained a contested, shaky, and uncertain terrain – or, to insist on Okwui Enwezor's phrasing – 'they always get it wrong'. Issues raised in relation to restitution and ownership have taken a more prominent role recently, especially since the

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[6] See, for example, Karp 1991; Karp et al. 1992; Hall and Open University 1997; Macdonald 1998.

[7] See, for example, publications by advocates of a Global Art History, Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim 2011; Elkins 2013; Belting, Weibel, and Buddensieg 2013; D'Souza and Casid 2014, or of World Art Studies, Zijlmans and Damme 2008; Rampley et al. 2012.

[8] These exhibitions include the self-reflexive exhibitions in the Musée d'Ethnographie Neuchâtel (CH) by Roland Kaehr and Jacques Hainard, such as *Collections Passions* (1982), *Temps perdu, temps retrouvé: voir les choses du passé au présent* (1985), or *Musée Cannibale* (2002); *Art / Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, New York, curated by Susan Vogel, 1988), *Lotte or the Transformation of the Object* (1990, Graz (AUS), curated by Clémentine Deliss); *Mining the Museum* (1992, Baltimore, artist: Fred Wilson), *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (1995, London, curated by Clémentine Deliss), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (1998, New York, curated with a team of curators by Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss). The phenomenon of the biennalisation of the art world equally calls these concepts into question, with examples such as the Havana Biennale, 1989 (curated by Gerardo Mosquera), documenta 10, 1997 (curated by Catherine David), Johannesburg Biennale, 1998 (curated by Okwui Enwezor), or documenta 11, 2002 (curated by Okwui Enwezor).

[9] For the history of the curatorial field, research, and the role of the curator, see for example O'Neill 2007; Thea 2009; Lind 2012; von Bismarck, Schafaff, and Weski 2012; O'Neill and Wilson 2015.

release of the restitution report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (Sarr and Savoy 2018). Still, the controversies around the representation of cultural difference remain prominent, as testified by the debates which accompanied the recent restructuring and reopening of several European ethnological museums.[10]

The Humboldt Forum is currently one of the most prominent examples of these contestations, as it condenses the critique which has been so prominently formulated in more than two decades of critical international scholarship and exhibition practice. Employed by both scholars and activists, and translated from Anglophone to German contexts in many cases, the critique concerned the construction of the building *tout court*; the housing of what has repeatedly been framed as the 'non-European' collections in the building; and finally, the way the Forum has been communicated about. This concerns, first, the Humboldt Forum's positioning. Located on Berlin's Museum Island, the museums associated with 'Ancient and Modern Civilisations' – 'Islamic', Egyptian, Greek, Roman, as well as nineteenth-century European painting – are situated in opposition to the Humboldt Forum. The Forum, in turn, has been repeatedly presented as a 'place for the world cultures' integrating the 'non-European' collections (Parzinger 2011:6). The framing of the Forum as representing the non-European has established a dichotomy between the 'European' and the 'non-European', which continues to reverberate on Museum Island. The collections in the 'European' museums – coming from areas as diverse as Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East – would geographically not necessarily be considered as such.

As Sharon Macdonald has argued, this particular 'constellation of difference' contributes to an understanding of the 'European' which is defined in terms of historic belonging, rather than in geographical terms. It implies the construction of these collection as 'European' heritage, which, conversely, serves as a constitutive part of 'European' history. This history is constructed in contrast to the 'non-European', a history which is excluded from the narrative (Macdonald 2016; see also von Bose 2013; von Bose 2016).

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[10] The most prominent example has remained the debate related to the reopening of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (Clifford 2007; Price 2007; Dias 2008; Shelton 2009; Sternfeld 2009), which was followed by the restructuring of the Weltkulturenmuseum in Frankfurt in 2012 suggested by Clémentine Deliss (Leeb 2013a; Leeb 2013b); the new concept and temporary exhibitions brought forward by Nanette Snoep concerning the ethnographic collections in Saxony (Deimel 2016); the reopening of the Weltmuseum Wien in 2017 (Jahns 2019:61–88), or most recently, the fundamental renovation and subsequent reopening of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, directed by Guido Grysseels (Demart and Robert 2017).

This dichotomy is accentuated by the exclusion of the collections of Museum for European Cultures, which have remained in Dahlem.

These politics of place on Berlin's Museum Island are, secondly, accentuated by the architectural frame of the *Schloss*, standing in for imperialism and royal grandeur, risking re-establishing, as Philipp Oswalt phrased it, 1918 as 'the actual identity-establishing moment for Berlin' (quoted in von Bose 2013). This symbolism is further emphasised by the housing of the ethnological collections. The combination of royal façade and ethnographic collections has been understood as a means to 'show off', to resume the critique in Mieke Bal's words (Bal 1992): the Forum's positioning has been interpreted as a continuation of colonial dominance and the maintenance of Western supremacy, whilst incorporating and 'strategically' using 'reflexivity' in order to fit with contemporary museum discourse, as Fred von Bose has argued (von Bose 2017).[11] The collections' regional division in the Humboldt Forum confirms ordering modes traditionally associated with anthropology and the claim to represent and 'explain' certain 'cultures' in their regional delimitation, traditionally via grand anthropological themes.

Repair as curatorial strategy, its ambivalences and ruptures
One of this chapter's guiding principles is that contemporary curating in ethnological museums can above all be understood to constitute a *response*. It is a response in the sense that exhibitions in ethnological museums today usually position themselves in relation to the legacies of exhibiting, and, more importantly, aim to address the critique of those representations and epistemologies which have challenged and disturbed contemporary curatorial practice and continue to do so. Legacies of critical reception form a crucial point of departure of ethnological exhibition projects; one that is distinct from the adherence to a purely thematical or collection-based curatorial approach commonly employed in other exhibition making processes such as in art history or science museums. First and foremost, the curator's approach, I argue, affords a careful and conciliatory response to the colonial depictions of Africa represented and reproduced through the artefacts exhibited in ethnological museums, which rely on imaginaries of the 'Black Man' as 'the ultimate sign of the dissimilar', as Achille Mbembe has put it (Mbembe 2017:11).

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[11] For some of the critiques see Chapter 1 for a detailed account of the activists' critique, and as key examples Artefakte//anti-humboldt 2013; No Humboldt 21 ! 2013:21; von Bose 2017; Soh Bejeng Ndikung 2018.

These imaginaries closely relate to broader colonial constructions of otherness in that such representations rely on binary differences. These binaries usually entail a strong hierarchy, because they were constructed to establish and maintain relations of colonial dominance. Exemplary binaries have been opposing 'nature' versus 'culture', 'tribal' or 'primitive' versus 'modern' or 'civilised'. Small-scale societies isolated in space and time are put in juxtaposition with great civilisations with deep and long histories, or localised, rural, and immobile societies contrast with global, interconnected, cosmopolitan, urban, and mobile ones. Anthropologists have been criticised for locking the people they claim to represent in a 'nonhistorical time' (Clifford 1988:202) and an eternal 'ethnographic present' that denies these subjects 'coevalness' in exhibition displays (Fabian 2014). This critique has been most powerfully articulated around exhibitions themselves, which became at once a prominent subject of analysis and a response to such analyses.

How to contend with the legacies of the colonial representation of Black history and the history of Africa has been interrogated by scholars and cultural practitioners through fictional and factual accounts and narratives. Notions of 'healing', or 'countering' have been suggested in order to engage with histories of conquest, domination, and misrepresentation.[12] Sadyia Hartman, reflecting on her own practice as a writer addressing slavery in the US context, problematises the role of authorship and positioning, and wonders how to

> do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive. I want to tell a story … without committing further violence in my own act of narration. (Hartman 2008:2–3)

In relation to the European colonial project and its reverberations, the artist Kader Attia centralises his practice around the notion of repair. 'Intentionally fractured', as Clémentine Deliss describes his practice, Attia's understanding of repair involves the rendering visible of the wounds and its stitching. This intentional fracture allows the histories and presents formerly erased, neglected or downplayed to be addressed and divulged (Deliss 2016, see also Vergès 2019).

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[12] The writings of bell hooks or Stuart Hall are just two, but crucial, examples of scholars focusing on analysing and grappling with representations of cultural identity, and Blackness in particular (see for example hooks 1990; Hall 1993).

In my observation of curatorial practices in museums, current responses to stereotypical representations of Africa can also be understood as an expression of the notion of repair. Repair usually departs from a particular given, and implies the explicit will to fix, to cure, or improve. Repair, more than similar notions such as redress or recovery, is a material practice. An exhibition, then, functions here as a temporary but materialised argument in order to correct or shift perspectives. At the same time, however, to repair often implies restoring. Particularly in the context of ethnological museum collections, this easy kinship between repair and restoration leads to a problematic ambivalence within curatorial responses since the restorative aspect of repair engenders a risk as much as a redress. Whilst attempts to heal articulate themselves in particular curatorial strategies, they run the risk of reproducing representations perceived as violent, or, on the other hand, of stabilising and legitimising an organisation otherwise contested.

In this chapter, I explore and discuss the difficulties that arise in today's reparative processes of exhibition making in more depth and detail. My analysis focuses on the exhibition concept which the curator Paola Ivanov prepared for Berlin's Humboldt Forum and the limits and innate contradictions of its implementation. One of the central principles of Paola Ivanov's concept was the development of counter-narratives and counter-histories to historically established, stereotypical, and persisting images of 'Africa'. Inasmuch as they are well-crafted and valuable attempts at repair, ultimately, their success is considerably impaired. The reason being, I argue in this chapter, that certain 'curatorial cultures' – reflected in the opaque and inert structural and organisational framework of the Humboldt Forum – impede new and innovative curatorial ideas for change. Since Paola Ivanov operates from within the confines of the museum, her curatorial ambitions are curtailed. In the end, the exhibition runs the risk of reproducing colonial forms of representation whose rotten roots the curator set out to sever. The chapter discusses the museum as a conflicting and troubling curatorial terrain, in which the working through of colonial collections articulates in the constant grappling with colonial representations and their genealogy.

After an introduction to the Africa department's histories of exhibiting, situated between the paradigms of art and artefact, I will detail Paola Ivanov's curatorial strategies for the Humboldt Forum in the second part of the chapter. These strategies articulate different dimensions of the attempt to repair, rendering invisible agents visible, displaying unknown objects, and subsequently, telling untold stories about and through the collections. I argue that her choice of different narrative strategies and accompanying

objects contrast, and counter, those histories hitherto associated with Africa. The third part illustrates how what I depict as the curatorial culture of the ethnological runs counter to and thus undermines the curator's attempts to repair. It is the analysis of the *how* of exhibition-making (process), beyond the *what* (representation) which allows me to argue that the attempts to repair break open again. In the final part of the chapter, I discuss how particular 'structures', as they are usually referred to by museum staff, contribute to maintaining this curatorial culture. The argument thus unfolds the ambitions, resistances, and difficulties regarding the curator's attempt to repair representations in the museum.

The history of representing 'Africa' at the Ethnological Museum: navigating the 'paradigms of art and artefact'

With my arrival at the museum, the search for photographs documenting exhibitions starts. My intention to capture the objects' lives in the museum entails when and how they have been exhibited. How was 'Africa' represented in the Ethnological Museum throughout its history is the question which I am interested in and which the first part of this chapter is concerned with. On my quest, I realise that the photographic documentation in the Ethnological Museum is dispersed, and diverse in its materiality: on the computer, single files of images of exhibitions are stored in low resolution in different folders, carrying names such as 'general photos historic, unsorted'. Images are not dated, the file names are unspecific ('Ausstellung Afrika_2.jpg'; 'EM_Afrika_2.jpg'). Different museum staff whom I consult are not aware of where I can find exhibition views. The research leads me through the entire museum, beginning with the Africa department's own photo archive, the museum's general archive, the museum's photo laboratory, as well as part of the 'Americas' archive which stores photographs of what is understood as 'Museum History' (*Museumsgeschichte*).
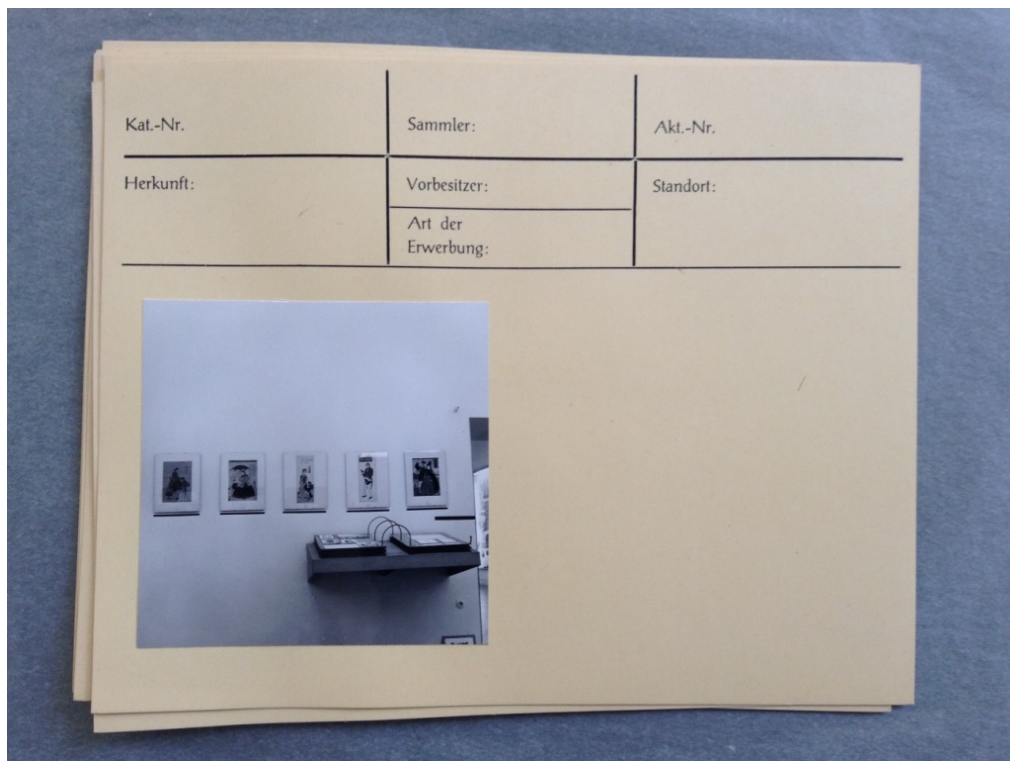
*Figure 2.1 Exhibition view mounted on an object card, photograph by Margareta von Oswald, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
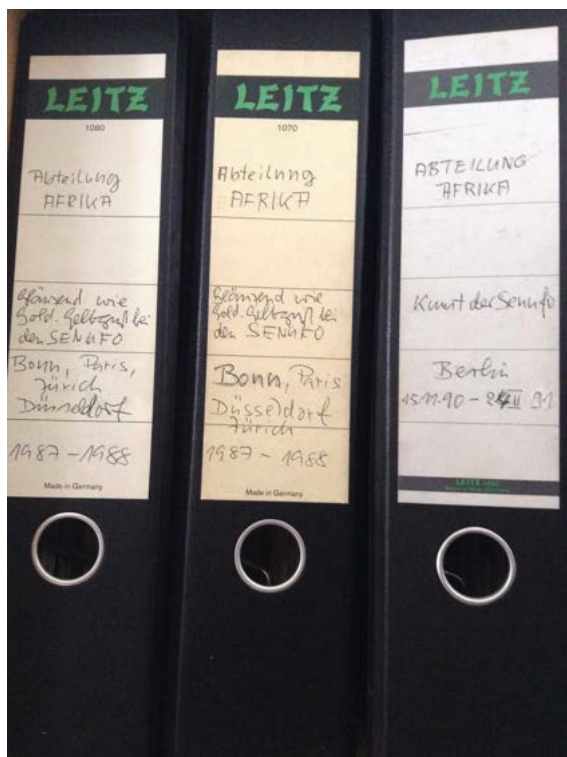
*Figure 2.2 Documentation of several temporary exhibitions in the archive, photograph by
Margareta von Oswald, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin –
Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 2.3 Exhibition views on diapositive in the Africa department's photo archive, photograph by Margareta von Oswald, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.4 Exhibition views on negatives in the Africa department's photo archive, photograph by Margareta von Oswald, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.5 Boxes with exhibition views in the Africa department's photo archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.6 Object photographs sorted in the Africa department's photo archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.7 Cupboards in the Africa department's photo archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.8 The museum archive with its more recent documentation in the folders on the right, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

What I find is scattered, unsorted, in bad condition, and usually difficult to identify and attribute to a particular exhibition, its dates, or even location. Exhibition texts, maps, or other additional material have hardly been documented. The Africa photo archive consists mainly of photographs which *don't* have any relation to the collections.[13] The object cards as well as all the photographs relating to the collection – such as photographs documenting the 'field' – were destroyed by fire during the Second World War. The efforts of Kurt Krieger, department director (from 1945) and museum director (from 1970), to document the objects are reflected in laboriously staged object photographs. These make up an important part of the archive and constitute an incomplete, but approximate public inventory of the collections, published in several volumes since the mid-1960s (Krieger 1965; Krieger 1969a; Krieger 1969b; Krieger 1990). It is in the department's archive that I can identify further singled-out exhibition photographs, negatives and slides, as well as remnants from old exhibitions, such as maps used in the exhibition, which help to identify the chronology of exhibitions in the museum. In the museum archive, I identify the documentation of more recent exhibition documentation – since the opening of the new building in the 1970s – with a row of folders documenting the different exhibitions in varying detail. In contrast to the traffic of collections to the museum's exterior, which are precisely documented by loan contracts, the objects' movement *within* the museum is difficult to trace. Most exhibitions lack lists of the exhibited objects. Finally, photographs understood as 'historical' are shelved in a room located behind the museum storage of the 'Americas'. Referred to as the 'museum's photographic archive devoted to "'Museum History'", the cupboard holds one folder and a box with numerous envelopes, some of which contain photographs of the museum's first exhibition on cardboard. In the photo laboratory, one of the photographers confirms that the focus is on object documentation, and that nowadays the exhibition views are always produced 'at the last minute', just before the exhibition on view closes. The different kinds of materialities, their dispersed locality, and the different qualities of conservation confirm an unsystematic and hierarchical approach to the documentation and keeping of the museum's organisational histories. Some histories are clearly understood and valued as 'History' with a capital H in the organisational self-understanding, but the attention and resources devoted to exhibition histories, notably post-Second World War, are minimal at the time of research.[14] This observation

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[13] The photographs which are stored in the Africa photo department consist mainly of donations from the BGAEU (Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte), a lot of which are photo albums from particulars and their travels.

[14] Today, in July 2019, what exists of the exhibition history is inventoried and scanned, but the exhibitions have not been researched further, such as with object lists.

somehow parallels exhibition catalogues in their focus on objects and their documentation, rather than exhibition views.[15]

The paradigms of art and artefact: the exhibition history of the Africa department
When I put the photos next to each other, they reflect how the museum's curators have worked with the collection via exhibition making. As early as 1961, the museum's director Hans-Dietrich Disselhoff classified museums according to the unresolved dilemma of 'art' and 'culture'.

> According to their exhibition style, German ethnological museums could be classified into two main types, namely those in which the main emphasis is on aesthetic aspects of the presentation, and those in which the aesthetic moment is more or less neglected for the benefit of the most complete display possible of the entire cultural sphere of the various ethnic groups, as far as we can grasp it.[16] (Disselhoff 1961:194)

Concerning the Africa department, the exhibition installation views vary between white cube, black cube, and 'contextualising' colours. The particular use of the number of objects, text, light, wall colour, and showcases alludes to whether this exhibition is about 'culture' or about 'art': the more objects, the more 'context' (photographic, video or audio documentation, explanatory texts), the more likely the exhibition situates itself within the mission to represent a particular 'culture'; the more an object is singled out, well lit, put on a pedestal, and accompanied with the least amount of text to let the object have its 'effect' on the audience, the more probable an association with 'art' will take place.

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[15] The only comprehensive collection of texts on the history of the museum and the department dates from 1973, published for the museum's centenary (Krieger and Koch 1973). Other histories of the museum are related to particular staff, including Felix von Luschan (Ruggendorfer and Szemethy 2009), or Adolf Bastian (Fischer, Bolz, and Kamel 2007); pre-war history of the Africa department (Stelzig 2004), or general accounts on the museum (Penny 2002) or its relation to anthropology (Zimmerman 2001).

[16] From the German: 'Ihrer Ausstellungsweise nach könnte man die deutschen ethnologischen Museen in zwei Haupttypen einordnen, und zwar in solche, in denen der Hauptakzent entweder auf ästhetischen Gesichtspunkten der Darbietung liegt, und in solche, das das ästhetische Moment mehr oder weniger zu Gunster einer möglichst vollständigen Schaustellung des gesamten Kulturbereiches der verschiedenen Völkergruppen, soweit es uns greifbar ist, vernachlässigen.'

The list of the museum's permanent exhibitions titles reflects these exhibitionary regimes. Its first exhibitions were housed in the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin's Königsgrätzer Straße, where the museum was opened after its foundation in 1886 next to the *Kunstgewerbemuseum*, the Museum for Decorative Arts, which today is occupied by the Gropius Bau.[17] The museum's first two permanent exhibitions don't carry specific titles, but already reflect the seemingly opposing regimes.

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[17] Königgrätzer Straße was renamed Stresemannstraße in 1930.

Figure 2.9 Exhibition title unclear ('Africa collections') (before 1926), Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Königsgrätzer Straße, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.10 Exhibition title unclear ('Africa collections') (before 1926), Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Königsgrätzer Straße, photograph Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.11 Exhibition title unclear ('Africa collections'), Benin room (1926–WWII), Museum für Völkerkunde, Königsgrätzer Straße, curated by Alfred Schachtzabel, Bernhard Ankermann, Herman Baumann, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.12 Exhibition title unclear ('Africa collections'), Cameroon Grasslands room (1926–WWII), Museum für Völkerkunde, Königsgrätzer Straße, curated by Alfred Schachtzabel, Bernhard Ankermann, Herman Baumann, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

An understanding of the 'Africa' collections as 'art' was exceptional before the early twentieth century. The museum was above all busy with inventorying the objects which arrived in significant numbers and predominantly from the German colonies. The collections were exhibited as study collections for the then institutionalising discipline of anthropology, publicly stored in a regional organisation (since 1886/1887). Equally without title and regionally organised, in 1926, the new exhibition suggested a change of paradigm with 'singled-out' arrangement of objects. This kind of display of 950m^2 was possible because parts of the collections had been moved to Berlin Dahlem to be stored in what was depicted as a shack (*Schuppen*). Exhibition and storage would from now on be separate entities. The exhibition was curated by the new – Alfred Schachtzabel – and the former department director – Bernhard Ankermann – as well as Herman Baumann, whose concept of 'cultural province' shaped the exhibition's organisation in regions (Krieger 1974:119–122).[18]

The collections and exhibitions were united in Dahlem after the Second World War, due to the museum's destruction in Königsgrätzer Straße during the war, as well as the impossibility of storing the collections in Berlin-Mitte alone. The exhibitions' titles and views reflect the different usages of the collections: The exhibition *African Art* consisted of an installation in a high-ceilinged, white cube setting with regional organisation (1957–1971, Kurt Krieger). The curator expressed his dissatisfaction with the exhibition's focus on 'art', but justified it on the grounds of the collection's lack of completeness after the war (Krieger 1974:123).

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[18] Baumann claimed that particular cultures could be associated to particular geographical regions. He was convinced that environment, culture, and particular groups formed entities, which could be distinguished one from the other.

Figure 2.13 African Art (*'Afrikanische Kunst'*) (1957–1971), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.14 African Art (*'Afrikanische Kunst'*) (1957–1971), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.15 African Art (*'Afrikanische Kunst'*) *(1957–1971), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 2.16 African Art (*'Afrikanische Kunst'*) *(1957–1971), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Shortly after the exhibition opened, Kurt Krieger highlighted that the future goals of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* would be to make the collections accessible in exhibitions of the region's cultural histories, rejecting the concept of 'exotic art' (Krieger 1963:248). Opened three years after the museum's official vernissage in 1970, paralleling the announced opening in stages of the Humboldt Forum (*Eröffnung in Etappen*), the new permanent exhibition curated by Kurt Krieger would last for 26 years and thus constitutes the most permanent exhibition of the department's twentieth-century history (1973–1999).

*Figure 2.17 'Introduction room' (*Einführungsraum*), permanent exhibition, Africa department (1973–1999), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 2.18 View of 'Sahara', 'North Africa', permanent exhibition, Africa department (1973–1999), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz
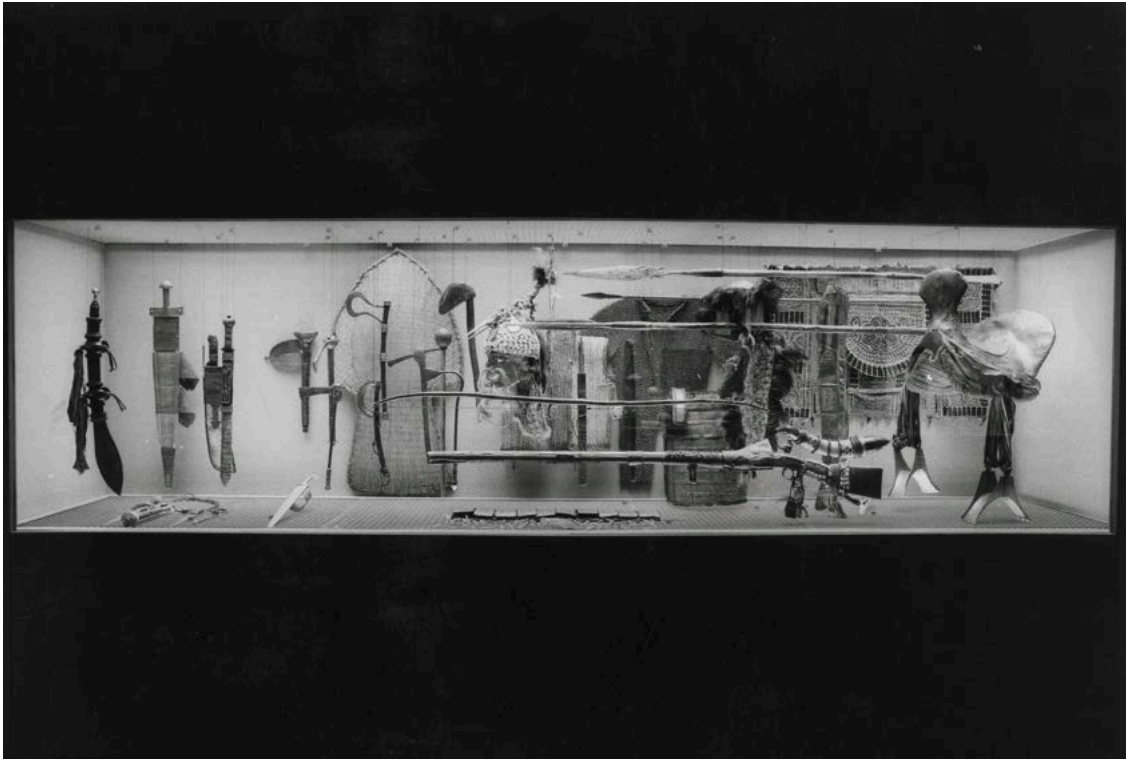
Figure 2.19 Vitrine, permanent exhibition, Africa department (1973–1999), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.20 View of 'Sudan', 'Upper Guinea', permanent exhibition, Africa department (1973–1999), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.21 View of 'Grassland Cameroon', permanent exhibition, Africa department (1973–1999), Museum für Völkerkunde, Dahlem, curated by Kurt Krieger, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Presented without a title, and thus suggesting a generalist view on 'Africa' via its material culture, the exhibition was organised in 'typical geographical and cultural regions', problematically making a distinction between 'white' and 'black' Africa.[19] The exhibition aimed 'to show the cultural property of the population of each region … in its entirety and not to rip it apart in single, incoherent pieces, such as with the unilateral separation of art' (Krieger 1974:123).[20] The focus on the use of material culture was reflected by large maps, wall-sized black and white photos of representatives of different cultural groups, as well as showcases integrating large numbers of objects (1,333), equally following a regional organisation.

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[19] Exhibition texts of the exhibition, archive of the Ethnological Museum. The exhibition only showed exhibits from what was depicted as 'Northern and Western Africa'.

[20] From the German: 'Es wird also versucht, den Kulturbesitz der Bevölkerung jeder Region – soweit museal darstellbar – in seiner Gesamtheit zu zeigen und nicht in einzelne, zusammenhanglose Teile zu zerreißen, z.B. durch die einseitige Herauslösung der Kunst. … Das Ziel ist es, dem Besucher einen Überblick und einen gewissen Einblick in die Vielfalt der nord- und westafrikansichen Kulturen zu vermitteln und damit zum Verständnis der heutigen Situation der Afrikaner beizutragen, die ohne Kenntnis ihrer vielfach och lebendigen traditionellen Lebensweise für uns kaum begreiflich ist' (Krieger 1974:123).

Figures 2.22–2.25 Africa: Art and Culture (*'Afrika. Kunst und Kultur'*) (1999–2005), *Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Dahlem, curated by Hans-Joachim Koloss, photographer unidentified, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

The curator Hans-Joachim Koloss only inaugurated 'his' permanent exhibition in 1999, despite the fact that he had already taken up the post in 1985 following Kurt Krieger. *Africa: Art and Culture* was exhibited in a light-flooded space, with objects arranged in glass and metal-framed show cases, partly in a cultural or regional organisation ('Makonde in Mozambique'; 'Cameroon Grasslands'), and partly in a thematic organisation ('primitivism'; 'Elements of Design in African Art') (1999–2005, curated by Hans-Joachim Koloss).

The last exhibition to be presented in Dahlem before the museum's closure in 2016 was *Art from Africa*, a black-cube exhibition using brightly lit pedestals and showcases to present the objects according to their attributed status as 'art' (2005–2016, curated by Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov).[21] *Art from Africa* was organised in four different categories: 'Art History', 'Figural Plastic', 'Performance', and 'Design'. Contrasting a geographical partition, this organisation emphasised its ambition to align itself with Western art history.[22]

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[21] Behind the *Art from Africa* exhibition, other singled-out rooms and smaller exhibitions followed, including a room on *Africa in Berlin*, a section on *Bamum: Tradition and Innovation in the Cameroun Grassland*, and a permanent exhibition on Benin, entitled *Benin: History of a Western Kingdom*, which all opened in 2009.

[22] The focus on an art-historical approach was further supported by descriptive, art-historical-styled exhibition texts including the attempt to name as many of the objects' individual authors as possible. For a substantial critique of the exhibition, see Dean 2010 and Bose 2016:203–212.
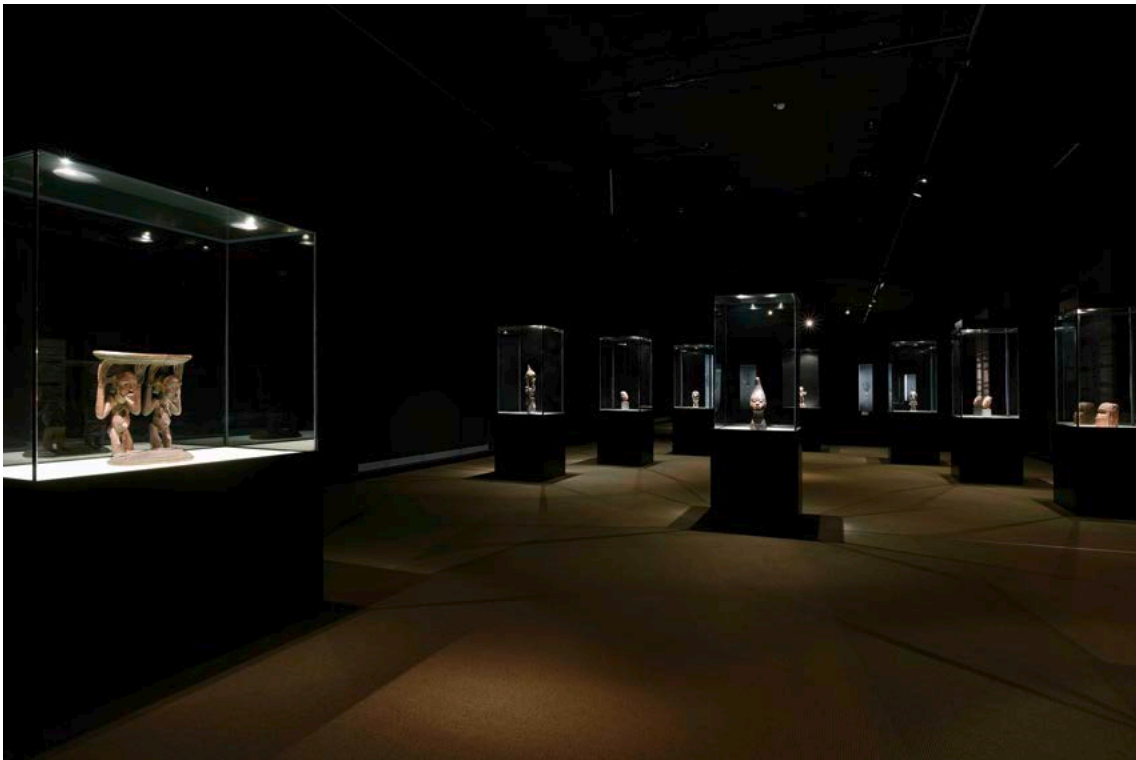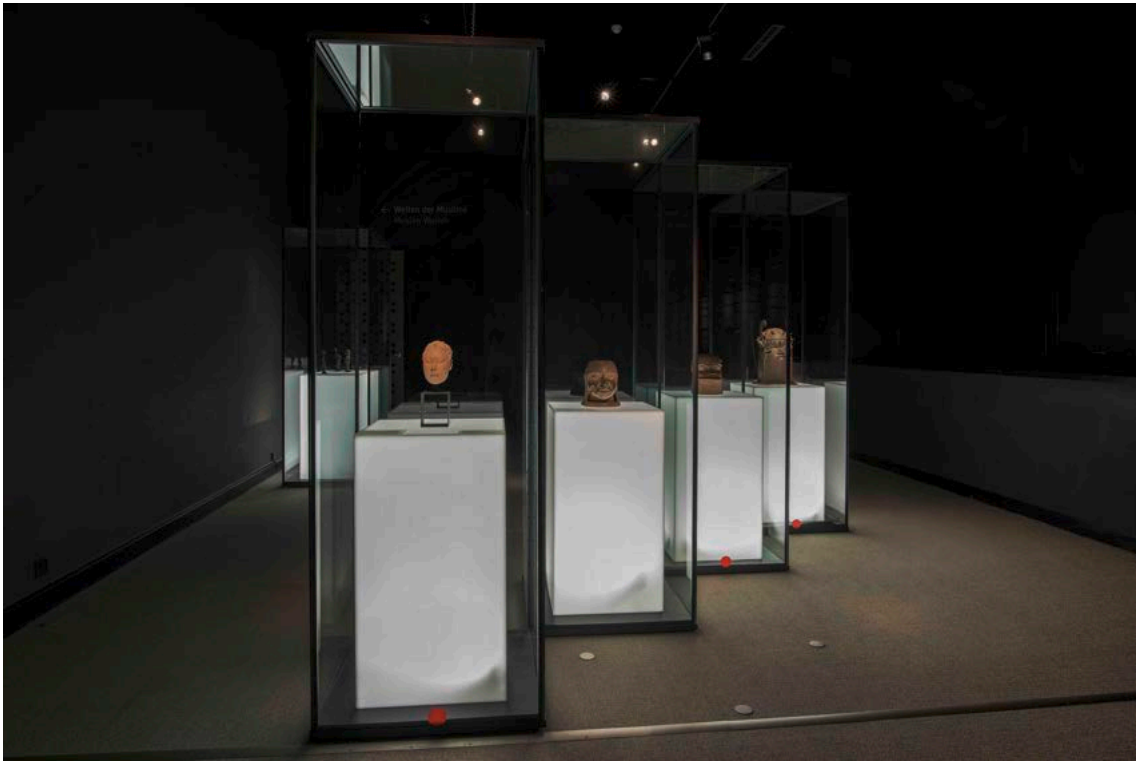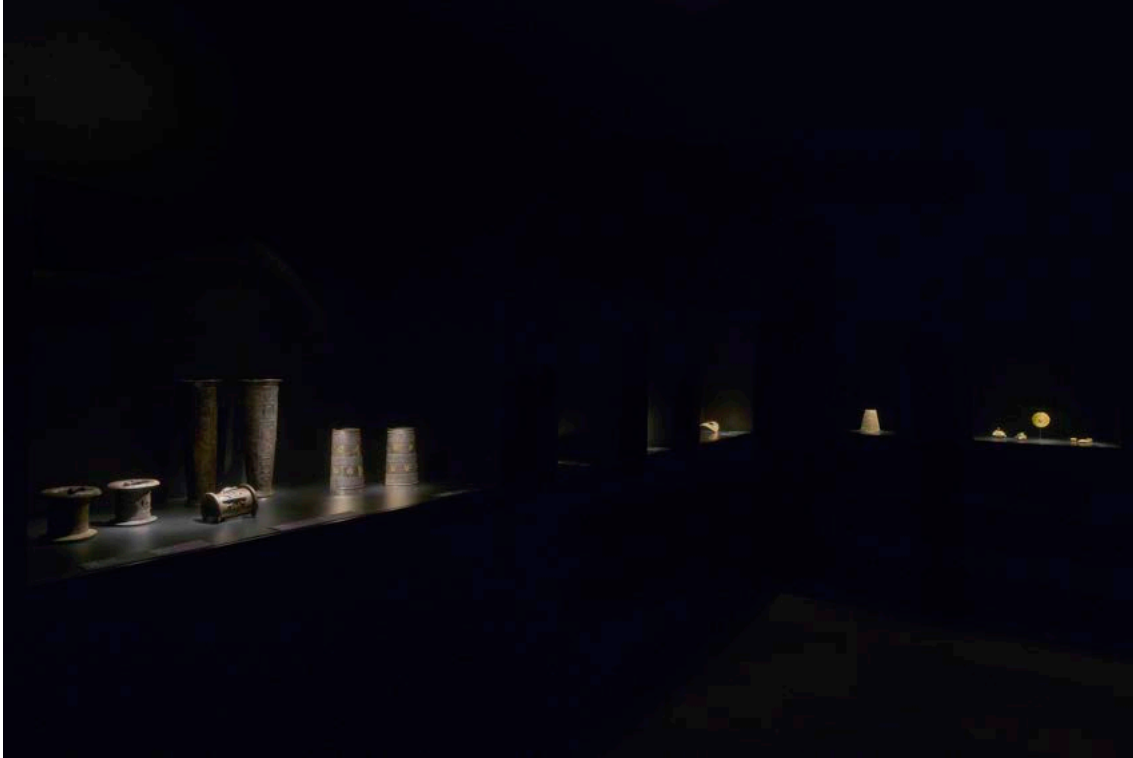
Figures 2.26–2.29 Art from Africa *('Kunst aus Afrika') (1999–2017), Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, curated by Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov, Dahlem, photographs by Claudia Obrocki, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Felix von Luschan	*Curator for Africa and Oceania (1885-1911)*
Division of the museum into curatorial and regional departments	*1904/1905 (Krieger 1963)*
Bernhard Ankermann	*Curator for Africa and Oceania (till 1911), then curator for Africa (1911–1924), head of the department from 1917*
Alfred Schachtzabel	*1924–1936, with Hermann Baumann (1925–1939)*
Kurt Krieger	*1945–1985 (museum director from 1970)*
Hans-Joachim Koloss, Angelika Tunis	*1985–2001*
Peter Junge	*2001–2014*
Peter Junge and Paola Ivanov	*2012–2014* *Junge: West Africa, Cameroon, Gabon* *Ivanov: East / North East / Central / South Africa / Namibia*
Paola Ivanov and Jonathan Fine	*Since December 2014* *Fine: West Africa, Cameroon, Gabon and Namibia* *Ivanov: East / North East / Central Africa*

Custodians and curators of the museum's Africa department, based on Krieger 1974:119

To sum up, whilst an overview of the exhibitions allows us to roughly categorise the exhibitions according to the paradigm, the genres between art and culture are not as clear cut as in theory. What these exhibitions share, however, is that objects are used as representatives to support the exhibition arguments – even if what these objects stand for changes with every exhibition. In her concept for the Humboldt Forum, Paola Ivanov envisioned an entirely new way of employing and staging the objects and introduced different theoretical and contextual tenets to guide the presentation of the objects.

Curating as an attempt to repair

Aiming at challenging the stereotypes confirmed in anthropology's historiography, and thus subverting the museum's own histories of exhibiting and producing knowledge, Paola Ivanov proposed an exhibition which focused on countering the established narratives and accompanying modes of display. In the concept which accompanied the PowerPoint presentation delivered on several occasions during my research stay at the museum (dated 11 September 2013), Paola Ivanov first disclosed and outlined her exhibition concept for the Humboldt Forum, she wrote:

> Africa *no longer appears* as an isolated continent, as the stereotype suggests, but as part of a common world history made not only by the Europeans. (p.2, my emphasis)

> The fact that East Africa [was embedded in the Indian Ocean as an early world system and as a proto-world economy] *is largely unknown to the public* and *refutes the stereotype* of a (at least until European expansion) 'closed' African continent. (p.1, my emphasis)

> The aim of this thematic space is to open up this 'southern' perspective to the audience and subsequently turn *established perspectives on their head*. There is a change of perspective, 'southern' and European actors each look at the 'other' ('reciprocal gaze'). (p.1, my emphasis)

Paola Ivanov clearly distanced herself from earlier representational tropes of 'Africa' and expressed her objective to counteract those. To this end, she developed an exhibition format that was decisively informed by research from 'relational global history' and its conceptual tools – a theoretic angle she had also employed for her anthropological research, notably for her research project on aesthetics and consumerism in Zanzibar (Ivanov 2012b; Ivanov 2013).

In order to challenge Eurocentric politics of representation, Paola Ivanov focused on the region of the Indian Ocean as a historically grown trade hub, shaped by early globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and South–South-exchange. Dating from 2012 and 2013, the first exhibition's concepts were entitled *East Africa in the Synaesthetic Trade Landscape*

of the Indian Ocean, and *Trade Routes of the Beautiful. East Africa in the Global World of the Indian Ocean (1000–2100 A.D.).*

As outlined in her proposal, Paola Ivanov decided to separate, in rough chronological order, the exhibitions in two rooms. The first so-called 'portal room' was smaller and positioned in between two large exhibition rooms. Entitled 'A Southern World: Pre- and Non-European Entanglements', the room would be dedicated to pre-colonial Eastern Africa as a 'world without Europeans', as well as first colonial encounters up to the nineteenth century. The second room, 'The World of the Swahili and the Encounter with Europe (nineteenth to twentieth century)', was to depict Paola Ivanov's findings on consumerism and aesthetics on the one hand, and address the colonial relations between Germany and colonial German East Africa (1885–1918, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*), on the other.

A key concern for Paola Ivanov was to 'provincialise Europe', a phrase famously coined by the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty in the 1990s.[23] Interrogating the 'politics of historicism', Chakrabarty claims that:

> European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is now everybody's heritage and which affects us all – may be renewed from and for the margins. (Chakrabarty 2008:17)

Paola Ivanov aimed to achieve this end, I argue, by means of employing three different strategies: (1) countercanonisation, (2) deep historicisation, and (3) the 'reversal of the gaze' (*Blickwechsel*). In the following paragraphs, I will carefully unpack these three remedies for addressing one-sided and gravely misconceived perceptions of 'Africa' and 'the South'.

Strategies of countercanonisation: East Africa collections and the museum as fieldsite
Paola Ivanov's exhibition concept, I argue, can be understood as a strategy of 'countercanonisation' (Sternfeld 2012: 75). She focused on working with collections acquired in East Africa, a large collection of around 20,000 objects which had never been exhibited permanently in the museum. This part of the collection countered a canon of 'African art'. What is understood as 'African art' in a modernist Western definition is,

very generally speaking, limited to sculptural pieces, ritual objects, and in particular masks, and is regionally confined to Western and Central Africa (Keim and Schildkrout 1998; Phillips 2007). At the Ethnological Museum, this canon is reflected, for example, in the Africa department's history through the post-war curators' research focus, whose expertise was concentrated on some of these precise regions, reflected in exhibitions, publications, and conferences with Kurt Krieger (Nigeria), Hans-Joachim Koloss (Cameroon), Peter Junge (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon), and since 2015, Jonathan Fine (Cameroon).[24] By shifting her attention to East Africa, Paola Ivanov was able to introduce objects and media such as textile, mats, and clothing, or archaeological fragments. This not only allowed her to work with material culture related to the practice of Islam, interrogating stereotypical representations of African spirituality and religion. At once, she was able to broach the issues of translocality, hybridity, and (early) globalisation, counteracting essentialist, isolated, and localised understandings of culture.

The East Africa collection was, however, unknown to most museum staff until that point and had been largely neglected and rarely exhibited in the museum's history. What I describe as Paola Ivanov's strategy of countercanonisation also meant getting to know the collection, as the documentation of the objects was rudimentary, if existent at all.[25] Usually, the database in museums stands as the privileged tool for object research.[26] Curators rarely *work* in museum storage, and lack physical engagement with the materiality of the collections as the digital data functions as the privileged tool for object research. Paola Ivanov, by contrast, engaged in this kind of work. The museum storage became a fieldsite; and was transformed into a space for imagination, speculation as well as finding evidence. Paola Ivanov had drafted what she termed the 'scientific argument'

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[24] The Ethnological museum's 'Highlights' on their digital database consist of objects from these regional entities: a throne from the Kingdom of Bamum, dated from the nineteenth century (III C 33341 a,b), the head of the Queen Mother from the Kingdom of Benin, dated from the sixteenth century (III C 12507), and the representation of the King and cultural hero Chibinda Ilunga from the Chokwe, today's Republic of Angola, dated from the nineteenth century (III C 1255), http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/preselectFilterSection.$FilterGroupControl.$MpDirectLink&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=13&sp=1&sp=SdetailView&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=S10026&sp=S1, consulted 29 May 2019.

[25] The East Africa collection was entirely inventoried in the data base, but only in a rudimentary way. Images, for example, were missing.

[26] This claim is based on work in the Ethnological Museum, but also my six months' fieldwork at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (December 2015), as well as interviews, for instance with curators at the Musée du Quai Branly.

of the exhibition, but in some cases lacked objects to illustrate, and in others, to substantiate, her claims.

Paola Ivanov took the time and effort to engage seriously with the collection's composition, genealogy, and constitution. Working from cupboard to cupboard, she assessed the objects' specific materiality, in particular metal and glass, examined techniques and styles of production, and importantly, paid attention to what had *not* been collected. As such, she worked with, around, and against the collection's composition: she recurrently came back to the selective colonial collecting policies, which had spared some and focused on the collecting of other objects, vis-à-vis the construction of a fictitious 'African' everyday. As a consequence, Paola Ivanov insisted on including items from other collections – the Museum for Islamic Art, the State Library, the Museum of Asian Art – to challenge these limits of categorisation, attribution, and disciplinary ordering she was confronted with in the Ethnological Museum. The objects can thus be understood as one amongst multiple sources to contribute to a historiography of the region, as tools both to reconstruct history and to authenticate and illustrate the curator's different research hypothesis and arguments.[27]

The museum storage turned fieldsite and thus, turned potential data for research, differed largely from its sole use as exhibition resource. It also connected the legacies of exhibition making and research with current approaches of ethnological curation by this way of working in the museum storage. It recalls nineteenth-century anthropology in terms of the central role attributed to objects. Despite the fact that today and in the past, theoretical or ideological convictions differed widely, the objects were and still are deployed both deductively and inductively. Deductively, they were used to evidence and authenticate theories from historical and anthropological research. Inductively, they were used by drawing on the constituency of the collections, such as when certain materialities (glass) evidenced the existence of certain craftsmanship, or when the quantity of other materials or objects pointed to particular kinds of trade (metal), or forms of warfare present at the time (gunpowder). In a certain sense, used as historical, anthropological, and exhibition source and resource, the objects 'become what we need them to be', as

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[27] For example, Ivanov tried to substantiate her hypothesis on the migration and dominance of Swahili traders towards the continent's centre. As such, the wealth of metal chains in the museum storage, both single chains and bundles, alluded to the region's central role in trade, as these may have served as money at the time. A spectacular find was the identification of glass fragments (*Glasfluss*) which, for Ivanov, allowed the possibility of speculation on early work with glass, instead of a simple import of glass products in the region.

Rachel Poliquin describes the curator's experience with, in that case, taxidermic collections (Poliquin 2012:203).

Countercanonisation, then, translated not only into the shift of focus towards a rarely exhibited collection and region, countering stereotypical images of 'Africa' in its materiality and spirituality. Grounded in in-depth research and new interpretations of the East Africa collections, countercanonisation notably introduced an understanding of 'culture' which was different from stereotypical representations. It countered the concepts of homogeneous societies, with a focus on the open, the migratory, the flux, the hybrid, which was further reflected in the exhibition's portal room.

Historicisation: hybrid objects and global, urban, and entangled histories
What I have deemed Paola Ivanov's strategy of historicisation primarily concerned East Africa's deep, global, urban, and entangled history. This more nuanced depiction of East Africa and its pre-colonial history was to be presented in the exhibition's portal room, where a focus on the former trade metropole Kilwa Kisiwani addressed the region's status as a hub for early globalisation, prosperity, and cosmopolitanism. The concept thus profoundly challenged concepts of Africa as 'timeless' and without History.

In particular, several 'hybrid objects' were employed to elucidate a much more global and historicised understanding of the region. Hybrid objects in the museum context, as curator Diana DiPaolo Loren put it, are characterised by a difficulty or inability to be categorised in standard museum typologies, as they contain two or more elements which defy categories such as function or religious, cultural, and regional affiliation (DiPaolo Loren 2015). If articulated in Homi Bhaba's sense, hybridity is characterised by ambivalence, contradiction, and even contestation. It is associated with encounter, interaction, exchange, and thus transformation between and of different groups, as it simultaneously attends to appropriation, oppression, dominance, and power imbalance (Bhabha   1994).

Figure 2.30 'Portuguese with Weapon', collected by William Downing Webster, III C 10863, photograph by Claudia Obrocki, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 2.31 Armchair, collected by Kristian Müller-Osten, III E 19902, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

The objects selected by Paola Ivanov for the exhibition reflect this ambivalence of hybridity as they contain material traces of both the coloniser and the colonised. The categories of objects range from (1) representations of Europeans by local craftsmen, both in complicity and in opposition to Europeans, such as the representation of a 'Portuguese with Weapon' (III C 10863), (2) objects which contain traces of colonial trade, such as through the use of glass beads or industrially produced metal ware in many objects of adornment (III E 6343), or the combination of different artistic styles, such as an armchair which contained stylistic elements of both Portuguese and Swahili origin (III E 19902). Paola Ivanov's choice of hybrid objects included these forms and styles informed by the colonial encounter. In addition, and even more significant for the exhibition's mission, was a shift in focus to pre- and non-colonial as well as South–South-relations. This exhibition section included archaeological finds from the Ethnological Museum's collection, which had so far not been prominently exhibited.

Figure 2.32 Marble relief, collected by Bernhard Perrit, III E 9684, photograph by G. Kunze, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Paola Ivanov's portrayal of an entangled and global pre-colonial cosmopolitanism was uniquely captured by a marble relief. The museum received the object (III E 9684) in 1901 from Bernard Perrot, the son of a colonial politician and plantation entrepreneur. Bernard Perrot and his brother Adalbert gifted a whole lot of objects to the museum's so-called 'Kilwa collection' between 1901 and 1911, objects which were collected in the former trade metropole Kilwa Kisiwani as well as Songo Mnara. The tombstones and stone fragments which were inscribed with Arabic writing raised particular interest, as they represented a welcome 'complement to the museum's portfolio of old Arabic culture in German East Africa', as the department's director Felix von Luschan wrote upon their arrival. This interpretation implied an understanding of Kilwa's ruins as 'Arabic-Islamic', and not of 'African' culture and history – an assumption which would sustain the contemporary theory of an Arab colonisation of the region, maintained until the 1960s (Kilian 2006:70,79; see also Chittick 1974). On the object's principal side, Qur'anic verses edge a relief depicting hanging lamps, which can be dated back to the fourteenth century. The object's other side contains a Hindu ornament dating from the tenth century. It is thus probable that the relief originates from an Indian temple and was later reformatted to be used in an Islamic building (Kilian 2006:81–82). It is likely that the relief was used continuously in different religious and cultural contexts, whilst simultaneously incorporating colonial traces of appropriation. As such, the object's history illuminated the region's pre-European globalisation and exchange, facilitated by the well-established trade in the Indian Ocean, and the possibility of peaceful religious co-habitat.

Reversing the gaze: synaesthesia, colonialism, and self-reflexivity
Paola Ivanov's aim of 'provincialising Europe' was not only implemented by focusing on pre-colonial global histories. In addition, the curator paid particular attention to 'voice' and 'gaze' with reference to representation and power. She introduced what she called a 'consistent Southern perspective' (*konsequent südliche Perspektive*), including the examination of a 'reciprocal gaze' (*wechselseitiger Blick*) to interrogate the museum's histories of collecting and ownership themselves.

The 'reciprocal gaze' was an attempt to integrate the voices of colonised people in order to subvert the omnipresent Western (and colonial) voice in the archives. A well-known map dating from the twelfth century, designed by the Arab and Muslim geographer al-

Idrisi, epitomised this question of gaze.[28] The map, described as one of the most accurate maps of that time, situates Europe at the bottom of the world and the African continent at the top, reversing the perspective on Europe and its supremacy over the world; the map was to defy a Eurocentric view of the world. The reciprocal gaze was also to be reflected by addressing Germany's colonial rule in German East Africa, focusing, however, on the Swahili agency and role within the colony, and not that of the colonisers. Paola Ivanov argued that it was Swahili traders, rather than European colonial staff, who had been the first to explore, index, and develop trade from the East African Coast towards the Congo Basin, including the trade of European goods. It would only be this groundwork, she claimed, which allowed famous European 'explorers', such as David Livingstone or Henry Morton Stanley, to follow up. In turn, she proposed that Swahili traders exported cultural goods from the Congo Basin, which were subsequently bought by European colonial staff for museums. This sustained her hypothesis that Swahili substantially contributed to a European understanding and conception of 'Africa' (see chapter 3 for more detail on this research).

The introduction of a 'Southern perspective' was to be articulated in the 'experimental' transmission of 'the Swahili's particular aesthetic and the construction of the world as an example of non-European constitutions of reality', that is, 'a non-Western cosmopolitan world' (Ivanov 2012a; RAM 2015: 26). Directly related to her habilitation research on Zanzibar, following Alfred Gell's understanding of aesthetics and art as a technology of enchantment, her research questioned the prevalent Kantian definition of aesthetics as predominantly visual. Contrasting to this idea, she suggested a synaesthetic understanding of what constitutes beauty in Zanzibar, including touch, taste, smell. Pointing to beauty's 'composed' character, Paola Ivanov described it as an 'interplay of visual, haptic, olfactory, and kinetic elements' (Ivanov 2012b:646). In the planned permanent exhibition, this idea was going to be translated into the integration of recited language, music, haptic experiences, and movement, as well as smells, including perfumes, spices, and incense. Paola Ivanov defined these elements as objects as well. Descriptions such as 'fragrant', provoking a 'material and spiritual purity', or 'shiny', 'smooth and soft', illustrated how Paola Ivanov imagined her research to take form in the exhibition.[29]

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[28] The geographer's full name is Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani as-Sabti. Ten copies of the map exist outside of Berlin's collection, but Ivanov aimed at integrating the map as part of a so-called media table (*Medientisch*), an interactive table which could include images and videos on a touchscreen.

[29] All quotations stem from Ivanov's above-mentioned 2013 concept.

Another dimension of interrogating the gaze entailed turning the focus towards the organisation itself, notably with regard to its relation to colonialism. In dialogue with the second Africa curator, Peter Junge, a visible storage (*Schausammlung*) aimed to shed light on the museum's organisational history of collecting and researching (see Ivanov and Junge 2015). In the tradition of institutional critique, they aimed at a self-reflexive approach which counters museum politics denying the collection's politics of (violent) acquisition, modes of ordering, and the collection as proof of scientific objectivity. As in other exhibitions in that tradition, addressing colonial histories would allow the focus to be shifted from the objects' roots – their function, role, or use in the originating society – to the objects' routes, which, in turn, facilitates the problematisation of the museum's entanglement with colonial rule and governance (Clifford 1997).

Repairing representations: curating as healing

As Anthony Shelton reminds us, '[a]rchives, including museums, never protect or ensure authentic pasts, but … reconstitute them within the terms of the present'. This, he argues, allows us to see that '[e]very history is a constructed fiction and every fiction has its own history' (Shelton 2013:10). History was constructed at this particular moment, I argue, with an attempt to repair former historiographies incorporated and materialised in exhibition narratives and displays. It was a historiography which was conceived in relation to these legacies of exhibition making, and predominantly one of reaction, of response, of counteraction.

To sum up, and resonating with other curatorial positions related to African collections, Paola Ivanov's concept situated itself within a general attempt to counter, oppose, and resist the legacies of representations and thus engaged in a dialogue with and responds to the critiques voiced against the museum. Yaelle Biro, Associate Curator for the Arts of Africa at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, identified the challenges associated with the curation of African collections in the 'danger of the single story', referring to the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The difficulty consisted in defying essentialist and simplifying ideas of what constitutes Africa and the histories conveyed through objects. Kevin Duchomelle, then Associate Curator of the Arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands at New York's Brooklyn Museum, stated in June 2016:

> I want visitors to understand that Africa has a deep history, that it is a place
> that is not cut off from the world and cut off from history but very much a

constitutive part of that story. And a part of the art historical story particularly.[30]

Paola Ivanov's concept reflected these attempts insofar as prised open these politics of misrepresentation, whilst at the same time articulating counter-histories. The choice of objects implied dispersing and diversifying common understandings of what 'African art and culture' consisted of through the strategy of countercanonisation. As I have shown, Paola Ivanov centrally opposed understandings of Africa as a continent without History by focusing on the pre-colonial processes of globalisation in East Africa. She strived to counterbalance and correct representations such as, on the hand, European explorers and their great deeds, and, on the other, Africans as sole victims of colonisation. She attempted to shift the gaze from a European perspective towards reciprocity. In her attempts to repair, she suggested alternatives and was adamant to resist and avoid the reproduction of representational tropes associated with the ethnological museum and 'Africa' in particular, as well as to reflect and address histories which the museum had hitherto rarely explicitly addressed.

The first part of the chapter concentrated on the curator's intentions to repair through exhibition making – the *kind* of representations that are imagined. In the second part, I focus on the *how* of exhibition making and the production and construction of representation: I depict how what I call the 'curatorial culture of the ethnological' obstructs attempts to change.

Repairs ruptured: struggling with the 'culture of the ethnological'

Within the process of imaging and producing Paola Ivanov's exhibition, a particular 'curatorial culture of the ethnological' prevailed. The notion of the 'culture of the curatorial' has been elaborated in different publications on the curatorial, pointing to the emergence and establishment of a professionalised field of 'the curatorial', rather than foregrounding the notion of 'culture' (von Bismarck, Schafaff, and Weski 2012; O'Neill 2012). Here, in contrast, I use 'culture' to elaborate a particular, habitual way of doing things. Using the notion of 'culture' thus points to the routine, practice-based, historically embedded, and customary character of exhibition making, as well as to the difficulties of escaping it. The notion of 'curatorial culture' implies particular ways of

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[30] Interview with Yaelle Biro, 6 June 2016, at the Metropolitan Museum, interview with Kevin Douchemelle, 8 June 2016, at the Brooklyn Museum.

doing the museum through exhibition making, informed by the organisational frame of 'the ethnological'. The analysis of curatorial culture, then, points to the importance of taking into account *how* exhibitions – and thus representations – are produced.

The curatorial culture, I argue, is characterised by different practices, three of which I elaborate in what follows: (1) being authoritative, (2) research-based, and (3) collection-centred and representative. As the analysis shows, this particular culture risks reproducing the stereotypes and narratives the curator intended to resist, concerning more generally what the museum was, what it contained, and who it was to serve.

An authoritative practice

The first element of this 'culture of the ethnological' consists in the maintaining of scientific authority over the collections and the museum's exhibition. This implies an emphasis on the curator as *custos*, which, etymologically speaking, focuses on questions of keeping and guarding. 'Keeping' collections implies the understanding of a custodian as gatekeeper or guard, defining and deciding who has access to authorship and the right of interpretation over the collections and who hasn't. In what follows, I analyse how the definition of the curator's role as *custos* has been closely linked to the internal organisational structure of the Ethnological Museum. I elaborate how the understanding of departments as 'curatorial kingdoms', historically grown through the regional departmentalisation of the museum, persisted during my fieldwork, despite attempts to break open and reform the museum's structure.[31]

In ethnological museums, it is regional departments which continue to predominate the museum's internal organisation. Ordered geographically, the respective collections are, in turn, managed and directed by curators. In 1963, the Africa curator Kurt Krieger recalled the coming into being and functioning of the departments within the larger *Museum für Völkerkunde*.

> At the beginning of this century (1904/1905), the mass of the collections made it necessary to divide them into independent departments, which since then have led a distinct life of their own, albeit in a changing administrative composition. Each

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[31] Talk of the curator's 'kingdoms' is common in ethnological museums. I came across it several times during my stay in Berlin (fieldnote from 27 November 2013), but interviews with Nanette Snoep, then director of the Ethnographic Collections of Saxony (2015), and Steven Engelsmans (2018), who had just retired from his director position at Vienna's Weltkulturen Museum, confirm the term and practice in European museums more generally speaking.

of these eight departments … is a closed whole within the wider framework of the *Museum für Völkerkunde*. (Krieger 1963:245)[32]

Up until 1999, the different 'closed wholes' – the departments – worked as comparatively separate entities alongside one another. The department's curator was provided with a storage manager, a restorer, and a secretary who together guaranteed the departments' autonomous functioning. It is then that the museum's director Klaus Helfrich (1985–2000) suggested a structural reform in order to break with the powerful curatorial authority over the collections. Helfrich had perceived it as 'impossible' to direct the museum with such powerful curators. He dissolved the different regional departments (*Abteilungen*) and suggested an organisation around the new departments 'Direction', 'Collections', 'Restoration', 'Communication', 'Centralised Services' and 'Science and Research'.[33] The curators' status changed from that of director of an autonomous study collection (*Abteilungsleiter*), to that of a managerial position in a scientific area within the 'Research and Science' department (*Fachreferatsleiter*). The curators perceived the consequences of the reform as a 'downgrade' and as a 'disempowerment', and, in practice, refused to accept the newly imposed hierarchies.[34] Replacing Helfrich in 2000, Viola König, the new director, was expected to withdraw Helfrich's reform, which she refused to do.

Today, the museum continues to be predominantly defined by its collections – which continue to be regionally confined.[35] During my fieldwork, the recurrent talk of 'my

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[32] Translated from the German: 'Anfang dieses Jahrhunderts machte die Masse der gesammelten Bestände die Aufteilung in selbstständige Abteilungen notwendig, die seither ein ausgeprägtes Eigenleben, wenn auch in wechselnder verwaltungtechnischer Zusammensetzung, geführt haben. Jede einzelne dieser acht Abteilungen, de im folgenden in ihrer heutigen Form dargestellt sind, ist ein geschlossen Ganzes innerhalb des weiteren Rahmens des Museums für Völkerkunde.'

[33] The two minor departments of Visual Anthropology and Music Ethnology existed as separate departments.

[34] The quotations stem from interviews with the former storage manager, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff (7 January 2015), and a conversation with the former Africa curator, Peter Junge (8 September 2017)

[35] The nine departments consist of the eight historically established regional departments listed on its website, complemented by 'ethnomusicology'. These departments are South Seas and Australia; Africa; North Africa, Western and Central Asia; South and Southeast Asia; East and North Asia; North American ethnology; South American ethnology; American archaeology; and Ethnomusicology. In an internal organigram, both 'Ethnomusicology' and 'Visual anthropology' are separate from the eight, historically established specialist departments (*Fachreferate*). Visual anthropology is, however, not listed as one of the museum's departments on the website https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/about-the-collection.html, consulted 5 June 2019.

collection', the implicit maintenance of regional restorers, or the very late introduction of an organised communication and exchange of information between the departments stand for the *de facto* persistence of what was recurrently described as 'curatorial kingdoms'. Whereas a generational change within the museum encouraged the progressive decomposition of the different departments, the work flow continued to principally take place within the respective departments, and thus not between them, despite the formal abandonment of this structure. The lack of exchange was further facilitated by the regional organisation within the Humboldt Forum, allowing the curators to work on the exhibitions involving 'their' collections by themselves. Up to the point where the exhibition projects were handed to the exhibition designers, no justification about the exhibition concept had been necessary, except in direct exchange with the museum's director Viola König.[36] Most of these curators thus prepared 'their' exhibition for the Humboldt Forum individually, and usually with the same method and (theoretical) references as they had always done, some of them for more than 30 years. The curators were also not informed about the other curators' exhibition projects, despite the fact that most exhibitions were already at the stage of being drawn by the exhibition designers when the discussions of and exchange on the different exhibitions started in early 2014. Solely in dialogue with 'their' collection, most curators were not involved in working groups within the museum or any other kind of collaboration. Speaking on behalf of the collections and keeping authorship thus remained in the hands of the curator. The curator would subsequently be defined as (and usually see herself/himself) as the legitimate and sole authority over the respective collections.

The possibility to work independently and without consulting others was encouraged by the fact that there was no defined concept or mission for the Ethnological Museum in the Humboldt Forum. Viola König had been explicitly employed in 2001 to create a new vision of the Ethnological Museum's collections for the Humboldt Forum (König 2012a:9) and handed in her first concept in 2008 (ibid.:11). However, the concept was *de facto* never recognised or referred to as such within the museum. The lack of acknowledgement and recognition of König's suggestions played out in multifarious ways. To quote just one example: in November 2013, in the first draft of the exhibition

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[36] The director, as part of the 'concept group', was responsible for reporting the museum's development to the organisational superstructures of the State Museum Berlin and the SPK (Prussian Culture Heritage Foundation), and communicating the ongoing processes and demands back to museum staff involved in the exhibition-making processes. The 'concept group' consisted of museum's director Viola König and Peter Junge, curator for the African collections, replaced by Monika Zessnik at Junge's retirement in 2014, and Markus Schindlbeck, curator for the Oceanic collections.

designs, the *Drehbuch* ('script'), the headings 'multiperspectivity', 'audience', 'contemporaneity' (*Gegenwart*) were to be applied to each exhibition section. The three terms stood for Viola König's vision of the museum and were supposed to serve as guidelines. Most of these boxes in the 'script' were empty, including in Viola König's own exhibition concept.

A desperate attempt to 'identify red threads' for the Ethnological Museum in the Humboldt Forum which would transcend individual exhibition projects was initiated by a group of curators in early 2014, regardless of the fact that most curators had already handed in the final object lists for their respective exhibition concepts. After a few weeks and meetings, the initiative was abandoned. With view to the longer history of how the Ethnological Museum was to exist within the Humboldt Forum, despite countless working groups, conferences, consultation groups, advisory boards, published and unpublished concepts, preliminary exhibition projects as well as different moratoria, there was no agreement *within the museum* on the Ethnological Museum's mission, vision, and contribution to Berlin's museum landscape, and the Humboldt Forum in particular.[37]

The understanding of the custodians as sole authors of the exhibition not only enhanced their authority, but simultaneously charged them to deal with a substantial number of expectations and tasks. One aspect of the expertise required in the context of ethnological museums is engagement with people who identify with the collections, or come from places where the objects have been produced. In 2011, Robin Boast had already stated in an article that

> [d]ialogue and collaboration is the name of the game these days and there are few museums with anthropological, or even archaeological, collections that would consider an exhibition that did not include some form of consultation. (Boast 2011:56)

Whereas this statement of a 'predicament of diversity' might apply in Anglo-Saxon museum contexts (Ang 2005), the Ethnological Museum did not provide a framework for

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[37] For an overview of the debates and developments of the concept, animated by formats such as the *Museumforum* (2002–2005), directed by Viola König and Narvid Kermani, replaced by Horst Bredekamp in 2003; the exhibition *Anders zur Welt kommen* in 2009, which integrated exhibitions by each of the three players at the time; and the diverse public conferences and internal workshop or the International Advisory Board, see König 2012a; König 2012b.

processes of consultation, cooperation, or collaboration to take place. They became lengthy and administratively difficult processes, without any resources – personnel or financial – available. According to her very first concept (p.3), Paola Ivanov envisioned a co-working process with the professor of history Abdul Sheriff (University of Dar-es-Salaam). But her objective to jointly develop the general exhibition concept failed as her attempts were not supported by the museum. Working alone was not challenged from within the museum at this stage, despite the repeated organisational injunction to 'let go' or 'share interpretational power' (*Deutungsmacht aufgeben/teilen*).[38] Curatorial authority and authorship were thus maintained, without any particular questioning of this authority within the frames of the museum. This raises the question whether and how Paola Ivanov's central claim to challenge Eurocentrism and to introduce a 'Southern perspective' would be possible from *within* the organisation. Would her position in the museum and the white Western authorship of the curatorial concept not rather contribute to confirming Europe as the reflection's point of departure?

A research-based and research-focused practice

The curatorial authority was accentuated by the exhibition's mission to translate scientific findings – both of the curator's contemporary fieldwork and global historiography – into the exhibition. A prerequisite for this kind of exhibition making was that it was *research-based*, aiming at translating current theoretical arguments and research findings (about the museum, about the objects, on the region) into an exhibition that reflected these arguments. Scientific accuracy, and the depiction of the research findings in the exhibition – in all their complexity – was of high priority for the curator. The focus on the translation (*Übersetzung*, in Paola Ivanov's words) of research into the exhibition rested on assumptions which define the museum as a scientific organisation. The exhibition, at least at the conceptual state, presupposed a considerable familiarity with the concepts and terms employed by the curator, giving way to the impression that the exhibition's primary audience was expected to be a scientific community. Put differently, the core of Paola Ivanov's concept produced an exhibition that was *research-focused*.

The exhibitionary format can of course serve multiple communities, including a scientific one. However, the role of experts in museum education and learning – in the German context labelled as 'mediation' (*Vermittlung*) – was barely existent in the exhibition's planning process, despite the curator's explicit and recurrent demand to have the task to 'translate the concept into an exhibition' delegated to someone else. This translation, she

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[38] See for example Hermann Parzinger's statement on sharing (Parzinger 2016a; Parzinger 2016b).

claimed, was not 'her' task.[39] With a view to the museum's infrastructure, the absence of a department of mediation in the museum signalled that the need for and existence of a professional expertise for such processes of translation or transmission was not considered at an early stage of the exhibition making process.[40] Rather, this process was expected to be fulfilled by the designers alone. The designers, for their part, were themselves struggling to understand and transmit the key arguments, and continuously characterised the exhibition as academic, and difficult to understand.[41]

'Education and Outreach' (BV – *Bildung und Vermittlung*) was, in contrast to these expressed needs, defined in particular terms: the person responsible's tasks were limited to (and at the same time overwhelmed by) 'junior spaces': BV was embodied by a single person, responsible for the entire spaces of the Ethnological Museum and Museum for Asian Art in the Humboldt Forum. The implicit assumption was thus that only children and teenagers needed 'mediated' content. In contrast to identifying and defining the process of exhibition making as a collaborative and multi-authored one, different kinds of expertise were not equally valued during the work process. Whereas the curator's claim of scientificity was enhanced, the person responsible for BV was deprived of the acknowledgement for being scientific, and thus, necessary: the almost complete absence of BV during the exhibition-making process testified to this prioritisation.[42] Despite calls for a greater acknowledgement of the – usually female – work force and expertise of museum educators, it continued to be absent from exhibition-making processes, maintaining its role as 'a secondary activity that only communicates pre-existing content' (Landkammer 2019: 2).

This understanding of the museum has been repeatedly challenged in the light of recurrent calls to democratise the museum, such as within the concepts of the 'new museology'. Reducing the exhibitionary format to a focus on 'scientificity'

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[39] Several times, Ivanov made clear that she was no expert in the process of translation, as fieldnotes from the beginning of the exhibition planning process (29 November 2013), but also much later (2 February 2015) show.

[40] Education was a 'service' centrally organised and provided by the State Museum Berlin's General Directorate (*Generaldirektion*), see https://www.smb.museum/en/education-and-outreach/profile.html, consulted 29 May 2019.

[41] Fieldnotes from an exhibition planning meeting, 6 March 2014.

[42] Even when the person responsible for BV was called to participate in several meetings after the draft had been dismissed by the 'the supervisory group' (*Steuerungsgruppe*) in February 2015, this was only 'last minute' (a few weeks before the final handing-in of the exhibition draft), with almost no impact on the outcome and the final exhibition draft.

(*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) has been criticised for reproducing the status of the museum as a place for the few, excluding large numbers of the museum's potential users.[43] These critiques, some of which have been developed within the recent 'educational turn' and build on constructivism and ideas of critical pedagogy, question the museum's approach to learning as a top-down endeavour, in which the museum represents the knowledgeable and objective instructor and, as such, the transmitter of knowledge.[44] Promoters of alternative approaches to learning in the museum rather suggest the museum as a place in which knowledge is co-produced in interaction, where it is possible to 'un-learn' its established modes of interacting with museum, or to go further, in which the museum might even learn from those who use it (Gerbich n.d., see also Sternfeld 2016; Landkammer 2019).

The maintenance of the exhibition as a research-based and research-focused practice can be understood as part of the cultures of the ethnological in the sense that it repeated and sustained historic understandings of the museum as an organisation by and for research. Whereas the continuation of research on collections and the display of this research is of course necessary, it nevertheless challenged, in its present form, current understandings of the museum as 'audience-oriented' (*publikumsorientiert*) and the way that this aim was put into practice in the museum. Recent approaches to the museum and results from visitor research concerning the role of museums were disregarded, such as defining it as a place for lifelong learning, or taking into account the variety of motivations that shape how people experience exhibitions (Gibbs, Sani, and Thompson 2007; Falk 2009). In relation to this contradiction stands another, in which the central role of collections – both with regard to research and exhibition – called into question the museum's claim to be 'contemporary' (*Gegenwartsbezug*).

A collection-centred practice

In museums, exhibition making is usually focused on the presentation of material culture, and thus, collection-centred. This means that the curator uses collections to illustrate, evidence, or demonstrate his or her argument with the means of objects. In ethnological museums, as pointed out by Henrietta Lidchi, museum objects are used as generalising and representative examples of the represented culture, rather than being singular and

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[43] For an overview of the debates, see for example Hohenstein and Moussouri 2017.

[44] Selected writings on the topic include Hein 1999; Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Lindauer 2007; Wilson and O'Neill 2010; Mörsch 2009; Jaschke, Sternfeld, and in collaboration with Institute for Art Education, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste 2012; Mörsch, Sachs, and Sieber 2017.

specific in space and time. The collections are thus employed as material proof and manifestation – as a 'representation' – of this precise culture framed as 'different' (Lidchi 1997:161;171–172). Adopting the 'format of contextualising and reconstructing', this representational paradigm claims the entitlement and right to display otherness, a kind of otherness shaped by anthropological theory and ethnographic research. This entitlement to represent otherness has been subject to critique at least since the writing culture debate. It always implies the risk of producing representations which limit, generalise, essentialise, and homogenise those it claims to represent – and above all, without their involvement.

Aware of these challenges, Paola Ivanov grappled substantially with colonial imaginations and representations co-produced and confirmed within and in complicity with anthropological organisations and was determined to escape the common pitfalls. Her attribution of different and multiple narratives to the objects and her double angle on exhibition making – relying on object-based research and using objects to illustrate research-based claims – rendered her exhibition concept successful in many ways. However, in parts of the exhibition which built directly on Paola Ivanov's fieldwork, the objects were used to represent culture in Lidchi's terms of 'translating difference'.[45] In Paola Ivanov's exhibition, this approach was epitomised by the exhibition's subheading 'The World of the Swahili'.

One of the reasons why she could not fully evade this kind of essentialism has to do with the contradiction inherent in a collection-centred organisation like the Ethnological Museum that simultaneously takes 'contemporaneity' to be its guiding principle. Viola König, in the museum's mission statement, endorsed contemporaneity alongside the key concepts of 'publics' and 'multiperspectivity' (König 2012c). The so-called *Gegenwartsbezug* runs counter to the collection-centred practice of the Ethnological Museum on two accounts: First, the museum's collection hardly contains any contemporary material and lacks the funds to acquire it. And second, the self-understanding of the Humboldt Forum, which the Ethnological Museum will integrate, is not historical. According to its online pitch, the Humboldt Forum does not claim to be a museum of cultural history; nor does it speak of its collection as historical. Current presentations of the Humboldt Forum rather depict it as a 'new cultural district … that

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[45] In Ivanov's exhibition, objects sometimes take unexpected roles – as proof of colonial violence and wars, as an example for the construction of value, or as an illustration of colonial modes of thinking and doing the world.

brings together diverse cultures and perspectives and seeks new insights into topical issues such as migration, religion and globalisation'.[46] This is not a problem in and of itself. Of course, topical issues do not preclude historical contextualisation as such. But in the case of the Humboldt Forum, this positioning implied an implicit refusal to define and mark the majority of the exhibited collections as historical. This incoherence – resulting, once again, from the failure to develop a stringent overall museum mission – enhances the risk of locking cultures into what Johannes Fabian famously coined an 'ethnographic present' (Fabian 2014). As such, the collection-centred culture of the Ethnological Museum conflicted with its aim to be contemporary; and in turn encouraged the museum's self-styled and historical task to represent 'culture' as decontextualized and invariant – and as something that is limited to that considered and marked as 'other'.

Curatorial cultures, agency, and material constraints
Another aspect – touched upon in the very beginning of this chapter – that complicated the realisation of more critical exhibition projects and undercut the curator's agency related to the strong symbolism and the location of the *Schloss*. The Humboldt Forum's strong architectural frames posed difficulties for productive criticality among those working within the museum. One interlocutor summarised this unresolved question amidst preparations to move the exhibitions:

> When you enter the reconstructed Royal Palace, situated opposite of the museums of 'the Great Civilisations', pass its foyer with an overwhelming display styled like a chamber of curiosity, learn about the glories of Western science and explorers, move up several floors until you find the exhibitions of the Ethnological Museum – what room to manoeuvre does one have to challenge all of these framings? [47]

This challenge was only enlarged by the Forum's ongoing conceptual limbo, reducing the Forum's mission and point of departure to the representation of cultural otherness.[48]

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[46] https://www.humboldtforum.com/en/pages/humboldt-forum, consulted 28 February 2019.

[47] Fieldnote from 3 February 2014.

[48] At the time of writing in August 2019, even the political opposition claims that no concept has been agreed upon to this day (Bundesregierung 2019:1).

Beyond the architectural and conceptual premises imposed by the Forum, there were other features of the exhibition that exacerbated the curator's limits of agency. First, the showcases were fixed, as the working session with the exhibition designers showed.[49] This meant that the recurrently advertised idea of constructing 'modular' and 'flexible' exhibition designs could not be realised, preventing the exhibition from being adaptable, and thus, the curators being reactive, resulting in the risk of the durability of permanent exhibitions (König 2012c: 127). The fact that the conceptual planning for the majority of exhibitions had already started in 2012–2013 contributed to the fact that most exhibitions risked being outdated at the Forum's vernissage. The relocation of 24,000 objects was calculated as a *one-way* move at the considerable cost of 29 million euros, which furthermore contradicted concepts of flexible and rapidly adaptable exhibition designs and displays (Fahrun 2016). This understanding of the objects' relocation also reinforced the separation between the Humboldt Forum and the Ethnological Museum, where the Forum would serve as a permanent showcase for a collection which was kept on the city's outskirts, with low to no accessibility.

A persisting culture of the ethnological

The preceding part of this chapter pointed out how the culture of the ethnological – or put differently, the way of doing exhibitions in the museum – counteracts the curator's attempts to repair. First, the focus on collections – in the way that these are typically used in ethnological museums – raises questions which concern the museum's temporalities and the entitlement to represent culture, which remain unresolved. Whereas Paola Ivanov shows the global histories of the region in the tradition of a cultural history museum, other parts of the exhibition use objects as representative for the 'culture' of 'the Swahili'. Based on her most recent ethnographic research in 21th century Zanzibar, the 'Swahili culture' today was planned to be illustrated with objects dating from the nineteenth century, subsequently risking not to be situated as historical.[50] Second, issues related to 'voice' and 'gaze' are challenged when the curator's position is confirmed as the collection's *custos*, as authoritative. This authority entailed the control of access –

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[49] For example, meetings with the exhibition designers on 5 February and 19 February 2014, which clearly showed how elaborate and immutable the exhibition cases would be.

[50] On the level of exhibition making, this tension meant that arguments developed in the context of Paola Ivanov's 2010 fieldwork, which informed her current exhibition concept for the museum, had to be illustrated with historic objects. As the exhibition experiment *Beauty Parlour* showed, co-developed by Paola Ivanov with the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, the alignment of historical collection pieces and contemporary material culture didn't allow for a clear distinction between the object's current and past situatedness.

both physical access and the access over the interpretation, counteracting the multiplication and diversity of 'voice' and 'gaze'. During the period of fieldwork (2013–2015), these politics of authority were enhanced by the fact that the museum didn't provide the infrastructures and resources to enable and develop cooperation, rendering the proper integration of what Paola Ivanov entitled a 'consistent Southern perspective' more difficult. The culture being research-focused finally raises the question who is addressed by the claims raised by the exhibition to correct stereotypical representations. These observations reflect how different kinds of expertise, which have been established in museum practice elsewhere, such as mediation as part of the curatorial process, or sustainable collaborative work, were only introduced at a very late stage of the process, if at all. At the same time, curators' expertise in representation and research on cultures was not taken seriously in the conceptualisation of the Forum as such. In other words, collaborative approaches, self-reflexivity, and postcolonial critique had at that time hardly found their way into the Ethnological Museum's and the Humboldt Forum's general concept and have only been selectively profiled after my explicit fieldwork in the museum ended in 2015.[51] To sum up, the 'fixing' of representations involves of course *what* is shown, but also *how* exhibitions are conceived and produced.

The characteristics of the curatorial culture spelled out and identified here – as research-orientated, built on collections, and dominated by curatorial authority – probably don't come as a surprise. They concern, in some way or another, a lot of museums and different kinds of museums: museums were conceived in this way (see for example Greenhill 1992). Taking stock of this curatorial culture, the chapter has up to this point addressed the scope and depth of the curator's *individual* agency: what the curator imagined her exhibition to become, and in what kind of work conditions and traditions – the curatorial culture of the ethnological – she was able to realise the exhibitions – and how her ambitions were undermined.

The question of agency leads us to the next part of the chapter, where I am interested in exploring the reasons behind the resilience of the cultures that impair the curator's ability to challenge the museum and its practices.

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[51] See Chapter 1 of this thesis. For the Africa department alone, cooperation projects with Tanzania, Namibia, Angola, and Cameroon have been put in place.

Cultures in 'structures'

In what follows, I offer attempts to understand how the curatorial culture was sustained by describing and situating what the museum employees usually framed as 'structures'. These 'structures' referred to that which seemed uncontrollable and autonomous from their very position as museum staff: a constellation difficult to grasp and to describe, consisting of numerous players, decision-making processes, diverging interests, but also material and symbolic premises such as the architectural and conceptual frame imposed by the Forum, and finally, what museum staff described as the 'unwritten rules' of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the SPK.

Describing my difficulties writing about the museum, and the positionality of curators within these constellations, one employee vividly disagreed when I pondered on whether or not to put particular agents at the centre of my analysis.

> We are all victims of the structures. The hierarchies are so important and massive when working in the Foundation. Just look at what the structures produce. This is what you should concentrate on in your analysis of the museum, not single persons. In your analysis, you have to always ask yourself: Is it about power, or is it about content (*Geht es um Macht oder um die Sache*)? The relation between power and content is out of balance in the Humboldt Forum: it is not about content, it's about power, representation, and how to keep or promote your own position. To be honest: every time I look in the mirror, I ask myself: 'Why am I doing this? Can I still stand up for what is actually happening here?'[52]

The following description of the 'structures', condensed into a vignette, is an attempt to understand why change with regard to the curatorial culture was difficult. Museum staff described and experienced the museum's structures and ways of working as lacking transparency, overbearing, and all-encompassing. The chapter thus finishes by arguing that until the museum's structures and ways of working are intelligently rethought and substantially addressed, changes on the level of representation are unlikely to take place. The successive deconstruction of the process of producing representations in this chapter thus reveals how attention needs to be devoted not only to what one will see in the exhibition, how these representations are produced, but also how these modes of working are structurally embedded in the museum as an organisation.

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[52] Fieldnotes from a conversation, 25 April 2018.

Agency within the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation: a vignette

Questions of agency, responsibility, and accountability were discussed with the notion of 'structures' by staff at the Ethnological Museum. In Berlin, the quantity of organisations, players, and interests involved in the Humboldt Forum project as well as the importance of its budget set the level for a high degree and scope of complexity – a complexity which was dismissed as 'intransparent', and 'entangled' not only by internal museum staff but at one point also by external players, including the press. When the art historian Bénédicte Savoy left the Humboldt Forum's Advisory Board in the summer of 2017, she put the critique of SPK on the public agenda, and described it as 'lacking transparency, team spirit, responsibility' (Savoy in Häntzschel 2017).[53]

The following conversation is composed of several discussions between museum staff and me during fieldwork, reflecting the museum staff's own analysis and struggle with positioning their work within the SPK, and within the Humboldt Forum.[54] I situate the conversation in the museum's canteen at lunchtime, the place and time of the day where museum employees would meet regularly to discuss. Employee A and Employee B sit with me, as we just come out of a meeting. We have our lunch while discussing.

> Employee A (sighing): Well, it is obvious that there is a failure of leadership on all levels. Once you notice that such a bad atmosphere is dominant, you need to organise a meeting, an event. You then need to understand what's going on to be able to counter it. But those responsible for the planning process in the Humboldt Forum don't even notice this atmosphere (*Stimmung*) anymore. For them, it has become the normal kind and vibe to communicate.

> Employee B (agreeing): They don't perceive these moods anymore. I feel that I'm foreign to this culture (*kulturfremd*). I actually tried to decipher the unwritten rules which reign here. What can you still discuss? At what point do I need to shut up? I sometimes asked questions to which I got three different, insufficient answers. I needed to pretend, however, that this answer was an answer, because at

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[53] Furthermore, echoing the impressions by the museum's staff, Savoy stated that 'the hierarchical structure, the lack of autonomy of the individual houses, there is total sclerosis. The SPK as mistress of so many archives, museums, libraries should have had the courage to say: That is too much. We are handing over responsibility. It is a question of honesty and a sense of responsibility' (Savoy in Häntzschel 2017).

[54] The conversation is assembled from different forms of exchanges (e-mail, informal conversations, meetings) from 11 November 2013, 19 August 2014, 9 August 2017, 25 April 2018.

that point, we couldn't go any further. There is no set of rules which defines where we will be in the near future. It's unspoken, there is a dynamic which carries you along. Of course, things also change – such as when new people come – but at its base, there is a certain standard pitch (*Kammerton*) – sometimes it goes up, sometimes down. But in essence, it is about control, power, and money. This is the general dynamic and it continues.

Employee A: These are the wrong working conditions. I am convinced that one of the main reasons for the bad atmosphere at the museum is the limited agency, coupled with arbitrariness (*Willkür*) and intransparency of the decision-making structures: ultimately, this is a problem of the Foundation's hierarchical structure, and this limited agency is also present on the higher levels. The leaders of the SPK, the SMB, and the museums are subject to a very bad contract with the exhibition designers, which was decided by the Ministry of Construction. And a stupid building, completely unsuitable for museum presentations! Instead of constructing solidarity structures, the frustration is handed on 'downwards', and the curators and storage managers and restorers are in a situation of entirely limited and limiting possibilities; at the same time, they are supposed to do 'everything': the exhibitions! This doesn't only generate frustration, but also anger and cynicism.

Employee B: And on top of that, we have wrong working contracts. It's simply a bad framework to work in. And it's impossible to be creative in these circumstances.

Employee A: Yes, but one just continues. No one tells the director that the Emperor is naked.

Employee B: Yes. It's actually like a marriage, where at one point you realise: Oh! This was a mistake! (They start laughing)

Employee A: Until the bitter end!

Employee B: And we stay together because of the children!

Laughing, we get ourselves some coffee. Employee B addresses me directly, asking 'So you are writing about ethnological museums and …', and I jump in 'And their transformations, yes. And I also wanted to consider the structural implications, but actually this information is not very easy to get.'

Employee A (nodding): You're right. But you know, that's part of the secret society which reigns here. This is anthropological theory. You create secrets if you refuse to communicate information. [Employee A pauses and looks at us.] It's as simple as that. The information can be whatever. The sky is blue. The point is that you create power by withholding information.

Employee B (disagreeing): Well, they do give you information. When I arrived, the first thing I did is ask for an organigram. And the administrative department (*Stabsstelle*) provided me with one.[55] But it takes a lot of time to understand what is *actually* going on, to grasp the conflicted constellations and relations (*Gemengelage*) of actors and interests. Still, and here I agree with you, one has to work oneself through. Despite the help and allies in the field, there are unwritten rules. The project has its own culture. There are rules which reproduce the institution. And institutions do also produce quite some botch (*Murks*).

Employee A (laughing in agreement): Yes, one thing it produces is that actors within the Forum don't work target-orientated. I mean, they do of course pursue some sort of target, but not the target that they are supposed to pursue. Namely, that the Humboldt Forum becomes a success. They pursue their individual interests. It's not about the Humboldt Forum. And this is why I tell you, Margareta, what you can study really well here is demotivation. How to demotivate people. I am also completely demotivated. A meeting like the one today demotivates me. And then people do things that get on their nerves a little bit less.

Employee B: Yes, as I like to say: the consensus has settled into resignation (*Der Konsens hat sich auf Resignation eingependelt*). It actually feels as if you are jumping

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[55] Bettina Probst headed the *Stabsstelle* ('administrative department') which was created in 2012 and funded by the SPK. Probst was responsible for the long-term planning of the Humboldt Forum concerning its content and design, as well as for cooperation with (future) project partners, with a focus on media, sponsoring, and education (Probst and Wegner 2013:115).

off a plane onto a huge terrain. But somehow, they didn't give you a compass and you don't have time to orientate; but you need to take decisions immediately! On basic principles that you can only guess at. And when you try to understand what's going on, you need to be careful not to waste your energy with all these many, many small things. Things with which you get entangled. Things that wear you out, in which you get caught, that make you run aground, that carry you off. And then the day is gone and no time is left to *really* work. There is a sediment of structural problems which has been dragged along. Either people leave, or they accommodate themselves to them. And these problems are so huge, no one dares to approach them. Every single employee here, with time, develops her own strategy. She secures herself in her own subsection, or subsubsection, with horse blinders. I think it does have something to do with the Foundation's size, and with how single individuals carry way too much responsibility with way too little resources. But they handle it anyway because they think that they have to. I think that's one of the keys to understand the situation. Because what this produces is resignation, and a lot of 'as if'. You just pretend 'as if' you do the work, but everyone knows that you don't do it. You serve the level of representation. You just satisfy the surface, the crust, the real work is not done. So the 'as if', in my opinion, is a big issue because the paradigm still is representation.

The employees' analysis reflected findings from the anthropology of bureaucracy and work on organisations more generally, which challenge popular understandings of public organisations and bureaucracy. These popular readings see bureaucracy as the rule of the rational, of objectivity, of neutrality, of impersonality, of professionalism, including the belief in centralised coordination, and a basis in paper- and rule-based governance (Mathur 2017). The employees' reflections reveal the gap between what public administrations are imagined to achieve and what they actually produce. Max Weber described this gap as 'irrationality', a gap which may produce 'absurdity', to reference Nayanika Mathur's accounts of state bureaucracy in rural India here (2016:2). Museum staff frequently described the organisational constellation in exactly these terms – 'irrational', 'absurd', or simply 'dilettante' – sometimes with direct reference to Max Weber.

Another dimension of this gap concerns the ambiguity of bureaucratic procedures, as the 'unwritten rules' museum staff identified produce frustration, insecurity, or even anxiety. At the same time, the gap leaves room for flexibility. This room for manoeuvre is limited,

however, to those agents who know and have learnt how to handle the internal procedures and processes, or to put it in one of the employees' words, who have become part of the museum's 'culture'.[56] The flexibility of the rules and regulations, then, articulates in the ways in which museum staff referred to how people seek, and succeed in gaining and maintaining 'power' (manifest for example in acquiring financial resources, more exhibition space than others, etc.). At the same time, the lack of project planning, definitions of tasks and responsibilities prevented accountabilities being clearly defined. It seemed as if everyone could adapt her role as she wanted, including the responsibilities which the role entailed. This enabled museum staff on all levels to regularly delegate responsibilities 'elsewhere', usually to an undefined 'above', leaving questions unanswered and problems ignored, working with 'horse blinders'.

The phrase 'we are all victims of the structures' was indicative of the way of working in the museum. The working conditions were at once difficult to handle, seemingly arbitrary ('victims'), but as a consequence, offered the opportunity of not feeling responsible and being accountable.

Whether structures and cultures impede change
What was depicted by employees as 'structures' can be understood, I argue, as one of the reasons why the curatorial culture of the ethnological was maintained and reproduced. It was difficult to identify the distinction and demarcation of the Foundation's 'work cultures' – and in this particular case, the relation of 'curatorial cultures' – and 'structures' and to understand how they reproduce each other through their entanglement. Difficult to make visible and to pin down, these entanglements between structure and culture continue to shape the museum profoundly when it comes to the maintenance of representational tropes as they impede processes of change. Put simply, if the structures don't change, culture won't change, and it is more difficult to do representations differently.

The observations were not limited to the Ethnological Museum. In other museum contexts, difficulties related to working in museums were expressed in terms of 'bureaucracy' and 'administration', such as in museum director Nanette Snoep's description of museum work in which 'bureaucracy takes you hostage' (Ethnographic

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[56] For ethnographic interrogations on 'bureaucratic ambiguity', see Best 2012 for research conducted within the World Bank and the IMF, and Tuckett 2015 for an ethnography of the bureaucratic procedure of acquiring a legal status in Italy.

Collections of Saxony, 2015–2018), or in museum director Clémentine Deliss's descriptions of her arrival at the Weltkulturenmuseum Frankfurt (2010–2015), trying to orientate herself in the 'German labyrinth of bureaucracy and administration'.[57]

Concerning the SPK, as Germany's most important public cultural organisation, the need to reform had also been identified by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Grütters. In her second mandate, in the 2018 government's coalition contract, Grütters fixed the aim 'to adapt [the SPK] to the requirements of a modern cultural industry with international appeal', including an evaluation by the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) and a subsequent 'general reform' of the SPK (Koalitionsvertrag 2018:169). This was necessary, Monika Grütters stated in an interview, because 'there is a certain administrative office habitus' (*Amtshabitus*), which includes hierarchies and the need to report (*Berichtspflichten*), which sometimes work in several steps and in complicated manners, before a result can take place.' In the same interview, the SPK's president Hermann Parzinger confirmed: 'We need to optimise administrative structures' (Mangold and Timm 2018). Which direction this reform will take is not defined at the time of writing.

To sum up, this last part of the chapter has argued that representations in ethnological museums are not only difficult to change because of established and regulated processes of how exhibitions are thought and produced in these museums, but that the maintenance of these cultures is facilitated, or rather these cultures are difficult to change, because of 'structures' predominant in the museum staff's everyday. Beyond difficulties in engaging with the architectural, disciplinary, and conceptual framings of the Forum, it is thus the organisational embeddedness, the 'structures', which shape museum work in profound ways.

Conclusion

Just after quitting her post in Saxony and moving to head Cologne's Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, the museum director Nanette Snoep declared in a public presentation at Berlin's Technical University (12 November 2018) that

> [a] museum doesn't only conserve its objects, it also conserves itself. It freezes itself. Why is the ethnological museum still dominated by ahistorical discourses as if societies were unchangeable? Why are the museum's and collection's histories,

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[57] Interviews with N. Snoep, 19 April 2016; C. Deliss, 26 June 2017.

the objects' biographies not represented in the museum? And what role does the diaspora play in the Ethnological Museum?

Looking back at her own museum career, she wondered whether the museum could be seen as a sick patient. Had the state of health got worse or had it stagnated in the last few years? Was there even any hope of healing?

This chapter has tried to respond to some of these claims and questions. It took the exhibition-planning process for selected 'Africa' modules in the Humboldt Forum as a point of departure to interrogate how the legacies of exhibiting 'Africa' in ethnological museums have been and can be dealt with in the Ethnological Museum. It showed how the curator's practice is notably characterised by the attempt to position herself in relation, and more specifically, in reaction to the exhibition histories and curatorial legacies of how cultural difference has been represented. The chapter showed how the curator engages in attempts to repair, in particular by developing counter-narratives to existing larger representational tropes as well as particular canons related to the ethnological museum. Departing from an account of the department's histories of exhibiting, the chapter showed how the curator Paola Ivanov engaged in a strategy of repair to counter stereotypical representations of Africa. This strategy unfolded in countercanonisation via the deployment of objects in East Africa, the use of hybrid objects to evidence and authenticate the region's transcultural and global histories, and finally, the attempt to 'reverse the gaze' through the introduction of a 'consistent Southern perspective'. This trend of attempts to repair, I claim, can be more widely observed in Africa departments in different organisational settings. Not only taking the imagined narrative of the exhibition into account, but focusing notably on *how* the exhibition was conceived, the chapter argued that the curatorial culture of the ethnological undermines repair. It highlights three persistent practices which define this culture: the definition of the curator's professional role as guard and keeper of the collection, monopolising the right to access and to interpretational power over the collections (who speaks?); the implicit definition of the exhibition's audience as academic, and subsequently, the reduction of the museum to a scientific organisation (who speaks to whom?); and finally, a collection-centred practice which, encouraged by the museum's mission to represent 'contemporaneity', which implies a refusal to acknowledge the museum's collection as historical and confirms the museum's mission and self-appointed role to display otherness (who speaks to whom about what?). In the chapter's final part, I argued how this curatorial culture is closely shaped by and entangled with what museum

staff depict as 'structures'. Apart from the way in which curatorial cultures worked against ambitions to change representations, certain 'structures' keep the curatorial culture alive. On the one hand, these structures confirm and conserve – on an architectural, conceptual, and disciplinary level – those representations which have been the focus of scholarly critique. On the other, they constrict and impede innovative work within organisations – as people are occupied with dealing with the structures, instead of doing 'proper work' – a condition of working which does concern other important (public) organisations and might be part of a broader modern condition.

The curatorial culture of the ethnological differs notably from other curatorial cultures with regard to the contemporary art field, and the profession of the 'independent curator' in particular. It is in the field of contemporary art that curating and the curatorial have been established as a theoretical and professional field. This understanding has implied the development towards establishing the curatorial by participants of the field (usually curators themselves) as a 'cultural field of production' in Bourdieusian sense: as singled-out and professionalised, in which agents of the field are interested in the field's reproduction (Bourdieu 1993). The independent curator, in contrast to the anthropologist-curator in museums, often presents herself or himself explicitly as an interdisciplinary non-expert. Beyond expertise, one of the curator's strongest assets consists in networks. The curator brings together and assembles, to paraphrase Béatrice von Bismarck here, spaces, things, people, and discourses (von Bismarck 2011:183). As such, the need for consultation, cooperation, delegation, of multiple modes of referencing, are *inherent* to the curator's profile.

As this chapter has shown, an understanding of the exhibition as single-authored, research-based, research-focused, and collection-centred contributes to complicating or contradicting exhibition concepts aimed at change. If exhibiting continues to be seen as a practice of dialogue only between curators and collections, curators risk being trapped in the museum's disciplinary frames. This is not an argument against expertise, but rather a suggestion to expand what counts as expertise and practising the exhibition process as the result of a *constellation of expertise*. This might help to break open these framings, as was suggested by Béatrice von Bismarck in her definition of 'exhibitions as collectives' of both human and non-human actors, thus defining the process and product of the curatorial as 'constellational' (von Bismarck and Rogoff 2012:24; von Bismarck 2012).

Returning to the metaphor of repair, the observations on culture and structure in particular reveal more clearly the restorative moment of repair. By repairing one risks conserving; one risks bringing back into existence or using that which was deemed damaged or destroyed. Repair is a means to mend what has been damaged. By healing the fissure, it conceals the fractures underneath and in turn confirms the existent. So even if the ambitions to challenge representations pursued by the curator had been realised, they would have inevitably and invariably contributed to confirming the contested constellations of access to resources, authority, and, ultimately, power. Repair can thus be a means to delegate, to distract from addressing the structural. It can become a means to paint or brush over without touching the root of the problem. In the case of the Humboldt Forum, this was articulated in an understanding of 'culture' rooted in colonial epistemologies, such as through the opposition of the European with a non-European Other, or the self-entitlement to represent culture defined as other.

Situating the ethnological museum as a place of repair nevertheless suggests the museum's central role in contemporary society-making. It includes the belief in the museum as a democratic place for the working through of contested histories in order to better understand and situate complex presents, allowing these histories to be visible, addressed, and problematised. Wayne Modest proposed the metaphor of repair to imagine the museum as a place for productive discomfort, conflict, as well as hope (von Oswald, Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Modest 2017; see also Modest in von Oswald and Tinius 2020). In this context, curating – in its etymological origin in 'taking care of' or even 'to cure' – can be defined as a means to engage in and contribute to processes of healing.

Situating the attempts and difficulties to repair in their ambivalence – between historical redress and healing, restoring and legitimising – leaves some questions unresolved. In relation to the curation of ethnological collections within their legacies, I wonder: can – and if so, how – exhibition making in ethnological museums be more than a response to its earlier wrongdoings, more than a reaction to critique? Is this even desirable? Or is it necessary to imagine other forms of inquiry, possibly working with and through the collections beyond exhibitions, full stop? With reference to questions of culture and structure: what kind of critique is possible within organisations such as the Humboldt Forum, which symbolically and conceptually confirm the critique that curatorial positions and strategies attempt to counter? Can the ethnological museum's powerful

trope of the right to exhibit and represent otherness ever be broken, and if so, how to do so in a context in which some people believe that this right is still valid?

Chapter 3
Researching through avatars: provenance and the struggles with historical knowledge infrastructures

Introduction

During my first days in the museum in October 2013, I visited Boris Gliesmann's office. He was responsible for the museum's database, MuseumPlus. I wanted to do research on a particular object, III C 14966, a 'Luba' caryatid stool. In Boris Gliesmann's office, several old exhibition catalogues, books, and historical files lay on different tables, ready to be worked on. Books were aligned on the wall on wooden shelves, next to historical photographs. Unlike other offices in the museum, Boris Gliesmann's was rather dark, and had a dusty, historical feel to it. Boris Gliesmann and I installed ourselves in front of the computer screen together. The research started by entering the precise object number. An interface with different tabs opened.[1]

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[1] If not indicated otherwise, the quotations and observations stem from fieldnotes of the training session with Boris Gliesmann, 24 October 2013.
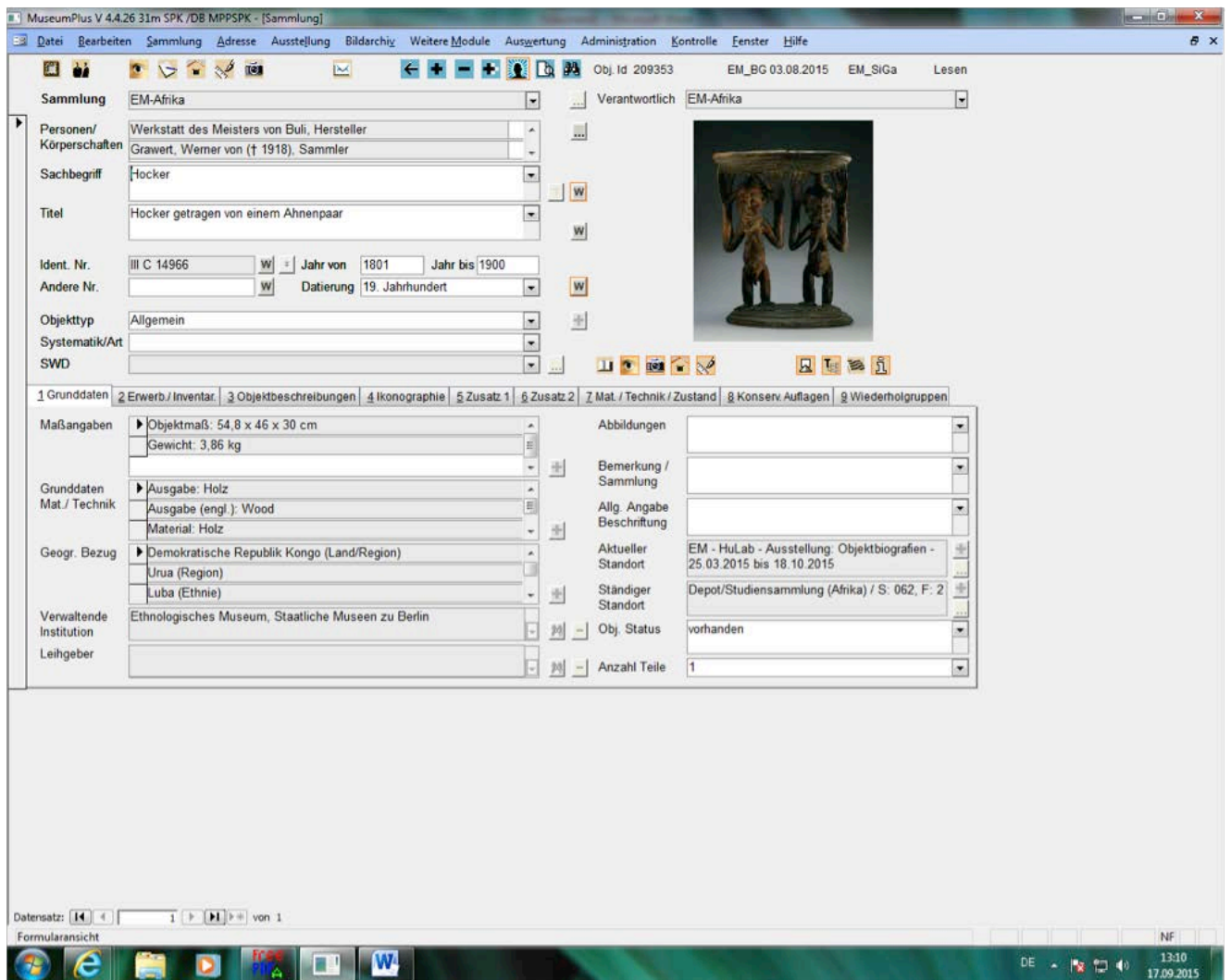
Figure 3.1 Screenshot of the database entry for III C 14966, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

The grey, sterile interface of the database suggested objectivity, order, and the uniformity of knowledge to me. It alluded to completeness. The look of the digital gave the impression of an almost ahistorical neutrality. The different categories seemed to be self-evident, such as the word 'inventory', which comes from the Latin word of 'to find' or 'to come upon'. Inventory was, however, the creation rather than the 'stumbling upon' of a certain reality.

The making of colonial differences in the museum's knowledge infrastructures
What I could observe on screen were the accumulated results of manifold processes of naming. The processes of naming are at the core of the process of differentiating, and are thus never innocent. It enables groups and categories to be formed, and order to be created, which, in turn, includes some, but excludes others. As Bowker and Star argue '[e]ach standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences another. This is not inherently a bad thing – indeed it is inescapable. But it is an ethical choice, and as such it is dangerous – not bad, but dangerous' (Bowker and Star 1999a:5–6). During the period of its foundation, institutionalisation, and professionalisation in the nineteenth century, anthropological category work is an exemplification of this danger: the ideologies which ground these categories were based on the production of (often binary) differences underlying the colonial project. I refer to what results from these differentiation processes as 'colonial differences' here.[2] These names and categorisation standards still form the core and base of the museum's knowledge infrastructure: its database.

The database was part of the museum's *knowledge* infrastructure insofar as it helped museum staff to access, administer, and order the museum's collections. The infrastructure thus enabled the inscription and administration of knowledge assembled around the objects and so enabled their maintenance and care. At the same time, the infrastructure itself needed to be maintained, to, as Jörg Niewöhner argues, make invisible the social and ethical priorities and decisions which underly its constructions and developments (Niewöhner 2014:343–344). Infrastructure work is characterised by invisibility. Database work in particular is invisible when it comes to who is involved, as well as how the daily work of entering, cleaning, and controlling data is accomplished (Nadim 2016). By describing processes of how knowledge is produced with and via the museum's database, this chapter attempts to render these processes and people tangible.

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[2] For the constitution of an 'anthropological difference' in relation to colonialism, and in particular in relation to visual culture, see Leeb 2016.

This chapter departs from what can be deciphered from this flat, flickering screen. It works through the genealogies of categorising and ordering, and, subsequently, the ways in which colonial pasts and presents relate. It discusses how and which data gets collected and assembled in the database, and how museum staff research, document, enrich the collections. How are past ways of conceiving, imagining, and classifying cultures reflected in current ways of working with the collections? Where and how do museum staff identify problems, where do conflicts between past and present arise, and how do museum staff grapple with them?

I engage with these questions by engaging in an ethnography of provenance research which allows light to be shed on the *practices* and *infrastructures* in which such research processes, and museum work more generally speaking, are embedded. The narrative and methodological tool of retracing the object's itineraries and lives in and beyond the museum allows me to tell the object's histories on the one hand, and to understand the way in which research is done on the other, and, subsequently, how museum staff produce knowledge. I argue that researching provenance falters because the research continues to operate in and is limited by established knowledge categories and infrastructures, categories and infrastructures which are themselves the result of and rely on colonial knowledge production and associated practices. I show how throughout the research processes – of inscribing knowledge into the museum's infrastructure, of finding and placing sources, and by the analysis of the object's reception history – colonial differences continue to be produced.

More particularly, I argue for and identify three modes of past difference making which endure and act in the present. First, the ethnography reveals how the museum's practices of ordering and classifying allow categories of colonial difference and stereotypes to persist – practices which I describe as *discrimination* in their effect of recognising and marking something as different and distinct. I then show how colonial difference continues to be produced in view of the production of knowledge about the objects, articulated in what I depict as *unequal distribution*: an imbalance of access, sources, and resources is maintained between the Global North and the Global South. Finally, I analyse past and present attempts by museum staff to counter and challenge colonial modes of defining culture. In particular, I work on the process of valuing the object as art by attributing an author – 'Buli' – to a particular group of objects. Inscribing the stool in a system in which 'art' opposes 'culture', this process reveals how the construction of this

particular difference articulates as *appropriation*. Ultimately, it is Western institutions and organisations, namely the art market, academia, and museums, which profit from the financial value produced.

The chapter demonstrates how historical taxonomies are maintained and continue to be privileged in the definition and interpretation of the museum's collections. These historical taxonomies and epistemologies, I show, coincide with the foundation of anthropology as a discipline, which worked in complicity with colonial ways of conceiving the world. Whereas I separate these processes of discrimination, distribution, and appropriation heuristically, they neither function as separate processes, nor are they chronologically or causally ordered. Rather, they are entangled and interlocked in many ways: the chapter tries to tackle these grounds of knowledge production in the museum, showing how people grapple with the very names, words, and orders which define the collections. I discuss how, why, and when these get challenged but resist.

Introducing the object's digital avatar

To think about the relation between past and present knowledge infrastructures – the inventory books, the naming and categorisation process, the database – I defined the object's digital counterpart on screen as its 'digital avatar'. The notion was, to my knowledge, first coined by Nicoletta Tiziana Beltrame in the context of her research on Paris's Musée du Quai Branly, and I would like to extend it further here (Beltrame 2015:114). The object's entry in the database resembled an avatar in the sense that it could be regarded as 'a variant phrase or version of a continuing basic entity'.[3] Expanding Boris Gliessmann's understanding of the object's digital presence as 'index cards' (*Karteikarten*) on screens', the basic entity consisted of an amalgam of the physical object, its historical inventory, and further documentation within and beyond the museum. These elements were constitutive of the object's existence within the museum. One element hardly functioned without the other. The avatar thus didn't only include material ('object, inventory documents') and immaterial elements ('categories'), but also integrated practices, and processes ('naming', 'cleaning', 'enriching').

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[3] The definition of an avatar following the Merriam Webster online dictionary: (1) the incarnation of a Hindu deity (such as Vishnu), (2a) an incarnation in human form, (2b) an embodiment (as of a concept or philosophy) often in a person, (3) a variant phase or version of a continuing basic entity, (4) an electronic image that represents and is manipulated by a computer user in a virtual space (as in a computer game or an online shopping site) and that interacts with other objects in the space, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/avatar, consulted 30 September 2017.

The concept of the avatar allowed the digital object to be lifted off its two-dimensional screen and to render it three dimensional, to see it as a figure evolving through the adding and taking away of data. I pictured how the different kinds of materialities related and linked through the avatar, in the database MuseumPlus which Boris Gliesmann described as 'relational', a database 'where everything is linked'. Conceiving the categories as the avatar's limbs, the image of the avatar showed how the object's understanding and definition was limited by the database's template and grid to organise information. The avatar's room for manoeuvre to develop and grow was thus clearly delimited, a delimitation historically shaped and disciplined.

At the same time, however, the idea of an avatar emphasises that it could develop a life of its own beyond the museum's constraints: Avatars, when defined as virtual counterparts of the human being, can be understood as 'fantasies come to life, individual chances to step outside of one's usual self, to transcend the boundaries of one's own identity' (Khatib 2007:70). The object's avatar offered opportunities to think the museum object outside of the museum's powerful frameworks, troubling categories, and contested names. The avatar thus foregrounds how the digital allows the potential disruption of the museum's given epistemologies. For the object's avatar, this opened possibilities for new interpretations and understandings of the object itself *a priori*. Before exploring these promises of avatars, however, this chapter demonstrates how the object's avatar comes into being, and how it is composed. Departing from the historically shaped categories of the museum's database, the chapter focuses on the question of what kind of transformation, or reproduction, of the avatar's identity was *de facto* taking place within the given framework.

Drawing the avatar's outlines: the interdependence of historical inventories and current digitisation

Recurrently, curators in the museum showed their disapproval of what they perceived as a lack of attention devoted to research in the museum, which they saw reflected in the few resources and staff allocated to it. 'Little research has been done about them', curators stated, and 'no time' was allocated to engage in research about the collections.[4] I worked with Boris Gliesmann because Paola Ivanov had charged me with provenance research for the Humboldt Forum. She intended to research the provenance of a specific

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[4] Conversation with museum staff, 26 November 2013, and during a tour of the depot 1 November 2013, see also von Oswald and Rodatus 2017: 214.

group of objects produced by groups identified as 'Luba' or 'Luba-ised' and asked me to join the study.[5] I had chosen one of the museum's most valuable objects, a wooden caryatid stool acquired by the museum in 1902 from the colonial officer Werner von Grawert in the then Congo Free State, and authored by the 'Buli-Workshop'. Paola Ivanov 's own description of the object in the exhibition at the time read:

> For the Luba and their related peoples, the stools were regarded as the most important objectivisation of the power of kings and chiefs and were only shown to the public during the highest ceremonies. The caryatids embody the ancestors and the royalty represented by them' (Junge, Ivanov, and Ethnologisches Museum 2005:91).[6]

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[5] In November 2013, I joined Verena Rodatus in the research on the object group. Rodatus was the museum apprentice (*Volontärin*) in the Africa department and Humboldt Lab Dahlem from May 2013.

[6] Translated from the German by the author: 'Bei den Luba und den mit ihnen verwandten Völkern galten die Hocker als wichtigste Objektivierungen der Macht von Königen und Oberhäuptern und wurden nur während der höchsten Zeremonien in der Öffentlichkeit gezeigt. Die Karyatiden verkörpern die Ahnen und das durch sie vertretene Königtum.'

Caryatid stool, collected by Werner von Grawert, III C 14966, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Starting the research on III C 14966 didn't only mean engaging with the Humboldt Forum's goal to provide information on the provenance of all exhibited objects. The research also entailed capturing and learning about the ways in which the database worked, including the genealogy and history of the museum's digitisation process. Following the process of research, I realised that the definition of a museum object relied above all on the object's first inventory, an inventory which had been produced in a particular context, in which several developments coincided: the institutionalisation of an anthropology considered problematic and 'anti-humanist' (Zimmerman 2001) today; the heyday of German colonialism; and the early days of the museum, during which chaos reigned due to the arrival of thousands of objects from, amongst other localities, these very colonies (Zimmerman 2001: 190-191; Penny 2002: 163 - 215). It is the historical inventory which formed the research's and the avatar's point of departure, drawing an outline of what the avatar would be constituted of.

Provenance research and the Humboldt Forum

The expressed aim for the Humboldt Forum was that the objects to be on display in the new permanent exhibitions should have gone through the process of provenance research. Paola Ivanov was not only committed to this goal, but was one of the initiators and promoters of provenance research within the museum. This concerned approximately 7,000 objects from the Ethnological Museum, with almost 1,500 objects from the Africa department.[7] The commitment to provenance research had been repeatedly communicated by SPK representatives as well as by Monika Grütters, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media: a 'clean' provenance would be a prerequisite for the objects not only to be displayed, but also to be kept in the collections.[8]

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[7] The precise figures communicated by Gliesmann consisted of 6,840 objects for the entire museum, 1,457 for the Africa collection (email 11 February 2019). This number contradicts the number communicated by the director of collections Lars-Christian Koch in 2018. Koch claimed that the number of objects on display in the Humboldt Forum from the Ethnological Museum and the Museum for Asian Art would be 20,000, doubling the number of objects that had been displayed in Dahlem, with 10,000 objects on display from the Ethnological Museum and 2,000 objects from the Museum for Asian Art (Kuhn 2018). A year later, Gliesmann confirmed that 9000 objects from both the Ethnological Museum and the Museum for Asian Art were officially to be exhibited in the Humboldt Forum (email 15 January 2020).

[8] The objects to be displayed were prioritised in the ongoing research on provenance in the museum. In the responses to the 'little request' (*kleine Anfrage*) of the Green politician Claudia Hermann, the city's mayor gave assurances that the objects' provenance was to be researched 'in depth' as well as exhibited in 'several exhibitions', see Claudia Hermann, 'Kleine Anfrage', 28 June 2013 (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin

As Boris Gliesmann reported on the state of the art of the inventory and research on the collections, however, in the Africa department alone, out of the 80,200 objects identified, 54,000 were inventoried in the database, whereas 26,200 were not (2019).[9] About 10 per cent of the museum's collections in the museum were 'well documented' (*dokumentiert*), Boris Gliesmann estimated (2016).[10] 'Documented' for him meant the identification and subsequent integration of the related (internal and museum) historical sources in the database, as well as situating the object in the current state of the art of the literature. With this state of the inventory and research as a premise, the 'documentation' of 1,500 objects for the Africa department alone was perceived as an ambitious goal to achieve by museum staff, and curators in particular. 'Clean' provenance, in addition, without further staff employed, aimed even higher and was carried on the shoulders of the present museum staff alone.[11]

Getting to know the database, its genealogy, and those who use it
Knowing how to manipulate the database was a premise for doing research in the museum. As we sat together in front of the screen, Boris Gliesmann explained: for any research, three important sources were to be consulted – the object, the person, the historical files from the archive. We had started with the consultation of the object, III C 14966. He navigated quickly and securely in the database. It became obvious that navigating the database was not self-explanatory and required a detailed knowledge and trained practice of its different functions. Boris Gliesmann made parts of it readable to

2013a). This claim was reinforced in January 2015 by Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters. In response to a parliamentary claim, Grütters guaranteed that no unlawfully acquired object should be kept within the collections of the SMB and that every object displayed in the Humbold Forum would have gone through provenance research procedures and that this research would be 'made transparent' (Deutscher Bundestag 2015:2–3). In 2018, as a reaction to Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr's 'restitution report', Hartmut Dorgerloh confirmed that 'looted art must always be returned' (Hunt, Thomas, and Dorgerloh 2018).

[9] In February 2019, the account was the following: III A 5,700 (out of which 3,650 were indexed); III C 45,600 objects identified (out of which 26,700 were indexed); III D 7,450 objects identified (out of which 4,315 were indexed); III E 21,900 objects identified (out of which 19,330 were indexed). Additionally, there were 2,500 objects without object numbers, as well as some permanent loans, objects not owned by the museum (*Fremdbesitz*), historical documents (*Zeitdokument*), plus numbers of so-called 'duplicates' (*Dublettennummern*), email from Boris Gliesmann, 11 February 2019.

[10] Interview with Boris Gliesmann, 8 November 2016.

[11] This concerns only the period of my research period in the museum, 2013–2015. With the foundation of the Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH in 2015, more staff were employed, also to support curators.

me, but the links, relations, and associations behind each object were not easy to trace. While he already discussed details concerning the object, I was still busy accurately writing down key combinations and 'translations' for different symbols, such as what he called 'pot with a lid', which refers to a link to the archive, or the 'burning head', referring to the search functions for images.
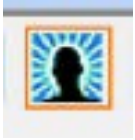
Figure 3.3 Screenshots from MuseumPlus: 'Burning head' and 'Pot with a lid', © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Boris Gliesmann was responsible for the process of the digitisation and documentation of the collection by himself. He occupied a quasi-monopoly position when it came to the control, monitoring but also understanding of the database's functioning. He had co-developed the database MuseumPlus, the avatar's most structuring framework, and could thus be seen as the ultimate creator of the museum's avatars. Located in the museum's department 'collections' (*Sammlungen)*, Boris Gliesmann's position was referred to as 'museologist' (*Museologe)*.[12] He preferred to call himself a 'documentalist' (*Dokumentar*). This designation highlighted his attempts to 'enrich' (*anreichern*) the database with more information, 'documenting' it, extracting this information mainly from sources from within the museum's archives and online research. Boris Gliesmann's focus was thus to render the avatars more complex. To my surprise, when I asked him about his everyday work, which, from an outsider's position like mine, could have been perceived as rather boring, he stated that it was 'extremely varied'. He described his role as being at the 'interface' (*Schnittstelle*), occupying a 'pivotal position' between different departments, such as the collections, the conservation services or the administration, as well as between regional departments of the museums. He was one of the few people, he argued, who could get a comprehensive understanding of the museum. Even though Boris Gliesmann was constantly working with different departments and switching interlocutors – 'in one day, it can happen that I have to switch from Africa to Oceania, from 1850 to 1979' – he wasn't part of a team, but could be considered the node between different teams and individuals. Boris Gliesmann was in his forties and had spent most of his career in the museum. After an education as a museologist in Berlin, he started to work in the Ethnological Museum in 1998.[13] A loner, he mainly worked by himself, with a discreet passion, not dusty like his office at all.

The history of the collection's digitisation and MuseumPlus
In the Ethnological Museum, in contrast to other museums in Berlin, the digitisation of the collections started rather early at the beginning of the 1990s. This was due to the arrival of tens of thousands of objects, a restitution of Soviet war booty that had been

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[12] The department was created in 1998 after a general reform of the museum's structure, which was overseeing the administration of collections. On Gliesmann's public LinkedIn Profile, he described his tasks as collection and archive management, programme administration, documentation system (database), data management (editing and correction), as well as project management (data recording, digitisation, online presentation), https://de.linkedin.com/in/boris-gliesmann-64503638, consulted 13 September 2017.

[13] Boris Gliesmann studied museology at the FHTW in West Berlin, a novelty at the time. A particular education for museology had only been offered in the GDR, not in West Germany.

stored secretly in Leipzig's Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde in the GDR. The so-called 'Leipzig repatriation' (*Leipzig Rückführung*) took place after Germany's reunification, 1990–1992 (see Chapter 4 for more on this).

*Figure 3.4 Inventory of 'Leipzig Repatriation', c. 1990–1992, photographer unidentified, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

The Africa department in particular occupied a pioneering role in the collection's digital documentation. This was not only due to the fact that it was 'recorded positively',[14] meaning that everything that was on site was recorded, in contrast to documenting everything listed in the books, including lost objects. It mainly concerned the digitisation process, which was to serve as a 'pilot project for the immature GOS programme',[15] the museum's still-to-be-installed database, which was later (1998/99) transferred to the museum's current database, MuseumPlus. The Africa department's storage manager, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, had been unsatisfied with the inventory of the Leipzig objects. He characterised the process as 'insufficient' and 'rough' (*grob*).[16] He subsequently developed a 'pilot project' within the museum. Klaus Helfrich, the museum director, put him in charge of the digitisation process, in a context in which, as Hans-Joachim Radosuboff framed it, everyone reacted to the new PCs 'as if the Black Death had just broken out'.[17] Boris Gliesmann described the transfer from the old documentation system GOS to MuseumPlus as a 'milestone' in his career and the museum's history. The process of transfer to a new database was monitored and developed together with a working group of the State Museums Berlin. The programme went productive within the museum in 2003. Boris Gliesmann accompanied this digitisation process and decided to take over Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's foundation (*Grundstock*) of subject groups (*Sachgruppen*), even though it had been designed for the collections from the African continent. For Boris Gliesmann, 'the vocabulary worked for about 70 or 80 per cent of the museum's collections: all collections have arrows, calabash, spears, cooking pots'. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's attempt to order the Leipzig repatriation collections thus ultimately became formalised, generalised, and inscribed in the museum's database.

Using MuseumPlus as the reference database didn't translate into a uniform and systematic digitisation process in the museum. The process can rather be described as fragmentary, selective, and subjective. The digitisation process was selective, because it was mainly through external research projects that the collection was digitised, such as a

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[14] Interview with Boris Gliesmann, 21 December 2015.

[15] Quotation from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's diaries for 1995, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1995/afro_jahr1995.html, consulted 20 December 2017.

[16] Quotation from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's diaries for 1995, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1995/afro_jahr1995.html, consulted December 2017.

[17] http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1995/afro_jahr1995.html, consulted December 2017; interview with Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, 7 January 2015.

European project on the inventory of musical instruments[18] or a research project on the Africa collection's archival files.[19] The digitisation was fragmentary, because the objects had been digitised at different times and with different technical support and expertise. Not all the objects were integrated in the database. Those which were digitised varied greatly in their detail, some missing photographs, measurements, or descriptions. The digitisation was subjective, because the collections' capture (*Erfassung*) and the detail of the indexation (*Erschließung*) depended on the personal engagement and interest of each regional department's employees. Put differently and somewhat provocatively: the objects which the museum staff considered important were privileged in their inventory. As a result, some parts of the museum's collections were almost entirely available via the database while other parts of the collections were absent.[20]

Boris Gliesmann's personal effort consisted in transforming the database – which he referred to the as the 'documentation system' – into a handy working tool. The most important change from GOS to MuseumPlus, he argued, was from a 'hierarchical' to a 'relational' documentation system. Research on the objects could start from different points of departure, depending on the researcher's interest – the object, the person, the region, the material, etc. All of the data was related, and included information on the transactions linked to the collections: the restoration and condition reports (*Zustandsprotokoll*), the loan procedures, the location management (*Standortverwaltung*). Establishing these relations from 2004 on had been 'manual work, work of sweat and tears' (*Schweißarbeit*). It consisted in cleaning the data (*Bereinigung*), erasing doubles, checking the spelling of people and things. 'We had three or four Adolf Bastian [the museum's founder] in the system, and we needed to merge the information into one single data set.' It was important to have one data set only, one single avatar which structured, framed, and assembled the data.

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[18] The project MIMO (Musical Instrument Museums Online) was financed by the European Commission and ran from 2009 till 2011. The project's aim was to create a large database of public collections of musical instruments, http://www.mimo-international.com/MIMO/accueil-ermes.aspx, consulted 2 October 2017.

[19] In the database, short summaries of each archival file were available, thanks to a research project that had inventoried all the files from the Africa department from 1873 until 1919. The archives were documented on microfilm. The research project, funded by the Volkswagen-Stiftung, was led by Christine Stelzig, whose PhD thesis resulted from this research, see Stelzig and Röhm 2000; Stelzig 2004.

[20] This observation is confirmed by the digitisation strategy of the SPK (*Digitalisierungsstrategie der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz – inhaltliche Prioritäten der Einrichtungen der SPK 2011–2015*), released in 2010 (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2010). The strategy doesn't suggest a systematic and general approach, but rather a strategy of 'priorities' and 'foci'.

The historical inventory as point of departure for the object's avatar

When we started look into III C 14966, Boris Gliesmann explained that all research included going back to the historical documentation. The information in the database was based on the historical inventory, which Boris Gliesmann described as the 'database in a book'.[21] The direct parallel established between the physical paper and digital counterpart mirrored his description of the data set representing an 'index card on screen'. The process of digitisation had consisted in transferring the historical information, if available, to the digital system. When III C 14966 arrived in the museum, it was first recorded in the inventory (*Erwerbsbücher*), within the bundle in which it arrived. Then, the objects were separated regionally and were recorded one by one (*Einzelobjekterfassung*) in the 'main catalogue' (*Hauptkatalog*).[22] Around 1900, objects arrived in their thousands in the museums. I could imagine the difficulty of a consistent and efficient inventory when Boris Gliesmann explained that to inventory a bundle of 2,000 objects at once, which was not improbable at the time, the museum might need between five and ten years. The process included the risk of losing sight of which object belonged to the bundle, and breaking the chronology. As Boris Gliesmann highlighted, 'in the best case' in addition to this two-step inventory process, an object card for each object was created and has remained as historical documentation until today. The cards included measurements of the objects, descriptions of their usage and significance, sometimes even some drawings and bibliography. However, in the case of the Africa collections, the object cards as well as the photographs linked to the collections were destroyed by fire when the museum building was bombed during the Second World War.[23] The only source which remained and is still used today are reproductions of the original negatives, printed on A4 and bound as a book.[24]

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[21] The inventory book within the museum started in 1880 and stopped in 2003. Since 2003, the inventory has only been done online in the database. Before 1880, it was the entry books (*Eingangsbücher*) of Berlin's cabinet of curiosities (*Kunstkammer*) that served to document the object entries.

[22] This two-stage process is not always the case and in a lot of museums, Gliesmann explains, the digital main catalogue is the same as the entry catalogue.

[23] During the Second World War, all the specific index cards (*Karteikarten*) as well as the photographs linked to and of the objects were hidden away in a spot considered particularly safe by the contemporary Africa curator. When the building in Königsgrätzer Straße was bombed, all those documents were destroyed. The detailed information about each object disappeared and had not been recorded elsewhere.

[24] In other departments of the museum, those cards still exist. However, the inventory books were photographed on microfilm in the 1940s and the negatives were stored elsewhere. Those microfilms were discovered only very late, and by accident. For the Africa department, in contrast to other regional departments, all of these catalogues have been scanned and are accessible by museum employees. The inventory book which covered the collection entries until 1880 was deemed destroyed during the war, but

Figure 3.5 A scan of the inventory book on the page including III C 14966, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 3.6 The entry for the object III C 14966, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

was found in 1994 by accident: a researcher in the East Asia department found photocopies of the inventory book in the bin and alerted the department's curator.

This source, or rather, its scan in the database, is what we went back to. The list resembled a listing of birth dates: once attributed a name and a number, the thing irrevocably mutated from what it used to be into a museum object. The description as a condensed characterisation of the object situated the object in a Western museum setting. As part of the list, the object was converted into a constitutive part of the museum and became part of a whole – the collection – with the number 14966.

As we scrutinised the inventory together, Boris Gliesmann stated 'That's it. The whole documentation that we inscribe for the object now departs from the collection itself.' This diverged from other collections in the museum, which relied on the 'original documentation'. As the inventory showed, the particular object 14966 was filed amongst a group of objects that had been given to the museum by Werner von Grawert. On the left of the scan, one could see the object number, the bundle of objects donated by von Grawert as a 'gift' starting with the object 14963. A reference to the entry book was given ('1555/02'), as well as to the collection date, 1902. III C 14966 was described as 'Chair, carried by two carved figures (man and woman)', '55 cm high', 'Urua'. [25] In this case, this referred to a geographical indication of the historical region called 'Urua', located on the west side of Lake Tanganyika. Almost disappearing, one could also see 'v. Sydow' just next to the description, which referred to an early publication by the art historian and anthropologist Eckart von Sydow (von Sydow 1923).[26] The 'Berlin' stamp above the object's number indicated that the object had stayed in Berlin during and after the war. The 'Berlin' stamp differed from objects stamped 'Back from C', indicating Celle (collecting point), and 'Back from L', indicating Leipzig. These stamps reveal the history of war booty and relocation of the collection during and after the Second World War. As far as the Africa collections are concerned, the only sources which remained were this entry in the catalogue, and the object itself.

The avatar's 'basic entity' consisted thus in the object and its entry in the historical inventory. This is what the avatar departed from. The comparison of the inventory books' scan and the database was considered a crucial entry point by Boris Gliesmann to, firstly, double-check if the historical information had been documented correctly in the database. Secondly, it was important to understand, in case something had changed, why and how those changes had taken place. It ultimately showed the trust put in the

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[25] Translated from the German by the author: 'Stuhl, von 2 geschnitzten Figuren (Mann und Frau) getragen'.

[26] Boris Gliesmann didn't know what the capital N indicated, email of 11 February 2019.

historical sources, clearly structuring the object's definition and perception. This trust was visually encouraged by the seemingly neutral surface of the database, a surface constituted by a particular taxonomy which I'll unravel in the next section.

Defining the avatar: taxonomies, epistemologies, and the continuity of colonial discrimination

The museum's database reflects the museum orders. Past and present practices of naming and categorising are condensed in each particular database entry, the avatar, which figures and is read by museum staff as a compressed characterisation of the object. The avatar, ideally, is supposed to indicate the accumulated knowledge of a particular object. In what follows, I will analyse the III C 14966 composition, and the categories which compose it, one by one. This analysis reveals how colonial imaginations – which accompanied processes and practices of ordering – are inscribed in present infrastructures and how they prevail through these infrastructures. Specifically, it shows how the database reproduces colonial conceptions of difference – of 'us' and 'them', reflected in understandings of culture, time, and space – and how these differences shape and define the object's digital counterpart in its essence.

The category 'collection': reproducing colonial binaries with the 'ethnological' and 'Africa'
In the database, the first category defined the object's affiliation to a 'collection', in this case 'EM-Afrika'. The MuseumPlus database was used in all museums governed by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. An indication of a particular museum – the Ethnological Museum – and a particular collection within the museum – 'Africa' – was necessary to locate the object. This particular indication thus situated the object within an even more important range of collections, namely Berlin's State Museum collections (SMB). Which collections the objects had been attributed to – between the Museum for Islamic Art, the Museum for Asian Art, the Museum for Decorative Arts, the Ethnological Museum, and many more – defined the objects' primary identity. This primary identity – as 'Ethnological', 'Islamic', 'Egyptian', 'Greek', etc. – was accompanied by particular value regimes and the making of differences. The implicit hierarchies were perpetuated and confirmed with the permanent inscription in a particular collection. Long before the museum's opening, its founder Adolf Bastian excluded Europe and Asia from being the subject of 'ethnology', and thus from the museum. Only Asia's *Naturvölker* and for Europe 'some exceptions, which fit into a very small cupboard', did he permit to be part of his museum's collections. Asia and Europe,

he claimed, were to be treated 'separately' from the other continents, and, importantly, through the discipline of 'history', rather than 'ethnology' (Bastian 1872:ix). These orderings are thus the result of difference making through distinction, defining 'ethnology' and its museum as devoted to a very particular kind of cultural alterity. This kind of distinction confirms colonial dichotomies of nature and culture, culture and art, civilised and primitive. The ethnological as 'the Other to art museums' could neither be an art museum, a historical museum, nor a decorative arts museum (Bangma 2013:63).

The categorisation as 'EM-Afrika' in the database extends the perpetuation of differences between 'European', 'Asian', and the 'Other' to conceptions of 'Africa'. Differentiating processes through categorisation within 'Africa' become evident in deciphering the object number itself – III C 14966. After the book inventory was compiled, the 'III C' was added and indicated an approximate geographical ascription of the object. The 'III' refers to the 'Africa' collection, compared to other continents such as 'Asia' ('I') or 'America' ('IV'). In the museum, Africa itself had been divided into regions, represented by letters. The objects were categorised as originating from East Africa (III E), West Africa (III C), North Africa (III B), and North East Africa (III A), as well as South Africa (III D) (Stelzig 2004:45–46). The initial division of the continent first took place in 1865, and was later corrected. As the former Africa curator and museum director Kurt Krieger noted in 1973, even though the introduction of the categories had somehow facilitated some work processes, it brought 'above all some substantial difficulties, because the regions had been selected too arbitrarily, so that overlaps couldn't be avoided' (Krieger 1973:105).[27]

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[27] See the original phrasing in German: 'Die Neuerung brachte in der Folgezeit neben einigen Arbeitserleichterungen auch erhebliche Schwierigkeiten mit sich, da die Regionen zu willkürlich gewählt waren, so dass sich Überschneidungen nicht immer vermeiden ließen' (Krieger and Koch 1973:105).

Figure 3.7 Map of Africa with division into different sub-categories, with national borders from 2004 (Stelzig 2004:391)

That these categorisations are consequential becomes especially evident for III C 14966. The object was marked as III C (West Africa). The stool was identified as originating in 'Urua', a historical region situated today in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Geographically speaking, this region was at the threshold of East and West Africa. Precise information on where the object had been produced was lacking, but it was likely that the object had been acquired in German East Africa.[28] That III C 14966 was marked as stemming from Western Africa, however, was influenced by underlying contemporary collecting conventions and aesthetic value regimes: Since around 1900, what was identified and valued as 'art' was mainly associated with West Africa. 'Art' in European conventions was synonymous with anthropomorphic and figurative elements, such as what the Luba-ised objects represented (Roberts and Roberts 1996:31; Schildkrout and Keim 1998). Contemporary Western aesthetic values contributed to the Luba-ised objects' early prominence in Western museums: when III C 14966 arrived in the museum, the department's director Felix von Luschan succeeded in persuading the collector to change the object's status from a loan to a gift. This change of status was probably motivated by the fact that von Luschan described the delivery as containing 'beautiful monuments of African art',[29] an exceptional categorisation for African artefacts at the time. Promising an exhibition with the newly acquired pieces, von Luschan offered a reward of a thousand marks to acquire more of those 'carved art pieces'.[30] Attributing this object a 'III E' would have contrasted with stereotypical ideas of Eastern Africa, a region that was predominantly Muslim, and thus, in conventional conceptions of this region, not representing objects with anthropomorphic features. The categorisation of III C 14966 thus shows how the categorisation system as III C or, conversely, not as III E, discreetly introduced and cemented hierarchies between different objects and within the collection: the regional categorisation perpetuated specific colonial ideas about 'Africa', and added symbolic value to certain objects (III C), whereas other objects were devalorised via their association with Eastern Africa.[31]

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[28] The object was given to the museum by the colonial officer Werner von Grawert based in German East Africa, who had not reportedly travelled outside the colony.

[29] '… schönen Denkmäler afrikanischer Kunst', E 1494/02.

[30] E 1555/1902; E 1494/1902.

[31] This asymmetry and hierarchy between East and West is confirmed in the Africa department's history, and Western museums more generally speaking. Few exhibitions and little research have been devoted to East Africa compared to West Africa, reflected for example in the curators' expertise in the department, which clearly concentrated on Western Africa.

Apart from the opposition of East versus West Africa, another division was drawn between what was depicted as 'North Africa' and the rest of the continent. This division appeared in the organisation of the departments. In the 1990s, the North Africa collections had been integrated into what used to be called the 'Islamic Orient' department (*Islamischer Orient*), which now bears the title 'North Africa, Western and Central Asia'. There was a rumour in the museum that the reorganisation of the collections depicted as 'III' was the fruit of a personal conflict within the department. Whatever the case, the reorganisation validated and reified common images of the African continent. Stereotypical representations divide the continent into a predominantly Muslim Northern part and what is sometimes problematically depicted as 'sub Saharan Africa', or the racialised term of *Schwarzafrika* (Black Africa). These divisions result from the colonial imagination of Africa as consisting of a 'white' North, to which European colonial powers granted a certain degree of culture and history, opposed to a Southern part, to which the West denied any history and culture (Arndt 2004; Machnik 2004; Arndt 2012:95–96).[32] This demarcation was legitimised by racial theories, which originated from or were supported by contemporary anthropology. The division additionally presupposes two distinct regional entities that suggest homogeneity in general, and religious homogeneity in particular: The 'North Africa' collections were integrated into the museum's 'Islamic' collections.[33] Not only does this classification deny the religious multiplicity within the different, associated regions, as well as the diversity of the collections that are part of the collection. It also contrasts the 'Islamic' North with the rest of the continent, implicitly suggesting an absence of Islam and its long histories on the rest of the continent.

In practical terms, the museum staff had problems drawing clear boundaries between the different regions and thus departments: 'No one managed to determine where sub-Saharan Africa ends', the storage manager Hans-Joachim Radosuboff wrote in his diary in 1998. For him, III B, North Africa, was clearly part of the collection 'Islamic Orient'.

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[32] For more discussion of racist terminology in the German language, see Arndt and Ofuatey-Alazard 2011; on the concepts of *Schwarzafrika* and *Schwarzer Kontinent*, see Arndt et al. 2004:204–208.

[33] Despite the denomination of the department as 'North Africa, West and Central Asia', the depiction of the department begins with classification as 'Islamic': 'The origins of the Islamic collection of today's Ethnologisches Museum can be dated back to the non-European holdings of the royal cabinets of art (*Kunstkammer*), which evidently contained individual items from Islamic countries from about 1830 onwards',
https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/about-the-collection.html, consulted 12 February 2019.

The clear division between North and South was challenged, however, by what he depicts as 'mixed regions' (*Mischregionen*) such as III A (North East Africa) and the 'Tuaregs' associated with III C (West Africa). These are just two of the manifold examples which raised doubts, according to Hans-Joachim Radosuboff.[34]

III C 14966's avatar constituted a whole which was simultaneously part of many parts. Its primary identity as being labelled as 'EM-Afrika' (Ethnological Museum-Africa) included a multiplicity of differentiating processes. These processes were historically situated in colonial and anthropological knowledge production and could be retraced by deciphering the category's coming into being in the museum's history. These categories and the inherent hierarchies were solidified by their continuous reproduction via the object's digital avatar.

'Geographical reference', Luba as 'ethnic group' and colonial continuations
Intended to provide precise territorial indications, the category of 'geographical reference' (*Geografischer Bezug*) sustained colonial concepts of temporality and culture. One needed to deal with 'inaccuracy', as Boris Gliesmann designated, when disentangling these different levels. Subsumed under 'geographical reference', the sub-categories 'Country' (*Land*), 'Region', and 'Ethnic Group' (*Ethnie*) compound historical, geographical, and cultural entities. The database dehistoricised contemporary and historical contexts, and finally omitted the most dominant political context of the time of the object's acquisition, namely the colonial governance of the 'Congo Free State', Belgian King Leopold II's private colony.[35] The 'country' was indicated as 'Demokratische Republik Kongo' (DRC), indicating a particular national constellation, only in place since 1997. The 'region' 'Urua' referred to a historical entity, on the west of Lake Tanganyika, now located in the DRC region of Katanga. Leaving both 'Urua' and 'DRC' without particular dates or denominations trapped them in what has been

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[34] Quotations from Radosuboff's diary entry for 2 January 1998, formerly accessible online, which he sent to the author.

[35] After the Berlin Conference in 1884/85, King Leopold II of Belgium was allowed by other Western powers to take charge of the territory that today is approximately synonymous with the DRC. From 1885 to 1908, he was the sovereign of the corporate state known as the Congo Free State, which he privately controlled through the non-governmental Association Internationale Africaine. In contrast to propaganda about 'civilising' the region, Leopold's reign was eventually and internationally dismissed as an infamy and barbarity itself. Public and diplomatic pressure led to the annexation of the colony to the Belgian state by 1908, when it became known as the Belgian Congo. The formation of the Belgian Congo involved the annexation of the former German-governed states of Burundi and Ruanda.

famously expressed by Johannes Fabian as an 'ethnographic present', denying both historicity to those who had produced the objects in question, as well as contemporaneity to those currently living in the DRC (Fabian 2014).

Equally part of the 'geographical reference', 'Luba' was referenced in the category *Ethnie*, which can be translated as 'ethnic group'. The attribution of names to societies in the context of European colonialism has been subject to critique: such names were ideologically accompanied by theories of social evolutionism and historical progress, and sometimes complicit with colonial governance. As with the notion of 'tribe', which 'is now commonly considered an ethnographic, rather than an analytical, term', attributions of 'ethnicity' continue to be contested (Sneath 2016; see also Arndt and Hornscheid 2004; Arndt 2011). Scholars in anthropology have argued that 'ethnicity' and 'tribe' can be designated as colonial inventions, part of what Peter Pels called an 'ontology of spatial discreteness'. Pels argues that this ontology

> derives from the imaginary geography of colonial anthropology characterised by the presupposition that human diversity has to be represented in terms of discrete ethnic units that normally occupy equally discrete territories – an imagination based in the cultural presuppositions underlying modern nation-states (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Stolcke 1995). (Pels 2008:283)

These colonial imaginations were closely entangled with and reflected by museum orderings in the metropoles. Paola Ivanov, for instance, defined the collections as 'material fiction', stating that 'the objects acquired in the nineteenth and early twentieth century can generally be seen as part of the European colonial appropriation of Africa, and the spatial, economic and political restructuring of the continent' (Ivanov 2005:42). The collections were used to map, research, commodify, and govern populations within the colony, a politics in which the adoption of culture zones as 'artistic regions' is complicit (Fabian 1998; Schildkrout and Keim 1998; Bennett et al. 2017). Sarah Van Beurden argues that stylistic analysis in Western museums and academia helped to solidify and naturalise the invented categories and identities. Despite the fact that artistic styles often exceeded colonial borders, which was partly acknowledged by scholars, they were nevertheless understood as unquestionable cultural units. These 'zones' were often named after dominant ethnic groups identified and imposed by the colonial power

(Kasfir 1984; Van Beurden 2013:478). The mapping of 'cultures' and 'artistic styles or regions' continues to be prominently used.[36]

With reference to III C 14966, the origins of the attribution 'Luba' predate colonial governance, but were fixed within the colonial context. Mary Nooter Roberts describes Luba people as 'a wash of myriad clan and lineage groupings that were more or less consolidated as a kingdom from approximately the seventeenth to late nineteenth century' (Nooter Roberts 1998:60). It was, however, not until the colonial period in the late nineteenth century that peoples referred to themselves homogeneously as 'Luba', when Arab traders and European explorers and travellers started to name them that way. As Pierre Petit notes, '"Luba" is a most ambiguous category that may refer to five thousand or five million people, depending upon its particular, situationally defined application' (quoted in Roberts and Roberts 1996:20). Based on the historical reputation of the old Luba Kingdom and the myths of the precolonial Luba 'empire', the 'Luba' were problematically described as a 'supertribe' during the colonial period, as Crawford Young shows. Associated with important intellectual capacities and economic success, notably by Western expatriates, 'Luba' were sometimes called the 'Europeans of Africa', comparisons sometimes going so far that their physical features were said to resemble those of Europeans (Young quoted in Roberts and Petit 1996:212). Those connotations had consequences for who decided, or not, to call themselves 'Luba'. Concerning artistic productions, stylistic devices considered 'Luba' were judged as a 'label of quality', leading to what has been referred to as 'Luba-ised' styles, such as Tabwa and Hemba peoples (Roberts and Petit 1996:236). Despite the vague definitions and colonial consolidation, the term continues to be prominently used, within and outside the museum context, including by people who identify as Luba.

Categories as 'historically situated artefacts'
The database's different categories can be understood as 'historically situated artefacts', as defined by Bowker and Star (Bowker and Star 1999b:278). The 'historically situated' in this case concerns the categories' particular genesis in and through colonial systems of governance, reproducing colonial categories of difference which underlie them. As 'artefacts', the museum's significant processes of categorising III C 14966 materialised in specific inscriptions of classifications and orderings, and in the solidification of temporal conceptions and cultural and geographical entities. This 'being caught' in colonial

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[36] Numerous exhibitions of African art use the mapping of different cultural groups. Examples include Junge, Ivanov, and Ethnologisches Museum 2005; LaGamma 2012:xiii; Chapuis, Fine, and Ivanov 2017.

epistemologies through the everyday use of the database allows me to understand this kind of difference making as a continuation of discriminatory practices. I use 'discriminating' in the sense that it distinguishes different entities from one another, charged, however ,with particular value regimes and hierarchies which rely on convictions of Western superiority and colonial modes of ordering the world. Discriminating is therefore used in the present tense here: the database not only inscribes *past* conceptualisation of difference via its *present* structure. It also provides a limited framework in which *present and future* (provenance) research would be integrated.

The categories could thus be seen as the avatar's limbs, parts of the body from which its being emerged. The categories and orderings predefined the avatar, and are consequential for how III C 14966 is understood, perceived, and valued, such as by often situating the object within hierarchical dichotomies: as 'ethnological', positioning it as 'non-European' versus 'European', or as 'culture' rather than 'art'. At the same time, contemporary anthropological imaginations such as of 'ethnic groups' continued to be confirmed by the museum's knowledge infrastructure, and were reflected in the avatar's structure. Finally, the avatar formed the prerequisite for how information gathered about the object could and would enter the database and be recorded for present and future research.

Enriching the avatar: the historiographies of Africa and colonial disparities

Departing from the avatar defined by the categories, the process of documenting and enriching the database would nourish the avatar further, helping it to grow. Documenting and enriching III C 14966 entailed both the identification and analysis of primary and secondary sources, and the consultation with external experts. Doing so revealed disparities concerning how the object's provenance was written about. The unequal distribution concerned the kind of sources available in the museum, which were produced in dialogue with and about the colonial system in German East Africa. This led to the focus on documenting only those who had collected objects, due to a lack of sources *on*, and importantly *by* those who had produced or lived with the material culture in question. The unequal distribution also concerned who was writing those histories, who was consulted, and who supposedly had the expertise on those objects – all of whom were located in Western academic institutions. This disparity was stabilised and fixed insofar as access to the collections and archives was difficult for outsiders to the Ethnological Museum. The museum was an organisation in which staff, and curators in

particular, functioned as gate-keepers for whom to (not) give access to information about the collections, inventories, and the collections generally speaking.

Humanising the avatar

The curator Paola Ivanov focused the research on how III C 14966 had circulated between its likely location of production in Central Africa, its acquisition by the collector Werner von Grawert, and its arrival in Germany. The distance between the location of production (referred to as 'Urua' in the archival files, located west of Lake Tanganyika) and the location of acquisition (German East Africa) was significant. Paola Ivanov's subsequent hypothesis was that a circulation of objects, of people, of ideas must have taken place in Africa before the objects were sent from German East Africa to Berlin.

During our initial training session, Boris Gliesmann told me how he approached 'the documentation of collections'.

> This is my favourite thing to do, the documentation of the collection. In other words: the documentation of the collectors! The people. To enrich the database with information on them, this is my passion, my playground. But it is extremely time consuming!

Being 'time consuming' indicates that the museum's collections are characterised by a significant lack of documentation, already lamented when the first items of the collection arrived around 1900 (Adolf Bastian in Zimmerman 2001:190). Despite the museum's effort and recurrent requests to document the incoming objects, people in the colony, such as the military, missionaries, or plantation owners, rarely provided information about what they sent to Berlin's museum (Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018:68–70).[37] This lack of accompanying information indicates that Berlin's Africa collections were above all the result of *colonial* collecting, notably contrasting with 'scientific collecting'. In contrast to colonial collecting, scientific collecting focused not only on *owning* but also on *knowing* the people by the means of their material culture.[38] The Africa department's collection consists substantially of objects acquired by colonial staff during Germany's colonial rule

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[37] For instance, starting in 1899, the department's director Felix von Luschan published 'Instructions for Ethnographic Observing and Collecting' in several editions, a booklet delivered to the colonies, including precise questions and requests to detail the use and function of the items collected.

[38] This distinction is not an exclusive one, but French museums, for example, unlike Berlin's Africa department, acquired a significant part of their collections via scientific expeditions. For details on the different modes of acquisition concerning the Musée de l'Homme, see Sarr and Savoy 2018:42–52.

in what were then called Togo, Cameroon, German East Africa, German South West Africa: About 64 per cent of today's Africa collections, consisting of approximately 75,000 objects, stems from what has been defined as 'colonial contexts', be they governed by German or other European colonial powers (German Museums Association 2018:16–23).[39] The lack of information was further accentuated given that the object cards had been destroyed.

Apart from the lack of sources, however, the quotation from Boris Gliesmann points to a seemingly natural mechanism omnipresent in provenance research in ethnological collections: for lack of other kinds of indications, the object is above all defined by the person who had *collected* it, not the person who had *produced*, *owned*, or *used* it. Boris Gliesmann distinguished between a 'collector' (*Sammler*) and a 'transferor' (*Veräußerer*). For him, a collector was not a gallerist with commercial intentions, nor 'Miss Erna from Steglitz' (a district in Berlin) who gives three objects to the museum. His understanding of a collector was someone who went on expeditions, someone usually employed by the colonial system. It implied understandings of the collection as disciplined, and possibly 'complete', reflecting scientific conventions of collecting in the nineteenth century, suggested for example by the museum's 'Instructions for Ethnographic Observing and Collecting' (Luschan 1904; Ankermann and Luschan 1914).

Boris Gliesmann's priority was to identify people individually, to give them a profile, a character, a face. He was engaged in the lengthy process of humanising the avatars – and objectifying the human. He changed the collector's discreet presence from a mere name into an individual, consistently enriching the avatars. The process consisted in pinning down key information, researching birth dates or locations. One of the ultimate aims was not to confound one person with another. In the case of III C 14966 and its collector Werner von Grawert, for example, Boris Gliesmann needed to distinguish sources that were marked as 'von Grawert' between Werner von Grawert and his brother Gideon von Grawert, who had also been present in the German colonies and provided the museum with objects. Practically speaking, the research comprised the consultation, transcription, and analysis of the museum's historical files, information that was subsequently expanded by bibliographical and online research. Boris Gliesmann could devote approximately an

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[39] The figure of 64 per cent stems from the following calculation: between 1884 and 1914 (German colonial rule), the African collections grew from 7,388 objects to 55,079 objects (Krieger and Koch 1973:106). Given that today's Africa collection is estimated at 75,000 objects, the difference constitutes approximately 64 per cent, Ethnological Museum's website, https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/sammlung.html, consulted 16 April 2019.

hour a week to this kind of detailed documentation of the collection, assembling, verifying, and adjusting information from literature, the museum archive, and online sources.

The presence and absence of sources in the archives

The provenance research was thus shaped by the *presence* of particular sources – produced within, for, and in dialogue with the colony – contrasted by the significant *absence* of local subjects, their voices, and perspectives. To retrace the object's trajectory meant identifying sources retracing the coloniser's trajectories. Then, in the case of III C 14966, this primarily translated as understanding the trajectories and life of Werner von Grawert. Here, we departed from basic information provided in the database. Werner von Grawert (1867–1918) had been colonial commander in 1898/99 of the town of Ujiji, which was then located in the administrative district on Lake Tanganyika, now part of Western Tanzania. Known for the fact that Henry Morton Stanley 'discovered' Dr Livingstone·there in 1871, Ujiji had been a trading hub in the region since the 1820s (Roberts 2013:203; Sheriff 1987). Von Grawert then moved to become colonial commander of 'Station Usumbara' (from 1898 to 1902, from 1904 to 1907), a town now located in the northeast of Tanzaniza. Several historical files (*Akte*) in relation to Werner von Grawert exist.[40] In contrast to the historical inventory which is available as scans, the historical records are only accessible physically and stored in the museum's archive.[41] To trace the collector's trajectories and interactions, we needed to move to the museum's archive to consult the related historical files.

We changed location from Boris Gliesmann's office, walking through the labyrinth of the museum to reach the archive, still located within the museum. This was exceptional (and is currently changing), because most museum archives had been transferred to the SMB's Central Archive.[42] The museum's archivist and Boris Gliesmann had keys to access the archive. The archive access policy was not restrictive, but it accorded the curators priority of access over the files.[43] As objects in storage, the documents were toxic

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[40] E 1555/1902; E 1494/1902.

[41] In the long run, this will change as the museum will scan and make publicly available all of its archival files up to 1947. See also note 45.

[42] The museum archivist Anja Zenner reported that only the archive of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte was still in possession of its archive, but had much more staff than the Ethnological Museum to look after it.

[43] Visitors and researchers had access to the files through the museum's library. With advance notice, specific files could be made available. Boris Gliesmann and the archivist answered visitors' requests, and the

because they had been treated with chemicals for their protection. The air in the archive was contaminated, particulates, heavy metals, and pesticides had been identified. Some museum staff described the conditions in the archive as 'dilettante': the files were stored in wooden cupboards, with significant air and light exposure because of the old wooden windows.[44] The transfer to the Central Archive, some museum staff hoped, would finally put the files in 'ideal' conservation standard conditions. Still undefined at the time, the definite move of the archive to the Central Archive has now been planned. It is accompanied by the cleaning and digitisation of what are understood as the archive's historical files (up to 1947), with the aim of making them accessible online in 2021. At the same time, this entailed that the files were only accessible as microfiche at the Central Archive, and that the physical files would be kept afterwards in a 'silent archive' (*stilles Archiv*), protecting them from any further damage through physical interaction.[45]

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files could be read and photographed within the museum's library space. The museum's curators, however, had priority of access to the files. They could keep the files for longer periods of time, and had the privilege of reading and keeping the files in their offices, or working in the archive space itself.

[44] See for example fieldnotes from 22 July 2014.

[45] Bibliothek und Archiv des Ethnologischen Museums website: 'Der historische Aktenbestand des Museums für Völkerkunde wird gereinigt und bis voraussichtlich 2021 im Rahmen eines DFG-Projektes digitalisiert. Ziel des DFG-Projektes "Digitalisierung des historischen Archivs im Ethnologischen Museum – 1830–1947" ist es, die Dokumente dauerhaft zu sichern und die Digitalisate im Internet zu veröffentlichen', https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/bibliothek-und-archiv.html, consulted 2 February 2019

Figure 3.8 The entrance door to the archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 3.9 Boris Gliesmann working in the archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figures 3.10–3.12 Workplaces in and views of the archive, photograph by Marion Benoit, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

When I looked around I saw that the archive had been a cosy workplace for some of the museum's employees once: even though not in use any more, personal items, such as a radio and ashtrays were lying around. It was obvious that people had worked in and with the archive intensively, taking their time. The archive was located in two rooms, separated by chronological order. The 'older' files (up to 1947) were stored in one room with five different cupboards, which reflected four continents as well as 'museum history'. The absence of 'Europe' as a continent, and thus a particular cupboard, exemplified the historical self-understanding of the museum as being about 'others'. The 'younger' files were stored in the other room.

As Boris Gliesmann highlighted, III C 14966 was collected during 'Prussian rule', which implied, in his understanding, an accurate documentation of the museum's activities. In 1906, responsibility for documenting the collection's traffic and growth had been transferred to the regional departments, which thereby gained in power and independence.[46] Whereas this shift of responsibility didn't change the accuracy of the documentation at the time, the documentation became fragmentary after the Second World War. The systematic approach had been replaced by the curator's individual responsibility, and thus depended on their personality and will. Even though physically separated, the collections of objects and historical files reflected each other. Concerning the files related to III C 14966, they were recorded and bundled chronologically as well as regionally: like the collection inventory, the system followed the same two-step sequence (inventory followed by regional attribution).

Several archival files were registered under von Grawert's name, of which some were directly linked to the objects.[47] Boris Gliesmann helped read the files' content. Through his reading, not only was the writing made easier to decypher thanks to his trained eye, he also explained and disentangled the colonial and administrative apparatus behind the delivery. He located the different people signing the reports and letters in the colony (Dar es Salaam), as well as in Berlin, rendering the process more comprehensible. Boris Gliesmann knew and imagined the people. His anecdotes about the museum's employees in Berlin, illustrating their personal characteristics, were followed by detailed accounts of the colonial administrative system in German East Africa. By spending several years of his life within the archive, Boris Gliesmann seemed negotiate the archive via a kind of

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[46] Fieldnotes from discussion with Boris Gliesmann in response to a first draft of the chapter, 16 April 2018.

[47] E 1555/1902; E 1494/1902.

cartography of objects, people, networks, and processes. 'Sometimes, it's like a crime novel here!', Boris Gliesmann liked to exclaim.[48] When I learnt to work with the archival files myself, I realised how some people's shape appeared more clearly, others less so. The form and style of the handwriting,[49] the choice of words, the order of paragraphs, made me project the person's characteristics ('sloppy', 'condescending', 'neat'). It was a trigger for the imagination during a lengthy and tedious work process. It also provoked emotional reactions, more or less welcome. Sometimes one giggled, when encountering the people's eccentricities. Or one remained in shock or disgust when coming across traces or even detailed descriptions of colonial violence.[50]

The file linked to Werner von Grawert contained drafts of letters from Felix von Luschan to the collector, as well as a report on the arrival of the objects, object lists, calculations of transportation costs. Werner von Grawert's letters to the museum were not documented in the file. III C 14966 had been part of an important shipment of 108 objects that arrived in Berlin in 1902 and 1903, but no information about the object's circulation and mode of acquisition on site was identifiable.[51] With few results on the objects's circulation, we reached out to external experts and secondary literature.

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[48] Boris Gliesmann, fieldnotes from 23 February 2015.

[49] A lot of the letters were written by anonymous museum staff as copies of original letters or dictated. Still, exceptions in individuals' handwriting existed.

[50] One letter stayed in my memory: the department's director Felix von Luschan ironically commented on an offer to the museum to buy several objects, in red. His depictions of the prices as 'exorbitant' and exclamations indicating 'Aha! I knew that already!', describing the person as the 'great Unknown' literally made me laugh (E 1078/1900). Paola Ivanov and Kristin Weber-Sinn, on the contrary, depicted their encounter with archival files linked to colonial wars as causing 'shock and anger' (Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018:118).

[51] The consignment was split and III C 14966 arrived with other highly valued objects in the collection directly from Ballenstedt in the Harz region, where Werner von Grawert was residing at the time. Today, 66 of these objects are still in the Berlin database. Twenty-two objects were given to the Linden-Museum Stuttgart as *Doubletten* (doubles), and Herr Gliesmann assumed that thus 12 missing objects could be considered lost.

Figure 3.13 The museum library, accessible by museum staff, © photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

The research hypothesis and the reaching out to external expertise

The research in yet another of the museum's locations – the library, with its primary and secondary sources – also led to insufficient evidence. Within the research team, we consulted other sources in the library to find traces of von Grawert, such as the German *Kolonialblatt*, which reported on missions in the colonies, that were archived in the library. Given that no reports on any mission were available, we assumed that von Grawert didn't travel westwards, which is where the objects that had entered the collections had probably been produced. The information available on Werner von Grawert in relation to our research request was thus minimal, even though several letters existed. We still didn't know where the object had been acquired and how.

Reaching out to experts in different universities and museums, we asked whether they were aware of archival traces which mentioned the circulation of objects in the region (German East Africa and Congo Free State), and in particular, whether they were aware of (possibly violent) transactions. Whereas all researchers – historians and anthropologists alike – approved Paola Ivanov's hypothesis that the objects may have circulated via Swahili trade caravans or as diplomatic gifts or trophies, none of them had come across specific sources that could confirm it.[52]

The first hypothesis we worked on concerned the circulation of the object itself. We were looking for traces which could prove that people had transported and exchanged objects at the time, both locals and colonisers. The objects could have been acquired by sale, barter, confiscation, or looting, all common forms of acquisition, but we were particularly interested in how the trade was organised around Lake Tanganyika and the functioning of local markets. Paola Ivanov argued that the object might have reached German East Africa through wide-spread caravans and slave traders. This would imply that the object might already have had the status of commodity then. Research had shown that a market of 'ethnographica' was emerging at the time in the same region (Schildkrout and Keim 1998). Allan Roberts, professor at UCLA, extended the hypothesis by raising the possibility that objects could have been used as diplomatic gifts.

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[52] Email exchanges: Margareta von Oswald with Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, professor emeritus of African history at Paris Diderot, 1 September 2014; with Philip Gooding, PhD candidate at SOAS London, 18 July 2014; with Adrian S. Wisnicki, director of the Livingstone Online project, 20 August 2014; with Katharina Zöller, junior fellow and historian at Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, 13 May 2015/16 July 2015; email exchange between Verena Rodatus and Allen F. Roberts, 25 June 2014.

He pointed to the prominent figure of the slave trader Tippo Tip, who might have been involved in such diplomatic exchanges.[53]

The finding of any source could lead to great excitement, which could subsequently be dampened just as quickly. The finding of a drawing was such a case, which Julien Volper, keeper at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, referred to in a conversation. Julien Volper had researched the circulation of a Luba mask. He had come across an early drawing by V. L. Cameron from 1877, in which a child is carrying an object, on the right-hand side of the image (Volper 2010:13). In discussion of the image with Pierre Petit, a professor at ULB in Brussels and an expert in Luba culture, he advised approaching the validity of colonial imagery with great caution. Drawings especially, he warned, were often the product of colonial imaginations and risked having little to do with local realities – a risk made all the more probable by the fact that the drawing was by Daniel Oliver, and not the book's author.[54]

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[53] Email exchange between Verena Rodatus and Allen F. Roberts, 25 June 2014.

[54] Conversation with Pierre Petit, 25 November 2015. The book can be consulted as a high-quality scan at https://archive.org/details/acrossafrica00came/page/357, consulted 29 September 2019.

SLAVE-GANG.

Figure 3.14 Image of a slave caravan, with the caption 'Slave-Gang', taken from V. L. Cameron, Across Africa *(1877) (Cameron and Oliver 1877:357)*

Another possibility was the objects' movement via European colonial officials and trade or exchange *amongst* European colonial staff and 'explorers'. Barbara Plankensteiner quotes the German 'explorer' Hans Meyer in a note concerning trade around Lake Tanganyika (1913):

> Since it is impossible to collect ethnographically in a methodical way when travelling quickly through the countries, one can only collect what one finds by chance rather than systematically. In the short time I spent visiting, I made an effort to complete my travel collection with collections or good individual pieces by European residents, who had the opportunity to collect extensively during their lengthy stay. (Hans Meyer in Plankensteiner 1998:120)

Other than the circulation of the object via people, another option consisted is circulation by those who produced the objects, as well as the circulation of ideas. Prerequisite for all of these kinds of circulations was the pronounced caravan and slave trade in the region. Artists could wander from place to place, and produce objects wherever they happened to be. Victims of the slave trade from Congo were transported long distances to achieve higher prices, mainly to Tanzania. Allan Roberts argues that slaves continued to produce objects in very different places and that religious practices and aesthetic forms from Congo circulated supra-regionally, citing the Tabwa as an example. The central position of and admiration for the Kingdom of Luba in the region encouraged the circulation of ideas and adoption of their style. The royal aesthetics, expressed through body art, sculpture, and performance, were highly regarded and embraced by immediate neighbours, as well as more distant societies, such as in Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi. These practices spread because of hierarchical relationships and by force, but also through what Roberts depicts as 'prestige through association' (Roberts 2013:201).

The research through external secondary sources and experts allowed further confirmation of Paola Ivanov's hypothesis on the circulation of people, things, and ideas in the region. Nevertheless, the results remained speculative as a result of insufficient evidence. The scant particular traces of how the object might have been acquired were diffuse in time and space (Cameron and Oliver 1877; Mayer 1913). Direct evidence in relation to III C 14966 didn't exist. Whereas the research is summarised in a short paragraph here, virtually and physically it ranged widely: in the attempt to reconstruct

and understand past relationships, new relationships were constructed in the present, people and things linked and reshuffled in different ways. The research involved the bringing together of sources which were spatially spread and materially diverse, locating them in their historicity. We physically and virtually moved through offices, computer screens, the archive, the library. These movements enabled different encounters with the materials available: historical documents in their fragility; scans of the historical inventory, flattened on screens; digitally assembled information; printed scans of historical originals which turned into 'originals' themselves via the stamps and notes added to them. The time-consuming research process left us with archive transcriptions, a collection of publications, email correspondence with external experts. We manoeuvred within the boundaries of the restricted sources and resources which the museum provided.

The diversity of data was linked via the digital avatar. The database in its relationality indicated historical and current sources, but the findings and transcriptions were still fragmented and scattered in their different digital and physical parts. The avatar was a mesh of those different material sources, including the ongoing, different practices and procedures associated with them. Through the transfer of the physical to the virtual, or from one digital source to another, the museum's temporalities, spaces, and materials were assembled and blurred into a virtual whole.

Unequal distribution, disparity, and the problems of access
These research results echo Arlette Farge's descriptions of what defines archival research, namley as being 'forever incomplete' (Farge 2013:55). The archives were incomplete in relation to local voices in particular. This absence pointed to the denial of the locals' agency, presence and even existence, as well as the omission of the function, production, or transaction of III C 14966. By contrast, what *was* documented were traces of a colonial apparatus of extracting the material culture from the colonies – logistically sophisticated and financially well equipped: The (minimal) documentation of shipping, transport costs, and the department director's appraisal and request for more objects show the entanglement of colonialism with museums and academia. This documentation reflects the contemporary department director Felix von Luschan's ambitions to 'systematically' collect, in order 'to raise an inventory, as it were, of the complete cultural heritage' (Ankermann and Luschan 1914:9).[55]

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[55] Translated from the German by the author: 'Wo es sich aber nicht nur um die Beschaffung einzelner Gegenstände handelt, da sammle man systematisch, d.h. so, dass die Sammlung ein möglichst

For Farge, 'today, to use the archives is to translate this incompleteness into a question' (Farge 2013:55). The question would translate into how to respond to this incompleteness, such as with attempts to generate alternatives to and interpretations of the collections. However, in contrast to opening up and searching alternative interpretations and methods to complement the colonial sources, the Ethnological Museum's collections and archives remain largely inaccessible to outsiders. Of the approximately 495,000 data sets which have been inventoried, only 71,500 data sets are freely accessible online (2019).[56] Only this fraction – mostly the pieces considered 'masterpieces' and published elsewhere – was accorded public access. This meant, in turn, that users – be they academics, curators, artists, activists – were victims of the museum's priority setting. Moreover, crucial information has been missing in the openly accessible database, including the date and mode of acquisition, and sometimes the collector. Being available only in German, access is reduced to German-speakers only. Whereas the archives are freely accessible on location, access to the museum's complete database and thus its collections is reserved to museum staff. Functioning as gate-keepers, the museum curators decide whether or not to answer requests addressed to the museum.[57] The fact that the curators' names and contacts are not identifiable on the museum's website further restricts access. An updated inventory catalogue, or a simple listing of the museum's collection, doesn't exist. Access to the collection thus remains reserved to those who have the financial and symbolic capital to access it from *within* the museum.

Apart from confirming the museum's entanglement with colonialism, analysing this *process* of provenance research shows an *unequal distribution* concerning where and how knowledge about the object is and can be produced. In other words, conditions for producing knowledge depend on where the resources (financial, personnel) and sources (library, archives, collections) are concentrated. In view of the lack of or limited (digital) access to both collections and archives, the disparity of access doesn't only show a *difference* and *asymmetry*, but an *inequality*, even *injustice* in these politics of concentration. Pointing to unequal distribution here, I don't aim to question the validity of expertise in Western institutions, nor to reduce their position to their geographical location solely.

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erschöpfendes Bild der Kultur des betreffenden Stammes gibt. … Diese sind also in erster Linie zu sammeln; es ist gewissermaßen ein Inventar des gesamten Kulturbesitzes aufzunehmen.'

[56] SMB database consulted 11 February 2019, email from Boris Gliesmann 11 February 2019.

[57] The curators are *a priori* obliged to answer all requests, as they are the keepers of a public collection, but *de facto* can ignore requests as every working professional can ignore emails.

Rather, I want to indicate the ongoing disparity of who is consulted, who is given voice, who is given access, and thus the right and opportunity to write these histories and to own the resulting knowledge. In the conventional paths of provenance research I was involved in, this concentration of knowledge within the museum was encouraged because there was no attempt to complement the analysis of established European, colonial sources located in museums and universities, and the consultation of 'experts' in these same organisations. This lack of a search for sources 'elsewhere' was justified by us as a team of researchers by reference to a lack of time, networks, contacts, or a presumed absence of local institutions and experts, as well as by the difficulty of working and doing fieldwork in war-torn Congo.[58]

The dissemination, accessibility, and sustainability of the provenance research results were further challenged by the insufficiency of the museum's database system to record the available information: concerning the research on III C 14966, the research ultimately resulted in a paper folder, securely stored in the curator's office. Initiating the research, as Paola Ivanov did, translated thus into monopolising and basically owning the research and its results, involuntarily or not. Through this lack of systematic documentation, the curator's role was thus further valorised as centralising the knowledge on the collections. The museum's power and authority has thus been conspicuously upheld – with the museum keeping and owning the collections, as well as centralising and controlling the knowledge produced around them. This unequal distribution and concentration of knowledge further raised questions of sustainability, as well as the transfer and documentation *within* the museum. In a context with more project-based provenance research, the risk of losing knowledge with the departure of staff was present. These questions seemed all the more urgent, as despite a possible increase and facilitation of traffic by means of emails, the documentation of these exchanges seemed all the more difficult, and ever more dependent on the curator's personality and stance towards the issue. Transcending this access policy was thus especially possible for 'insiders' – curators and researchers acknowledged for their museum research. Any kind of 'outsider', and notably those unable to speak German and decode the museum's mechanisms, faced important restrictions in so doing.

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[58] Research including fieldwork existed, but was dated (Nooter Roberts 1991). Pierre Petit had equally done fieldwork in the 1990s, but had not published his dissertation. Since then, I was told, fieldwork had been difficult due to the political circumstances in the DRC.

Attempts to complexify the avatar: struggling with the museum's knowledge infrastructures

The process of provenance research didn't only concern an analysis of the present taxonomies and historical sources associated with the object. By working through the museum's knowledge infrastructures, I identified the *persistence of*, but also the *resistance to* colonial modes of ordering and perceiving the world. III C 14966 was proof of one particular attempt to counter colonial epistemologies, as the category 'producer' ('Buli workshop') testified to. Through the adding of categories, and adjustment and amendments of names, the avatar's form could potentially be changed, and shaped differently. This last section of the chapter explores the potentials and limitations associated with amending the grids in which the avatar was situated.

The paradoxes of naming

The analysis of an object's reception history is part of researching an object's provenance. III C 14966's history after it arrived in Berlin is proof of a contemporary attempt to counter colonial epistemologies: I discuss this attempt with the ambivalences and paradoxes of naming and valuing African artefacts in terms of *appropriation* here.

The category of the 'producer' as 'Buli workshop' was an exception in MuseumPlus. Generally speaking, those who produced the objects remain anonymous in ethnological collections. Implicit in the lack of the contemporary documenting of producers, and individuals more generally speaking, was a denial of individual creativity in societies considered localised, collective, nature-bound, and isolated as cultural entities by colonial governance and complicit knowledge production. The retrospective identification and attribution of 'masters', 'workshops' or simply 'artists' to particular objects or groups of objects has been a progressively established reaction to the anonymity of collections. The recognition of an individual author contributed to counter colonial imaginations of Africa and its cultural production, and to recognise individual creativity and artistic genius within African cultures.

III C 14966 reflected this attempt to counter anonymity. The stool belonged to a group of objects, to which the Belgian anthropologist Frans M. Olbrechts had attributed a particular author since the 1930s, the 'master of the long-faced style', also known as the 'Buli Master'. The 'Buli' style is characterised by what has been described as outsized long hands and faces, also depicted as 'Disneyesque' by the prominent British

anthropologist William Fagg (quoted in de Grunne 2011). The author was named after the village where two sculptures were acquired (Vogel 1980:133; Nooter Roberts 1998:61). Olbrechts is acknowledged as the founder of the method of morphological analysis when it comes to collections of African origin. His method consisted of stylistic criticism, identifying the artistic styles of different objects kept in Western museums. The naming practice therefore has its origins during colonial times, but continues to be used extensively and increasingly in the ongoing 'invention' of 'masters'.[59] This and similar processes of naming have had complex, and even paradoxical, consequences. Mary Nooter Roberts describes the politics of naming as 'both an appropriation of identity and an imposition of it. To withhold a person's identity may be a form of protection or of subjugation. To impose a name may be a form of repression or of elevation' (Nooter Roberts 1998:56). This paradox of naming was reflected in the reception history of III C 14966.

On the one hand, challenging the alleged anonymity of African artists and showing an interest in the artist's style and characteristics reflected a political standpoint. Olbrechts built his thinking on the anthropologist Franz Boas's concept of culture areas and his conviction of racial equality, a conviction which rejected evolutionist theories dominant at the time. Paired with art-historical methods aimed at identifying artist's 'hands' (Giovanni Morelli, nineteenth century), this theoretical background allowed for the recognition of individual artists in the study of groups and societies which had long been denied individual authorship and style by Western academia. Predecessors of stylistic classification, such as Eckart von Sydow, had already worked with III C 14966 (von Sydow 1923). That 'von Sydow' was prominently marked in the object's first historical inventory highlighted the importance of the shift of perception concerning African artefacts, as well as the object's continuous recognition as 'art' (Petridis 2001:123). The Buli Master was the first individual artist to be retroactively assigned to a group of African objects, followed by the invention of a number other 'masters', such as the Master of the Cascade Headdress or the Warua Master, all put forward by Western scholars, dealers, and collectors (Nooter Roberts 1998:61).

On the other hand, the reassessment of anonymous as authored and singular pieces of art contributed to transform the museum's collection to 'another exceptional resource of the

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[59] In an interview with the art consultant and expert in the art market for African art Bruno Claessens, he confirmed the explosion in 'masters' in the last two decades, notably in relation to the auction market, Antwerp, 5 November 2015.

colony' (Van Beurden 2013:483). Objects identified as 'Buli', and III C 14966 in particular, have been outstanding examples of processes of the production of value via the interlinked resource production of the museum, the market, and academia. In its more than a hundred years in the Berlin museum, III C 14966 has been exhibited in museums and private institutions in Europe (Paris 1964, Maastricht 1991, Paris 1993, Brussels 2001), the USA (New York 1990) and South America (Rio de Janeiro 2004, Santiago de Chile 2013).[60] Publications and the museum's photo archives show how the object's exhibition and international publication history have continuously confirmed its exceptional reception, which had started with its denomination as 'art' upon its arrival in the museum in 1902.

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[60] This list of exhibitions is not exhaustive. It includes examples of exhibitions I could trace in the museum's database and archive (loan procedures). Early publications include those of prominent scholars Carl von Eistein and Eckhart Sydow, as well as an exhibition and publications by the German artist collective Berliner Secession (Einstein 1921; von Sydow 1923; Berliner Secession (Association) 1932), and exhibitions in London, Paris, and New York, amongst others (Musée des Arts Décoratifs (France) and Fagg 1964; Fagg 1966; Koloss, Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York 1990).

Carl Einstein, Afrikanische Plastik, 1920

Eckart von Sydow, Ahnenkult und Ahnenbild der Naturvölker, 1923

Berliner Secession, Afrikanische Plastik, 1932

Frans Olbrechts, Les Arts Plastiques du Congo Belge, 1959 (1946),

William Fagg, Afrique, cent tribus cent chefs-d'oeuvre, 1964

1969, Kurt Krieger, Westafrikanische Plastik, Band III

Hans-Joachim Koloss, Art of Central Africa. Masterpieces from the Berlin Museum for Völkerkunde, 1990

Hans-Joachim Koloss, Kings of Africa, 1992; Peter Junge, Kunst aus Afrika, 2005

Figure 3.15 Photographs of III C 14966 in different publications throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

Figure 3.16 Screenshot of the promotional video advertising the sale of 'A masterpiece of the "Master of Buli"', produced by Sotheby's in 2010 (Sotheby's 2010b)

The subsequent symbolic value encouraged the object's commodification and translated into financial value. The perceived rarity, both of the object and of the occasion to acquire such an object, is reflected in the record prices which caryatid stools associated with 'Buli' reached on the auction market. In 1979, one object was sold for £249,000 (Sotheby's 1979); in 2010, a similar stool fetched 5.4 million euros at auction (Sotheby's 2010a).

Disputes over 'Buli' have been ongoing. They concern the particularity of the artistic identity (is it one artist, a workshop, a generation?), but also which object is considered 'Buli' or not, and thus exceptionally valuable or not.[61] The number of 'Buli' objects has continuously risen from 12 objects identified by Frans M. Olbrechts in the 1930s to 29 being under scrutiny in 2011.[62] As the stakes are high, the agents involved in these disputes are diverse, and reflect the close entanglement between the market, academia, and the museum particularly well. The caryatid 'Buli' stool sold in 2010 exemplifies the interrelated process of value production, as the auction house didn't only publish a glossy catalogue and release a video, praising the object, but also entrusted the catalogue entry to François Neyt, professor emeritus in anthropology (UCLouvain) and acclaimed expert in Luba societies. By reason of his academic reputation, he thus automatically authenticated and valued the piece (Neyt 2010). In Berlin's Ethnological Museum, notably in contrast to my fieldwork in museums in Paris and Brussels – capitals of the trade in what is still often referred to 'primitive arts' – the market felt rather absent. Still, it was not exempt from these dynamics. In 2001, III C 14966 went on loan to be exhibited in a bank in the major exhibition 'Masterhands' in Brussels, co-organised by the dealer and collector Bernard de Grunne, himself in possession of a Buli sculpture (de Grunne and Bassani 2001). The disputes on the identity of 'Buli' are also ongoing because naming as a practice is valuable in itself: the acknowledgement of an individual author accentuates the absence of an identified individual. An absence, Sarah Van Beurden argues, which was subsequently occupied by either the collector, scholar, or

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[61] For a recent overview of the ongoing debate, see LaGamma 2012:263–265. Different positions include the following: Neyt 1994:216–217; Pirat 1996; de Strycker and de Grunne 1996; Pirat 2001.

[62] In his initial analysis, Olbrechts identified 12 sculptures as originating from the Buli master, confirmed by the British anthropologist William Fagg in 1948 (quoted in Pirat 1996:56). In 1980, the art historian Susan Vogel identified 20 objects authored by the master, in 1996, Claude-Henri Pirat produced a *catalogue raisonné* with 19 identified Buli pieces. In 2011, Alisa LaGamma mentions 29 objects which have been scrutinised for evidence of belonging to the Buli legacy (Vogel 1980:133; Pirat 1996:56–57; LaGamma 2012:263).

dealer who had 'discovered' the master, or the museum in charge of keeping it (Van Beurden 2013:483).

Beyond the value generated by and for Western institutions, assigning an individual artist to III C 14966 contradicts Luba definitions of authorship. The attribution reveals, on the contrary, a modern Western understanding about the status of art. Mary Nooter Roberts, in her fieldwork about the Luba in the then Republic of Zaire, never came across court historians who mentioned individual artists (Nooter Roberts 1998:56). She demonstrates that during the conception and production of a sculpture, the Luba's concept of remembrance was at play, which integrated several people and spirits. In contrast to the individual artist, Nooter Roberts refers to how Luba artists participate in a 'transpersonal identity', 'the phenomenon whereby artists become subsumed by the larger network of relationships – both social and spiritual – of which they are part' (ibid.:67). As James Clifford noted, the Western understanding of individual artistry cannot simply be imposed upon non-Western cultures, as definitions of originality, authenticity, and authorship differ. He stated that '"culture" and "art" can no longer be simply *extended* to non-Western peoples and things. They can at worst be *imposed*, at best *translated* – both historically and politically contingent operations' (Clifford 1988:236).

Understanding the naming of Buli as such a form of imposition, I argue that the processes of naming and valuing can be considered in terms of *appropriation*. As Benoît de L'Estoile has argued, 'colonial relations, often stamped by domination and violence, are however more aptly characterised by a multifarious process of appropriation than by the sheer negation of the colonised' (de L'Estoile 2008:268). Whereas naming can be interpreted as an attempt to repair and engage in the nuanced and complex character of colonial relations, the appropriation seems also to result here in a second expropriation, as the symbolic and financial value generated ultimately continue to serve Western institutions. The category of the 'producer' and the accompanying processes of naming and valuing stood out above the ambivalence of the attempt to counter colonial epistemologies. At the suggestion of a museum employee, the Ethnological Museum's staff considered the addition of categories as just one amongst other methods to challenge the ways in which object definitions could be expanded.

Manoeuvring within and opposing the limited infrastructures
Museum staff, and curators in particular, were aware of the problems and historical genealogy of the museum's database. Attempts to circumvent and challenge the

categories and their limitations exist and continue to be invented in the museum. Two attempts to change started to be used with regard to the database when I was working in the museum: the adding of categories and the erasure and replacement of names considered derogatory.

The adding of categories could concern the multiplication of categories which already existed, such as adding another 'geographical reference' to III C 14966, indicating the colonial political context 'Congo Free State'. One method for challenging historical epistemologies was the introduction of the sub-category 'historical depiction' (*historische Bezeichnung*) as part of the same category 'geographical reference'. When I worked at the museum, the category was notably used to indicate historical descriptions of locations and places. The sub-category helped to nuance and complexify the object's digital presence and to avoid confounding temporalities, such as indicated in the analysis of the 'geographical reference'. The adding of sections in the database allowed for more space to record research results: whereas in my time at the museum, the only option to report particular research trajectories was the 'Notes' field in the database, in 2016, a category devoted to 'provenance' was added to the database.[63]

In 2018, Boris Gliesmann explained during a discussion of the first draft of this chapter that the category of 'historical depiction' was also more frequently used to engage in a 'transfer of categories' (*Kategorieüberführung*), in which depictions considered derogatory (*abwertend*) and offensive (*anstößig*) were replaced by depictions considered more neutral.[64] One of these categories, he explained, was his favourite, 'magic' (*Zauber*).

> 'Magic', 'charm', 'holy substance' (*Zauber*, *Magie*, *heilige Substanz*), these are the categories we are now pushing into the subfield of 'historical depiction'. One method we pursue is to transform all of the 'magic things' (*Zaubersachen*) into 'medicine things' (*Medizinsachen*).

This was, for example, the case for a research and exhibition project in Tanzania, which featured one important object formerly depicted as 'magic bag' (*Zaubersack*) that the curators renamed as a 'bag with objects used in the practice of medicine' (*Beutel mit medizinischen Objekten*) (Reyels, Ivanov, and Weber-Sinn 2018: 84, 202).

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[63] Interview with Boris Gliesmann, 8 November 2016.
[64] Notes from a conversation with Boris Gliesmann, 16 April 2018.

> If you type anything with magic, or anything with witchcraft into the search machine, there are several hundred things which appear. 'Fetish device' (*Fetischgerät*); 'miraculous impact' (*wundertätige Wirkung*); 'amulet against malicious witchcraft' (*Amulett gegen bösartige Hexerei*); 'hunt charm' (*Jagdzauber*); 'something that has the power to make rain' (*die Kraft, Regen zu machen*).

Boris Gliesmann explained that it was not only difficult to replace these names with others considered more appropriate. The numerous depictions related to 'magic' were difficult to identify and find if your aim was to change these depictions, systematically, amongst so many other thousands of objects.

> I hear the curators say: 'Oh, this is a colonial use of language to depict this object, it was only used to depreciate (*abwerten*) those from who it was collected!' I know the debates and of course, we are working on it. But pragmatically, it is difficult to tackle them, it needs a lot of time, thought, research, and expertise. And also, we cannot record the discussions in the database!

Similar problems arose with the category of *Ethnie*, which Boris Gliessmann depicted as the next 'construction site' (*Baustelle*) he was dealing with, in particular in relation to the Africa department.

> There are so many ethnic groups in Africa, more than 300 in the Congo collections alone I believe! 'Hottentots' (*Hottentotten*) are just one example, but there are so many more. We cannot continue to use some of these depictions, as they are 'malicious' (*bösartig*). We have different categories which we use, such as 'external designation' (*Fremdbezeichnung*) or 'ethnic subgroup' (*Ethnie Untergruppe*), but all of them carry their own problems.

The attention devoted to the Ethnological Museum and its collection in the context of the Humboldt Forum heightened the pressure concerning data work, both in its quality and quantity.

> The Forum has an enormous number of requests concerning the collections, and of course, in particular concerning objects which might have a problematic provenance, or a particular role. People are queuing up like at the doctor's for these kinds of data! And sometimes, the names considered problematic are

communicated to the public, when there are specific demands on objects. Then, people turn up and complain that the museum hasn't overcome its obsolete spirit (*altzeitlichen Geist überwunden*).

Another side effect of the preparations concerning the Humboldt Forum exhibitions was that activity around the database had grown significantly. Objects needed to enter the data system to be communicated to the exhibition designers. I smiled in surprise when Boris Gliesmann said that 'the work has accelerated, which is actually *not so good*'. He recounted how there were approximately 500 new entries per week, with 60 people having access to the database.[65] However, for documenting the collections, Boris Gliesmann explained, one needed time, accuracy and care. He took on the role of what he framed as 'data police'.

> I adopt the role of a traffic policeman. I take care that no one crosses the street when it's red and that pedestrians and cyclists have their rights, too. And that no one rides their bikes on the sidewalk, you know?

As an example, he pointed to the useful, but dangerous function of copy/paste within the database. One could copy data sets, indicating which categories, such as the material or the location, should be repeated for the following object. This could be useful, such as when it came to the inventory of the manifold weapons in a collection. Some curators, as he noticed, just pressed the 'yes' button to duplicate categories and produced a lot of 'nonsense' by not examining the details of the objects. More data entries turned into more training, more data control, more 'traffic policing' for him. 'I see the mistakes immediately. There are gaps, discrepancies, questionable assignments.'

In view of the pressure to document and inventory as many objects as possible, the risks of naming didn't only appear with reference to object depictions considered offensive. At a workshop with museum staff, Boris Gliesmann described the slippery terrain in which one navigates when labelling objects.[66] Boris Gliesmann characterised the database's category 'notion' as the object's 'business card' (*Visitenkarte*). It needed to be as precise as possible, and ideally deduced directly from the collection's historical documentation. He

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[65] Gliesmann explained the situation to his colleagues at a workshop, 4 November 2013.

[66] This workshop took place on 4 November 2013. Boris Gliesmann initiated the workshop himself. At the time, curators and other staff were not necessarily very familiar with the database, but expertise was needed because of the museum's preparation for the Humboldt Forum. He aimed at ensuring 'correct data entry'.

gave 'wooden bowl' as an example. A wooden bowl could simply be described as a 'container' (*Behälter*) or a 'vessel' (*Gefäß*) but would lose meaning through it. By not being precise enough, one risked, he warned, turning a religious or spiritual object into a profane one. This would erase all meaning from it. As a lot of the collections were unknown to museum staff, one needed to be especially careful. With a single careless entry in the database, spirits could literally be deleted, taken away from the object and silenced. The avatars were reproduced, steadily, but deformed, recalling the situation evoked by Goethe's 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', where an army of avatars created disorder, instead of its desired contrary.

Additionally, the database was not a sufficient tool to record the information available. The museum's present and emerging knowledge could not be accurately reflected in its documentation systems. Even the new field 'provenance' was judged insufficient by museum staff: it didn't leave the opportunity to integrate the complex itineraries, agents, and questions which accompany provenance research, or the debates and discussions which accompany it.[67] With the transfer from MuseumPlus to the new database management system Rich Internet Application (RIA), Boris Gliesmann aimed at creating more spaces within the database where free text could be added. He hoped to 'take the chance to break open gridlocked pathways, to rethink the system, to realise new requirements and wishes. … The system needs to become more flexible (*beweglicher*).'[68] This allowed, in theory, the chance to transcend the rigid grids and templates imposed by the database's framework, but the pragmatic outcome was uncertain at the time of the conversation.

'It would be nice to have a system in how we document the collections, but we don't have one', Boris Gliesmann stated. The different attempts to circumvent the database's limitations and shortcomings were thus judged necessary, but insufficient, and sometimes even problematic, by museum staff, notably because of this lack of system. The current practices of data making stood as a continuation of the museum inventory's history, as subjective, fragmentary, and selective. Some names considered racist or derogatory were changed, whilst other names were kept in their historical version. As an example, Boris Gliesmann said that 'sandal' (*Sandale*) didn't constitute a problem, but 'shoes of broads', a derogatory term for women (*Weiberschuhe*) did, 'magic figure' (*Zauberfigur*) was changed, but 'magician' (*Zauberer*) wasn't.

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[67] Internal workshop at the Ethnological Museum with museum staff, 9 November 2017.

[68] Interview with Boris Gliesmann, 8 November 2016.

The process of making data – the transfer from historical to digital inventory, the addition, erasure, and adjustment of information – became unmarked through the database's functioning. The information entered in the database was not systematically referenced;[69] object descriptions were made without source; some categories changed with time, others didn't. Once entered in the database, the data was objectified, confirmed by Boris Gliesmann's image of the 'index card on screen' and the avatar's ordered surface. Despite the database being rather scattered, the progressively naturalised data was used in the museum context, cited, and passed on. Infrequently, I came across visible traces of doubt in the database – such as question marks after dates or names of people – which, however, shape the coming into being of its data. Layers of time, people, and their work overlapped, without being clearly traceable on its two-dimensional, seemingly neutral screen.

The lack of system spanned the different activities to counter the database's drawbacks and was reflected by Boris Gliesmann's claim to have situated himself 'at the periphery' of the Humboldt Forum developments. That the collection's inventory, digitisation, and documentation was not defined as a priority, but rather treated as 'peripheral', was significant. The lack of resources devoted to collection management, as well as the restricted access policy, implied a particular understanding of the museum's role and mission. This role, I argue, clearly prioritised representation over research, collection care, and management.

The avatar morphed through the input and erasure of data. It could be modelled at will. The avatar's components, its limbs, could be entirely erased, added to, or amended. The avatar thus contrasted with the objectified character of the inventory, questioning the naturalising process of objectifying itself. Just as the material object might have changed status, form, and substance during its life within and beyond the museum, the avatar was equally yet differently multiple, instable, and mutable. However, the avatar could only dwell within the museum's particular ecology, and was defined by the grids, frames, and work procedures of the museum's knowledge infrastructure. The different attempts to extend the avatar, to adapt its form to contemporary anthropological understandings of culture and to respond to expectations raised by critical museum and heritage studies

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[69] Each entry was authored by a particular person and amendments would be marked (for example, 'amendments made by B. Gliesmann on a specific date'). It was not clear, however, what exactly had been amended.

proved difficult to achieve, in an infrastructure shaped by colonial thought. Inconsistencies, spelling mistakes, synonyms for similar objects, inaccuracies flourished. Defects and bugs appeared, reshaping the avatar to unexpected, and sometimes, undiscovered ends, notably due to the lack of system in the digitisation of the collection, as well as in the documenting and enriching of the database.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, provenance research is slow and limited, and risks resulting in no further answers to the questions addressed. If defined conventionally as retracing the chains of ownership, the results of our research on III C 14966 could be summarised as follows. We assumed that the caryatid stool had been acquired by the colonial officer Werner von Grawert in either Ujiji or Usumbara in German East Africa, where he had been stationed. As the object had presumably been produced in or around Buli, a village in the then Congo Free State, it must have travelled long distances to reach German East Africa. The objects might have reached the trade centres of Ujiji or Usumbara via the prominent caravan or slave trade, as diplomatic gifts, or as commodities. A specific group of objects, including III C 14966, had been separated out of a group of 108 objects that had been shipped from Dar es Salaam to Berlin. A selection of these objects had been, since their arrival in the museum in 1902, hailed as 'art' by Felix von Luschan, the Africa department's director at the time.

With regard to III C 14966's itineraries *after* arriving in Berlin, it has held a special status because of a stylistic resemblance with other objects, a style which had been associated with 'the master of Buli' since the 1930s. Whereas the association with a 'master' confirmed and generalised the object's status as 'art', it ultimately served Western institutions. The attribution of a singular artist contradicted conceptions of 'Luba' authorship, who understand the artist as partaking in a 'transpersonal identity' (Nooter Roberts 1998). The value gained from the object's appreciation has remained in Western hands, both in terms of the increase in financial value, as well as when it comes to questions of esteem: the symbolic value attributed to the object eventually translated into financial value, reflected in record prices at auction for similar objects in 1979 and 2010. Finally, it is the 'discoverers' of the masters who fill the void of anonymous authorship. With regard to the reception history of III C 14966, I thus argue that despite the efforts to counter colonial epistemologies, the process of naming the object as 'Buli' can be regarded as a continuation of historical forms of colonial appropriation.

The chapter's focus was not only on research results *stricto sensu*, but also engaged in an ethnography of the process of provenance research. Focusing on the composition and life of III C 14966's digital presence and counterpart enables the museum's infrastructures to be unravelled. The analysis thus doesn't only shed light on III C 14966's trajectories, the museum's colonial involvement, and therefore the museum's and the collection's past. It also allows me to identify and point to the struggles of the continuous practices, materialities, and discourses which reinscribe processes of colonial difference making in the museum. The deconstruction of different categories and imaginations in past and present knowledge infrastructures shows how their unstable, provisory, and fragile character is continually solidified, materialised, and perpetuated within the database, and the museum's infrastructure more broadly speaking. Whereas museum staff struggle with these categories which emerged in colonial thought, the categories nevertheless form the differentiating and discriminatory grid and order which organise the museum. The ethnography of the research processes points to the symbolic geographies and hierarchies of knowledge production which are sustained between the Global North and South, perpetuated through the imbalance of access to sources and resources available to research, analyse, and write provenance histories today. The ethnography reveals how those knowledge systems persist and how deeply the epistemological practices are engrained in the museum's everyday – both in the past and today.

In contrast to an argument questioning provenance research as a method, this chapter rather points to the struggles which accompany and result from working with infrastructures and epistemologies which stem from and rely on colonial practices and knowledge production. It attempts to discuss the difficulties of being caught within such epistemologies and taxonomies and disparities; the seeming impossibility of not reproducing them; whilst acknowledging the efforts of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2010).

The avatar as a metaphor for the object's digital counterpart illustrates its definition, historical genealogy, and restrictions imposed by the database's grid. Disciplined, the avatar emerged and was defined by the museum's historical inventory and sources, which served as the primary reference point for how III C 14066 was understood, perceived, and valued, and how it could exist within the museum. The different categories constituted the avatar's limbs, defining its condition and form. Shaped by the adding and taking away of data – the process of 'documenting' and 'enriching' – the avatar assembles the material and immaterial, which both emerge closely in relation to the museum's

particular ecology. Beyond being a vessel incorporating data, however, the avatar also defines which data can be integrated and worked with within the museum's infrastructure. The avatar determines how this data is perceived, managed, and worked with. The avatar thus manoeuvred within particular boundaries, boundaries which were both challenged and confirmed by the museum staff through their daily work. Possessing limiting and liberating capacities, the avatar is characterised by both enabling and detaining processes.

Using the avatar as a figure to picture the object's digital counterpart not only shows the continuities of historical categories and practices. Apart from restrictions, the figure allowed me to conceive the avatar's potential to reinvent and transcend these very categories. Conventionally, avatars are understood as a 'digital you'. Khatib describes them as 'a type of transcendent alterity which is both created and controlled *by the self*' (Khatib 2007:70; my emphasis). The virtual manifestation of the object, however, opened the possibility to extend the right to create, shape, and compose itself to multiple and diverse authors. The call for 'multiperspectivity' has been voiced frequently in relationship to ethnological collections, and has been a constitutive part of the Humboldt Forum's concept and communication strategy (von Bose 2017:415–416). In contrast to the practical difficulty of having access to the *material* collections themselves, the *digital* offered the potential to liberate the avatar from its constraints in order to attend to a more diverse multivocality.

The potential of the object's digital counterpart to become 'otherwise' lay beyond the adding of categories. Other ways of administering and ordering collections digitally were possible. Examples existed, and one of them had been developed within the Ethnological Museum itself. Fundamental in these alternative database systems has been the attempt to take into account different ways of organising and naming fields of knowledge, with the aim of establishing a base for collaborative relationships. This concerns, for example, a general flexibility and multiplicity, instead of a rigidity and singularity, in the denomination of objects, the restricted access to particular objects which were not made to be viewed and used by all (Geismar and Mohns 2011), work with images instead of text in order not to privilege one language over another when formalising object-related attributes (Scholz 2017) or to include other data, such as audio, to contribute to linguistic revitalisation efforts (Glass, Berman, and Hatoum 2017). Other measures include suggestions for facilitating access, such as by the digitisation and release of the museum's complete inventory catalogues and information on the objects (Sarr and Savoy 2018). To

my knowledge, no European museum has published their entire inventory, but calls to do so have gained recent public and academic attention (Öffnet die Inventare! 2019).[70]

Put differently, rethinking the digital storing of collections offers the means to transcend and challenge the museum's knowledge infrastructures and epistemologies, and thus to redefine the collections themselves. Inviting doubts and contradictions, some of which the research itself allowed, stood in for what Walther Mignolo has framed as 'epistemic disobedience' in his call for decoloniality (Mignolo 2011:9). Provenance research, then, goes beyond telling the museum's histories, and even beyond the possible restitution of particular artefacts. It rather encompasses dealing with the very words, categories, and place making which name, order, and differentiate museums and collections. Deconstructing and rethinking the way in which museums continue to reproduce colonial modes of doing the world might also help to reflect on (colonial) difference making, its reverberations, and challenges associated with it in society more broadly speaking.

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[70] Whereas some museums, such as Paris' Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, make their entire collections available online, the freely accessible databases only give access to particular, and very limited, information on the objects.

Chapter 4
Conserving toxicity: *Gift*, agency, and the transformation of substance

Introduction

The museum's staff entrance is situated within the museum courtyard. A sign indicating 'registration' (*Anmeldung*) is written in capital letters on the big glass door. Once you enter, you find yourself in a controlled area. On your left, three to four security men, sealed off behind glass, look down at you: The security guards' room is elevated in such a way that you need to reach up to get a list, on which you need to fill in your name, affiliation, and the time of your arrival. When you leave, you sign out the same way. Security staff frequently comment on late arrivals and absences, clearly indicating that they observe one's behaviour and work routine. In exchange for the list, slid through under the window, you receive your keys.

With my keys, as a research stipendiary, I had access to the museum storage. When the key manager handed them to me, I could see who had made use of the keys to access the museum storage in the last ten years. The list was short, I knew almost all the names – access to what has been described as the 'continuously throbbing heart of a museological collection' has been highly restricted (Griesser-Stermscheg 2012:81).[1] Walking into the museum's East Africa storage, located in the cellar, I felt as if this was as far as one could get in entering the museum's backstage. A former air-raid shelter, the storage closed with an impressive and heavy metal door, the air was charged and heavy, noises muted, random interactions with other people were very unlikely, one was alone. The overwhelming number of objects seemed to conceal uncountable stories, and despite the order it felt almost impossible to orientate oneself, to get an overview. A particular sense of discovery, similar to exploring one's grandparents' attic, and, thus, of adventure, came together with a feeling of risk, the fear of breaking things, or of disarranging the seemingly neat order.

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[1] Translated from the German by the author: 'das kontinuierlich pochende Herzstück einer musealen Sammlung'.

Figure 4.1 Anmeldung *(registration), photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.2 The museum's endless hallways, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figures 4.3–4.5 The East Africa storage, photographs by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Colonial collection mania and its legacies

Being in the museum storage gives access to the dimension, scope, and breadth of the museum's collections. Physically working in the museum storage allows the researcher to experience the objects' materiality – smelling, touching, turning and looking at them, laying them next to each other, comparing. Practically, it means to be subject to the museum's regulations, always wearing gloves, breathing masks, full-body suits when one opens storage cupboards, to avoid breathing in the residues of the objects' treatment with pesticides and heavy metals. The objects affected me. Not only did these ways of storing and conserving trigger the imagination in their seemingly unexplored potential to be 'remediated', as Clémentine Deliss phrased it, as a means to shift the perspective and 'experiment with alternative ways of describing, interpreting and displaying' the collections (Deliss 2015:28; see also Deliss 2012). They also affected me in the sense that I usually left the storage with a headache and slight nausea, feeling saturated and weirdly exhausted, imagining how the residues of the objects' treatment were acting upon me. Visually, in contrast to today's rather bare presentation of museum collections, singled out and well-lit behind glass, the quantity and accumulation of thousands of objects in one place raises questions of orderings, ownership, and its relation to power for me.

As Mirjam Brusius and Kavitha Singh framed it in a recent volume on museum storages, 'museum collections are, like archives, simultaneously the outcome of historical processes and the very condition for the production of historical knowledge' (Brusius and Singh 2017:7). The curator Paola Ivanov repeatedly described the historical context we were dealing with as one of 'collecting mania' (*Sammlungswut*) (Ivanov 2005:43). This frenzy would have lasting consequences for how the work of conserving and storing was organised in the Ethnological Museum. In the museum storage, the colonial collecting frenzy materialised, and the politics of the Ethnological Museum collection's constitutions became graspable. Not only had the museum storage managers difficulties of keeping up with the inventory, localisation, and administration of the objects, but there was also an important lack of knowledge constituted about the collection. 'This museum focused on collecting, but little research has been done', the former Africa curator Peter Junge stated during a conversation.[2] This statement concerned the East Africa collection in particular, as it had generally been neglected by the museum's curators until Paola Ivanov's arrival at the museum. A museum curator stated in

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[2] I was allowed to be present at the conversation between the two Africa curators, Paola Ivanov and Peter Junge, and the researcher Friedrich von Bose, 31 October 2013.

conversation about the museum's collections and the difficulties of doing research with them that

> [i]f we are honest, we don't know anything about what we have here. The musealisation is an end in itself (*ein Zweck an sich*). The whole story consisted in appropriation. The museum put the objects in storage, for the objects to be there, with a pseudo-label, and that's what constitutes all the knowledge. And this plethora develops agency (*Agency der Unmenge*)! The sheer mass of objects is stifling. I think that the collection is so stifling – it's crushing us! It's even preventing us from recording the collection. [3]

These impressions and descriptions of the museum storage allude to different issues this chapter is concerned with: grappling with the abundance of objects, their storing and conserving, and the way in which museum practices impact the objects' agency throughout their trajectories within and outside the museum. The chapter introduces the metaphor of the gift and toxicity, which I will literally and metaphorically work through throughout the chapter. The chapter addresses the following questions: How do museum staff deal with the responsibility for taking care of the collections as 'gift' – handed down from the past with the mission to keep it for future generations? How does this responsibility for the collection articulate in the museum's everyday?

Gift, toxicity, and poison

Without returning to the traditions of anthropological exchange theory, what interests me in the following is the inherent double-sidedness of what I spell out as 'Gift' in museum collections: on the one side, 'Gift' alludes to the ambivalence of the act of gifting, requesting reciprocity. On the other, it points to the poisonous character of the gift in itself, demanding protection from its endangering agency, as *Gift* in German has the meaning of 'poison', as the editor of the classical volume *Gifts and Poisons* reminds us (Bailey 1971). [4]

On the one hand, this chapter thus deals with the ambivalence of collections as gift in the sense of 'treasure': as assemblages of precious things worth displaying, keeping, and taking care of, the collections as 'Gift' simultaneously entail the responsibility and expectations of reciprocity and return. Along the same lines as a legacy, a Gift creates

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[3] Fieldnotes from 27 November 2013, with the demand not to be quoted directly.

[4] Thanks to Sharon Macdonald for pointing this volume out to me.

relations. During the heyday of colonialism, gifting was one of the most common modes of relating between the collector and museum, encouraged by the Ethnological Museum's role as Central Museum, monitoring and controlling the entry of objects from the colonies. What preceded this act of giving, and thus *how* the object was acquired, however, remains uncertain for most objects that constitute the museum collection today. The status of the *what* is gifted is thus ambivalent, as the chain of ownership remains usually unknown to the museum – is that which is gifted stolen, looted, or even evidence of (colonial) wars? The *act of giving* is further ambivalent insofar as the acceptance of the gift implies its incorporation in the museum structures which, in turn, transform the gift into a museum object. The status of the museum object is accompanied by rules, regulations, and obligations which demand a multiplicity of resources – financial, personnel, physical space, and time. This ambivalent act of giving and gifting relates to the 'agency of plethora' mentioned above, but it is rather abstract to grasp. It does, however, unfold in this chapter by exploring the exact means by which museum staff have dealt with the seemingly 'unending quantity of objects' that these collections comprise (te Heesen 2017). The chapter thus discusses how museum staff have coped with the abundance of (colonial) collections. Whereas the first section gives an overview of the museum's management of the collections from the beginning of the twentieth century until today, the second part focuses on the individual attempt of Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, who worked as the Africa department's storage manager from 1990 till 2012. Both sections situate the current state of the museum storage, described as 'devastating' by museum staff, in a history of organisational neglect of the responsibility to keep and research.

On the other hand, the Gift *in itself* is ambivalent today because of its literal toxicity: in what follows from the chapter's first two sections, I discuss the collection in its effective toxicity, addressing the object's agency in relation to its transformation of status as well as substance. The status of being a museum object overshadows objects' potential other ontological status – such as being a person or a character. Being contaminated, and thus toxic, however, endows the object with a particular kind of agency, potentially disturbing the museum's regulated everyday. It forces those interacting with the objects to protect themselves. Toxicity thus shifts the focus towards the agency of things, but at a slightly different angle then how it was described above: paradoxically, the objects turn into subjects as they poison those in interaction with them. Their treatment irreversibly marks their material composition, and they – in visible and invisible ways – effect and affect their environments and surrounding ecologies.

The chapter concludes by taking the objects' transformation of substance as a point of departure to argue that the objects are an amalgam of their different histories – not only through their altering status and their ongoing change of meaning, but also in their chemical and physical composition. The objects carry and are marked by visible and invisible traces of these diverse histories, on their surfaces and within them. Being thus existentially hybrid, these objects defy any kind of definition of purity: in their very essence and materiality, they are neither from 'there' nor from 'here', but incorporate the multiplicities of lives and identities they have passed and gone through.

A history of neglect? Conserving and storing collections at the Ethnological Museum

In a personal conversation in 2018, one museum curator commented on why the situation of the museum storage was 'symptomatic' for what characterised, in the curator's view, the Humboldt Forum's general attitude: it was 'representation' that took pride of place, instead of what was understood as 'substantial' museum work.[5]

> The museum storage is symptomatic of what generally happens in the Humboldt Forum. Since it is not possible to profile the Forum with the museum storages, there is absolutely no investment. The situation in the museum storage is devastating and it is getting worse and worse. For me, working on a research project, this is a disaster. It has been said for more than a year that the storages will close soon, but they are still not closed. Only the *minimum* requirements are met. Currently, apart from objects for the Humboldt Forum, the objects considered at risk are taken out: 'at risk' means those objects which might become subject to restitution claims in the next few years. The rest of the objects will be covered for an indefinite amount of time under plastic tarpaulins. If insects come and devour the collections, this will hardly be noticed! If the collections are closed off, we do not have any control of what is happening in there. As far as I know, there is no timetable. Neither for when they close the collections but – most importantly – nor for when the collections will be accessible again! This means that for an unlimited period of time, it is not clear when and whether one can work with the collections!

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[5] Fieldnotes from the conversation between the curator and me, 25 April 2018.

The organisational prioritising of 'representation' over conserving and storing was confirmed and went public with an article in 2019 entitled 'Contaminated, Corroded, Flooded (*Verseucht, zerfressen, überflutet*)'. The journalist Jörg Häntzschel describes the conditions of museum storage in German ethnological museums, and particularly in Berlin, as 'administrative emergencies'. Referring to the museum storage's current operation as 'passive de-collecting', he criticises what he understands as a lack of transparency concerning the state of conservation of the collections, which are 'to say the least, not ideal' but rather, 'catastrophic' (Häntzschel 2019).

In what follows, I situate the curator's and journalist's accounts in the museum storage's histories from the museum's opening in 1886 until now. I argue that museum work is characterised by an organisational neglect towards conserving and storing as a fundamental aspects of museum work.

Histories of building, placing, and relocating a collection (1886–1990)
'By 1900, Germany's leading ethnographic museum had descended into chaos.' This is how historian Glenn Penny opened his book on Berlin's Ethnological Museum (Penny 2002:1), then the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*. The historian Andrew Zimmermann, in turn, foregrounded that the collection had become so large that the situation had begun to 'escape all control' since 1886 (Zimmerman 2001:190). By 1900, the museum director Adolf Bastian stated that 'the cases are overfilled so that every instructive arrangement of the collection remains impossible' (quoted in Zimmerman 2001:191). In their contemporary reading of the museum's history, both historians describe in detail how the museum's founders' mission to represent and research humanity in its completeness had failed. Instead of research, museum staff were forced to concentrate on the management and administration of what was arriving in the museum. Curators complained about their task being reduced to working 'like handymen, to take inventory of objects as they came in from every possible part of the earth' (Fritz Graebner quoted in Zimmerman 2001:194). Researchers that came specifically to do research on the collections were forbidden access. Adolf Bastian's fervour to represent humanity in its diversity and entirety turned out to be inherently paradoxical: the more objects arrived, the less overview researchers and visitors would get.

In 1903, the condition of the museum was assessed as 'untenable' (Westphal-Hallbusch 1973:29). In 1907, the museum was threatened with closure by the police, unless corridors and stairs were immediately cleared so that at least two people could pass each

other (ibid.).[6] At the time, all of the collections were housed within the museum, with no separation of exhibition and storage spaces. Visitors keenly complained about the apparent chaos. They lamented that the public interest was explicitly neglected by museum staff and demanded repayment of their admission charges (Stelzig 2004:40–41). For years, the museum staff, anthropologists, and politicians heatedly discussed what to do with the masses of objects, how and where to construct a new museum building in order to properly house the collections. This included quarrels over whether or not to separate 'display collections' and 'study'/'work collections' (*Schau-/Studien-/Arbeitssammlung*) as well as whether to build distinct museums representing peoples considered of 'nature' and of 'culture' (*Natur-/Kulturvölker*), and, more precisely, whether to separate the Asian collections from the 'ethnological' ones (Westphal-Hallbusch 1973:18–30). A first relocation, however, of the collections was only realised in 1906. The collections were moved to a cheaply and rapidly constructed 'shack' (*Schuppen*) in Berlin's Dahlem suburb, located about 12 kilometres from the museum. The architect Bruno Paul was commissioned to design an entirely new museum in the same area. The draft, consisting of four buildings representing four different world continents excluding Europe, was approved by the Berlin parliament (*Abgeordnetenhaus*) in 1912 (Westphal-Hallbusch 1973:32).[7]

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[6] Translated from the German by the author: 'In 1907 sollte das Gebäude in der Königsgrätzer Straße polizeilich geschlossen werden, falls nicht sofort Gänge und Treppe so weit geräumt wurden, dass wenigstens zwei Leute aneinander vorbeikommen konnten.'

[7] The distinction of four continents was based on conversations with the directors of the museum's departments for Near Eastern and Indian collections (*Vorderasiatisch und Indisch*), East Asia, Africa and Oceania, and the Americas. These departments were founded after the museum director's Bastian's death in 1905.
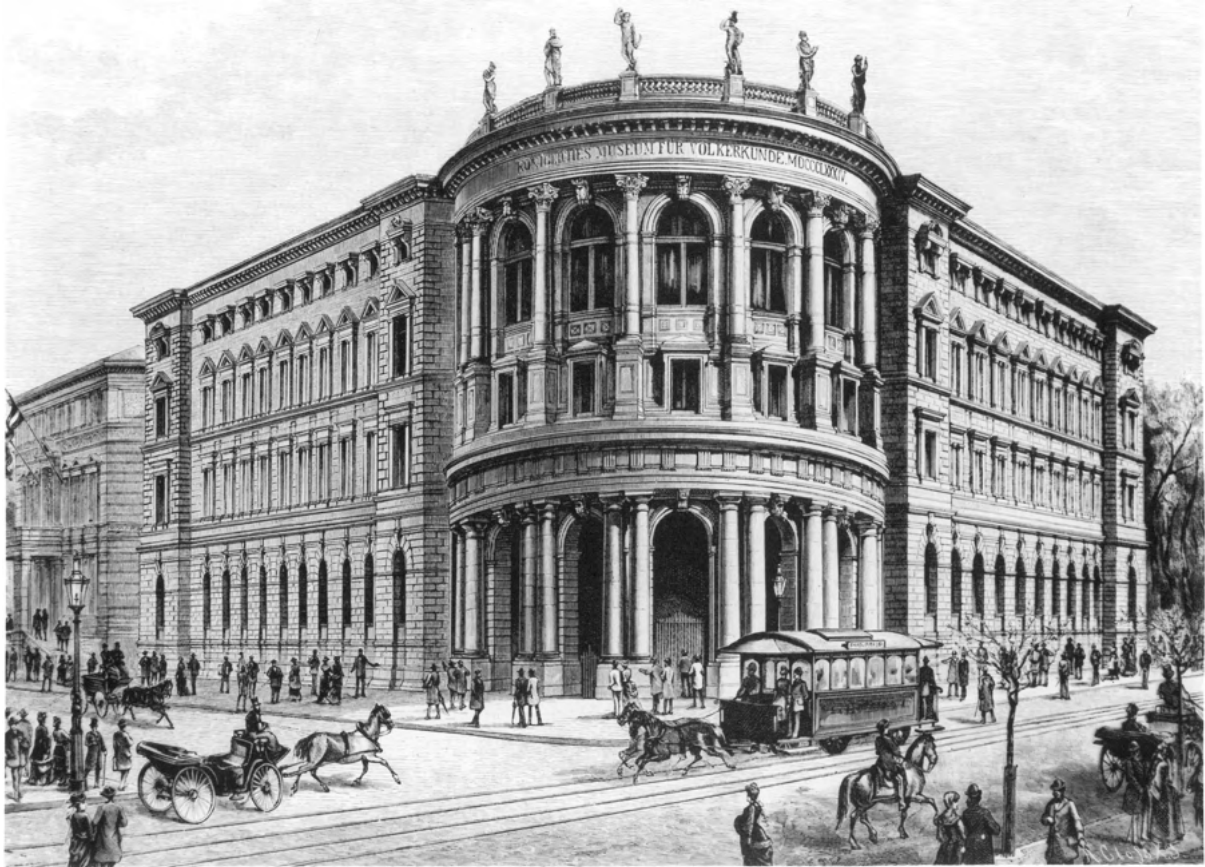
Figure 4.6 Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, *at the corner of Königgrätzerstraße and Prinz-Albrechts-Straße, 1886, wood engraving from the* Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung, *1886,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
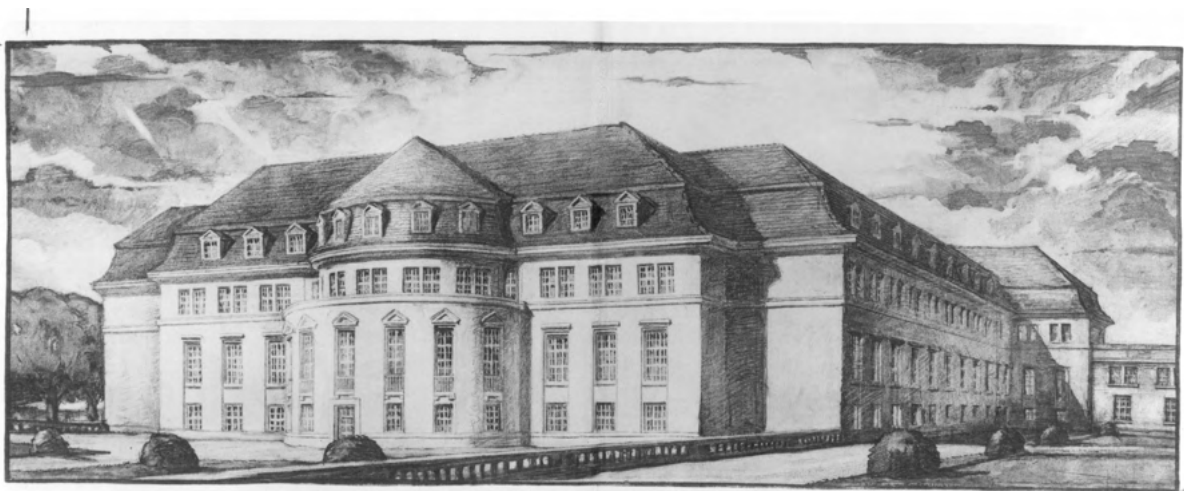
Figure 4.7 The planned museum buildings around 1910. View of the northern part, © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Interrupted by the First World War, the building, whose construction had started in 1914, was left unfinished. It consisted only of two floors without a roof. After the war, the museum was confronted with major financial problems. The museum was converted into storage spaces, whose costs were covered by selling parts of the collection itself, namely so-called *Doubletten*, objects considered doubles of other objects in the collection (Westphal-Hallbusch 1973:29–34). As a result, the exhibition spaces stayed in Berlin's centre, and the storage spaces were moved to Dahlem. In the centre of town, new exhibitions were prepared, reopened in 1926 and remained largely untouched until 1941, when the museum closed due to the Second World War and the increasing danger from air raids (see Chapter 2 for exhibition views).

Already in 1934, the museum started to prepare the collections in case of war, differentiating the entire collection into 'irreplaceable' objects (immediate evacuation in case of war), 'especially valuable' objects (to be safely stored), and 'other' objects (left to their fate) (Höpfner 1992:157). During the Second World War, the Ethnological Museum set up, as did many other museums in Berlin, the relocation (*Auslagerungen*) of the collections to the museum's cellar, as well as to other spaces considered secure in Berlin and all over Germany.[8] From 1942 till 1946, as the museum database manager Boris Gliesmann told me, 'we can only speculate where the objects were, as they were pushed wildly all over Germany, depending on where the front was'.[9] The Africa collections were mainly stored in Berlin's museum cellars, in Wiesbaden, in a castle in Celle, as well as in a castle in Schräbsdorf. After the war, from the 1950s on, the objects slowly returned, but were moved to Dahlem.[10] As a result of war damage, the original museum building in the centre of Berlin was demolished in 1961. A new museum complex was planned in Dahlem. The *Museum für Völkerkunde* opened its different permanent exhibitions, and new storage spaces, in stages from 1970 on.

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[8] The storage places consisted of the cellar of the museum in Prinz-Albrecht-Straße and the Königsgrätzer Straße, the *Flakturm Zoo* and the *Flakbunker Hohenschönhausen* in Berlin. See a graphic and map of the different museum buildings and storage spaces during the Second World War in Berlin and Germany in Eichhorn, Grabowski, and Vanja 2005:129–131.

[9] Meeting with Boris Gliesmann, 21 December 2015, translated from the German by the author: 'Die Sammlungen wurden wild durch's Land geschoben, je nachdem, wo die Front war.'

[10] The stamps in the inventory book 'Zurück aus W', 'Zurück aus C' (Back from W, Back from C), indicate the objects' trajectories as they slowly returned to Berlin (see Chapter 3 for more detail on inventory processes).

Figure 4.8 Main entrance of the former Museum für Völkerkunde, *Stresemannstraße 110, corner Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 6a, 31 March 1949, photographer unidentified, © Landesbildstelle Berlin*

Figure 4.9 Museum für Völkerkunde, *undated, atrium with broken glass, photographer unidentified, © Landesbildstelle Berlin*

Figure 4.10 Demolishing the Museum für Völkerkunde, *1961, photographer unidentified,* ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 4.11 - 4.12 Museum für Völkerkunde, *April 1972, photograph by Reinhard Friedrich,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Looting looted art? Histories of the Leipzig repatriation (1990–1999)

In 1973, after completing an approximate inventory, the curator of African collections and then museum director Kurt Krieger estimated war losses in relation to the Africa collection. The loss was estimated at approximately 50 per cent, with an original inventory of 66,953 objects, 36,656 objects lost in the war and 30,297 objects remaining in Berlin's storage spaces (Krieger 1973:129).

This estimated amount changed drastically, when in 1990 it was publicly revealed that Leipzig's *Museum für Völkerkunde* had kept 45,000 of the Ethnological Museum's objects as a state secret, with significant numbers of objects from the African continent. How many objects were actually lost due to wartime relocation remains unclear to date. No systematic inventory of Berlin's collections has been done yet.[11] After the revelation, it was decided to return the objects to Berlin (Feest 1991). The Leipzig Hall (*Leipzighalle*), a storage room, was constructed to house and store the objects intermediately. The objects were then inventoried and assigned to the museum's different departments.[12]

What had actually happened to the collection was only slowly reconstructed – a reconstruction which has not necessarily come to an end. Some questions remain unanswered. The collections in question were presumably first relocated from Berlin to Schräbsdorf, a town located in Lower Silesia in today's Poland. Given the region's occupation by the Red Army in 1945–1946, it is most probably those collections that were taken as war booty to Leningrad, and possibly to other places in the Soviet Union. How exactly this journey took place has not been uncovered and so remains unknown. In 1975, the GDR government was approached by the Soviet Union to receive the collection. In a recent article, the anthropologist Philipp Schorch describes how the GDR government accepted this 'return' on German territory, 'thus metamorphosing from victory trophy over Nazi Germany to material symbol and marker of friendship between brother states in order to stabilize the Cold War' (Schorch 2018). With 44,561 ethnographic objects packed in 610 boxes, the transport from 1977 to 1979 to Leipzig turned out to be extremely complicated. It had taken two years to unpack und repack several hundred boxes and large and small packages in Leningrad, which were delivered

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[11] In his personal notes Boris Gliesmann made the following calculation, where he added different numbers of objects to identify the number lost through the war. Repatriation from Leipzig (18,627 objects), repatriation from Celle (30,500 objects, source: Protokoll 47), repatriation from Wiesbaden (2,000 objects), objects stored in Berlin (1,000), unnumbered objects (1,688), in all 53,815 objects, which would mean a war loss of approximately 12,000 objects, meeting with Boris Gliesmann, 21 December 2015.

[12] The Leipzighalle still exists today and serves as a storage room for exhibition furniture.

in 12 truckloads to Leipzig.[13] What complicated the mission, however, was the fact that it was a clandestine transport, which museum staff in Berlin recounted as a 'cloak-and-dagger operation' (*eine Nacht-und-Nebel-Aktion*).[14] The objects were installed in a temporary exhibition space in Leipzig, which served – as objects were covered up and the exhibition space closed – as a secret storage space.[15]

Up to the present, museum staff still grapple with the remnants and consequences of these histories of relocation, theft, and looting on a daily basis, often referred to as the collection's 'odyssey' (Haas 2002:21). In the Africa department's case, the remaining objects to be inventoried lay stored in banana boxes (*Bananenkisten*) on top of the storage facility cupboards. In a conversation with museum staff, one storage manager remarked that, 'it is difficult to work if you know that it is impossible to do the job. Inventorying 30,000 objects in a few years, this is completely impossible.'[16]

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[13] Figures stem from Philipp Schorch's article, which also lists 727 wooden boxes, 505 large packages, and 293 individual packages that were repacked in Leningrad.

[14] Conversation with Boris Gliesmann, 21 December 2015.

[15] Little information on the repatriation is available. It is mentioned and discussed in publications authored by curators and staff of the Ethnological Museum themselves, such as in Höpfner 1992; Sanner and Bolz 1999:45–49; Bolz 2003:200; Haas 2002, or from external commentators and researchers such as Feest 1991; Schade 1991; Schorch 2018.

[16] Fieldnotes from 7 November 2014. The storage manager was thinking in particular of a then current deadline. This time frame would consist of exactly three years until the collections would have to move to the external storage spaces in Friedrichshagen in 2017 after the museum's closure, still scheduled as such in 2014.

Figure 4.13 Construction of the so-called Leipzighalle, autumn 1990, photograph by Dietrich Graf, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

*Figure 4.14 Press conference in the 'Boat hall' (*Bootshalle*) of the* Museum für Völkerkunde *in Dahlem, after the first transport of big objects (*Großobjekte*) and 'masterpieces' from the Africa collection, 23 August 1990. The curator of the Africa collections Hans-Joachim Koloss showing journalists some of the returned Benin Bronzes, photograph by Dietrich Graf, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
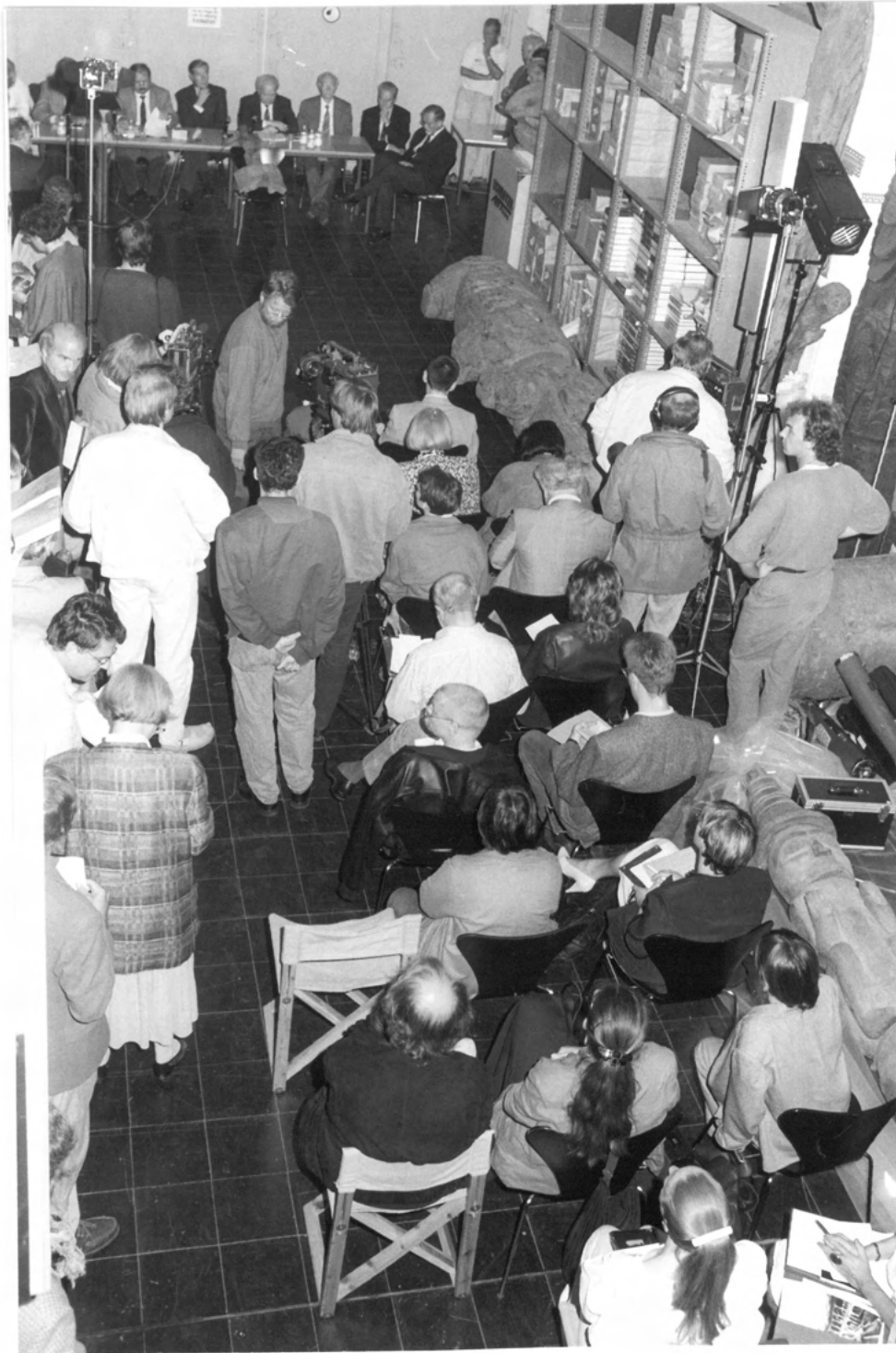
Figure 4.15 From left to right, Stein (director of Leipzig museum), Dube (general direction [of State Museums Berlin]), Helfrich (director), Horst Hartmann, Kurt Krieger (former director), Gerd Höpfner, press conference, 23 August 1990, photograph by Dietrich Graf, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 4.16 Transport of 'Leipzig boxes' to the Leipzighalle *of the* Museum für Völkerkunde, *Berlin, March 1991, photograph by Dietrich Graf,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
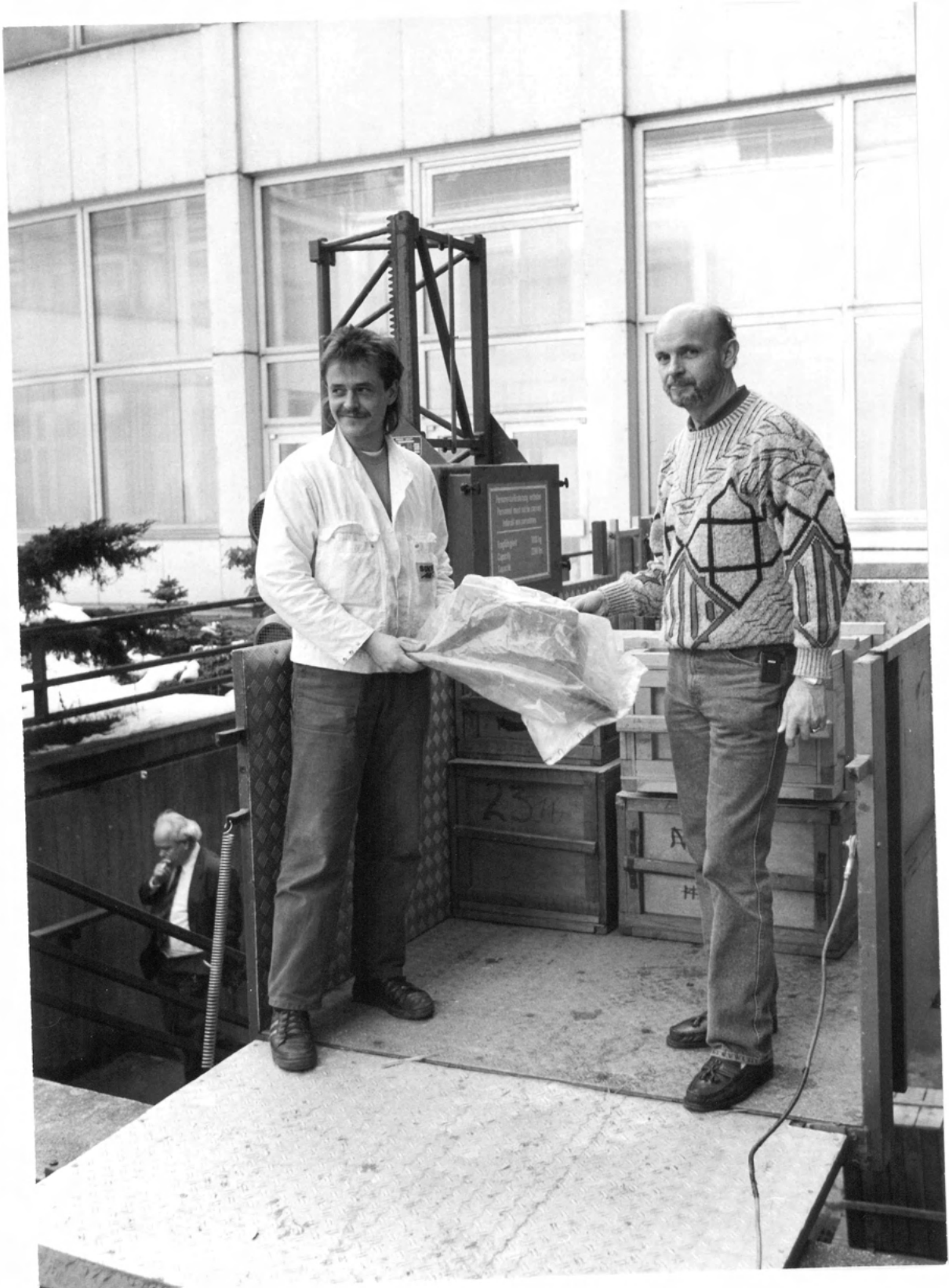
Figure 4.17 Transport of 'Leipzig boxes' to the Leipzighalle *of the* Museum für Völkerkunde, *Berlin. Two unidentified people, with museum director Klaus Helfrich thoughtful in the background, March 1991, photograph by Dietrich Graf,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.18 Outside the Hohenschönhausen hall, used as interim storage, 7 December 1992, photographer: Dietrich Graf, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Figure 4.19 Inside the Hohenschönhausen hall used as interim storage, 7 December 1992, photograph by Dietrich Graf, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Unfinished business: storing collections in the Ethnological Museum, Friedrichshagen, and Dahlem as 'Research Campus' (1999–present)

The neglect of the care of collections in favour of what museum staff framed as 'representation' had a history in the Ethnological Museum. In the context of debates on the Humboldt Forum, the museum storage's poor condition was used to argue for the collection's move to the city centre. In 2010, at a moment where the plans for the Humboldt Forum were put at risk, the museum director Viola König argued that

> [t]he storage space's conditions don't correspond in any way to the collections' requirements … In the summer it is too hot in the uninsulated building, whereas in the winter, there is condensation running down the walls. (*Die Welt am Sonntag*, 13 June 2010 quoted in König and Scholz 2012:76)

In an article published at approximately the same time in the national newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, similar statements were made:

> Bad news arrives on the director's desk every day. In addition to fire protection, the air-conditioning and electrical engineering are partly in a miserable state. 'We could only bear the situation because we knew that it was not long until the collection's move' says König, who still pleads for a relocation of the collections from Dahlem to Mitte. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 June 2010, quoted in König and Scholz 2012:76)

In 2013–2015, during my time at the museum, conditions had not changed for the better. The Africa collections were housed in a building originally constructed to show exhibitions.[17] The rooms were thus not suited for storing objects: the floor was made out of wood, the windows were big and unprotected. With no air-conditioning, the museum storage rooms were exposed to marked temperature fluctuations, going up to 35°C in the summer. Not only were these temperatures difficult to endure in terms of working conditions, but they also carried the risk of damage to objects, such as causing cracks in wooden objects. In contrast to the museum storage's situation, the exhibitions were entirely air-conditioned. Probably, museum staff sometimes joked, this was to pretend that everything worked professionally in the museum. 'What is most absurd in this

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[17] In conversations with both storage managers from the Africa department, they could not tell me why this was the case, email from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, 23 August 2018, and conversation with current storage manager, 17 July 2019.

context is that the objects have to be transported in so-called "climate boxes" (*Klimakisten*)', museum staff explained to me.[18] Alerted by the damage caused by fire to the Anna Amalia library in Weimar in 2004 and the collapse of the State Archive in Cologne in 2009, checks on the buildings' capacity to host the collection were carried out. If a fire broke out, 'better save yourself, don't even try to rescue the objects', members of museum staff stated. The building would simply collapse. Even though the consequent measures, i.e. evacuation of the collections, were supposed to be realised immediately, they hadn't taken place yet. Staff thus concluded and confirmed that the museum's concerns were rather about 'representation than about the objects'.[19]

The lack of planning, funding, and thus personnel as far as the collections were concerned was incomprehensible to some of the people working in the museum. 'It is not as if the Humboldt Forum is a particularly new idea', one member of staff claimed. The discrepancy between what was spent on the Humboldt Forum and external curatorial projects[20] in contrast to the collections' care was just too significant in museum staff's eyes. 'It is not only the museum's task to do new and costly exhibitions. The museum is also there to conserve!' another employee stated, referring to the ICOM definition of the museum's multiple roles (ICOM 2007).[21] This discrepancy was confirmed when in 2018, 350 additional staff were employed for the Humboldt Forum's 'programme'. These positions, responsible for all the organisations in the Humboldt Forum, not just the Ethnological Museum, were transformed from temporary to permanent staff in 2019.[22] This contrasted with the employment of 40 temporary staff for the Ethnological Museum, employed solely to prepare the objects from the point of view of restoration for the exhibitions (Kuhn 2018).

When I was working in the museum, the museum's official plan was to move the collections to an external storage system in Berlin's Friedrichshagen suburb by 2017,

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[18] Fieldnotes from 27 November 2013.

[19] Fieldnotes from 27 November 2013 and 21 March 2014.

[20] The critique concerned for example the Humboldt Lab Dahlem, which received more than 4 million euros for its projects between 2012 and 2015.

[21] Fieldnotes 6 November 2014.

[22] The staff became permanent when its employer, the publicly funded company Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH, founded in 2016, was integrated with the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace Foundation (Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss), 1 January 2019, see https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/inhalte/hf-kultur-gmbh, and https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/inhalte/shf, consulted 12 October 2019.

located some 25 kilometres from the Humboldt Forum. The site was described as providing ideal storage conditions, conserving techniques, and, importantly, enough space to host the collections. However, as museum staff stated in 2013, the SPK didn't seem to have engaged in seriously planning Friedrichshagen. The time, staff, and financial resources that were needed for the construction and move of the collections were not only unknown to museum staff, but the necessary planning didn't seem to be on the SPK's priority agenda at the time. At a debate in the Berlin parliament in December 2013, the SPK's president Hermann Parzinger provided only vague answers with regard to questions concerning the future of the museum complex in Dahlem. As his answers suggested, the research, storage, and conservation of the collections were shaped by a lack of general planning, but substantially, by a lack of financial planning (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin 2013:32–37). Information on these precise aspects of museum work were difficult to obtain during my stay at the museum, and also afterwards. To my knowledge, official publications on the matter don't exist, and information was based on the accounts of those working in the museum.

In 2017, the plan to move the collections to Friedrichshagen was abandoned. Its financing had not been secured. Whereas museum staff had lived with doubts about whether or not the move would actually take place, the plans concerning Friedrichshagen were also officially suspended. Instead, the idea of a 'research campus' (*Forschungscampus*), was suggested. This would imply that the collections would mostly stay in Dahlem, and a cooperation with the Freie Universität, the museum's neighbour, would be set up (Ossowski 2017). In July 2019, the results of a 'potential assessment' (*Potenzialanalyse*) were published by an architectural firm, and partly made public, announcing the anthropologist Alexis von Poser as the research campus's director at the same time.[23] As with plans announced for Friedrichshagen, however, the project's, and thus the collection's, future, remained uncertain as the financial realisation was not guaranteed.

That 'representation' took precedence over conservation was thus described and confirmed by museum staff by an organisational and financial priority-setting on the making of exhibitions and other temporary projects such as conferences, as well as the construction of the representative building of the Humboldt Forum. As an immediate consequence for museum work and research, the West Africa storage has been closed to

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[23] The plans suggested a restructuring organisation of the former museum complex and its transformation into a research campus, and situated the campus in a network of different academic organisations (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2019a).

public access for fire protection, as described by the curator's statement opening this section. I will elaborate what it means to grapple individually with the collection in the context of organisational neglect in the following section.

'A treasure too big is a treasure no more': object love and the making of the East Africa storage

In the local news programme *Abendschau*, broadcast on 23 August 1990, the director of Leipzig's *Museum für Völkerkunde*, Lothar Stein, showed himself relieved to know that 'the objects returned finally to where they rightfully belong'. The journalist, joking, shot back – 'Ah, to Africa or Asia?' to which Stein responded, 'No, this is another issue. Many conferences have been devoted to this topic. In Dahlem, the objects can finally be treated appropriately from the point of view of restoration' (Abendschau 1990).[24]

What it meant to 'come home at last', as the anthropologist Christian Feest described the repatriation at the time, is elaborated in the following section (Feest 1991). I trace the process and histories of returning the collections labelled the 'Leipzig repatriation' back into 'museum objects'. These histories are understood here as a continuation of the grappling with the abundance of colonial collecting, and point to where the majority of collections stem from: not only from a colonial *context* but also *mindset*. I discuss these histories not only with regard to the their circulations in the course of the twentieth century. Rather, I depart from the particular: the history of Hans-Joachim Radosuboff and the 'object love', devotion, and passion that accompanied his work at the museum.[25] Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, responsible for the Africa storage from 1991 until 2012, was the one dealing with this precise 'point of view of restoration' the museum director Lothar Stein alludes to – inventorying, reorganising, cleaning, and moving objects within and between old and new storage spaces. Countering the organisational neglect individually, this history not only pays homage to his achievements. It also argues for the

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[24] Translated from the German by the author: 'Das ist eine andere Frage, da sind schon ganze Konferenzen abgehalten worden zu dieser Frage. In Dahlem können die Objekte restauratorisch angemessen behandelt werden.'

[25] A note concerning quotations and sources. Whereas the past storage manager Hans-Joachim Radosuboff was interested and eager to provide details on his career and working methods, the current storage manager told me from the beginning that he did not want to be named in this PhD thesis. I thus never quote the storage manager directly in the following, and the person's name is not mentioned. Similarly, the conservators are quoted anonymously here.

recognition and impact of individuals and their agency in the museum's history, opposing anonymised understandings of what constitutes the museum.

'Only the humble question remains: "Where to put things?"' The making of the East Africa storage

When visiting and working in the East Africa storage, one constantly stumbled on Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's traces. The cupboards were organised by topic, and similar objects were neatly arranged next to each other. When opening the cupboards, taking out the objects to properly look at them, I imagined hearing Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's successor sigh as I had heard so many times before: once something was taken out, it was not always easy to reconstruct the complicated hanging system that Hans-Joachim Radosuboff and his assistant Mr Tröster had put in place. Beautifully installed, the objects would not touch each other, draped and arranged behind glass following what Hans-Joachim Radosuboff called 'movement and aesthetics'.[26] Tröster contributed to these particular hanging systems significantly insofar as he had previously worked for the prominent German porcelain manufacturer KPM and had installed their displays at fairs (*Verkaufsmessenausstatter*).

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[26] If not otherwise indicated, all quotations from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff have been transcribed and translated from an interview I conducted with him on 7 January 2014.

Figures 4.20 and 4.21 The storage was shaped by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's aesthetic sense and his individual way of finding solutions for the lack of space, and material, not always considered practical by other museum employees, photographs by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

When I contacted Hans-Joachim Radosuboff to do an interview, he replied enthusiastically. He was happy to report on his '85,000 children',[27] referring to the approximate number of objects in the Africa collection. We met in January 2015. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff had been retired for over two years, and still knew the collections by heart. He had prepared well for the interview, he had reread the diary that he had kept from 1991 to 2002. His speech was accurate and detailed, spiced with funny details.[28] He came to visit the museum, 'not so much for the museum as for the people'. With a likeable Berlin accent, he always ready for repartee. He greeted everyone and quickly made appointments for a chat when we encountered museum staff during our tour. We installed ourselves in the office just next to the West Africa storage. Immediately we sat down, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff started his narrative.

> Hans-Joachim Radosuboff (HJR): I arrived here out of the blue in 1991. If you look at my CV, I am not an expert. I didn't have anything to do with Africa.

> Margareta von Oswald (MO): What did you do?

> HJR: I was a craftsman. At one point, I learnt how to be a mason and then, for many years, I worked as a craftsman in manual sectors, in technical areas. My last job before coming here was at the Museum of Decorative Arts (*Kunstgewerbemuseum*), as a guard, in the guardhouse. There was a notice that the *Museum für Völkerkunde* was looking for a storage keeper. And I applied and it worked. And then I walked in here (the storage), as we did today. The only difference was that it was somehow much less chaotic, but still, much more chaotic than it is now (laughs). And Mr Koloss [Hans-Joachim Koloss, the Africa curator at the time] who employed me, he picked me out of 128 applications. This was the time when the Wall just had come down. One and a half years after. Anyone applied for anything. Do you understand? Koloss gave me a few brief explanations. When I started to ask interested questions, he was suddenly gone. That's how it was! In that sense, he was not an instructor! And after a few questions and a few gruff answers I told myself: 'OK, you have to do your own thing.' … And very quickly, I understood why I got the job here. After a short time [of working in the

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[27] Quotation from an email exchange with Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, 11 August 2014.

[28] Since then, he has printed, bound as a little book, and deposited the diary in the museum library. The book is consultable in the museum's library. The accounts here are based on his website, which was accessible at http://www.radosuboff.de/starttage/indexMi.html, and consulted on 20 December 2017, but which he has since deleted.

museum], the door swung open, two of my colleagues stood there with these huge carts, filled with objects from Leipzig. 'Achim, your first objects are here!' So, and then of course, I had to help myself – unpacking and disinsectising and such. And then, the hall here was filled with another 25,000 objects.

When the objects arrived in Berlin, the museum was confronted with an exceptional situation. As put by Christian Feest in 1991, '[n]o sane museum ever acquires 45,000 objects in a single stroke' (Feest 1991:32), of which 25,000 belonged to the Africa collections. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff was most directly and immediately confronted with this situation.

When I arrived at the museum, I had *a lot* of ideas in a short period of time. But then I realised, that every single idea I have, I need to keep up 65,000 times. Do you understand? If I don't keep this particular idea, I create more disorder than anything else.

In his diaries, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff wrote: 'Only the humble question remains: "Where to put things?" It certainly doesn't fit in a hatbox.'[29] He found a timely solution. Given that the museum's air-raid shelter in the cellar was out of use due to the end of the Cold War, he decided to reuse it as storage space. In order to have clearly distinct entities in the two different storage spaces – one located in the building's cellar, the other one under the same building's roof, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff separated the regional collections within the Africa collection. He dedicated one space to the East Africa collections and the other to the rest of the Africa collections, which consisted mainly of objects from West Africa and today is commonly referred to as the West Africa storage.

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[29] Quotation from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's 1991diaries, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1991/afro_jahr1991.html, consulted 20 December 2017.

Figures 4.22 and 4.23 Photographs of 'emergency cupboards' (Notregale) *as interim storage for the collections, photograph by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

When the 25 000 objects arrived, I started to get an idea of the amount and the kind of work that I was going to be confronted with. Mr Koloss said to me: 'Well, this will keep you occupied for approximately four years, won't it?' (Hans-Joachim Radosuboff looks at me, and laughs out loud.) As I said, I didn't have much of an idea of what I was doing. I also had no one to talk to. I was what you call an autodidact. However, I knew that in four years, I could never deal with this amount of objects (laughs again). I had a little bit of experience already and if I did my job correctly, I knew that I could only do 25 objects a week. At the most! That's 100 objects per month, and then we have to consider vacation and sick leave. This added up to about 1,000 objects a year. I had 27 years left, there are 25,000 objects. So then, I said to my boss, Koloss, everything would work out: by the time I retired, he would have his two study collections. This information blew him away! Koloss was a Cameroon fan and of course he wanted to see and process everything that concerned Cameroon right away. And this is how I got him to get help. Koloss organised assistants to support me.

And I said to myself: 'OK, the East Africa collection holds approximately as many objects as what has been returned from Leipzig as repatriations.' One didn't have any measure in terms of physical mass. An object could be a pearl or a drum. Still, I knew that the quantity of inventory numbers from the East Africa collection was about 25,000, and thus, the number of objects that were returned. So I said to myself: 'We need to get a whole region out of here. If not, we'll have a mess again.' And this turned out to be East Africa.

As a nonprofessional, I had a dream: I wanted to create a study collection, where you can see possibly everything, but were you do not need to touch anything and where no object touches another object. This was the most important rule. And then there was the question – what motivates the object's arrangement? Well, I said to myself, by topic: It's organised a bit like a thesaurus.

MO: And how did you assign the objects to each category?

HR: I actually created a thesaurus. When I added objects, they appeared immediately in the database, but only as a list of names. I then I assigned certain functions to those objects, and functional groups appeared. … As a result, one could

say that this museum's database's Mama, the Ur-Mama ('great-mother'), comes from me.

The Leipzig repatriation incited the museum to start the collection's digitisation earlier than other SMB museums. The collections coming from Leipzig were all inventoried when they arrived. However, as Hans-Joachim Radosuboff explained, it was done in a rough way.

> If an object came back from Leipzig which was made out of wood, they would just write 'piece of wood'. Then, the object was assigned a Leipzig number (*Leipzignummer*) and that's it. For me, that was an insufficient procedure.

As a reaction, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff expanded the museum's current database GOS and started to define notions (*Sachbegriff*) and subject groups (*Sachgruppen*), departing from the collections themselves. In the old storage system, the objects had already been sorted by subject groups (*Sachgruppen*). This meant that the different regions represented in the collection were mixed up (see Chapter 3 for details of the geographical division of objects). Hans-Joachim Radosuboff thus had to go through all the cupboards in the old storage system as well as through all the war repatriations, to first identify objects marked 'III E', designating East Africa. He then physically laid out the objects according to his self-defined subject group in the museum's hallways and prepared cupboards for those objects in the basement. Mr Tröster, his assistant, then sorted the objects into the cupboards. In the cupboards, the objects were arranged by subject group, such as 'masks' or 'dress', and then, within those thematic cupboards, by region, for example, 'Tanzania'.

In addition to expanding GOS as a database, a system which would be taken over by the entire museum at the end of the 1990s, he created another thesaurus at home to acquaint himself further with the collections. He said that he didn't know anything about the collections, of notions and words 'of which I don't even know if it's a river, a country, a region, or an ethnic group'. A database would help to orientate himself in the thousands of objects. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff designed an *Ethniendatenbank* at home, a database of ethnic groups, based on the works of international and German anthropologists William J. Waterman Roome, Herrmann Baumann, George Peter Murdock and Walter Hirschberg. He kept and continued this database during his entire career but it never entered the museum system. The database of ethnic groups, he admitted disappointedly,

was conspicuously ignored in the museum.[30] Despite the inventory and database work, it was still difficult to find his way around in the collections, as he noted in his 1994 diary:

> I want to mention it once more. It's not easy for someone like me to identify where the objects come from, as I have just started to get a feeling for the appearance of an object. The old collection with its narrow shelves stuffed up to the farthest corner was roughly sorted according to subject groups. But that was also the only comprehensible order that existed in this storage. The object catalogues as well as the fragmentary index cards are sorted by sequence numbers. This didn't say anything about the origin and locations of the objects [in the storage]. A 1000m² storage area with several hundred cupboards of approximately 80 metres of shelves, stuffed with war repatriations. Here I had to do the trick of bringing all East Africa objects together, according to subject groups (*Sachgruppen*). If I were to overlook some, there would be problems later in the East Africa study collection because of too narrow space calculation.[31]

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[30] Phone conversation with Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, 8 October 2019.

[31] Quotation from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's 1994 diaries, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1994/afro_jahr1994.html, consulted 20 December 2017.

Figure 4.24 Map of the East Africa storage, designed by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1993/afro_jahr1993.html, *consulted* 20 December 2017, © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.25 Hans-Joachim Radosuboff in his office, as 'Proud administrator of the study collections, with two connected computers', 1995, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1995/afro_jahr1995.html, consulted 20 December 2017

The challenges inherent in creating systematised ordering structures – imposing names, establishing hierarchies, creating meaning – became evident when I addressed the topic directly. He explained the genealogy of the different categories, listed on the East Africa storage plan – ranging from 'toys' to 'dancing tools' (*Tanzgeräte*) to 'extrasensory' (*übersinnlich*).

MO: Could you explain how the ascription in functional groups worked exactly?

HJR: That resulted first from what was there as a collection. For example, there is hunting (*Jagd*). You can add hunting to livelihood (*Lebensunterhalt*). There is active hunting, when you shoot with bow and arrow. And there is passive hunting. But at one point, I dropped passive hunting because anyways, passive hunting consists in traps. So it becomes 'active hunting' and 'traps'. Then we went on. The 'traps' group consists of 40 or 50 traps. This is confusing. When you have more than 10 terms in a group, you create a subdivision: traps for small animals, traps for big animals.

And so it went on and on. No one wanted to talk with me about this thesaurus. There was no one here to discuss with me, they all dodged when the topic came up …. So I consulted dictionaries or experts. For example, 'What is the difference between medicine (*Medizin*) and drug (*Arznei*)?' Well, I talked to my dentist. Actually, I talked to different people all the time. And later on, when this information was needed for MuseumPlus, every one, constantly, had demands. And they mocked me, in particular for those 'magical objects'. Just to explain to you. For me, 'magic' was not an obvious category. If someone has a crucifix hanging on the wall, it's religion for me. When an African in Cameroon has got his object of faith in his hut – what does that mean to me? Is it 'magic' (*Magie*) or 'bewitchment' (*Zauberei*) or what-do-I-know? But this is an unfair perspective (*ungerecht*)! Why would a crucifix be 'religion' and the Cameroonian object be 'magic' or 'bewitchment'? So, for me, this whole area was simply extrasensory (*übersinnlich*). Why? It is something that my senses cannot perceive, so for me it's 'extrasensory'. Later on, it became 'spiritual' (laughs). This is how such things emerged. With this expression, without being unfair, this African spiritual object could be on equal terms with a European spiritual object. This is how I thought about those issues.

MO: And how did you associate objects with functions? There exists so little detail

about most of the objects …

HJR: Yes, but when you're here for 10, 15 years, then you know how to assign what. What comes up sometimes, for example, is that an axe is a tool but might also have a magical purpose. One can make cross-references in the database: 'see also'. So that works as well.

MO: But in that case, you put the axe in a cupboard for tools?

HJR: Yes, exactly.

MO: So, you have created a hierarchy concerning the assignment?

HJR: Right.

MO: You have to, I guess.

HJR: Yes, you do. As I said, there are about 65,000 objects in the collection. You have to keep track, not only physically but also mentally. If they come and say that they want to have an exhibition about hairdressers, you need to be able to go to the cupboards with 'body hygiene'.

In 1999, parts of Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's dream to create a functioning study collection, at least for East Africa, were realised. In his account of this time on his website, he recalled the situation in detail.

Today, I can add up. A full-time and a part-time position have jointly set up a study collection of 16,500 objects in 5.5 years and entered them into the PC with all relevant information. Since there was no experience for such an undertaking, we had to create a concept (learning by doing) and sometimes adapt completed works to new experiences.[32]

The East Africa storage can be framed as a personal success within an organisational framework that would not prioritise care of collections. As described by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, it was thanks to his personal commitment to the collections and his

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[32] http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1999/afro_jahr1999.html, consulted 20 December 2017.

determined will to realise the storage that he was able to accomplish the task. In his narrative, he continuously described his efforts as 'auto-didactic', with little support from either the curator or other museum staff in the museum. This narrative of 'learning by doing' is repeatedly confirmed by committed employees in different departments within the museum – in which knowledge gained through experience and time in the museum is not documented nor passed on for and to future generations of museum employees (see also Chapter 3). Both Africa museum storages are generally speaking referred to as comparably well organised, but the East Africa storage in particular is described as standing out in the museum's different storages.

Figures 4.26–4.29 West Africa storage, photographs by Marion Benoit,
©Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

'Object love' to circumvent neglect

The work of inventory, ordering, and classifying didn't stop with the process of finishing the East Africa department. Until he left in 2012, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff continued working on the organisation of the West Africa department. Since then, his successors have been in charge of the job of inventory, which has not been accomplished to date. This is testified to by the different accounts of the number of objects that are part of the Africa collection. The official number communicated to the public is a collection of 75,000 objects.[33] In 2014, the curator Peter Junge talked about 42,000 to 45,000 objects already inventoried in the database, with approximately 30,000 still to be done.[34] However, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff would talk of his '85,000 children', then referring to '65,000 objects' to be dealt with. In a meeting with Boris Gliesmann, the database manager, we added up the different accounts and protocols for the department's war repatriations (Leipzig, Wiesbaden, Berlin, Celle). The calculation amounted to 53,815 objects, with a loss due to war of approximately 12,000 objects.[35] The number of objects is not only imprecise because of the absence of an overview of the collection, but is further distorted by an inconsistent system of inventory, which has not been agreed on and has been realised differently and unsystematically in the different departments, depending on the individuals responsible for the inventory. The precise number of objects can thus not be determined.[36]

Whereas on the organisational level the constant lack of resources devoted to collection care can be framed as a history of neglect, on an individual level, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff expressed 'object love'. Object love, as used by Sharon Macdonald in the context of curatorial work, translates into a general commitment to the collection, a feeling of responsibility, honour, and the need to care for the objects (Macdonald 2002:65; see also Geoghegan and Hess 2015). Radosuboff attested to his particular relation to the objects through his personalised narrative and choice of metaphors and

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[33] https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/sammlung.html, consulted 25 February 2019.

[34] Fieldnotes from a guided tour with the curator, 20 November 2014.

[35] Meeting with Boris Gliesmann, 21 December 2015.

[36] This is exemplified when it comes to the inventory of object bundles. What to do and how to categorise object bundles that consist of several parts, such as a quiver with arrows? This question was addressed to Boris Gliesmann during a museum workshop with staff. Even though Boris Gliesmann insisted and imposed on describing an object bundle as one object consisting of several parts (one object number), other museum employees suggested inventorying every single object (several object numbers), while others suggested categorising the object parts with 'a, b, c, …' (one object with parts a, b, c, …). Fieldnotes from a workshop with Boris Gliesmann, 4 November 2013.

words. He referred to the objects as 'my children', or framed it as his duty 'to protect' the collections. In 1996, he commented on the leaking roof, stating that 'Sometimes, something swashed in the storage which would burden my soul.'[37] To counteract 'lakes of water' causing damage, he was forced to install internal gutters, going into buckets that he needed to empty daily. Keeping the storage tidy, organised, and neat was for him a matter of honour (*Ehrensache*).

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[37] Translated from the German by the author: 'Manchmal ist was reimgeschwappt, was meine Seele belastet hat.'

*Figure 4.30 Protecting objects from the leaking roof, photograph by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

*Figure 4.31 The installation of internal gutters, photograph by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.32 Buckets of dirty water that needed to be emptied daily, photograph by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Care for the object also translated in a diversity of, sometimes improvised, practices. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff always had a pen and paper lying beside his bed. 'Sometimes I would wake up at 4 a.m. and would say to myself: "Ah, this is how I am going to do it!" And I would write it down immediately.' When walking around in storage, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff pointed to the different techniques he had invented to store the objects safely. In the context of what he described as a lack of budget, 'I needed to have a lot of energy and ideas!' One prominent example was the placing of yoghurt cups in the cupboards, which I had repeatedly come across while working in storage. The cups had been filled with camphor, a chemical solid that had historically been used as a pesticide. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff had put camphor in every single cupboard to protect the objects from what the museum framed as infestation (*Befall*), an invasion of insects in a particular group of objects.

> It was always the question: How do I protect the objects best? Because there was the story about the insects. A danger for the museum, it was said. And there was always so much drama around this topic, because I had taken over the tradition from colleagues of putting a spoon of camphor in the cupboards [to keep the insects off the objects]. Maybe you can still notice it, when you open the cupboard doors, there's maybe still a bit of a smell of menthol. I mean, I felt it was successful, I did have very little infestation! But it was very much disliked by my colleagues. Well, it's true, the smell, camphor, is an insult to the nose. But then people said it was harmful. But come on, this stuff is part of baby lotion!

Whereas the use of camphor was controversial in the museum, as Radosuboff acknowledged himself, he pointed to further procedures for protecting the objects in the context of scarce resources. After lengthy negotiations, he had managed to convince the curator Hans-Joachim Koloss that new storage cupboards were needed. When he received them, however, they had no fittings, shelves, etc. So that he could install the objects, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff asked all his friends to give him old cardboard tubes and clothes hangers from the drycleaner's. He pushed his colleague, a wine drinker, to never throw away the cork. Wedges made out of cork would avoid putting objects directly on the shelves and would stabilise them.

The list of his solutions and inventions continued. As an entire part of the museum's histories and presents, those stories and names, if mentioned at all, usually disappear into the footnotes of those doing archival work or fieldwork in the museum. Radosuboff's

career and narrative stand in for the many untold histories of personal passion, engagement, and effort which shape the making of these organisations profoundly.

'A treasure too big is a treasure no more.' Referring directly to the ambivalence of the Gift, Hans-Joachim Radosuboff opened his diary with this observation, made by Gerd Höpfner in 1991, curator of South East Asia collections at the time of the press conference on the Leipzig repatriations.[38] Dealing with the 'treasure' in the course of his entire career, Radosuboff embodies both the pleasures and difficulties of what the responsibility of keeping a collection entails from a practical point of view. In the next two sections, the role of the Gift will be elaborated with regard to the object's agency. Reflecting on the tangible impacts of the processes of musealisation, and in particular the process of *Entwesung*, the remaining sections discuss the object's transitions from subject to object, and from object to subject.

From subject to object: musealising and the paradigm of conservation

During a research trip to the Republic of Benin in the context of the exhibition *Object Biographies* in December 2014, our interlocutor Mondicaho Bachalou, a former employee of the museum in Abomey, talked about the ongoing force of so-called *bocio*, protective figures which are usually stuck upright in the earth by the entrances of homes, alongside roads, or as part of shrines.

> To stop a *bocio*, you first have to kill it. Kill it how? You aren't going to kill it with a knife or a gun. There are things that will prevent you from killing it for good so it has no power anymore. And it's not dead, you take it in [your museum], it's alive, in your country. That creates problems. Do you understand?

In this section, I discuss the implications of what it means to turn subjects into objects. By analysing processes of musealisation, I depict how the 'paradigm of conservation' imposes important restrictions on the use, circulation, and, finally, return of objects. I frame conservation as a paradigm to describe a progressive tendency to, at least in the

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[38] Quotation from Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's 1991 diaries, http://www.radosuboff.de/em/1991/afro_jahr1991.html, consulted 20 December 2017.

museum's communications, prioritise the preserving and keeping of collections over other kinds of object uses.[39]

The ontological transformation of an object's status and role

Many objects in the Ethnological Museum have a status which resembles more a person, a subject, or a creature, than what is commonly defined as a simple object. However, once these objects enter the museum, the status of a subject is usually described as having been obliterated, and they are turned into immobile, stable, and unchanging museum objects – controlled, restricted, and confined by the museum's rules and legal regulations. As Hilke Doering and Stefan Hirschauer write, conserving objects means that 'the normal biography of a thing is decelerated, if not halted completely. Aging and decay are replaced by a fixing of the actual state, a kind of eternal youth' (Hirschauer and Doering 1997:297).[40] Other scholars rather compare this 'eternal youth' derogatorily to an act of killing, or freezing (and thus depriving the object of its life). The 'museum effect', for example, is considered to have such consequences, 'a phenomenon observed by museologists whereby an object is radically dislocated from its point of origin, wrenched from its context and rendered a frozen work of art in the surrounds of the museum' (Alberti 2007:373).

When I described the museum storage as a graveyard for objects, insisting on the fact that the museum objects were 'dead' and 'unactivated' in the museum storage, the department's storage manager strongly disagreed. He referred to the objects as not being 'dead' but rather being 'kept' – situating conservation not as a passive activity of the museum, but as an active, crucial, and resource-demanding part of museum work. Along similar lines to Hans-Joachim Radosuboff's assessment of the orderly state of the museum storage as a personal matter of honour (*Ehrensache*), the taking care of the collections was considered the museum's responsibility.

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[39] Encouraged by the professionalisation of tasks related to conservation and collection management, a prominent example of this trend is the Musée du Quai-Branly-Jacques Chirac, in which only the conservators, and not the curators, have direct access to the museum's collections. Another development is the progressive closure of storage to public access as a result of the relocation of collections to geographically distant places. Examples include the British Museum in London or the Musée d'Ethnographie in Geneva.

[40] Translated from the German by the author: 'die Normalbiographie eines Dinges zu verlangsamen, wenn nicht zum Stillstand zu bringen. An die Stelle von Alterung und Verfall tritt eine Fixierung des Ist-Zustandes, eine Art ewiger Jugend.'

The bocios *as an example for the paradigm of conservation*

Throughout our work on *Object Biographies*, working with the objects revealed the limits the paradigm of conservation imposed, and in particular in relation to the *bocios*. In the exhibition, we wanted to address the multiple transformations and trajectories of the *bocios* throughout their lives, highlighting in particular their status as 'stored museum objects', inaccessible and invisible to a general public. Standing in for about 98 per cent for the museum's collection which are not exhibited, we chose the *bocio* to problematise and question the 'unactivated' presence in Western collections, contrasting the absence of *bocio* in Benin, their location of production.

Vis-à-vis the role and signification of a *bocio*, the argument of the 'unactivated' was significant in a particular way. Their use endows them with a psychological potency and role. In her monography on *bocio*, the American art historian Suzanne Preston Blier situates the *bocio*'s potency between art, psychology, and political power. Etymologically, a *bocio* refers to its liminal status between that of an object and subject, between life and death. As 'empowered (*bo*) cadaver (*cio*)', it 'comprises any activating object (*bo*) taking the shape of the human body, more accurately a "cadaver" (*cio*)' (Preston Blier 1996:95). An incarnation of a person, a *bocio* is a figural sculpture through which power is anthropomorphised and visualised. The *bocio* thus enabled residents to somehow gain a sense of control of sometimes onerous social, political, and physical conditions. It helped to respond personally and socially to the wrongs they were going through and to dissipate attendant anxiety around hardship and loss. This is why, Preston Blier claims, the figures were especially significant during the slave trade, which shaped the lives of people for several centuries in their region of production (Preston Blier 1996:26–27).

The *bocio* in our exhibition *Object Biographies* would serve as an example to both shift attention towards the museum's politics of access and storing, and as a point of departure for an exploratory research and cooperation project. We wanted to visually implement our argument by installing the objects in their storage setting. More particularly, we planned to display the objects in the exact way in which we had first encountered them, together with the Beninese art historian Romuald Tchibozo, our collaborator on this section of the exhibition. Most probably arranged by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff or his assistant, the *bocio* – 'visible' and 'aesthetically arranged' – had literally been hanged. With strings attached to their heads, around their bodies, and with object labels wrapped around their necks, the figures were dangling inside the museum storage cupboards. This image of the lynched object, deprived of life by its move to the museum and kept like this

for decades, seemed just too good to be true: we wanted to address the effects of turning things considered and lived with as subjects into museum objects. However, one conservator was shocked when we talked about our plans: the way of storing the objects was *obviously* derogatory according to basic standards. The conservator claimed that there was a risk of losing a good reputation if colleagues were to see that the objects were stored *like this* in the Ethnological Museum. The following day, we found the objects arranged in new boxes, wrapped in silky, acid-free paper, laid down horizontally to prevent any damage from hanging, and protected from light. Regretfully, we would exhibit them that way.[41]

The *bocio* would be part of a collaborative research project, sketched and realised together with Romuald Tchibozo. Considering the *bocio*'s low purchase value, we thought that it would be possible to make the objects an entire part of the research project. We suggested taking them to Benin and Togo.[42] When negotiating the issue, however, the responsible conservator explained that the objects needed to be packed in expensive, so-called climate boxes when travelling (*Klimakisten*). These would protect the objects from any damage and temperature change (conditions which were not provided in the storage). The *bocio* needed to be accompanied by official museum staff to ensure their 'appropriate' treatment, as well as their unpacking and repacking on location. The conservator calculated the costs of this move at several thousand euros. This sum far exceeded our project budget. We decided to take high-resolution images of the objects on site instead. Despite the importance of the objects' physical presence on site and their particular materiality, we thus followed this common but very limiting way of dealing with museum regulations.[43] We addressed the impossibility of taking the objects directly in the video installation which summarised and documented the research process and its

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[41] Fieldnotes from conversations on 18 and 20 July 2014.

[42] The objects had been sold to the museum in 1967 by 'Dr. Otto A. Jäger', a collector about whom we couldn't find more information. We speculated that the contemporary curator Kurt Krieger had been obliged to buy the collector's entire collection for 24,000 DM, as it was only the collection's masks which were subsequently exhibited in a temporary exhibition entitled *Gelede masks from Dahomey* (*Gelede-Masken aus Dahomey*) (1967). Compared to the masks, whose prices went up to 1,500 DM apiece, the *bocios* were comparatively cheap, costing between 45 and 50 DM at the time.

[43] In many collaborative museum projects, one sees people on site working and dealing with images, instead of material objects. The promotional image for the collaborative project 'Tanzania–Germany: Shared Object Histories?' (2016–2019), which worked with the Ethnological Museum's East Africa collections, was just one example of such image use, see https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/research/tanzania-germany-shared-object-histories.html, consulted 12 October 2019.

outcomes (Ramella 2015). Following Romuald Tchibozo's call for a 'decolonisation of research', problematising the absence and presence of objects in Benin and in the West became one of the central questions of the exhibition and research project and enabled discussions on ownership, representation, and memory politics (Tchibozo 2015; Oswald and Rodatus 2017).

*Figure 4.33 'Lynched' bocio in the museum storage, photograph by Margareta von Oswald, ©
Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
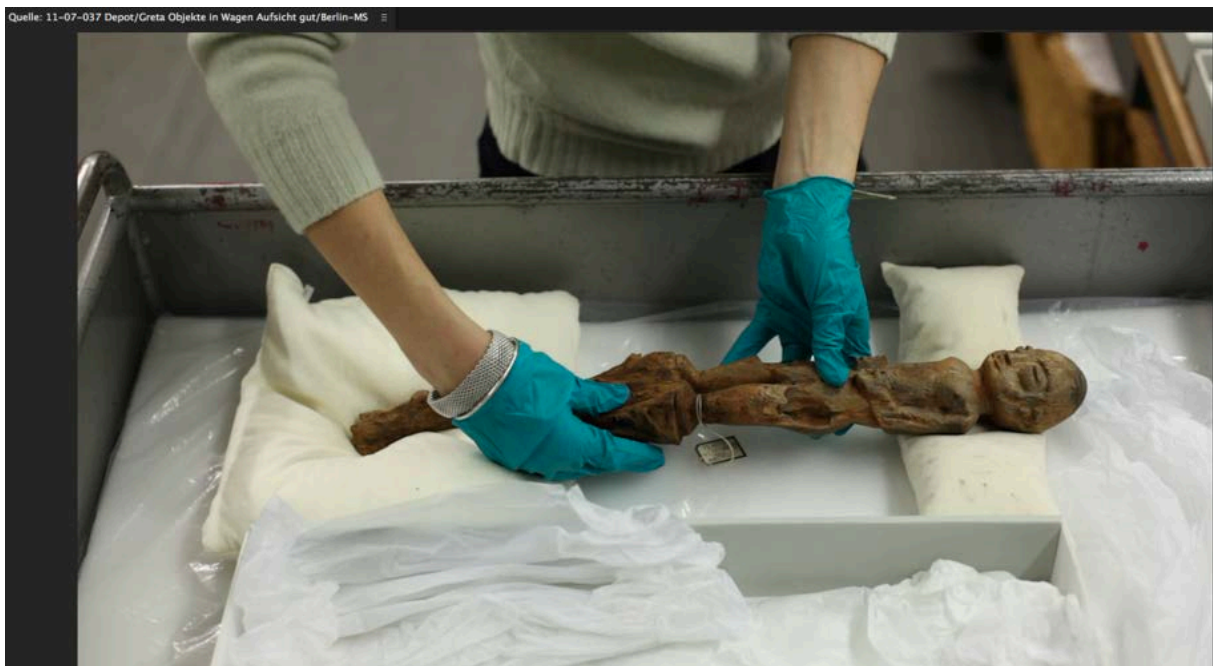
*Figure 4.34 Extract from the video installation: Preparing bocio to be photographed, photograph
by Anna Lisa Ramella, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin –
Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.35 Extract from the video installation: Marion Benoit taking photographs of the bocio, *photograph by Anna Lisa Ramella, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.36–4.38 Examples of the object images taken by Marion Benoit for the research trip,
© Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz
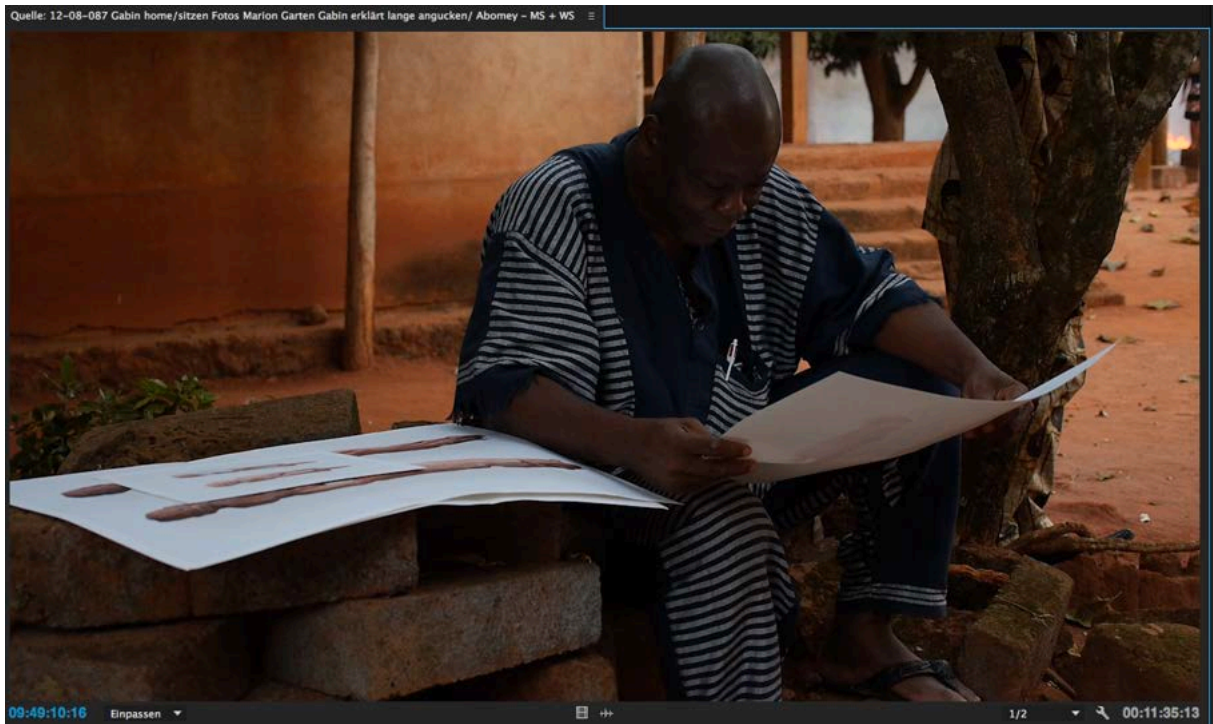
Figure 4.39 Extract from the video installation: Working with the images in Benin with Gimassè Gabin, photograph by Anna Lisa Ramella

Figure 4.40 Extract from the video installation: Discussing research results with David Gnonhouévi, photograph by Anna Lisa Ramella
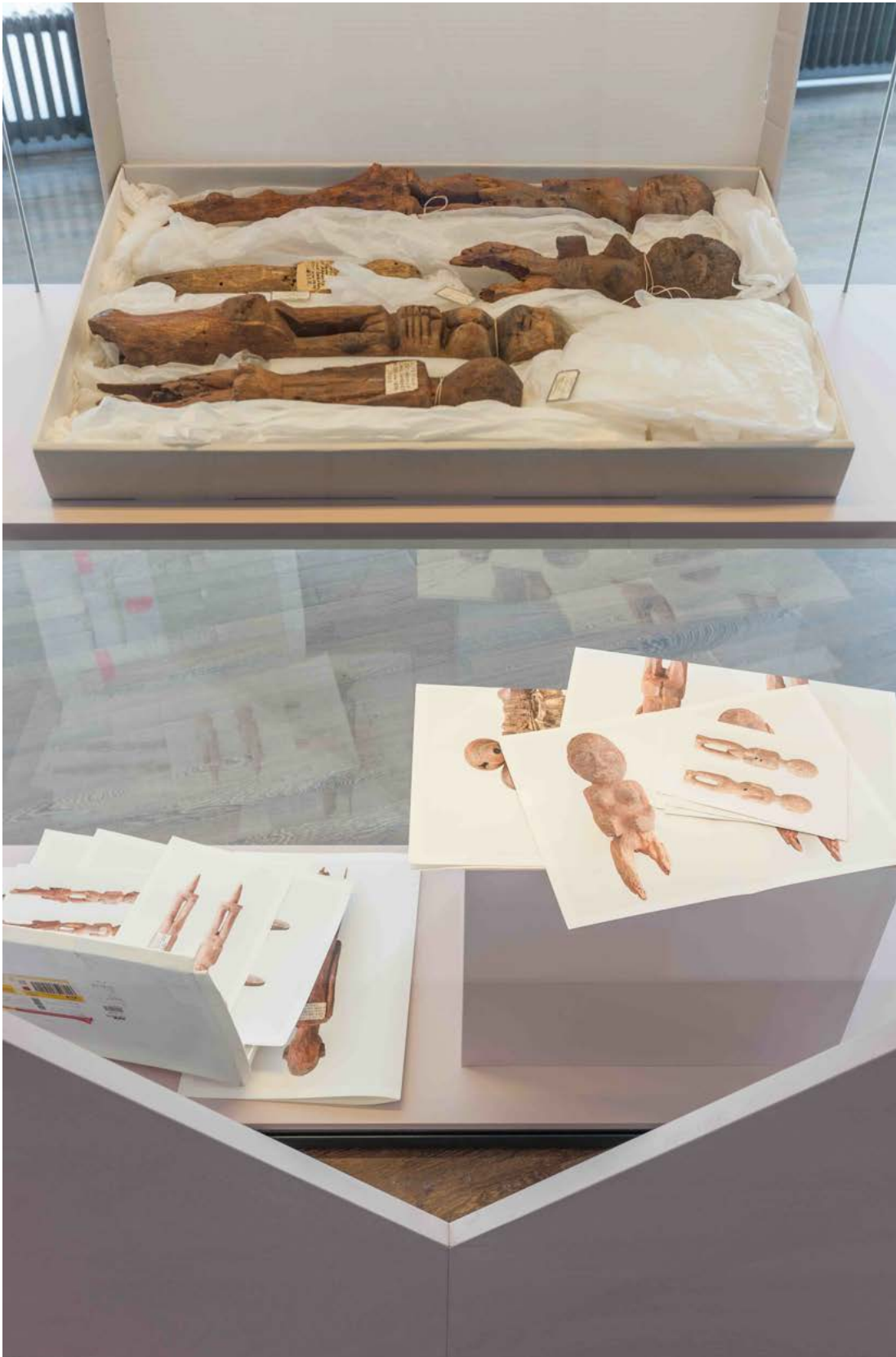
Figure 4.41 Installation view of the bocio *in the* Object Biographies *exhibition, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*
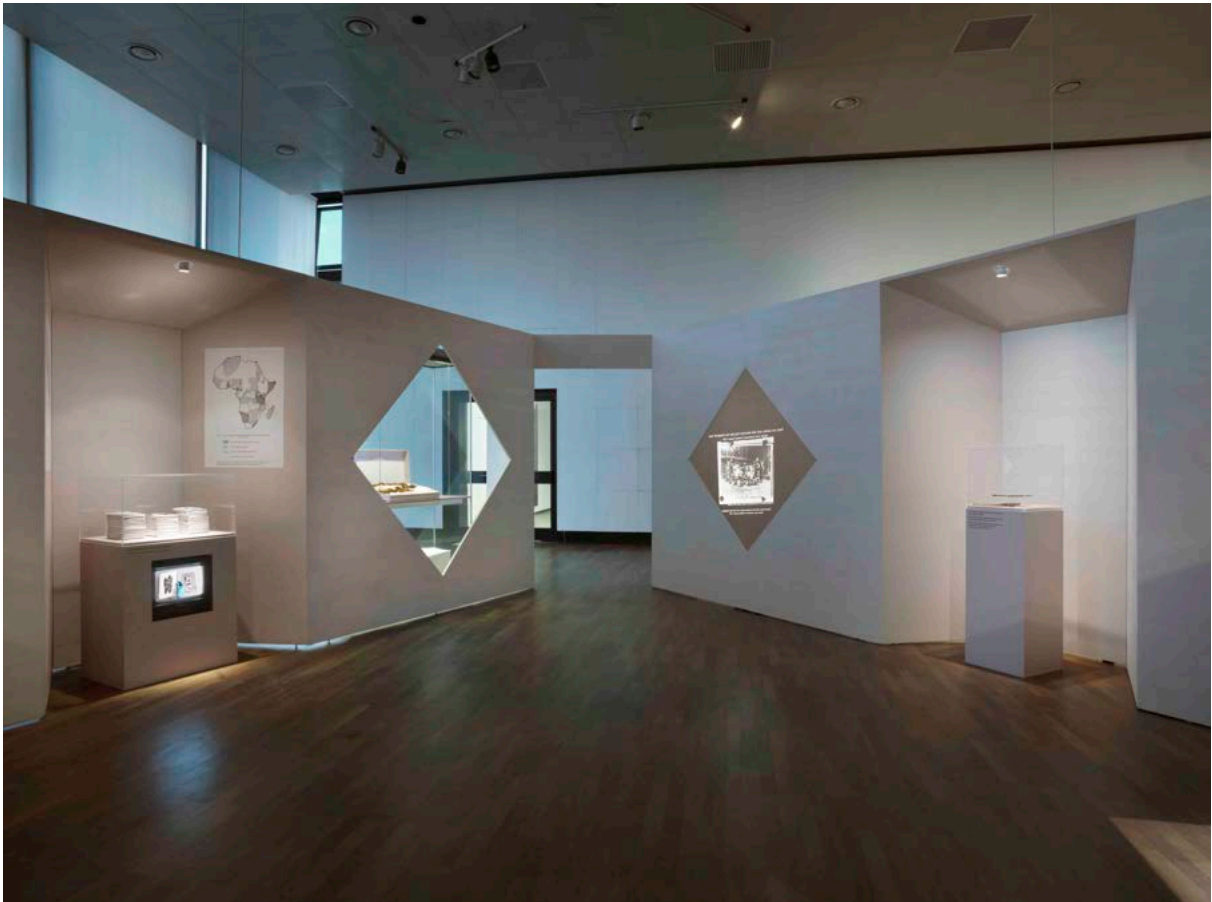
Figure 4.42 Installation view of the bocio *in the* Object Biographies *exhibition, photograph by Jens Ziehe, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Working within the paradigm of conservation, the translocation of things from one context to a museum context translates in their definition and treatment as museum objects. Their previous status, function, and role – possibly also as a subject, a living being – are overshadowed by their integration in a regime defined and determined by the museum's rules and regulations. This regime is supposed to guarantee the preservation of the object, to make it last for an indefinite length of time. These regulations impose particular limits on the way in which these objects can be handled, displayed, and researched on the museum site, but also restricted their circulation and mobility more generally speaking. Being a museum object usually entails being denied other forms of lives – and thus implies the difficulties of engaging with the plural kinds of relationships people and things can establish.

The call for the restitution of museum objects housed in Western museums has been voiced with more pressure recently, especially after the release of the 'restitution report' in 2018 by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (Sarr and Savoy 2018). Regardless of whether this call asserts itself in the future, within the paradigm of conservation, the exploration of the multiplicities of possible thing–human-relations which exist and are to be developed will remain unlikely, or at least controlled and limited. Bénédicte Savoy's and Felwine Sarr's invitation to 'resocialise and resemantise' objects thus seems untenable: The paradigm denies the objects' potential reinsertion into ecologies which Savoy and Sarr depict as 'necessarily plural' (ibid.:27).

At the same time, the process of musealising things also entails that they themselves might have become dangerous for their surroundings. The products once used to protect the objects have turned the objects into things that humans need protection from.

From object to subject: *entwesen* and becoming an agent through the toxic

> Visitor: In which storages is it especially dangerous to work without protection?
> Storage manager: In all of them. You are always obliged to wear protective work wear when you approach the objects. In theory, it's OK to work in the storages when the cupboards are closed, but as soon as you start rearranging objects, it becomes dangerous.
> Visitor: So you shouldn't spend more than eight hours in these rooms?
> Textile Restorer: You shouldn't work more than eight hours anyways![44]

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[44] Dialogue from fieldnotes, 19 November 2013.

As a consequence of the objects' treatment with pesticides and heavy metals, the museum's collection had become poisonous. The official German term for the practice of disinfecting is *entwesen*. In a literal translation, *entwesen* can be translated as 'de-being'. The term can thus be understood as describing the attempt to erase anything living within the object. However, the process of *entwesen* implies not only the taking away of lives. Through the process of disinfecting and treating the collection with poisonous substances, the objects are endowed with another, and not only metaphorical, toxic and disturbing kind of subjectivity and agency. In the following, I show how constant treatment with chemicals has transformed the objects into poisonous agents – treatments which have not only had effects on the objects' substance, but also constitute a danger for those who work with the objects. The objects' new composition then has an impact on their present and future sociability, restricting the way in which one can work, live with, and, as mentioned above, resocialise the objects. Following up on the question of what the objects do, instead of what they represent or symbolise, the chapter's last section then discusses the transformation, effects, and potential agency of the object's very materiality in the museum's everyday.

Killing to preserve: entwesen *and the objects' new forms of agency*
Killing or paralysing an object doesn't only seem to occur when taking it out of its original context where it might have 'lived' and imprisoning it behind glass or placing the object in anonymous storage. The killing also becomes physical and literal, by the museum's attempt to erase everything living inside and around the objects to preserve it. In practical terms, conserving means killing. Today, conservation is ensured by either freezing the object or closing it off from oxygen. The disinfection takes place either in the 'freezing chamber' (*Gefrierkammer*) or the nitrogen tent. In both places, objects persist for some time, isolated from their surroundings, in order to eradicate those living beings which might harm them.

Figure 4.43 Entry to the Entwesung, *photograph by Marion Benoit,* © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.44 Nitrogen tent, photograph by Marion Benoit, © *Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz*

Figure 4.45 Objects prepared to be frozen, photograph by Marion Benoit, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Historically, however, the objects were literally intoxicated by the application or injection pesticides and heavy metal compounds. Even though this method was common in all Western museums, ethnological objects were especially vulnerable because they consist mainly of 'natural' materials, such as wood, leather, textiles, or feathers. These materials are extremely fragile and prone to infestation. Research by the Ethnological Museum's conservator Helene Tello suggests that two-thirds of the museum's collections are contaminated, and that the objects were treated 'extensively and continuously' with heavy metal compounds and pesticides from very early on, some of them even in their place of production (Tello 2006:12, 136). The documentation of and archival traces of the use of pesticides and heavy metal compounds are scarce, but guidelines for pest control date from as early as 1898 and 1924 (Tello 2006:36–39). Tello's research equally shows that the objects which were subject to relocation – such as those stored secretly in Leipzig, as well as in temporary storage spaces during the war, and in particular in Celle – bear additional traces of treatment (Tello 2006:44–47).

After complaints from museum staff, an analysis in 2001 by an external company assessed the effects of the objects' contamination. Based on random samples, the company analysed the quality of indoor air, the composition of dust, and the concentration of pesticides within selected objects. The analysis' results confirmed that the health risk for museum employees was 'relatively high' (Tello 2006:67). As a consequence, before entering the collections, visitors and researchers have been obliged to sign a document to confirm that any visits were at their own risk.[45] Different materials represent different degrees of contamination and thus risk. Textiles, for example, are especially charged with chemicals, while metals are less apt to absorb them. Usually, the collections are kept within closed cupboards, reducing the degree of pesticides and heavy metals in the air. Once the cupboards are opened, however, the researcher, curator, or conservator needs to protect herself, wearing a full-body suit with breathing mask.

Despite the results of this analysis, the degree of protection depends on the museum[46] as well as on the will or not to protect oneself. In the Ethnological Museum, older generations of staff didn't take the new obligations seriously but rather joked about them. When I commented on the fact that the textile conservator didn't wear any protection,

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[45] The document confirmed that '[the c]ontamination with PCP (pentachlorphenol), lindane and DDT (dichlorodiphenyl-trichloroethane) as well as the elements arsenic and mercury has been determined' (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2017).

[46] In Tervuren's Royal Museum for Central Africa, no protection was used when entering the collections and staff were not informed about the degree and kind of chemicals used on the objects.

she just dismissively turned away from me, smiling. She was close to retirement, and had breathed among dresses, puppets, carpets, or flags her entire life. Hans-Joachim Radosuboff confirmed this attitude. 'I didn't die from it. If the DDT made me infertile, I wouldn't know because I don't want children anymore in any case.'

The pesticides and heavy metals' presence was clearly felt when working in the storage. The rooms were charged. Headaches and nausea were recurrent after the visits, especially for infrequent visitors. 'You get used to it after a while', the storage manager claimed.[47] The particular smell within the storage, which consisted of old traces of camphor, the lack of air-conditioning, the narrow rows, and artificial lighting made working in the storage a particular experience, losing a sense of time and place. The treatments had, however, not only an effect on those working with them, but also on the objects themselves. As Helene Tello writes:

> It is an undeniable fact that damage such as fading or changing of colours, yellowing of paper, black spots and/or blooming on works of art or in entire collections are residues of former treatments with pesticides. Hence, besides destruction, these pesticides must be considered an additional potential cause of damage by conservators in their daily work. (Tello 2006:136)

Joshua Pollard in an essay on decay and transience has depicted the change of an object's materiality as 'the transformation of substance' (Pollard 2004). Whilst it might thus prevent or delay the processes of decay, the practice of *Entwesung* doesn't keep the object stable, and fixed. The treated objects transform differently, but in equally substantial terms. Countering the idea of the immortal and durable quality of objects the observation of these processes allow the redefinition of the understanding of objects. As such, ethnographies of processes of conservation, as the work of scholars such as Fernando Domínguez Rubio at New York's MoMA or Tiziana Nicoletta Beltrame at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris shows, shed light on the way in which the works' temporalities are constructed: By observing attempts to stabilise heritage in a material way, the very notions of the stable and perpetual destabilise (Domínguez Rubio 2014; Beltrame 2017). The objects then become inseparable from those who manipulate them, as well as from the infrastructures, technologies, digital and physical environments, invisible substances which conserve but transform them. Taking into consideration the

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[47] Fieldnotes from 4 November 2014.

transformative potential of the material, museum collections can be conceptualised 'as collections of processes rather than as collections of "objects"' (Domínguez Rubio 2014).

Unruly agents: disturbing the museum's everyday

As part of these processes, the substances turn the collections into agents by rendering them toxic. At the same time, through the continuous and seething presence of these compounds, the objects disturb the regulated procedure and supposedly sterile environment of the museum. Some of the objects contrasted with what Fernando Domínguez Rubio depicts as 'docile objects': 'artworks that diligently occupy their designated "object-positions" and comply with the set of tasks and functions that have been entrusted to'. On the contrary, these objects were unruly insofar as they were leaving marks, they 'blossomed out', as if exhaling their venomous breath (Domínguez Rubio 2014).

The residues of treatments left visible traces. What's inside the objects, such as the chemical DDT, has been leaking out on the objects' surface, and materialises in the form of a shiny dust. The objects 'blossom out' (*ausblühen*). Sometimes white crystals, similar to ice, appear. To remove the chemicals, visible or not, one 'aspirates' (*absaugen*) the objects, a lengthy and unsatisfying job.[48] 'It's not like cleaning the living room. You aspirate those tiny objects for hours, the machine is extremely loud and you most probably won't see the result of your work. It's also unsatisfying because it's a superficial treatment. The objects are thoroughly contaminated and the remnants of treatments will continue to leak.'[49] The removal of pesticides and heavy metal, however, could only ever be superficial because they were now completely part of the object's physical and material constitution. Whereas 'wet methods' for cleaning the objects would remove dust and soiling from the objects' surfaces it would have 'little impact on the matrix of artifacts' (Tello and Unger 2010:37).

During the deinstallation of an exhibition, one conservator suddenly started to swear. An object had unexpectedly left lasting, yellow traces in the form of the sculpture on the expensive neon-lit plinth. This object had come from museum storage to replace an object which would now return. As if it wanted to annoy and leave a trace in the exhibition before being reintegrated in storage, it left its marks within the exhibition space.

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[48] Fieldnotes from 26 November 2013.

[49] Conversation with museum storage manager, 30 October 2013.

Figures 4.46 and 4.47 The yellow traces left by the object, and the attempt to remove it with methylated spirits (Brennspiritus), 19 October 2015, photographs by Margareta von Oswald, © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

'Damn it', the conservator exclaimed, 'this is the first time something like this has happened! I should have put a piece of protective foil underneath the object. But usually, the plastic of the plinth is resistant!' The conservator tried to remove the stain but the traces stayed. The conservator explained that these happened to be traces, evaporation (*Ausdünstungen*), consisting usually of fat that originated in the objects' patina. Trying different products, the conservator got more and more aggressive and anxious. Only after rubbing hard, could the spot be removed.[50]

Continuing our work, the conservator explained that, besides these evaporations, there was a diversity of different forms of dust in the museum that they were working with, which could come from multiple contexts and regions. Dust is a matter, as Tiziana Nicoletta Beltrame describes, which ties elements and entities in the museum together: a sign of the objects' physical histories and treatments, carrying traces from where they have been and what has been done to them, dust also allows the insects' presence in storage and exhibition areas to be mapped: it is a supplier of food for the insects and fungi to nourish themselves from (Beltrame 2016). The conservator pointed out a particularly persistent dust, which drove museum employees crazy. This dust would appear *inside* the glass showcase, even if the objects were perfectly isolated by the glass, as if the object was sweating. Cleaning the showcases from the inside after the object had been removed, the conservator smiled when mentioning the high number of profession-specific articles that mentioned this kind of miraculous dust, which seemed to appear out of nowhere.

'Museum dust' was another kind of dust which I encountered, and which was always described derogatively in the museum – a disturbing dust to be eradicated. In a working session with a conservator in the museum storage, we were looking at so-called 'Swahili mats', deciding which of them were to be exhibited in the new permanent exhibition. Inspecting several of these mats, the conservator stressed that one of the mats could not be exhibited because of the 'ugly black museum dust' it bore. When I asked what this meant, the conservator explained, speculating that this dust presumably came from either 'Russia, Leipzig, or simply from here. This dust looks very much like dust from the museum to me.' 'Museum dust' in this context referred to the former use of coal stoves, blackening the objects with soot.[51] During our tour with Hans- Joachim Radosuboff, he commented on how 'museum dust' could become source of conflict.

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[50] Fieldnotes from 19 October 2015.

[51] Fieldnotes from a restoration session, 20 March 2014.

When Peter Junge [curator for African collections 2001–2014] wanted to give things on loan, sometimes we had war. The conservator's priority was always to know whether an object was apt to be put on loan (*ausleihfähig*). Sometimes, I said to Mr Junge. 'No, this object looks dingy (*schäbig*), we can't give it on loan.' And he answered, 'But these are just signs of use!' No, this is not a sign of use. This has been damaged when it was in Leningrad or Leipzig. This is *our* fault. Not the African's traces. And that's why we can't give it on loan. We are making fools of ourselves! And then Junge told the conservator to come. I basically threw myself on my children, protecting, shielding them from any harm.[52]

The objects' 'signs of use', also described as 'wear and tear', are essential in ethnological collections. As a proof of 'ethnographic authenticity', value is attributed to the objects, and the signs of use are even judged an integral part of the objects' identity.[53] The object is supposed to physically carry the magic it is imagined to transmit. As Hans-Joachim Radosuboff pointed out, judgements of the 'original' and 'authentic' came into conflict with the traces of the collection's museum career, traces which were devalued and made to disappear.

At the same time, however, the conflict points to the simultaneous agencies, the 'vibratory quivering of material' (Beltrame) which one is dealing with in the museum. The ongoing attempt at controlling the object results in the over-shadowing of the object's former subjectivities and spirits with the paradigm of conservation whilst endowing it with new kinds of agency – toxic and disturbing – which significantly impact museum employees' work conditions. Conservation then always remains an *attempt*: Mondicaho Bachalou highlighted that the *bocio* wasn't dead, but very much alive, creating problems. These transformations of the object's meaning and substance allows me to argue for an irreversible transformation of its identity.

Conclusion

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[52] Translation from the German by the author: 'Und so habe ich mich quasi schützend über meine Kinder geschmissen.'

[53] The 'wear and tear' is quoted here from an interview with the Belgian collector Marc Felix (Corbey 2000:174). See also the monograph by Christopher B. Steiner on the trade in African art for definitions of 'ethnographic authenticity' (Steiner 1994:100–103).

Commenting on the much-discussed and controversial 'restitution report' in an interview, its co-author Felwine Sarr came back to the significance of objects in Africa for their former owners.

> All the objects that came from Africa had a meaning, a role in the community. These artefacts were not objects, they were subjects. They have an identity, they emanate power and the ability to act. In the cosmology of Africa, they brought the invisible into the visible. Rituals gave them influence. The identity of these objects changed when they entered museums. They were given a new identity. This metamorphic identity made them hybrids. They encompass both Europe and Africa, they stand at the border between the two cultures. This now defines their very essence. (Bloch 2019)[54]

Whereas Felwine Sarr argues from a purely historical and symbolic point of view, this chapter has shown that museum objects are physically, and thus irreversibly, an amalgam of their different histories. The making and returning things into museum objects has had material, lasting, and irreversible consequences on the objects' physical and symbolic constitution and identity. As 'hybrids with a metamorphic identity', as Felwine Sarr characterises museum objects, the layers of histories are living and working within the objects, added through human (creative) intention, encouraged by the different materials, liquids, and chemicals that they have absorbed, shaped by the technologies and environments that surround them.

The chapter's guiding metaphor of the Gift, then, articulated in its double-sidedness throughout the chapter – both in its toxicity and the different museum practices of dealing with and caring for the collection's abundance. This chapter thus concentrated on the objects' museum life and 'being kept' in the museum storage. Whereas the aspect of being kept concerns the greater part of the collections (as opposed to being exhibited), and the lion's share of their life span, this aspect of their trajectory is hardly taken into account. It is practices associated with 'keeping' which form the core of this chapter, ranging thus from the histories and presents of storing the objects, and in particular the dealing with these practices in the context of organisational neglect, to the practices of conserving, as in the musealisation of objects and the practices of disinfecting, or *entwesen*. Despite the overall framing of these practices as conserving or keeping, observation of the objects' life in the museum shows how much the objects are subject to

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[54] Translated from the German by the author.

change, if only through the objects' transformation of substance.

The object thus counters simple understandings of the 'here' and 'there', the 'us' and 'them'. Through its materiality, it defies understandings of identities as singular, or pure. Rather, to put it in Paul Basu's words, the object can be understood as being intrinsically 'in-between' worlds and systems of knowledge production (Basu 2017). The object challenges notions of authenticity, and of the original, as it incorporates the multiplicity of existences it has gone through, being part of both African and European universes. With a view to the virulent discussions on restitution, return, and the rearticulation and reanimation of ethnological collections and archives, the chapter raises questions in relation to the paradigms in which the object will be and can be thought and worked with. Central here is the question whether or not the paradigm of conservation will continue to be privileged in the treatment and definition of the museum's collections. This includes interrogations on whether the museum's primary goal should be to keep things for future generations, or rather if its aim should be to use its collections for present ones. Do these two options exclude each other? And if not, how can the paradigm of conversation be made compatible with the objects' former uses and roles, and thus with the option to be resocialised, in 'ecologies' that are 'necessarily plural', as Sarr and Savoy suggest (Sarr and Savoy 2018:27)?

Conclusion: Sticking to ambivalence, staying in crisis

At the time of writing in mid-2019, colonialism is politically and publicly acknowledged as an integral part of Germany's history. The remembrance and recognition of, and research into, German colonialism was first announced, then anchored in the 2018 coalition contract (Koalitionsvertrag 2018:154, 166, 169). The coalition contract confirmed Germany's focus on memory politics as part of the motto 'no future without memory' (*ohne Erinnerung keine Zukunft*) – and included German colonial history by putting it on the same level as the remembrance of the SED dictatorship and the NS reign of terror (Koalitionsvertrag 2018:167). In 2018, representatives of the government stated that 'Germany and Europe need to face their colonial history', and in direct connection with this recognition, described restitution as 'only the first step' in a process of historical reconciliation (Grütters and Müntefering 2018).

The seemingly natural or causal relationship between questions of addressing German colonialism and museum collections substantiate ever more that museum collections, and the Humboldt Forum as Germany's 'most important German cultural project of the twenty-first century' (Parzinger 2011), serve as central prisms to negotiate Germany's stance towards its colonial history. Public funds now prominently support research on colonialism, and in particular provenance research. In 2019, the German Lost Art Foundation established a branch which focuses on colonial-era provenance research – in an organisation originally founded 'in order to aid the search for cultural assets and especially those of Jewish provenance which were illegally obtained through Nazi persecution' (German Lost Art Foundation 2019a; BPA 2019). Felwine Sarr, co-author of the controversial and provocative 'restitution report', now describes Germany as one of the 'most progressive [nations] in Europe' when it comes to dealing with its colonial histories, and in particular where commitment to and implementation of restitution are concerned (Sarr and Savoy 2018; Felwine Sarr in Bloch 2019). The Humboldt Forum, for its part, is profiled to become a 'centre for postcolonial debate' (Bayerischer Rundfunk 2019; see also Bundesregierung 2019:9). These discourses, political decision-making processes, and their organisational implementation point to the multifarious ways in which different histories understood as 'difficult heritage' (Macdonald) in Germany and the associated remembrance practices and memory politics start to relate, and risk competing.[1]

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[1] With the public recognition of German colonial history, its relationship to and the general position of Holocaust and National Socialist remembrance has become more central. Relationships between

When I started my research in 2013, the scene was different, if not contrary. The German political landscape was marked by political *faux pas* and the breaking of diplomatic protocol when it came to the interaction with representatives and descendants of the formerly colonised, both in Germany's former colonies and in Germany. Requests for recognition and claims for (financial) reparation concerning the colonial war and genocide committed against the Ovaherero and Nama peoples were pressing. Public outcries and opposition to the Humboldt Forum were prominent, and even dominant, in the public sphere. Understood as a national representation of Germany, the Forum was criticised as 'Eurocentric', 'restorative', and 'in direct contradiction to the aim of promoting equality in a migration society' (No Humboldt 21! 2013). Demands for transparency around and access to research and, finally, restitution of collections were on the table. The Forum's representatives, however, routinely confirmed the collection's legal and legitimate status within the Ethnological Museum (Parzinger 2011:21).

Recent developments suggest change – despite recurrent setbacks and contradictions in the recognition of and dealing with German colonialism throughout the last years.[2] If and how words will be followed by (sustainable) action is uncertain at the time this thesis is being completed. Which promises will be kept until after the passing of politically opportune events, and in particular the Humboldt Forum's opening, remain unforeseeable; promises which include that of research on and making accessible colonial collections, of collaboration in the collection's curation and related programming, and finally that of the restitution of cultural artefacts.

Adopting a perspective from within the museum, this thesis engaged in an anthropology of colonial legacies in order to grasp, document, and analyse these developments. In its first chapter devoted to the practice of 'communicating', the thesis chronicled

provenance research related to both regimes has started to solidify since an initial conference in Munich in 2017 (Förster et al. 2018), and has been institutionalised with the creation of the colonial-era-focused branch of the German Lost Art Foundation. However, the need to politically position the Holocaust as 'without precedent and incomparable' in Germany remains prominent (Kultusminister Konferenz 2019:3).

[2] One prominent event was the opening of the exhibition German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present' (German Historical Museum) in the autumn of 2016, during which activists and the descendants of victims of the Nama / Herero genocide claimed that they had been excluded from the opening ceremony in the museum, and protested outside (Kopp et al. 2018). Another item on the agenda of activists has been the option for financial reparations concerning the genocide committed against the Ovaherero and Nama people.

developments from the organisational neutralisation and downplaying of Germany's colonial past to its public recognition and acknowledgement. I discussed how the colonial past was explicitly dealt with by representatives of the organisations involved, as well as from my own curatorial perspective. This allowed me to address the tensions, frictions, and affects involved in the tackling of so far unacknowledged parts of a nation's history. The chapter positioned the mobilisation of notions such as 'provenance', 'shared heritage', or 'collaboration' as paradoxical and often contradictory: related practices are both pivotal and critical for the 'working through' of the museum's colonial legacies, as well as politically opportune and possibly self-referential.

The thesis thus began by elaborating and discussing an evolving acknowledgement of German colonialism. Its focus, however, was on how the colonial past and its legacies cannot be 'come to terms with'. It subsequently concentrated on how – even if addressed and identified as such – a 'working through' the colonial past needs to be dealt with continuously and in its contradictions, limits, and frustrations, trapped within asymmetrical power relations. Concerned with the practices of 'exhibiting', 'researching', and 'conserving' the collections, the thesis's remaining three chapters thus articulated the grappling with and troubling of the museum's colonial legacies on multiple levels and scales. These concerned the museum's epistemologies and infrastructures, its modes of display and issues of representation, the interplay between the museum's 'cultures' and 'structures', embracing the abundance of the collection and its materialities.

Throughout the thesis, I showed how current knowledge production and museum practices within the museum are based on and continue to be shaped by parameters that date back to the museum's foundation in the nineteenth century. In the museum's everyday, how an object is thought and defined, and how it is named, ordered, and categorised can be linked back to and can risk reinscribing and reproducing colonial taxonomies in the museum. Its definition as museum object limits, overshadows, and sometimes overwrites or impedes the object's potentially other ontological status and lives. Even if museum staff identify and explicitly confront the museum's colonial genealogy, the process of engaging with colonial legacies is a far from linear and clearly defined process. Besides persisting taxonomies, this process is further obstructed by the positioning in a disciplinarily secluded museum landscape, in which binaries continue to be produced and colonial differences re-emerge. Materially embedded and architecturally fixed, definitions of 'us' and 'them' are confirmed through the attribution of 'European' and 'non-European' to particular collections on the Museum Island and throughout

Berlin's museum landscape. These segmentations allude to understandings of 'civilised' and 'primitive' by reducing the understandings of material culture to either 'arts' or 'culture'. Furthermore, the collection's regional departmentalisation, both in exhibition and the museum's internal infrastructure, confirms historical anthropological understandings of how 'culture' is conceived. It includes the conviction that culture is regionally confined and can be holistically represented via material culture; an understanding which forms one of the point of departure of the museum's mission in the nineteenth century.

To sum up, the analysis pointed to how the museum's structures and infrastructures are rooted in and confirm colonial modes of defining 'culture'. These understandings of culture imply particular conceptions of how to live together, shaped by colonial binaries which contribute to reproducing convictions and narratives of Western superiority. These understandings have been challenged on several fronts from within and outside the museum. At the same time, they continue to be engrained in the museum and subsequently sustain processes of colonial difference making, which, in turn, reflect conflicts and frictions related to German society more generally.

Metaphors

The thesis suggested four central metaphors which enabled reflection and proposed alternatives on how to tackle the 'working through' of colonial legacies. The introduction of the metaphors was an attempt to redirect and divert reflections on these processes towards more uncertain and undefined terrain. The metaphors of haunting, repair, avatars, and toxicity all convey diverse theoretical baggage and itineraries. The metaphors thus carry the potential to expand the reflections to a diversity of debates beyond the museum as colonial legacies *stricto sensu* – and to relate the analysis to larger debates and literature on ontology, (gender) identity, hauntology, reparation, and recovery.

This possibility of the *beyond, elsewhere, and otherwise*, I argue, is crucial in the field of museum anthropology, which is in need of abstraction and distance taking, on the one hand, and of kindness, empathy, and curiosity on the other. Reflections tend to stay within the field's own frames of reference, potentiated by the twists and turns of the ethnological museum's 'identity crisis'. The curator and former museum director Clémentine Deliss once described the field as being reigned over and monopolised by a

self-referential 'endogamous society of museum anthropology'.[3] At the same time, the field is shaped by binaries of 'good' and 'bad' practice, 'bashing', as well as, crucially, weariness. The museum staff I engaged with, and in particular those employed by the SPK, judged work to be difficult not only because of the need to contend with 'difficult heritage' and high expectations, but also on account of the organisation's over-complex structures, its hierarchical composition, the lack of transparency, and thus the limitations imposed on its employees. The metaphors are thus a proposal to think outside of the usual references, and to point towards potentials and possibilities in the future.

The metaphors pointed in particular to a rethinking of the museum's temporalities, the role of affect, and agency. One crucial inquiry of the thesis was on the relationship between past, present, and future. In different degrees and shades, the metaphors question these relations, as they destabilise and blur demarcations between them. This includes challenging notions such as 'continuity', of descriptions of the 'different' or the 'new', as well as promises of 'transformation' or 'change'. The metaphors render tangible *how* the past and its material and immaterial legacies persist in the present. With references to healing, recovery, reparation, the metaphors of repair and haunting in particular propound different modalities of living with and amongst the echoes of the past. The metaphor of the avatar, then again, offers a means to reflect on, but also to evade the museum's historical groundedness. At the same time, these images subsequently allow us to move beyond the seeming impasses of the past and present, and to think towards other futures.

The metaphors also illustrate the affective dimension of museum work. Haunting in particular articulated the uncanniness, malaise, and uneasiness that contending with colonial legacies entails. The literal presence of colonial legacies in material and immaterial shape alludes to the lingering presence of colonised bodies, and the histories these presences document and incorporate. Positioned and writing from within predominantly white organisations, both university and museum, these presences articulated a particular affective dimension of museum work to me. For me personally, the emotional responses related back to those associated with contemporary white privilege, fragility, and shame. They laid open and referred to both historical and current power asymmetries. As Nanette Snoep, then curator and museum director in Leipzig, once recounted in conversation with me, 'It is not enough to talk a little bit about

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[3] Discussion of the author's presentation of her PhD project at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac within the framework of the seminar 'Ecologie des collections', 7 May 2017.

colonial history, put it in a small showcase, and that's it. The malaise stays.'[4] The seemingly unintelligible colonial presences then raise unsettling questions about today's circumstances of living together and negotiating society. The presences confront us with the violent colonial pasts they incorporate and the continuation of racist structures they point to.

The consideration and acknowledgement of the presence of spirits and ghosts at the same time allude to the manifold subjectivities and identities the collection embraces. Thinking with the metaphors of the avatar, toxicity, and the Gift in particular shifted attention to the objects' identity and the forms of agency the material deploys, both in its quantity and quality. They point to the different ontological transformations the objects traversed throughout their existence, encouraged both by the transformation of their significance, and their transformation of substance. I suggested the use of metaphors in order to think the beyond and otherwise of the collections, but they also bear the risk of exoticising or trivialising the subjects of analysis. Stating that 'the colonial past is haunting', for example, risks denying agency or even presence to those activists who have engaged in the recognition of Germany's colonial past. Hoping to have sensitively dealt with the problems associated with the use of metaphors, the metaphors invite readers to not take the objects' seemingly naturalised status as passive museum object for granted – such as when the object develops agency because of its potential to harm and poison those surrounding it. Thinking with metaphors troubled the object lessons this thesis proposed, as they problematised the suggested 'arguments about the world made through things' (Geismar 2018:xv).

Ethnological museums and the anthropology of colonial legacies

Situating the museum as colonial legacy might appear to some as a strong framing. Can one limit the understanding of the museum to the label of the colonial? Whereas the museum has been recognised as a modern organisation, and as an organisation which contributed to the making of nations,[5] positioning the museum as colonial legacy might still cause irritation. To reduce the collections to being 'colonial' ignores, for instance, the fact that many of the objects, and more importantly the cultures and peoples who are

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[4] Retranscription of an interview with Nanette Snoep at Leipzig's Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde, 19 April 2016.

[5] For the modern museum, see for example Greenhill 1992; Bennett 1995, and for the relationship between modernism and colonialism see for example Quijano 2007; Mignolo 2011.

at their origin, pre-date colonialism and have existed independently from colonial power structures. The historian Glenn Penny has stated that the 'the role [of colonial interests] was neither the dominant nor the most important factor in the development' of ethnological museums (Penny 2002: 13). However, like 'modern' or 'national(ist)', I adopt regarding the museum as colonial, and the ethnological museum in particular, as one particular lens. This focus shifts attention to the museum's historical relations with and role within the colonial project, as well as towards the afterlives, echoes, and implications of these relations in the present. This positioning is thus an acknowledgement of the structuring factors that the colonial past has had on the present. It puts an emphasis on how the colonial weaves through the museum's histories and reverberates in its presents. Defining the museum as colonial legacy then focuses on where and how its structuring effects manifest – as, indeed, they do in obvious and less obvious modes. Centrally and finally an ethical choice, the museum as colonial legacy enabled me to explicitly point to the continuation of and dealing with racist and discriminatory aspects of contemporary life and work in a society shaped by its genealogy in colonialism.

The thesis contributes to the anthropology of colonial legacies insofar as it focuses on the way in which a pivotal Western organisation, grounded in, and constituted through colonial governance, works through its colonial pasts and presents. The Ethnological Museum offered itself as a means to think about Germany's relation to its colonial past in particular because the museum's colonial legacies are not deniable. The colonial relations are materialised in the museum's constitution, the collections and their documentation are evidence of colonial exchange in its different, and often violent forms. It is possibly only because of colonialism's material dimension, in combination with the strong representational tropes of the Humboldt Forum, that the discussion around German colonialism could arise in such intensity and manifold forms during the period that the thesis covers; in a national and notably political context which has long been shaped by bypassing and ignoring the public remembrance and recognition of its colonial past. As such, the research was in itself often subject to contradiction, as those working in the museum stood in for and were active participants in, at once, the addressing, laying open, and working through of the museum's colonial legacies as well as their reproduction, maintenance, and confirmation.

The field's dynamics and prospects for future research

In both their intimate and public and political manner, grappling with the colonial in and through the collections in Berlin indicates larger dynamics in society making, institution building, and memory culture. These dynamics include the political desire to be more 'inclusive' and 'diverse', and the closely related call to 'decolonise' Western organisations. Major cultural organisations in the West have been under scrutiny concerning their relation to intersectional 'diversity', in relation to their publics, programme, and personnel in particular. Controversies in this regard have been frequent in the last few years.[6] Following museums such as Tate Modern in London or the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the recently reopened Museum of Modern Art in New York testified to this demand, as the expansion and rehanging of its collections followed the mission to 'globalise' and 'diversify' its narrative of twentieth-century art histories. The Humboldt Forum, in this regard, occupies an ambiguous position. Concerning 'programme', the organisation claims to pay respect to these questions. Its general framing and structure, however, reflect and cement differences and museum concepts rooted in colonial thought, which in turn challenge inclusive and egalitarian conceptions of society. The Forum doesn't have a regular and visiting 'public' yet, which could be scrutinised in terms of 'diversity'. Political decisions concerning 'personnel' seem to have bypassed the calls for diversity and decolonisation by political decision-makers responsible for recruitment. The personnel-related decisions have rather confirmed the Forum's reputation as a 'house of old white men' (Rollhäuser 2017; Bloch and Soh Bejeng Ndikung 2016; Holfelder 2018).[7] How the organisation will respond to these demands and expectations for more diversity and inclusivity remains to be seen.

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[6] On the issue of personnel, the outraged reactions at the Brooklyn Museum after the museum's decision to hire a white woman, Kristen Windmuller-Luna, as its consulting curator for African art (Greenberger 2018) are the most striking example. This appointment took place in the context of a debate on restitution of African art by Western museums, fuelled by the recently released film *Black Panther*, which prominently featured a scene in an imagined museum (Candy 2018; Ragbir 2018; Cascone 2018; Haughin 2018).

[7] This concerns Hartmut Dorgerloh (director and CEO of the Humboldt Forum), Jan Lindner (director 'Programme and Events' of the Humboldt Forum), Lars-Christian Koch (director 'Collections' of the Humboldt Forum, director Ethnological Museum and Museum for Asian Art), Gorch Piecken (chief curator of the Humboldt Laboratory in the Humboldt Forum), Paul Spies (chief curator of the State of Berlin in the Humboldt Forum and director of the Stadtmuseum Berlin), Alexis von Poser (deputy director Ethnological Museum and Museum for Asian Art).

Part of these dynamics is also the shifting relationship between memory and identity politics, including the challenge to define and foster a memory culture which is inclusive and 'multi-directional' (Rothberg 2009), and not competitive. On the one hand, this concerns the architectural politics – of construction and demolition – on the *Schlossplatz*. Being for or against particular architectural visions for the *Schlossplatz* have, at least since the fall of the Wall, pointed to particular visions of the German nation and identity. The politics of recognition involved in these negotiations seem to articulate the desire of some for a restorative and conservative memory politics, honouring Germany's Prussian and royal heritage, closely entangled with Germany's imperial mission. At the same time, the conflict stands in for the continuous erasure and silencing of Germany's socialist past. This has not only manifested in the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, but also in the ongoing doubts around and blockage of the construction of the *Einheitswippe*, the only German memorial honouring the GDR's Peaceful Revolution (*Friedliche Revolution*) and German reunification (Fröhlich 2018; Balzer 2019). On the other hand, and more recently, the focus on the 'provenance' of colonial collections has stirred up debate on the singularity of the Holocaust and related crimes, and the fear of challenging its singular position in German memory politics (Koalitionsvertrag 2018; Kultusminister Konferenz 2019). The claims for a recognition of colonial pasts and imperial histories, finally, have been closely related to developments and debates on Germany's self-understanding as 'migration society' (*Einwanderungsgesellschaft*), in a context of both rising right-wing presence in the German political landscape and right-wing extremism, crime, and racist terrorism.[8] Shaped by a consciousness of tackling its 'difficult heritage' with a focus on its National Socialist past, the nation seems confronted with negotiating how to bring together and reconcile a diversity of groups and claims in search of recognition of 'their' histories of marginalisation or discrimination. The thesis thus opens up reflections and invites further thought about how a national memory culture in Germany is shaped and what it can become.

With a further acknowledgement of colonialism in Germany, the reflections and interesting discussions concerning colonial legacies seem only to open up now, rather than settling. With parallel debates and developments in other European contexts, it remains to be seen and researched what the policies and associated processes in relation to museum collections, and the politics of restitution in particular, indicate with regard to international diplomacy. What can these politics in relation to confronting colonial

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[8] See for example Thiemeyer 2016; Terkessidis 2019; Thiemeyer 2019.

histories indicate about desires and realities vis-à-vis contemporary North–South relations and, subsequently, contemporary modes of cooperation? What can politics of restitution and memory say about inter-European relations, in which advances in one country clearly trigger reactions and the need for a political stance in other European contexts? The focus on one single organisation in this thesis allowed me to peripherally touch upon these questions, but notably permit the asking of further ones. Future research would have to further explore the manifold historical and contemporary relations in which the collections unfold and spread; to diversify the kind and sites of fieldwork; and to focus on these relations with regard to the diverse forms of diasporic formations which have developed since then, in the former metropole, the colonies, and elsewhere.

Whereas the current political developments offer themselves as a subject for inviting important questions in connection with the politics of reconciliation, I argue that this thesis's interrogation of the museum's practices is just as valuable. As I have shown, the challenges and contradictions inherent in the grappling with colonial legacies through the museum's everyday, touching upon the very words, material orderings, and interactions in the museum, show the irreversible grounding of contemporary worlds in the colonial. I thus argue that there is no easy way out, and no simple solution to offer for the ethnological museum's crisis. Questions emerge and rather than finding answers, remain. What kind of critique is possible within organisations such as the Humboldt Forum, which confirm the critique which curatorial work attempts to counter? Can the ethnological museum's powerful trope of the right to exhibit and represent Otherness ever be broken, and if so, how to do so in a context in which some people believe that this right is still valid? Should and can the museum's primary goal be to *keep* things for future generations? Or should the aim be to use things for present generations and, in Felwine Sarr's and Bénédicte Savoy's words, to *resocialise* them? And to close very generally: how can those collections and questions remain relevant and stay approachable in a contemporary setting?

Staying in crisis, sticking to ambivalence

This thesis invites us to welcome the ambivalence one encounters in the museum. Within the Ethnological Museum, some staff grasped the opportunity of heightened political attention devoted to their museum in order to tackle long-addressed but underfunded problems. The Africa curators Paola Ivanov and Jonathan Fine, for

example, took advantage of the general need for projects related to the colonial. They managed to acquire funding for several, and potentially long-term, collaborative projects in Angola, Cameroon, Namibia, and Tanzania, as well as for the digitisation of the museum's archives; being fully aware of the political use these projects will be confronted with. The 'working through' of colonial collections suggests staying with the museum's crisis and sticking to its ambivalence. It entails living with the past in the present, being aware of its echoes and aftermaths, whilst embracing the potentials this work offers to reconcile in the future.

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Annexe 1: Research itineraries and exchanges

List of interviews (in chronological order)

    Hans-Joachim Radosuboff, Berlin (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin), 7 January 2015

    Christine Bluard, Tervuren (Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale), 14 August 2015

    Julien Volper, Tervuren (Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale), 18 August 2015

Interviews with members of the 'groupe de six' (consulting group of Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale)

    Emeline Uwizeyimana, Brussels, 30 October 2015

    Billy Kalonji, Brussels, 8 October 2015

    Anne Wetsi Mpoma, Brussels, 7 October 2015

    Gratia Pungu, Brussels, 23 November 2015

    Ayoko Mensah, Brussels, 8 December 2015

Interviews with art dealers and consultants

    Andres Moraga, Brussels, 3 November 2015

    Bruno Claessens, Antwerp, 5 November 2015

    Bernard de Grunne, Brussels, 25 November 2015

    Pierre Loos, Brussels, 1 December 2015

Interviews with museum staff and independent curators

    Laura van Broekhoven, Leiden (Volkenkunde Museum Leiden), 11 December 2015

    Nanette Snoep, Leipzig (Director Ethnographic Collections Saxony), 19 April 2016

    Yaelle Biro, New York City (Metropolitan Museum, New York City), 6 June 2016

    Kevin Dumouchelle, New York City (Brooklyn Museum, New York City), 8 June 2016

    Agnes Wegner, Berlin (Humboldt Lab Dahlem), 10 October 2016

    Boris Gliesmann, Berlin (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin), 8 November 2016

    Stefan Eisenhofer, Munich (Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich), 18 November 2016

    Wayne Modest, Skype interview (Research Centre for Material Culture, Leiden, with Bonaventure Ndikung, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin) (see also von Oswald, Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Modest 2017), 28 November 2016

    Clémentine Deliss, Berlin (Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main) 26 June 2017

    Gaëlle Beaujean-Baltzer, Paris (Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Paris), 14 November 2017

    Stephen Engelsmann, Berlin (Weltmuseum Wien, interview conducted together with Jonas Tinius and Larissa Förster), 16 January 2018

    Lili Reyels, Berlin (Humboldt Lab Tanzania), 13 February 2018

List of guests who discussed CARMAH's, and in particular my, research at CARMAH (in alphabetical order)

    Tony Bennett, Mirjam Brusius, James Clifford, Henrietta Lidchi, Bernadette Lynch, Ciraj Rassool, Andrea Witcomb.

    Some of the exchanges led to publications and further common research (Macdonald, Lidchi, and von Oswald 2017).

Résumé en français
Working through colonial collections.
'Africa' in the Humboldt Forum

Introduction : *Working through* les collections coloniales

Cette thèse prend comme point de départ les processus actuels de transformation des musées ethnologiques en Europe pour analyser comment les héritages coloniaux sont travaillés avec et à travers le présent. Définis ici comme un héritage colonial en soi, les musées ethnologiques ont longtemps été critiqués pour leur tentative de posséder et de représenter le monde. Coïncidant avec le début de mon travail sur le terrain en 2013, les anthropologues et commissaires de renom Clare Harris et Michael O'Hanlon ont ouvert leur article « The future of the ethnographic museum » en déclarant que « le musée ethnographique est mort ». Reflétant des voix du terrain, ils ont écrit que : « [le musée ethnographique] n'a plus d'utilité et n'a plus rien à offrir pour remplir son mandat historique de lieu de représentation des « autres » cultures (O'Hanlon et Harris 2013,8). » La provocation « *Le musée ethnographique est mort* » reflétait ce qui caractérisait le champs à ce moment précis : la question de savoir comment le musée allait faire face à ce qui a été décrit comme sa « crise d'identité » (O'Hanlon et Harris 2013, 9). Lié à la relation constitutive du musée avec le projet colonial européen, la crise comprenait des enquêtes sur le rôle et la mission du musée, l'autorité sur la représentation et, finalement, la collection comme propriété légitime des musées européens. Les demandes que les gens - non seulement dans le milieu universitaire, l'activisme et le domaine de l'art et de la production culturelle, mais aussi en politique - adressaient au musée étaient multiples. Les questions adressées au musée portaient notamment sur la façon dont le musée ethnologique devait se positionner au sein d'un paysage muséal vaste, sur sa mission et à qui le musée devait servir. Il s'agissait également de savoir comment justifier l'autorité sur la représentation, et en particulier la représentation de la « différence culturelle ». Enfin, la question de savoir comment légitimer la présence et la propriété de telles collections en Europe a pris de l'ampleur, notamment récemment.[1] La plupart des musées ethnologiques européens sont entrés dans un processus de transformation fondamentale depuis la fin des années 1990, en tentant de s'attaquer à l'héritage contesté du musée. Il s'agit notamment du changement de nom, du développement et de l'application de

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[1] Les dimensions de la « crise » avaient été identifiées, discutées et prises en compte depuis au moins 30 ans. Parmi les monographies et les volumes édités qui ont façonné ma recherche, mentionnons, en ce qui concerne les études de cas internationales, Clifford 1988 ; Karp et Lavine 1991 ; Karp et al. 1992 ; Clifford 1997 ; de L'Estoile 2007; Gosden, Larson et Petch 2007 ; Byrne et al. 2011 ; Phillips 2011 ; Harrison, Byrne et Clarke 2013 ; Golding et Modest 2013 et, en Allemagne, voir par exemple Kraus et Noack 2015.

nouveaux concepts de conservation, de la restructuration radicale des expositions permanentes et de la construction de nouveaux bâtiments pour leurs collections.[2] Ce projet de recherche se concentre sur la façon dont ces questions sont abordées au sein d'un musée, le *Musée Ethnologique de Berlin*, et en particulier, son département Afrique.

Afin d'interroger ce que signifie réfléchir aux héritages coloniaux dans le présent, la thèse aborde les questions suivantes : comment le personnel des musées travaille-t-il et traite-t-il les collections qui ont été collectionnées dans des contextes coloniaux ? Comment les héritages coloniaux du musée s'expriment-ils dans la vie quotidienne du musée ? Comment le personnel des musées s'implique-t-il dans les héritages coloniaux, tant matériels qu'immatériels, au fur et à mesure qu'ils deviennent de plus en plus contestés ? Ces questions ne concernent pas seulement le Musée Ethnologique dans sa quête pour définir sa position et questionner son rapport avec son passé colonial. Elle renvoie plutôt à des questions plus générales sur la manière dont les héritages coloniaux ont été « travaillés » (*worked through*) de manière plus générale. Il s'agit d'interroger les définitions de l'identité d'une nation. Elle permet de discuter des politiques de mémoire, du travail de mémoire et de leurs implications (restitution, rapatriement, réparation). En fin de compte, aborder la manière dont les musées s'engagent dans leurs héritages coloniaux pose la question de la reconnaissance du rôle constitutif du colonialisme dans l'édification des sociétés contemporaines – tant chez les anciens colonisées que chez les anciens colonisateurs. Travailler sur les collections coloniales soulève donc des questions centrales qui concernent nos sociétés contemporaines de manière plus générale : la réverbération, les échos, les séquelles du colonialisme au quotidien dans ses

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[2] Pour un aperçu des changements dans les musées ethnologiques, voir, jusqu'en 2013, Pagani 2013. Depuis lors, dans le contexte germanophone, au-delà du Forum Humboldt, ce sont notamment les développements suivants qui ont suscité le débat : la nomination de Clémentine Deliss au Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt (2010-2015) avec l'introduction d'une mission muséale " post-technologique ", de Nanette Snoep aux Collections ethnographiques de Saxe (SES) (2015-2018), puis sa direction du Jautenstrauch-Joest-Museum à Cologne, le remplacement de Nanette Snoep au SES par Léontine Meijer-van Mensch en 2018, la nomination de Barbara Plankensteiner au Völkerkundemuseum de Hambourg et le changement de nom du musée en MARKK, ainsi que le changement de nom, la rénovation et l'inauguration de la nouvelle exposition permanente en 2017 au Weltmuseum Wien (Musée mondial). Sur le plan international, la réouverture du Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale à Tervuren (Belgique) en 2018 a été l'événement le plus attendu, précédé par la publication et la remise du " rapport de restitution " de Bénédicte Savoy et Felwine Sarr au président français Emmanuel Macron en novembre 2018, qui s'est intéressé aux questions de restitution (Sarr et Savoy 2018 ; pour un aperçu des débats relatifs au rapport, voir von Oswald 2018).

épistémologies, ses représentations, ses matérialités, ou encore plus concrètement, les mots, les relations, les affects auxquels nous faisons face.

Collections coloniales et « Afrique » dans le Humboldt Forum

Le Musée Ethnologique intégrera le Forum Humboldt, un nouveau centre culturel situé sur l'île des musées de Berlin, approuvé par le parlement allemand en 2002. Le Forum ouvrira progressivement à partir de 2020. Il sera situé dans le *Stadtschloss*, qui sera en partie reconstruit à l'image de l'architecture baroque historique. Le *Stadtschloss* a été fortement touché par les bombardements de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, puis démoli par le gouvernement de la RDA et remplacé par le Palais de la République, pour être finalement reconstruit sur les ruines de cette « Maison du peuple » démolie - *Haus des Volkes* - comme on l'appelle souvent. Caractérisé par le rapprochement et la confrontation des différentes histoires de la nation, ou selon les mots de Jonathan Bach, les « incarnations du XXe siècle allemand » - impérial (jusqu'en 1918), Weimar (1919-1933), national-socialiste (1933-1945), une Allemagne divisée (1945-1990) et une Allemagne réunifiée (depuis 1990) - le Humboldt Forum s'est progressivement transformé en une « zone de conflit » condensée dans laquelle la question de la négociation de ses diverses histoires a occupé une place centrale (Bach 2017b, 91). C'est la combinaison des collections dites « non européennes » au sein du *Stadtschloss* qui a sans doute suscité le plus de débats en ce qui concerne le profil du Forum. Cette configuration représente la nation dans son admiration des cultures du monde - potentialisé par la façade royale reconstruite. Les débats autour du Humboldt Forum portent donc sur des questions plus larges de mémoire collective et politique, de diversité et de différence, d'articulation de l'identité européenne, allemande et berlinoise, et par la suite, de propositions d'un « nous » commun en Allemagne.

Le développement majeur lié aux musées ethnologiques, et en particulier au Humboldt Forum, a été la résurgence et la négociation du rôle du colonialisme européen et de son héritage dans les sociétés respectives. A Berlin, ce débat a notamment pris de l'ampleur depuis la cérémonie inaugurale du Forum en 2013, initiée et soutenue par des militants, des artistes et des universitaires. De 2013 à 2019, les négociations sur l'héritage colonial de l'Allemagne concernant les collections du Musée Ethnologique - tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur du musée - montrent un changement progressif d'attitude quant à la manière dont les institutions publiques, la politique et le débat public se sont positionnés vis-à-vis du passé colonial de l'Allemagne. Ce changement est orienté vers la reconnaissance et l'acceptation du passé colonial de l'Allemagne en tant que partie intégrante de l'histoire

de la nation, ainsi que vers l'établissement d'un consensus moral quant à la manière dont ce passé et ses implications symboliques et matérielles sont traités publiquement. Les collections ne sont donc pas en elles-mêmes coloniales, mais plutôt considérées et en quelque sorte limitées à cette attribution, en raison de leur mode ou de la période d'acquisition, de production et d'appropriation dans les « contextes coloniaux », tant dans la colonie que dans la métropole (German Museums Association 2019, 20-33). Les débats liés au Humboldt Forum reflètent et condensent les développements internationaux, où les appels internationaux croissants à la décolonisation et à la diversification des institutions occidentales - notamment les musées - vont de pair avec la résurgence et la normalisation de la rhétorique et du discours nationalistes, dont le populisme raciste.[3]

J'ai intégré le département Afrique du Musée Ethnologique parce que je m'intéressais aux généalogies et aux représentations actuelles du continent, et du corps noir en particulier, dans les institutions artistiques et muséales. Des universitaires comme Achille Mbembe ont soutenu, sur la base des récits de Hegel sur l'Afrique, que le continent a été historiquement construit comme « le signe ultime du dissemblable, de la différence et du pouvoir pur du négatif » par la recherche occidentale et le discours populaire (Mbembe 2017, 11). L'intérêt pour les représentations découle de mes recherches antérieures dans le domaine de l'art contemporain,[4] au cours desquelles j'ai compris que bon nombre des imaginations, des constructions et des récits que j'ai rencontrés provenaient ou avaient été coproduits par l'anthropologie et ses musées - et que certains d'entre eux continuent à le faire. En même temps, les débats sur le colonialisme allemand se sont concentrés sur l'Afrique, reflétant l'observation d'Andreas Eckert et Albert Wirz selon laquelle le colonialisme et l'Afrique sont devenus « presque des synonymes » en Allemagne (Eckert et Wirz 2013, 508). Cela s'est reflété par exemple dans le champs de l'art contemporain allemand, et plus généralement dans la production culturelle, que j'ai suivie de près. Les

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[3] Le collectif « Decolonize This Place" de New York, l'initiative hollandaise « Decolonize the museum » ou le #noname collective, fondé en Bélgique ne sont que quelques exemples de groupes qui protestent temporairement ou régulièrement contre l'autorité du musée à posséder, commander et représenter les collections. En ce qui concerne le monde universitaire, ce sont notamment les développements autour de #RhodesMustFall qui ont suscité le plus de débats, initiés à l'Université du Cap, qui se sont étendus à et dans différentes institutions en Afrique du Sud, ainsi qu'à des universités en Grande-Bretagne, dont Oxford, et aux États-Unis, dont Harvard Law School.

[4] Mes projets de recherche antérieurs comprenaient une ethnographie de l'exposition « La Triennale : Proximité intense », avec le directeur artistique Okwui Enwezor, qui a interrogé de manière centralisée les tropes de représentation en relation avec l'anthropologie, le modernisme et le colonialisme (Oswald 2016).

artistes et commissaires d'exposition ont rendu très visibles les questions concernant l'Afrique dans le paysage culturel allemand, notamment en ce qui concerne la discussion sur le projet colonial et ses suites - à la fois concernant les colonies allemandes et le colonialisme en Afrique plus généralement.[5] Enfin, les contestations autour des collections de musées en relation avec le colonialisme se sont presque exclusivement concentrées sur les collections du continent africain. En Allemagne, et au Humboldt Forum en particulier, cela s'est notamment reflété dans les négociations concernant des objets particuliers,[6] mais aussi en ce qui concerne la concentration de l'expertise et de l'intérêt concernant « l'Afrique » dans les musées ethnologiques et universitaires allemands.[7] Ce que l'on entend ici par « Afrique » est particulier, car les définitions

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[5] Des commissaires d'exposition pionniers, comme Okwui Enwezor ou Simon Njami, ainsi qu'une jeune génération de conservateurs, comme Alya Sebti, Yvette Mutumba, Gabi Ngcobo ou Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, ont contribué et ont été soutenus pour institutionnaliser la production culturelle contemporaine et les arts africains dans le paysage culturel allemand. Okwui Enwezor, le premier conservateur non occidental à avoir organisé la documenta 11 à Kassel (1998-2002) a été un pionnier, dont l'importance en Allemagne a été institutionnalisée en devenant le premier directeur non européen du Haus der Kunst à Munich en 2011. L'intérêt pour l'Afrique, qui va souvent de pair avec une sensibilité postcoloniale et l'adressage du passé colonial, a été confirmé par le recrutement de la commissaire d'exposition marocaine Alya Sebti comme nouveau directrice de la galerie de l'Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) à Berlin. Savvy Contemporary, un espace de projet qui a reçu un financement substantiel du Sénat de Berlin en 2017, fondé et codirigé par Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, a eu un accent programmatique sur l'Afrique postcoloniale. La plateforme médiatique et revue Contemporary&, fondée et dirigée par Yvette Mutumba et Julia Grosse, est devenue l'un des organes centraux de communication et d'information sur « les questions et informations sur l'art contemporain en Afrique et sa diaspora mondiale ». Des fonds publics de l'ifa ou de la Bundeskulturstiftung des Bundes, dont une partie est explicitement consacrée à l'Afrique (fonds TURN), ont soutenu ces projets de manière durable.

[6] Parmi les exemples d'objets particulièrement contestés, on peut citer les Bronzes du Bénin, confisqués en 1897 par les forces coloniales britanniques, situés dans l'actuelle République du Nigeria. Le musée de Berlin a acquis un nombre important de ces objets lors d'une vente aux enchères à Londres. Christine Howald et Felicity Bodenstein ont dépeint ces objets comme des « représentants » (*Stellvertreter*) pour des objets acquis dans des contextes coloniaux (Bodenstein et Howald 2018, 533).
Un autre objet clé a été le trône du roi Njoya du royaume de Bamum, situé dans l'actuelle République du Cameroun, dont le statut est d'autant plus contesté que le trône a été décrit comme un cadeau diplomatique de Njoya à l'Empereur Guillaume II. Par exemple, les deux objets faisaient partie d'une campagne d'affichage d'AfricAvenir : voir http://www.africavenir.org/de/projekte/projekte-deutschland/dekoloniale-einwaende-gegen-das-humboldt-forum.html, consulté le 2 août 2019.

[7] En ce qui concerne le monde universitaire, l'anthropologie en Allemagne est centrée sur l'Afrique. Plusieurs instituts consacrés à l'histoire de l'art et à l'anthropologie en Afrique existent en Allemagne (Kunst Afrikas, Freie Universität Berlin ; Institute of African Studies et Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, Bayreuth), ainsi que des conférences régionales spécifiques. Au sein même des musées ethnologiques, des commissaires spécialistes de l'Afrique ont récemment été nommés à des postes

concernent généralement explicitement ou implicitement l'Afrique « subsaharienne », une description apparemment régionale qui continue à circuler malgré des critiques virulentes.[8] Mais la division entre le Nord et le Sud de l'Afrique est avant tout racialisée : elle résulte de l'imagination coloniale de l'Afrique comme consistant d'un Nord « blanc », auquel les puissances coloniales européennes ont accordé un certain degré de culture et d'histoire, par opposition à une partie méridionale, à laquelle l'Occident a nié toute histoire et culture, également décrite de manière problématique comme l'Afrique noire (*Schwarzafrika*) en Allemagne.[9] L'accent mis par la thèse sur « l'Afrique » renvoie donc à des représentations qui ont été au cœur de la construction d'un soi occidental et d'un Autre, permettant d'interroger la relation entre colonialisme, racisme et politique identitaire actuelle.

Le Musée Ethnologique, et plus particulièrement son département Afrique, constitue ainsi le point de départ de la thèse pour interroger la manière dont l'histoire coloniale d'une nation est traitée à la fois de manière intime et publique. Ces développements soulèvent des questions au-delà de l'histoire coloniale *stricto sensu*, mais indiquent plutôt comment la diversité culturelle et la différenciation, « l'inclusion » et « l'intégration », et l'identité nationale en général, sont négociées dans une Allemagne contemporaine.

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de directeurs dans des musées ethnologiques, avec Barbara Plankensteiner à Hambourg (depuis 2017), Nanette Snoep en Saxe (depuis 2015-2018), qui a remplacé Klaus Schneider au Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum de Cologne en 2018, Christine Stelzig étant ancienne directrice du Musée Ethnologique à Munich (2011-2017) et Clémentine Deliss (2010-2015) à Frankfurt. La plupart de ces conservateurs ont récemment traité explicitement de l'enchevêtrement colonial de leurs institutions, et se sont concentrés sur l'Afrique, en particulier dans leurs programmes, dans des expositions telles que *FOREIGN EXCHANGE (ou les histoires que vous ne raconteriez pas à un étranger)* (Francfort, 2014), *invite GRASSI : #1 Fremd* ('étranger'), co-commissaire par Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Anke Dyes, et Anna Jehle (Leipzig, 2016) ; *Erste Dinge. Rückblick für Ausblick* (Hambourg, depuis 2018) et l'exposition permanente de Cologne.

[8] Il s'agit plus particulièrement, et plus récemment, du « rapport sur la restitution » récemment publié. Le rapport a été publié et remis au président français Emmanuel Macron en novembre 2018 par les universitaires Bénédicte Savoy et Felwine Sarr, et s'est concentré uniquement sur les archives, les collections, les musées et les préoccupations relatives à ce que les auteurs ont décrit comme « l'Afrique subsaharienne » (Sarr et Savoy 2018).

[9] Pour une analyse des discussions sur les concepts de *Schwarzafrika* et *Schwarzer Kontinent*, voir Arndt et al. 2004:204-208, et pour la terminologie raciste en langue allemande plus généralement, voir Arndt et Ofuatey-Alazard 2011 ; Arndt 2012.

Le Musée Ethnologique de Berlin comme héritage colonial

Le postulat de départ de la thèse consiste à définir le musée ethnologique comme un héritage colonial. Je développe cette affirmation dans ce qui suit en discutant de l'enchevêtrement constitutif entre la domination coloniale, les pratiques de collecte et la discipline de l'anthropologie, avec une référence au Musée Ethnologique de Berlin et à son département Afrique en particulier.

Collecte et colonialisme

« Le colonialisme était profondément matériel », soutiennent Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden et Ruth Philipps (Edwards, Gosden et Phillips 2006, 3). La matérialité du colonialisme ne concernait pas seulement l'extraction des ressources (or, caoutchouc, ressources humaines, etc.). L'acquisition, parfois violente, de la culture matérielle dans les colonies était également une partie constitutive de l'entreprise et de la gouvernance coloniales. La collection coloniale a permis au colonisateur d'étudier, de contrôler et ainsi, d'affaiblir les sociétés en s'emparant de leur culture matérielle, tant dans les colonies que dans les centres impériaux (Abonnenc, Arndt, et Lozano 2016 ; Bennett et al. 2017). Il ne s'agissait pas seulement d'une simple saisie matérielle, mais aussi d'une perte d'autonomie spirituelle, comme dans le contexte de la guerre : certains objets ont été délibérément pris parce qu'ils avaient une importance spirituelle pour ceux qui résistent à la conquête coloniale (voir par exemple Ivanov et Weber-Sinn 2018). La collection coloniale allait généralement de pair avec l'établissement d'archives coloniales ou, en d'autres termes, la collection de la culture matérielle faisait partie des archives de la domination coloniale des métropoles. Ces archives ont permis l'acquisition, le stockage et l'extraction de connaissances sur les colonies (Basu et de Jong 2016). La façon dont le personnel des musées utilisait ces archives et collections - dans les expositions et les recherches - encourageait souvent la justification de la mission coloniale et soutenait la conviction et les récits contemporains de la supériorité européenne et blanche dans les centres impériaux. Les objets sont devenus des acteurs principaux dans la construction des récits sur la colonie et ont confirmé le rôle central, et non marginal, de la collection dans le projet colonial.[10]

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[10] Pour des études de cas et des exemples qui retracent et interrogent l'interdépendance entre les musées, les colonies et les métropoles, voir les exemples internationaux Thomas 1991 ; Gosden et Knowles 2001 ; Edwards, Gosden, et Phillips 2006 ; Bennett et al. 2017, et pour les études de cas allemandes Essner 1986 ; Gothsch 1983 ; Zimmerman 2001 ; Penny 2002 ; Weber 2005 ; Förster et Stoecker 2016 ; Brandstetter et Hierholzer 2017 ; Förster et al. 2018 ; Reyels, Ivanov et Weber-Sinn 2018 ; Spletstößer 2019.

Collecte et anthropologie

L'anthropologie était tout aussi profondément matérielle, en particulier dans sa phase constitutive qui coïncidait avec l'apogée du régime colonial européen (1884-1914). Comme dans d'autres départements d'anthropologie européens, l'institutionnalisation progressive de l'anthropologie à Berlin était étroitement liée au Musée Ethnologique de Berlin et à sa politique de collection, puis au *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*. Dès la fondation du musée en 1873, son cofondateur et directeur Adolf Bastian s'est fixé pour objectif d'établir l'anthropologie sur la base des sciences naturelles. Dans ce contexte, la collection servirait de point de départ à la recherche, Bastian étant convaincu que « la masse monstrueuse [était] nécessaire pour représenter suffisamment, dans un ordre systématique et méthodologique, les provinces ethnologiques de la terre dans toute leur étendue » (cité dans Zimmerman 2001, 186). Pour Bastian, contrairement aux sciences naturelles, les catégories en anthropologie n'avaient pas encore été établies, mais elles résulteraient du regard totalisateur des collections et seraient développées à partir de celui-ci. Bastian a tenté de créer une « archive universelle de l'humanité » afin de « fournir une base réelle pour l'étude de l'ethnologie » (Bastian 1872,iii)[11]. Définissant l'anthropologie comme une discipline « comparative » et donc « statistique », « la complétude (...) est le premier et le plus important desideratum ». Dans la tradition d'une anthropologie de sauvetage, Bastian décrit ce desideratum de la complétude comme « éternel » (*für immer*), comme dans « impossible », parce qu'il part du postulat que « de nombreuses tribus [*Volksstämme*] sont irrémédiablement et définitivement perdues » (Bastian 1872,iv-v).[12]

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[11] Pour plus d'informations sur Adolf Bastian et ses « archives universelles de l'humanité », voir Fischer, Bolz et Kamel 2007.

[12] Extraits cités de l'allemand : «Die Ethnologischen Museen sind eine Schöpfung der Neuzeit und der Gedanke zu ihrer Anlage, um dem Studium der Ethologie eine thatsächliche [sic] Grundlage zu gewähren, konnte überhaupt erst dann gefaßt [sic] werden, nachdem bereits die Entdeckungsreisen den Blick über die gesammte [sic] Erdoberfläche erweitert und neben der historischen Entwicklung unserer eigenen Cultur [sic] noch eine große Zahl selbstständiger Cyclen innerhalb der Menschheitsgeschichte in den Geschichtskreis eingeführt hatten » (Bastian 1872:iii). « Da die Ethnologie, als zu den comparativen Wissenschaften gehörig, statistischen Regeln zu folgen hat, bleibt, wie in jeder Statistik, Vollständigkeit der thatsächlichen Daten, auf den sie ihre Aussprüche zu begründen hat, ihr erstes und wichtiges Desiderat, und leider, wie es sceint, ein Desiderat für immer, da auf jemalige Erfüllung dieses Wunsches wird verzichtet werden müssen» (Bastian 1872:iv–v).

Pour une documentation et une analyse de la position et de l'œuvre d'Adolf Bastian, voir par exemple Penny 2002 ; Fischer, Bolz et Kamel 2007 ; Penny 2019.

La publication de l'*Anleitung für ethnographische Beobachtungen und Sammlungen* (Instructions pour l'observation et la collecte ethnographiques) en plusieurs éditions reflète la mission du fondateur du musée et fait allusion au type de collection que le musée ethnologique poursuit.[13] Les instructions proposaient de collecter « systématiquement », de « donner une image de préférence exhaustive de la culture de la tribu concernée » et de « dresser, pour ainsi dire, un inventaire de l'ensemble du patrimoine culturel » (Ankermann et Luschan, 1914, 9)[14]. En même temps, le fait que les instructions étaient nécessaires a mis en évidence le manque de documentation des collections. Dans le musée de Berlin, les collections n'étaient pas le résultat d'une collection « scientifique » mais surtout coloniale.[15] Cela signifie que, contrairement à d'autres musées qui envoyaient des expéditions scientifiques dans les colonies,[16] les collections étaient principalement fournies par le personnel colonial situé dans les colonies, qui était le fournisseur de la culture matérielle du musée. C'est donc à la fois les collections et le manque d'information et de documentation à leur sujet qui constituent l'héritage du musée.

Colonialisme et anthropologie

En ce qui concerne les collections africaines, les objets sont arrivés en surnombre en provenance des colonies allemandes, à savoir ce qui était alors le Togo, le Cameroun, l'Afrique orientale allemande (*Deutsch-Ostafrika*), l'Afrique allemande du Sud-Ouest (*Deutscht-Südwestafrika*) (Ivanov 2005, 42). Entre 1884 et 1914, les collections africaines

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[13] L'instruction a été publiée pour la première fois en 1899 par le conservateur de l'Océanie et de l'Afrique Felix von Luschan, rééditée en 1904 dans une version étendue par le même auteur, et reformulée dans une dernière édition par Bernhard Ankermann, le successeur de Luschan, en 1914. Il a été conçu comme un questionnaire, avec des questions d'un côté de la page et des espaces vides à remplir de l'autre.

[14] Traduction de l'allemand par l'auteur : « Wo es sich aber nicht nur um die Beschaffung einzelner Gegenstände handelt, da sammle man systematisch, d.h. so, dass die Sammlung ein möglichst erschöpfendes Bild der Kultur des betreffenden Stammes gibt. […] Diese sind also in erster Linie zu sammeln; es ist gewissermaßen ein Inventar des gesamten Kulturbesitzes aufzunehmen. »

[15] Dans mon travail d'archives personnel, comme exemple non représentatif, Félix von Luschan demande constamment aux collectionneurs de fournir des informations sur les objets doués, comme dans sa correspondance avec Werner von Grawert, I. 23. 1903. La notion de collection « scientifique » est ici mise entre guillemets, car les pratiques définies comme « rationnelles », objectives et scientifiques au tournant du siècle sont en elles-mêmes profondément façonnées par l'imagination coloniale, comme le montrent de manière convaincante les monographies de Johannes Fabian sur les premières ethnographies en Afrique sur l'ethnographie (Fabian 2000). Les observations de Michel Leiris sur la mission Dakar-Djibouti remettent également en cause les récits de la « scientificité » de la mission (Leiris 1988).

[16] L'expédition Dakar-Djibouti (1931-1933) dirigée par l'anthropologue français Marcel Griaule est probablement l'exemple le plus célèbre de cette mission de collecte « scientifique ».

sont passées de 7 388 à 55 079 objets (Krieger et Koch 1973, 106). La position du musée de Berlin en tant que « musée central » a favorisé l'augmentation constante des collections, le musée de Berlin revendiquant le droit de propriété sur toutes les collections provenant des colonies allemandes.[17] Environ 64 % des collections africaines d'aujourd'hui, soit environ 75 000 objets, proviennent de ce qui a été défini comme des « contextes coloniaux », qu'ils soient gouvernés par des puissances coloniales allemandes ou européennes (Association des musées allemands 2018, 16-23)[18]. Les musées ethnologiques ont donc joué un rôle crucial dans le système colonial, dans lequel « la collection complète [s'articule] comme une forme de domination », comme le souligne Mieke Bal (Bal 1992, 560).

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[17] La vaste collection de culture matérielle a été facilitée par la décision du Conseil fédéral (« Bundesrat ») en 1889 de définir le musée de Berlin comme le « Musée central » lorsqu'il s'agissait d'acquérir des collections des protectorats allemands. Cette décision impliquait que toutes les collections acquises dans le cadre d'expéditions financées par des fonds publics seraient la propriété du musée de Berlin, qui pourrait alors décider de conserver les collections, de les renvoyer dans les colonies ou d'envoyer ou d'échanger des doubles, appelés Doubletten, avec d'autres musées allemands. Pour plus d'explications et de contextualisation, voir par exemple (Stelzig 2004, 39 ; Ivanov 2005, 41-42).

[18] C'était différent, par exemple, des expéditions scientifiques dans les contextes coloniaux qui se concentrent non seulement sur la *propriété* mais aussi sur la *connaissance des* gens par le biais de leur culture matérielle, reflétée alors dans la documentation détaillée de la collection. Les musées français, contrairement au département Afrique de Berlin, ont acquis une part importante de leurs collections par des expéditions scientifiques. Pour plus de détails sur les différents modes d'acquisition du Musée de l'Homme, voir (Sarr et Savoy 2018, 42-52). Soixante-quatre pour cent proviennent du calcul suivant : Entre 1884 et 1914 (époque coloniale allemande), les collections africaines sont passées de 7 388 à 55 079 objets (Krieger et Koch 1973, 106). Etant donné que la collection africaine actuelle est estimée à 75 000 objets, la différence représente environ 64 % (site Internet du Musée ethnologique, https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/sammlung.html, consulté le 16.4.2019).
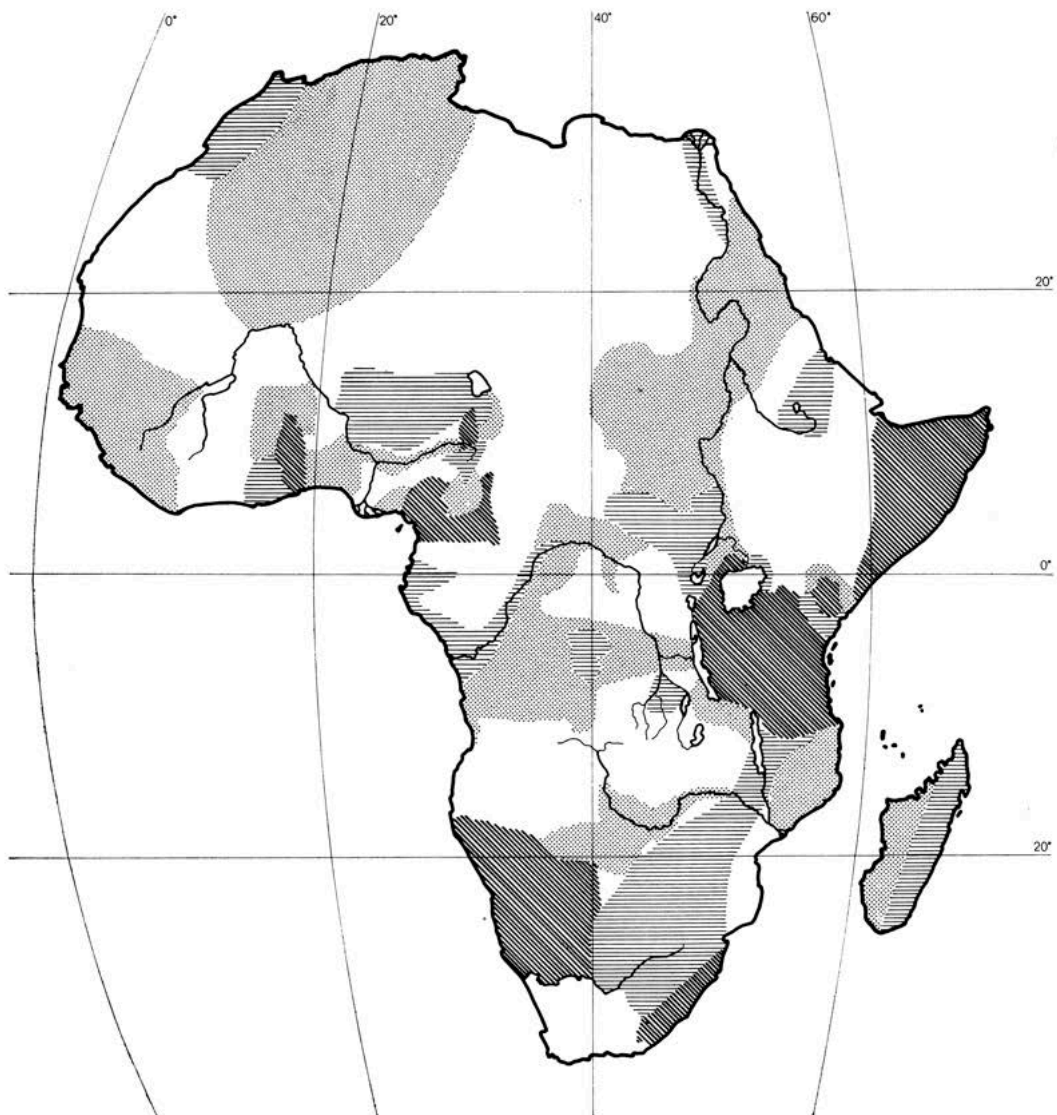
Abb. 37. Karte mit Angaben über die Sammlungsbestände der Abteilung Afrika
im Jahre 1911:

ganz oder nahezu vollständige Sammlungen

ziemlich gute Sammlungen

schlechte, sehr lückenhafte Sammlungen

keine oder fast keine Sammlungen
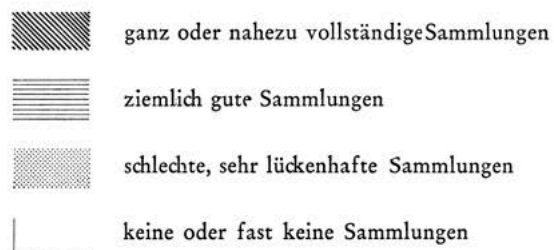
Figure 1 : « Carte avec indications sur les collections du département Afrique en 1911 »
(Bernhard Ankermann, Krieger et Koch 1973, 112)

      Foncé - collections complètes ou presque complètes.

      Gris foncé - assez bonnes collections.

      Gris clair - mauvaises collections très fragmentées.

      Blanc - aucune ou presque aucune collection.

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Figure 2 : « Carte des frontières nationales contemporaines et des « protectorats » allemands, conçue et utilisée pour l'exposition » créé pour l'exposition Object Biographies

La figure 1 conçue par le conservateur du département, Bernhard Ankermann, en 1911, reflète les idées contemporaines des collections du musée, dans lesquelles « une culture », une « tribu » ou une « région » particulière pouvait être représentée par « sa » production matérielle. Cette compréhension disciplinée des collections reflète la définition que Sharon Macdonald donne des collections comme « un ensemble d'objets conçus pour avoir un sens en tant que groupe », dans lequel « les objets prennent une signification supplémentaire précisément à force de faire partie de la collection » (Macdonald 2006, 82). En effet, les conceptions des « tribus » et de l'indigénéité ont été définies en s'appuyant sur des collections qui ont été construites comme la matérialisation de l'altérité, et en particulier de la « sauvagerie » et du « primitivisme ». Dans l'exposition, les objets ont été utilisés comme représentatifs de types particuliers d'altérité, comme fragments de cultures. Ces modes d'exposition et de présentation, ainsi que les objets eux-mêmes, auraient des implications sur la manière dont les notions de « culture » étaient utilisées de manière normative, ainsi que dans les régimes de gestion sociale dans la métropole et les colonies. En même temps, la carte révèle le fort impact que la colonisation aurait sur la politique d'acquisition du musée : toutes les zones marquées en gris foncé - indiquant « collections complètes ou presque complètes » - sont presque identiques aux colonies allemandes (voir figure 2). Les collections sont donc une preuve de la matérialité du colonialisme ; elles constituent l'une des manifestations tangibles du colonialisme. L'utilisation des collections - dans les expositions et la recherche - révèle alors comment les ontologies coloniales contemporaines ont été étayées par l'anthropologie, et en particulier par ses musées.

Du musée ethnologique au Humboldt Forum dans le *Stadtschloss* de Berlin (1990-2019)

Avant de détailler les conditions et l'approche méthodologique de mon travail sur le terrain dans la section suivante, j'esquisse l'histoire du Humboldt Forum afin de comprendre les cadres institutionnels qui ont encadrés ma recherche.

Ce projet de recherche se situe à la fois comme une ethnographie d'un *processus* d'une institution en devenir et d'une *institution établie*, mais en transformation. Quant au processus, le travail au musée a été caractérisé par l'urgence et le changement, le renforcement des institutions et un avenir incertain. Quant au regard sur une institution établie, cependant, le quotidien du musée a été façonné par des règles et des règlements,

des routines et des habitudes. Dans ces modes de travail parfois contradictoires, la recherche ressemblait à une ethnographie du musée en tant que société fermée et isolée, comparable à un village, avec un intérêt pour la « vie sociale totale » de l'institution (Handler et Gable 1997, 10 ; voir aussi Gable 2013). Dans mon cas, l'impression de village était littérale car le musée était situé à l'arrêt de métro « Dahlem Dorf » - village de Dahlem, et renforcé par le fait que le musée ethnologique était situé dans la banlieue de Berlin, à environ 10-15 kilomètres du centre-ville et généralement désert. Cependant, contrairement à la conception des musées comme des villages ou des îles, l'examen des processus m'a permis de voir comment " le local se négocie en relation " (Macdonald 2009, 5). Comme Sharon Macdonald, Christine Gerbich et moi l'avons mentionné dans un article sur les approches méthodologiques de l'ethnographie muséale, des organisations comme les musées « sont inévitablement empêtrées dans de multiples réseaux de toutes sortes, impliquant habituellement un certain degré de gouvernance distribuée » (Macdonald, Gerbich et von Oswald 2018, 140) - confrontées à des changements institutionnels et politiques qui ne semblent pas contrôlables de l'intérieur des musées.

Planification du Humboldt Forum
Centrées sur la question du choix des ruines à conserver et des monuments à construire ou à reconstruire, les controverses autour du Humboldt Forum ont reflété la manière dont les différentes histoires de l'Allemagne étaient traitées, notamment au niveau politique. Deux controverses centrales se sont succédées depuis la chute du Mur : le débat sur la reconstruction du *Schloss* contre la conservation et la rénovation du Palais de la République a suscité des questions centrales sur le rôle de la mémoire publique du patrimoine de la RDA. Ce débat a été suivi par des discussions sur ce que serait le *Schloss* et ce qu'il comprendrait, déplaçant la perspective vers des controverses autour du passé prussien et colonial de l'Allemagne, et éclipsant et remplaçant presque entièrement les débats précédents sur le passé socialiste de l'Allemagne. Peu avant son ouverture, l'histoire de la création du Humboldt Forum se termine donc par une interrogation sur le type d'institution que le Forum est en train de devenir.

Sur la base des recommandations d'une commission d'experts chargée d'imaginer et de concevoir le « centre historique » de Berlin, la reconstruction du Château a été décidée par le parlement allemand en 2002, après plus d'une décennie de débats (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin 2002). Le Château, construit et développé comme résidence des Hohenzollerns depuis 1443, a été détruit en 1950 par le

gouvernement de la RDA après de lourds dommages de guerre. En 1976, le Palais de la République a été inauguré pour accueillir le Parlement populaire de la RDA et servir de cadre à des manifestations et activités culturelles pour les citoyens de la RDA. C'est un point de repère de l'architecture de la RDA, il a été fermé depuis 1990. Peu après la chute du mur, les défenseurs des droits de l'homme ont commencé à mobiliser des appuis en faveur de la reconstruction. La proposition de démolition d'un palais en échange de la construction d'un autre a soulevé la question de savoir quelle histoire et quelle mémoire nationales étaient valorisées dans ce qui était progressivement construit comme le « centre historique » (*historische Mitte*) de la capitale allemande.[19]

La décision parlementaire a ouvert un débat sur la manière dont le gouvernement allemand, dans une Allemagne unifiée, a traité l'histoire, la mémoire et les traces de la RDA. Conçu comme un lieu central pour les expériences vécues et la mémoire sociale de l'époque de la RDA, le Palais de la République a interprété sa démolition comme un effacement public et une dévaluation de ces souvenirs spécifiques. Ainsi, le conflit du *Schloss* a été interprété par beaucoup comme un conflit Est-Ouest, symbolisant les difficultés du processus de réunification (Binder 2013, 106).[20] D'autre part, le remplacement d'un Palais par un autre a déclenché un débat sur la question de savoir si la période antérieure à 1918 serait considérée comme « le moment auquel Berlin s'identifie réellement » (Philipp Oswalt, cité dans von Bose 2013). Comme l'a affirmé Jonathan Bach, la reconstruction visait à recréer « l'aura prussienne », une aura qu'il décrit comme « ambiguë » dans la mesure où elle représentait à la fois la tolérance et l'éveil culturel, ainsi que la discipline, l'obéissance et, surtout, la violence dans les guerres coloniales en Allemagne (Bach 2017b, 115).

Le concept de la commission d'experts soutenait et intégrait les arguments des défenseurs du Palais, non seulement en suggérant le nom de « Humboldt Forum », mais aussi en recommandant un récit pour le Forum qui mettrait en évidence les réussites prussiennes

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[19] Les partisans du *Schloss* ont présenté la zone autour du château - la Schlossplatz - comme abandonnée du point de vue de la politique urbaine, un centre qui devait être rétabli. Au fil des années, ils ont radicalisé leur argumentation. Les partisans de l'idée « ont présenté le Château comme la clé de la structure génétique de la ville, de son esprit et de sa culture « , comme l'exprime Jonathan Bach dans sa chronologie du débat (Bach 2017b, 110).

[20] Le débat sur la position du souvenir de la RDA a pris une autre direction à travers les débats autour de « l'*Einheitswippe* », un monument commémorant la réunification de l'Allemagne. Le monument, conçu par le bureau Milla & Partner, a dû être voté deux fois au Bundestag et a été confirmé pour la dernière fois à l'été 2017 (Peitz 2017 ; Fröhlich 2018).

en matière de politiques éducatives et culturelles au début du 19ᵉ siècle, établissant cette période historique comme une référence clef de l'histoire allemande. Parmi les acteurs du Forum figurent les collections de l'Université Humboldt et de la Bibliothèque centrale de Berlin, ainsi que les collections dites « non européennes ». Au-delà du lien évident entre la bibliothèque et l'université et les frères Humboldt, le concept du Forum était centré sur « le dialogue entre les cultures européennes et non européennes [*außereuropäischen*] » (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin 2002, 22), et basé sur une proposition du directeur du SPK, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann. Les « collections non européennes » du Musée d'Art Asiatique et du Musée Ethnologique étaient alors situées dans la banlieue de Berlin et leur emplacement était souvent utilisé pour expliquer le déclin du nombre de visiteurs, autre raison avancée pour déplacer les collections vers le centre-ville.[21]

> Centré sur les notions de rencontre, d'ouverture et d'expérience culturelle, le Humboldt Forum est conçu comme un espace de réflexion, dans lequel le national se stabilise dans un monde globalisé et parle en même temps de la tolérance et de l'ouverture de la nation allemande. (Cartable 2013, 99, 114)

Comme Beate Binder l'a souligné en 2013, les recommandations reflétaient l'ambition politique du Forum d'être perçu comme une représentation du national en se faisant passer pour cosmopolite.[22]

La SPK représentant le Humboldt Forum (2013-2015)
Mon travail sur le terrain au Musée Ethnologique a commencé quelques mois après l'inauguration du chantier avec la pose de la première pierre du Humboldt Forum à l'été 2013. En décembre 2013, la politicienne conservatrice Monika Grütters a été nommée commissaire du gouvernement fédéral à la culture et aux médias - l'équivalent allemand du poste de Ministre de la Culture[23] - dans une grande coalition de la CDU et du SPD

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[21] Pour une reproduction des suggestions de Lehmann, voir (König et Scholz 2012, 21-26).

[22] L'occupation temporaire du palais et, après sa destruction, de la pelouse, a permis la réalisation de projets artistiques et culturels, le transformant en « Fun Palace » (Misselwitz, Obrist et Oswalt 2005) et laissant la place à des projets comme l'initiative privée de la Temporäre Kunsthalle (2008-2010), voir également (Bach 2017a, 120-29).

[23] En Allemagne, selon le principe de la souveraineté culturelle des Länder, il n'y a pas de ministère de la Culture au niveau fédéral. Le poste de commissaire du gouvernement fédéral à la culture et aux médias a été créé en 1998 par le chancelier Gerhard Schröder (SPD). Le commissaire est ministre d'État auprès du chancelier fédéral et en même temps chef d'une autorité fédérale suprême (Oberste Bundesbehörden).

sous la direction de la Chancelière Angela Merkel. Monika Grütters a fait du Forum son projet politique central. Elle visait à faire du Humboldt Forum « une maison toute entière » (*ein Haus aus einem Guss*) et de la « carte de visite de la nation » (*Visitenkarte der Nation*), qui comprendrait le renforcement des institutions et des décisions centrales de recrutement, deux éléments qui façonneraient le profil du Forum (Richter 2017 ; Mangold et Timm 2018). Dans ce qui suit, j'évoque les développements les plus importants concernant le Musée Ethnologique et le Humboldt Forum, dont la plupart ont fait l'objet de controverses.

En 2013, aucun représentant officiel du Humboldt Forum n'était encore en place. Dans le musée, les protagonistes qui relient le musée au Humboldt Forum sont d'abord sa directrice Viola König et son équipe interne.[24] Le manager culturel suisse Martin Heller a été chargé en 2010 d'élaborer un concept pour l'Agora - le programme du Forum - ainsi que plusieurs espaces d'exposition temporaires, et a été nommé directeur artistique du Humboldt Lab Dahlem (2012-2015). Le Lab, doté d'un budget important par la Fondation fédérale du patrimoine culturel (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*), avait été créé pour « donner des impulsions pour la planification des expositions (...) pour le futur Humboldt Forum » (Humboldt Lab Project Archive–Humboldt-Forum 2015).[25] Enfin, Hermann Parzinger, président de la SPK, avait pris la parole en public au nom du Humboldt Forum.[26] La SPK se compose d'un grand conglomérat d'institutions culturelles dont, entre autres, les Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SMB), la Bibliothèque Nationale, les Archives Secrètes d'Etat, ainsi que plusieurs institutions de recherche. Employant plus de 2000 personnes, la SPK est la plus grande institution culturelle d'Europe (Häntzschel 2018 ; Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2018). Le Musée Ethnologique était l'un des dix-sept musées de la SMB, dirigé depuis 2008 par Michael Eissenhauer. Le travail du musée était dominé à l'époque par ce que l'on appelait alors les « structures » de la SPK, car c'est à la SPK et à la SMB que la directrice du musée, Viola König, et son équipe devaient rendre compte et communiquer leurs plans pour les expositions.

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[24] Au cours de mon travail sur le terrain au musée (2013-2015), le Konzeptgruppe (« groupe de conception ») était composé de Viola König, directrice du musée, et Peter Junge, co-commissaire des collections africaines, remplacé par Monika Zessnik à sa retraite fin 2014, et Markus Schindlbeck, commissaires des collections océaniques, qui était chargé de faire rapport au SPK et au SMB des développements du musée et de communiquer ces derniers.

[25] 4,125 millions d'euros ont été mis à la disposition du projet pour la réalisation d'expositions, de conférences, de symposiums, d'ateliers, etc. (Humboldt Lab Dahlem 2015).

[26] Le fait que Hermann Parzinger ait adopté ce rôle est attesté, par exemple, par les publications qu'il a écrites en son nom (Flierl et Parzinger 2009 ; Parzinger 2011).

Le Humboldt Forum en tant qu'institution indépendante (depuis 2015)

Monika Grütters, depuis sa nomination en décembre 2013, a cependant été investie dans la construction du Humboldt Forum en tant qu'institution indépendante. Sa première intervention importante dans le Forum a consisté à nommer la Direction Fondatrice (*Gründungsintendanz*) en avril 2015. La Direction Fondatrice serait la première représentation officiele du Forum à développer sa « vision commune », réunissant les différents acteurs du Forum, à savoir depuis début 2015 le « Musée du Site » (Museum des Ortes), l'Université Humboldt et, en remplacement de la bibliothèque municipale, une exposition sur Berlin ainsi que les collections « non européennes ».[27] Hermann Parzinger, représentant la SPK, l'historien de l'art Horst Bredekamp, représentant l'Université Humboldt, et Neil MacGregor. La nomination de Neil MacGregor, ancien directeur du British Museum a été célébrée par la presse comme un succès diplomatique, en tant que « candidat préféré de la chancelière Merkel », justifiant qu'il a pris la tête de ce que l'on appelle souvent le « triumvirat » (dpa 2015). Les plans d'exposition du Musée Ethnologique en étaient à leur phase finale au moment de la nomination de la Direction Fondatrice. L'intervention de Neil MacGregor dans les plans de l'exposition a été prononcée,[28] et la société Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH (2016-2018), explicitement fondée, a apporté son soutien logistique et financier.[29] En décembre 2017, la Direction Fondatrice a été remplacée lorsque la structure organisationnelle et administrative du Humboldt Forum a été introduite.[30] Monika Grütters a créé et nommé deux autres postes de direction : le « directeur des collections » (*Sammlungsdirektor*), qui fusionne la direction du Musée Ethnologique et du Musée d'Art Asiatique, et le « directeur général »

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[27] L'exposition sur Berlin était dirigée par l'ancien directeur du Musée d'Amsterdam Paul Spies depuis septembre 2015 (Brockschmidt 2015). Spies a été chargé à la fois de l'exposition pour le Humboldt Forum et est devenu directeur de la Stiftung Stadtmuseum.('Fondation du musée de la ville). L'exposition de l'Université Humboldt est dirigée artistiquement par Gorch Pieken à partir d'avril 2018, employé temporairement pour créer la première exposition pour l'ouverture du Forum (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 2018).

[28] Environ un tiers des plans du Musée Ethnologique et du Musée d'Art Asiatique ont été modifiés, les expositions permanentes ont été transformées en expositions temporaires, ce qui a permis de débloquer des fonds, d'exercer un contrôle et de fournir l'expertise de la Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH (Häntzschel 2017b ; 2018).

[29] Début 2019, l'entreprise et son personnel nouvellement recruté intégreront le futur propriétaire et exploitant du Schloss, la Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss (Fondation Humboldt Forum au Stadtschloss de Berlin).

[30] Il se composait d'un système de direction composé de « quatre piliers » plus la direction (*Generalintendanz*) : 1) Administration, 2) Collections (y compris le Musée du Site), 3) Académie Humboldt " (Éducation) et 4) Programmation (responsabilité de l'*Intendant* du Forum, en coopération avec le Land de Berlin) (Zawatka-Gerlach 2017).

(*Generalintendant*). Le nouveau directeur des collections Lars-Christian Koch était auparavant conservateur et directeur par intérim du Musée Ethnologique, le directeur général Hartmut Dorgerloh ancien directeur des Palais et Jardins Prussiens. Leurs recrutements ont été interprétés comme des solutions d'urgence à la constellation institutionnelle du Forum ; des solutions que le personnel du musée et la presse ont qualifiée à plusieurs reprises d'« opaques », « hiérarchiques » ou « paralysés » (Häntzschel 2017a ; 2017b ; 2018).

En tant que « projet culturel le plus important du XXIe siècle en Allemagne » (Parzinger 2011), le Forum n'allait pas devenir une institution muséale dans sa conception traditionnelle. Comme l'a déclaré Monika Grütters en 2017, « nous ne voulons pas faire du travail de musée, mais plutôt utiliser les objets des collections comme point de départ pour un travail interdisciplinaire » (cité dans Häntzschel 2017b). Malgré la position centrale attribuée aux « collections non européennes » et malgré la comparaison récurrente avec d'autres grandes institutions nationales telles que le Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, le British Museum ou le Centre Pompidou (Parzinger 2011, 6-7), le concept et l'organisation du Forum étaient sans doute différents des institutions des musées, notamment en termes de répartition et distribution budgétaires. A Paris, la restructuration du paysage muséal concernant les collections ethnologiques a impliqué l'inventaire, la numérisation, la restauration et le nouveau stockage de ses collections.[31] A Berlin, les ressources n'ont pas été consacrées aux musées concernés, mais plutôt au Forum lui-même. Les coûts globaux de construction du bâtiment ont été prévus à hauteur de 595 millions d'euros.[32] En 2019, les coûts de construction supplémentaires ont été estimés à 78 millions d'euros (Bundesregierung 2019, 2). D'importantes ressources supplémentaires ont été distribuées au secteur de la programmation, des expositions et des événements du Forum.[33] En 2017, les plans de transfert des collections vers le dépôt périphérique de Friedrichshagen ont été suspendus parce que le

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[31] Voir par exemple l'ethnographie du processus par Nicoletta Tiziana Beltrame (Beltrame 2015).

[32] Cette somme s'est répartie entre 483 millions d'euros couverts par l'État fédéral et 32 millions d'euros par la ville-État de Berlin, et les 105 millions d'euros restants pour la reconstruction de la façade historique constituée de dons privés, https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/pages/faq, consulté le 25 juin 2019.

[33] En 2018, il a été communiqué que 350 personnes seraient employées temporairement jusqu'à l'ouverture du Forum (Kuhn 2018). Ces postes deviendront toutefois permanents le 1er janvier 2019, lorsque la filiale Humboldt Forum Kultur GmbH sera intégrée à la Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss. En revanche, il a été communiqué que 40 recrutements temporaires supplémentaires ont été consacrés aux musées (Musée ethnologique et Musée d'art asiatique), correspondant pour la plupart au besoin immédiat de restaurer et de préparer des objets pour le passage au Forum (Kuhn 2018).

financement du nouveau dépôt n'avait pas été assuré. L'idée d'un « campus de la recherche » (*Forschungscampus*) est née en 2017. Cela impliquerait que les collections resteraient principalement à Dahlem, réparties dans l'ensemble du musée, y compris dans les anciennes salles d'exposition (Ossowski 2017). Au moment de la rédaction de cette thèse, cependant, le financement du campus de recherche n'est pas officiellement publié ni garanti.[34] En revanche, en 2016, le budget annuel du futur Humboldt Forum a été calculé et estimé à 50 millions d'euros. Ce n'est qu'en comparaison que l'on peut saisir les dimensions des fonds du Forum : alors que certains grands musées internationaux disposent de budgets annuels comparables, comme le *Musée du Quai Branly* avec 54 millions d'euros en 2016 (AFP 2016), d'autres font face à des coupes budgétaires malgré une réouverture et une rénovation récentes, comme le *Musée royal d'Afrique centrale* à Tervuren (Belgique) avec un budget annuel de 16 millions d'euros (2018) (Lismond-Mertes 2019, 27). Par rapport à d'autres institutions culturelles berlinoises, le Humboldt Forum bénéficiera toutefois d'un financement nettement plus important : le budget 2015 de l'État fédéral consacré à la Haus der Kulturen der Welt, au Berliner Festspiele dont le Martin-Gropius-Bau, ainsi qu'au festival de Berlin Berlin Berlinale s'élève à 29 millions d'euros (Fahrun 2016).

Pour résumer, en entrant dans les coulisses du Musée Ethnologique, j'ai pu observer que ce que l'on a appelé la « représentation » l'emportait sur la durabilité, sur la planification à long terme et sur ce qu'on peut appeler le travail muséal fondamental. Ce n'est qu'à travers le travail direct dans et avec les collections du musée, et notamment en étroite interaction avec le personnel du musée, que j'ai pu saisir l'écart entre le travail représentatif et le travail fondamental du musée, dans un contexte où l'information sur le travail du musée était peu ou pas accessible de l'extérieur. D'un point de vue général, l'accent mis sur la représentation se reflète dans la répartition des ressources. Les ressources ont été principalement consacrées à la construction du Forum, à des projets à court terme tels que le Humboldt Lab Dahlem pour préparer le Forum, la préparation du programme du Forum et des expositions (temporaires), ainsi qu'à son entretien quotidien (futur), l'emportant largement sur les ressources consacrées au Musée Ethnologique et à son travail fondamental et quotidien.

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[34] Des progrès ont été réalisés pour soutenir le campus de recherche : Le Musée d'art asiatique et le Musée ethnologique sont depuis juillet 2019 codirigés par Christian Koch et Alexis von Poser en tant que directeur adjoint. Une analyse de potentiel a été publiée, y compris les plans architecturaux (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 2019).

Le cadre institutionnel fourni par le Humboldt Forum a constamment changé au cours de la période 2013-2019. Ce n'est qu'avec l'intervention de Monika Grütters après 2015 que les conservateurs du musée ont été incités à travailler avec et au sein d'une structure globale qui n'a pas seulement servi de mécanisme de consultation et de retours, mais qui est intervenue avec des suggestions spécifiques et conséquentes pour le changement. Les conditions qui ont façonné le cœur de mon travail sur le terrain, de 2013 à 2015, se sont ensuite déroulées dans des circonstances sensiblement différentes de celles qui prévalent actuellement.

Working through. Une anthropologie des héritages coloniaux
« Working through colonial collections », titre de cette thèse, condense son approche méthodologique, analytique et théorique, et structure son argumentation. C'est lors d'une conversation avec Wayne Modest, conservateur, chercheur et directeur du Research Centre for Material Culture à Leiden, que j'ai découvert pour la première fois la notion de « working through ». Wayne Modest a inventé sa conception du musée comme un « espace pour le processus de *working through* » , où, comme il l'a déclaré,

> les objets se trouvent dans un espace de relationnalité contestée et enchevêtrée. *Working through* implique que l'on doit questionner, débattre, se sentir mal à l'aise, boxer et se battre sur les objets et leur signification dans le présent. (von Oswald, Soh Bejeng Ndikung et Modest 2017, 15-18)

En Allemagne, peut-être plus que dans d'autres contextes, la notion de *working through* (*aufarbeiten*) implique, même si ce n'est qu'implicitement, des références au traitement du passé contesté et du traumatisme de manière plus générale. En particulier, il fait référence à la manière dont le passé national-socialiste et, plus tard, socialiste de l'Allemagne a été traité. La notion de « working through » fait référence à un travail en cours et non concluant : un travail qui traite du passé contesté, du « patrimoine difficile » (Macdonald), de son déploiement et de ses implications dans le présent. *Working through* implique de faire face à quelque chose qui est difficile ou désagréable, de gérer un problème qui comporte plusieurs parties, étape par étape, ou de passer par un processus de compréhension et d'acceptation.[35] Avec cela, il fait allusion aux efforts laborieux, durables et répétés que le processus de *working through* le passé implique, ainsi qu'aux multiples formes de difficultés, de refus, de résistances et de refus de le faire.

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[35] Dictionnaires en ligne consultés le 1er juillet 2019 : Merriam-Webster, Oxford, Cambridge.

Une analogie avec le concept de Siegmund Freud de « working through » (*durcharbeiten*) serait trop facile à faire ici. Pour Freud, le processus de ce travail est composé de deux phases: une résistance à la mémoire, articulée dans la maladie du patient, suivie d'une reconnaissance de la résistance, qui s'articule à son tour en un dépassement de cette résistance, et un processus de guérison. En fin de compte, pour Freud, le processus de travail se transforme en une volonté de récupération et, par conséquent, une volonté de se souvenir. Cependant, et au-delà de la critique des raisons pour lesquelles l'application des concepts psychanalytiques aux institutions, aux sociétés ou aux nations est difficile à maintenir,[36] cette compréhension analyserait les multiples ambivalences, nuances et contradictions qu'implique le processus de travail dans les collections coloniales du musée. Cela transformerait le processus en un processus progressif et en quelque sorte causal, niant à la fois les nombreux précurseurs, ainsi que les nombreuses retombées, récidives et reproductions que le processus implique. .

Le musée comme héritage colonial

Je situe l'analyse dans le champ de recherche d'une *anthropologie de l'héritage colonial*. L'anthropologie des héritages coloniaux s'est intéressée à la recherche des différents types de *relations avec le passé colonial dans le présent*, et en particulier à la *persistance* des épistémologies coloniales. Les musées ethnologiques s'offrent comme sujets potentiels pour une anthropologie de l'héritage colonial. Tant dans leur dimension matérielle qu'immatérielle, elles sont un exemple flagrant de violence coloniale, car elles ont joué un rôle crucial dans le système colonial d'appropriation et d'aliénation. En même temps, les relations entre le colonialisme, l'anthropologie et ses musées ont été façonnées par l'ambivalence. Comme le souligne Benoît de L'Estoile, les relations coloniales se caractérisent par « un processus d'appropriation multiple plutôt que par la négation même des colonisés ». Ces processus d'appropriation, à peu près situés entre le XVe et le XXe siècle, ont historiquement adopté différentes formes et modalités, mais ont souvent été principalement façonnés par la violence, la domination et la conquête. Pour de L'Estoile, « bien que généralement asymétrique, ce processus d'appropriation comportait, dans une certaine mesure, un aspect mutuel » (de L'Estoile 2008, 268). Cela concerne en particulier la discipline de l'anthropologie : si l'on examine la politique de la recherche anthropologique de l'époque, on constate qu'elle se déroule à la fois en complicité avec les régimes coloniaux de domination, d'appropriation et de fausse représentation raciste, mais aussi qu'elle révèle un intérêt crucial pour la différence

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[36] Voir par exemple Macdonald 2013,11 ; Rothermund 2015,13-15.

culturelle, les échanges, l'hybridité et le cosmopolitisme.[37]Comme la situation était complexe dans le passé, elle est tout aussi contradictoire dans le présent : Les musées ethnologiques, dans leurs tentatives de transformation, ont à la fois recherché, abordé et problématisé leur mission très critiquée de posséder et de représenter l'altérité, tout en risquant de passer sous silence, de légitimer et de reproduire les épistémologies, les représentations et les inégalités conventionnellement associées à la colonialité des musées ethnologiques. C'est à travers ces ambivalences, ces contradictions et ces complexités de la manière dont la présence coloniale s'articule dans le présent du musée qu'une anthropologie du musée en tant qu'héritage colonial tente d'éclairer et de comprendre.

En utilisant cette définition large de l'héritage colonial, la compréhension d'un « héritage » découle de sa caractéristique de relation. Plus particulièrement, un héritage crée des relations dans le double sens de « partager », de diviser et d'avoir en commun (de L'Estoile 2008:270). Cette définition d'un héritage reflète la conception du musée comme étant « relationnel », comme l'ont suggéré Chris Gosden, Frances Larson et Alison Petch. Inspirés par la théorie ANT, ils ont défini le musée comme une « entité dynamique, composée d'une masse changeante de personnes et de choses », dans laquelle les musées ne créent pas seulement des relations par les personnes et les choses, mais aussi entre le lointain et le proche, le passé et le présent (Gosden, Larson et Petch 2007, 7).

> Le musée est donc un lieu où des lieux lointains sont transformés, représentés et étudiés de loin à travers certains de leurs produits matériels. Les « grandes » idées sur le monde sont liées par des ensembles de « petites » choses. (Gosden, Larson et Petch 2007, 7)

Cette description du musée en tant qu'héritage attribue donc un rôle central mais ne le réduit pas à sa dimension matérielle - et en particulier, aux collections en tant que manifestation matérielle des relations coloniales. Elle comprend également les pratiques,

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[37] Pour des exemples, voir Pels 2008, 283. En ce qui concerne les collections muséales, cet aspect de la mutualité s'exprime par exemple par le fait que tous les objets acquis dans des contextes coloniaux n'ont pas été pillés, volés ou acquis dans des circonstances douteuses, et qu'il existe des preuves de cadeaux diplomatiques, de commerce et de formation précoce d'un marché de l'art incluant la négociation et l'adaptation aux styles, goûts et prix ou la dérision de la personne colonisée par des images d'Europe. Pour des exemples concernant l'Afrique de l'Est allemande, voir par exemple Weber 2005, 120-130; pour l'Afrique centrale, voir par exemple Schildkrout et Keim 1998 ; et pour des représentations de l'européanisme, Lips 1937.

les processus et l'imagination qu'implique le travail muséal, reflétant les systèmes de valeurs contemporains respectifs. Situant le musée dans ses relations coloniales, le projet colonial s'appuyait sur des idéologies, des imaginations, des systèmes de connaissances et une production, bref, un état d'esprit. Cet état d'esprit justifiait la mission du colonisateur en vertu de sa supériorité, au-delà de sa colonisation actuelle - c'est-à-dire l'occupation d'un territoire et d'une société. Comme l'ont montré les recherches littéraires, les « fantasmes coloniaux » et les « imaginations impérialistes » faisaient autant partie du colonialisme allemand que l'exercice du pouvoir. Ces imaginations et mentalités ont précédé, accompagné et persisté longtemps après la colonisation allemande actuelle (Zantop 1997 ; Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox et Zantop 2001 ; Ames et Gilman 2005). Comme Sharon Macdonald, Henrietta Lidchi et moi l'avons résumé,

> Les musées ethnographiques portent donc un héritage colonial non seulement en termes d'objets acquis durant des périodes spécifiquement coloniales, mais aussi en termes d'objets eux-mêmes. Les questions de l'acquisition potentiellement illicite d'objets, ainsi que les questions de propriété auxquelles elles conduisent, sont certes importantes, mais elles ne sont qu'un aspect de la complexité de cet héritage (...). Il est également important de se pencher sur l'héritage étendu des relations coloniales et de s'interroger sur les formations particulières du savoir et les modes de production du savoir, sur la nature du musée ethnographique et sur les personnes auxquelles il s'adresse, ainsi que sur l'accès aux collections et la participation à la construction de leur avenir, tant dans le passé que dans le présent. (Macdonald, Lidchi et von Oswald 2017, 97)

Pour en revenir à la problématique centrale de cette thèse, à savoir comment le musée en tant qu'héritage colonial est aujourd'hui aux prises avec cette question, je l'aborde à travers une ethnographie des pratiques muséales.

Se concentrer sur le travail. Une ethnographie muséale

> Les passés coloniaux, les récits relatés à leur sujet, les distinctions tacites par lesquelles ils continuent à révéler les charges affectives qu'ils réactivent et les « leçons » implicites qu'ils sont mobilisés pour transmettre sont parfois si ineffablement enfilés dans le tissu des formes contemporaines qu'ils semblent indiscernables comme effets distincts, comme partout et nulle part. (Stoler 2016, 5)

C'est par le biais d'une ethnographie que j'aborde dans cette thèse la boîte noire de l'héritage colonial étant « partout et nulle part ». Alors que la critique postcoloniale a été accusée d'établir des liens rapides et de faire des suppositions causales entre le passé colonial et sa continuité dans le présent, j'essaie d'identifier et de comprendre comment aborder le musée comme héritage colonial à travers une analyse ethnographique du quotidien du musée et des pratiques concrètes du personnel du musée.

Bien que le musée soit certainement centré autour de ses collections, mes observations et ma participation au travail du musée me permettent d'affirmer que le musée peut être compris comme une « organisation peuplée » (*peopled organisation)* (Morse, Rex et Richardson 2018, 116). Voir le musée comme une organisation peuplée, c'est opposer une définition du musée comme homogène, sans visage et anonyme. Cela met plutôt l'accent sur la façon dont le personnel du musée contribue, résiste et produit le musée. Il est courant dans l'histoire des musées de mettre au premier plan le rôle des fondateurs du musée et des collectionneurs importants pour la constitution du musée. Cependant, ceux qui travaillent « en coulisses » avec des tâches considérées comme banales et même ennuyeuses, comme le responsable du stockage, le responsable des bases de données ou le conservateur, sont généralement laissés inaperçus et sans documentation. Dans la thèse, en décrivant leur engagement personnel et passionné envers les collections, je souligne le rôle crucial que les individus et leurs subjectivités jouent dans le processus constant de devenir du musée, contre leur rôle habituel de « notes de bas de page de l'histoire » (Miller 2010, 50). L'accent mis sur les personnes et leurs pratiques était également nécessaire dans la mesure où l'histoire institutionnelle récente du musée, faute de documentation, ne peut être enregistrée et analysée aujourd'hui que sous la forme d'une histoire orale. Les connaissances institutionnelles ne sont donc pas documentées, mais plutôt intégrées par les personnes qui travaillent dans l'institution, dont certaines depuis plusieurs décennies. Ce n'est qu'en travaillant avec ces personnes que j'ai pu documenter ces histoires, des histoires qui façonnent l'institution de manière cruciale, mais qui sont aussi sujettes à des changements rapides dans le contexte de la restructuration institutionnelle. Enfin, une approche ethnographique montre que *le* Musée ethnologique n'existe pas. Alors que dans la perception médiatique et publique du musée ethnologique, l'institution est présentée comme une entité, au sein du musée, toute une série d'opinions, de convictions théoriques, de pratiques professionnelles et d'expériences de vie interagissent et se reflètent dans les différentes façons de faire du musée. En s'appropriant et en définissant leur rôle spécifique dans les constellations du Forum et du

musée, le personnel du musée contribue de manière significative et délibérée à la construction progressive et continue du musée, quel que soit le niveau de gouvernance sur lequel il se situe.

Working through se traduit alors littéralement et méthodologiquement par une concentration sur le *travail*. Cela concerne également mon propre poste au musée puisque j'y ai travaillé quotidiennement entre 2013 et 2015 en tant qu'assistante d'un des conservateurs du département Afrique et en tant que co-commissaire de l'exposition *Object Biographies*. La recherche en tant qu'*ethnographie muséale* se concentre sur les pratiques liées aux collections - conserver, exposer, faire des recherches, stocker, inventorier, etc. - qui définissent le quotidien des employés du musée. Les collections sont devenues de plus en plus contestées pendant et notamment après ma présence quotidienne au musée - des développements que j'ai suivis avec plus de distance depuis 2015 jusqu'à la date d'écriture, à la mi-2019.

Adoptant cette perspective ethnographique, la recherche interroge la relation au passé colonial de deux façons que je qualifie de distinctes mais qui se réfèrent l'une à l'autre. D'une part, l'analyse porte sur l'identification et l'analyse de la négociation, de l'utilisation et de la mobilisation *explicite* du passé colonial. D'autre part, cette approche ethnographique des héritages coloniaux interroge « le passé tel qu'il vit aujourd'hui », comme Benoît de L'Estoile l'a défini en référence à Bronislaw Malinowski, en se concentrant sur la manière dont une présence coloniale s'exprime et est traitée dans le quotidien du musée (de L'Estoile 2008:272)

L'utilisation et la mobilisation du passé
Une anthropologie de l'héritage colonial implique la manière dont l'histoire coloniale allemande est explicitement traitée à travers le débat sur le musée ethnologique et ses collections. Le concept de Sharon Macdonald du « past presencing » est utile ici, car il s'intéresse « à la façon dont on se réfère au passé à certains moments ou périodes précises » (Macdonald 2013, 16). Il s'agit de la manière dont les acteurs concernés se rapportent « au passé et à l'histoire coloniale de l'Allemagne » - définis différemment par les différents acteurs concernés. Cela signifie en particulier comment le passé colonial est mobilisé, négocié, minimisé ou négligé à l'égard de la collection du Musée Ethnologique de multiples façons - ou pour ne citer que quelques nuances, comment il est traité, supprimé, réduit au silence, censuré, rendu invisible ou visible, etc.

Ce n'est qu'au cours de mon travail de terrain (2013-2019) que les collections du *Musée Ethnologique* ont été progressivement, publiquement et largement définies comme « patrimoine difficile » en Allemagne (Macdonald 2009). Dans un contexte national longtemps qualifié d' « amnésique » par rapport à son passé colonial (Kößler 2006 ; Zimmerer 2013: 9), c'est sans doute par la mobilisation de la collection du Musée, et en particulier de sa « provenance », que le colonialisme allemand a été traité en Allemagne.[38] En ce qui concerne le débat sur le colonialisme allemand, le Humboldt Forum a été décrit comme un « catalyseur de la critique » et un « point nodal discursif » de l'érudition critique - rapidement approprié par la politique - pour déterminer comment le Forum a fonctionné comme un prisme pour problématiser le passé colonial allemand (von Bose 2017: 127 ; Monika Grütters, commissaire fédérale pour la culture et les médias citée dans Ringelstein 2018). Les convergences entre l'érudition, la production culturelle, les médias et, surtout, l'activisme, ont encouragé la lutte contre le colonialisme allemand. Le Humboldt Forum a été l'une des premières références, sinon même *la* première référence, explicitement utilisée et mise à niveau. Au fur et à mesure que le Forum prenait forme, les collections qui avaient longtemps été considérées comme sans problème, scientifiques et faisant naturellement partie des musées européens par les responsables des musées et des politiques culturelles, sont devenues « contestées », et « dérangeantes », comme Sharon Macdonald le décrit avec certaines des caractéristiques du « patrimoine difficile » (Macdonald 2009: 1). Alors que la relation constitutive entre le colonialisme et l'anthropologie était reconnue depuis un certain temps dans la recherche sur les musées ethnologiques, le *Musée Ethnologique de Berlin* n'a été construit que progressivement et perçu comme un vestige du colonialisme à l'époque de mon travail de terrain dans le débat public.[39] Les collections ont par la suite fait l'objet de « conflits d'intérêts et de divergences d'opinions permanents » (Macdonald 2009, 19). La thèse couvre donc une période durant laquelle les discussions sur le colonialisme allemand par le biais de ses collections ethnologiques nationales ont beaucoup évolué - discussions dont l'issue n'était pas claire au moment de la rédaction de cette thèse, à la mi-2019.

Le passé tel qu'il est vécu aujourd'hui

Contrairement à la « mobilisation » explicite du passé, par exemple pour des moyens politiques ou des réparations financières, une anthropologie de l'héritage colonial

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[38] Pour une discussion des développements autour des questions de provenance, (Förster 2019).

[39] Pour une analyse documentaire approfondie, voir le chapitre I de la présente thèse, et comme exemples marquants du cas de Berlin, voir Zimmerman 2001 ; Penny 2002.

regarde « le passé tel qu'il vit maintenant » dans le quotidien du musée. Il s'agit donc de « remettre en cause » ou de « vivre avec » le passé colonial dans le présent. Il s'agit aussi de saisir et de situer les différentes formes sous lesquelles les présences coloniales s'articulent et agissent dans le présent - pas nécessairement immédiatement identifiable ou identifié comme tel - y compris les manifestations parfois peu évidentes, historiques et éventuellement transformées des modes coloniaux de production ou de représentation du savoir.

Afin d'identifier et de travailler sur ce qui reste du passé, ou inversement, sur « les généalogies impériales profondes du présent » (Stoler 2016, 4), il est nécessaire de traiter conjointement l'analyse historique et ethnographique. En tant que tel, l'anthropologie du musée comme héritage colonial est distincte, mais étroitement liée à la littérature subsumée sous la catégorie « anthropologie du colonialisme », qui interroge la relation entre l'histoire coloniale et le présent de l'anthropologie. L'anthropologie du colonialisme, telle que définie par Peter Pels, consiste en l'analyse des relations historiques entre anthropologie et colonialisme par rapport au présent.

> L'anthropologie du colonialisme est aussi toujours une anthropologie de l'anthropologie, parce que dans de nombreux aspects méthodologiques, organisationnels et professionnels, la discipline conserve la forme qu'elle a reçue lorsqu'elle a émergé du début du XXe siècle, bien que partiellement en opposition avec les circonstances coloniales. (Pels 1997, 164-65)

Le musée ethnologique étant une institution anthropologique, l'analyse de ses modes historiques de production de connaissances et, plus généralement, des épistémologies, est donc une partie discrète de ce qui constitue son fonctionnement contemporain. Elle contribue à l'analyse du musée contemporain, car « au lieu d'essayer de résoudre *la crise de la représentation* par de plus en plus de représentations, (l'anthropologie du colonialisme) s'est tournée vers le travail de la représentation comme objet historique » (Pels 1997:165). Le musée ethnologique a figuré comme un sujet d'analyse important pour identifier, déconstruire et analyser les représentations passées et présentes, dans l'anthropologie elle-même, mais aussi dans les *cultural studies* et les études muséales plus généralement parlant.[40] De plus, l'anthropologie du colonialisme place les racines

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[40] Voir le chapitre II pour une analyse documentaire approfondie sur les musées (éthologiques), les représentations et le colonial. Clifford 1988, Karp 1991, Macdonald 1998, Schildkrout et Keim 1998 en sont des exemples précurseurs.

intellectuelles, les outils et les méthodes de l'anthropologie au centre de ses recherches. Dans le présent travail, cela ne concerne pas seulement ma propre position de chercheur, mais aussi le travail de commissaire dans lequel je me suis engagé. Une anthropologie des héritages coloniaux va donc nécessairement de pair avec une anthropologie du colonialisme afin de situer ces phénomènes actuels dans leur généalogie historique.

J'utilise ici la formulation d'une « anthropologie des héritages coloniaux » bien que cette formulation ne fasse pas nécessairement l'unanimité lorsqu'il s'agit de l'interrogation ethnographique de la présence du passé colonial dans le présent.[41] Ann Laura Stoler, par exemple, dont cette thèse s'appuie largement sur les travaux, a fait valoir qu' «une anthropologie des héritages coloniaux manque de potentiel analytique pour décrire et analyser l'importance de l'histoire coloniale, notamment par opposition aux notions de « duress », « debris » ou « ruins /ruinations » qu'elle a elle-même établies (Stoler 2013, 2016). Mais c'est précisément ce manque de précision conceptuelle et d'argument, et donc la possibilité d'une description et d'une analyse ouvertes à ce qui se passe sur le terrain, qui me pousse à utiliser ici le terme « héritage ». Contrairement à la description que fait Stoler des vestiges du passé, qui laisse souvent entendre des associations au brisé, le musée ethnologique comme héritage colonial semble relativement intact, même si contesté. C'est plutôt la notion de *working through* qui remplace ici l'argument, puisqu'elle se réfère à l'analyse de la manière dont s'articule dans le musée la lutte avec le passé colonial.

Working through représente donc les relations entre ce qui reste et ce qui change dans les processus de transformation. La thèse montre comment les héritages coloniaux sont identifiés, étudiés et traités au sein du musée. Elle met en lumière les efforts et les processus mis en avant et pour lesquels le personnel du musée s'est battu afin d'identifier et de traiter publiquement l'héritage colonial du musée, comme dans une mobilisation explicite du passé. Alors que la thèse décrit et analyse ces processus, elle se concentre avant tout sur la manière dont le personnel du musée s'efforce de trouver des alternatives aux cadres et ordres disciplinaires, aux conventions professionnelles et aux hiérarchies institutionnelles, dans la perspective de leur genèse historique. La thèse traite donc notamment des frontières et des limites auxquelles le personnel du musée est confronté lorsqu'il tente de travailler sur l'héritage colonial du musée. Elle met en évidence de constants mécanismes d'attraction et de répulsion, ainsi que le risque de reproduire, de

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[41] Des objections à ce terme ont été formulées, par exemple dans Dias 2008:307 ou Stoler 2013:7.

stabiliser et de légitimer le musée en tant qu'héritage colonial : des tensions qu'entraîne plus généralement le traitement d'héritages contestés.

Etre affecté. Recherche sur le musée en tant qu'héritage colonial
Dans cette section, je présente les méthodes et l'éthique de la recherche, en la situant comme une ethnographie muséale, façonnée par le fait d'être « affecté » par le terrain et ses évolutions.

Une ethnographie muséale
Malgré les changements institutionnels et politiques susmentionnés, les transformations liées au Humboldt Forum, mon travail de terrain au musée (2013-2015) a surtout été défini par la structure organisationnelle, les routines de travail et ses conventions. Il peut donc être considéré comme une ethnographie du musée. Si les ethnographies muséales ont pris de l'importance depuis les exemples pionniers de la fin des années 1990, elles restent l'exception en ce qui concerne la manière dont le musée a été abordé et analysé.[42] Les projets de recherche sur les musées utilisant des méthodes ethnographiques dans une certaine mesure, se sont concentrés sur l'ensemble des différents types de pratiques du musée. Tout en se focalisant sur un aspect particulier du travail du musée. Ces ethnographies couvrent la réalisation des expositions, le stockage, la conservation et la numérisation des collections, la collecte, la médiation et l'apprentissage, ainsi que le travail de communication.[43] Ces projets partagent l'analyse des processus, préférée à l'analyse des produits y compris l'analyse de ce que « [les gens] font réellement, (...) et pas seulement de ce qu'ils disent faire » comme Daniel Miller qui en fait une caractéristique centrale de l'approche ethnographique (Miller 1997, 16-17). Même si le point d'entrée

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[42] Parmi les exemples pionniers, mentionnons (Handler et Gable, 1997 ; Katriel, 1997 ; Macdonald, 2002).

[43] Dans un texte rédigé en collaboration avec Sharon Macdonald et Christine Gerbich, nous passons en revue la documentation sur l'ethnographie muséale, sur laquelle je m'appuie dans ce qui suit. Parmi les exemples, mentionnons l'accent mis sur la réalisation d'expositions (Macdonald 2002 ; Yaneva 2012 ; Morgan 2013 ; Bunzl 2014 ; Franklin 2014 ; Shannon 2014 ; Bouquet 2015 ; Jung 2015 ; Kreplak 2017), l'analyse de la façon dont les musées se présentent et communiquent sur eux-mêmes, notamment au moyen d'expositions, et comment leur rôle est perçu et négocié par autrui (Butler 1999 ; Prix 2007 ; Torres, Andrea Meza 2011 ; von Bose 2016 ; Porsché 2018), comment ils sont utilisés par leurs publics ou comment les musées tentent de les impliquer (Roberts 1997 ; Bhatti 2012 ; Schmitt 2012 ; Morse et Munro 2015 ; Knudsen 2016 ; Debary et Roustan 2017 ; Kendzia 2017 ; Sabeti 2018). Il s'agit d'ethnographies sur les processus de conservation, d'archivage et de numérisation (Geismar 2013 ; Domínguez Rubio 2014 ; Beltrame 2015), de travail communautaire et de projets collaboratifs (Hendry 2005 ; Krmpotich et Peers 2013 ; Schorch, McCarthy et Hakiwai 2016), et enfin, de pratiques de collecte, tant actuelles que historiques (O'Hanlon 1993 ; Förster et Stoecker 2016).

de cette recherche s'est fait par le biais des expositions d'un musée en particulier, ce projet de recherche en couvre les différentes pratiques - de la communication à l'exposition, en passant par la recherche, le dépôt et la conservation.

J'ai commencé à travailler au Musée Ethnologique de Berlin en octobre 2013. Mes intérêts principaux consistaient, d'une part, en une ethnographie des processus de transformation dans les musées ethnologiques, analysé sous l'angle de ses processus de réalisation d'expositions. D'autre part, je me suis focalisée sur la culture matérielle et en particulier, les biographies d'objets - leur vie passée, présente et future – de certains objets choisis de la collection Afrique.[44] Annoncé comme tel à la conservatrice Paola Ivanov, également anthropologue, nous devions travailler ensemble sur la nouvelle exposition permanente qui devait inclure les collections Afrique du musée pour le Humboldt Forum. Ivanov était l'un des deux conservateurs des collections africaines.[45] J'ai commencé à travailler avec elle un an après son entrée en fonction en 2012. Ma contribution, au moment où les préparatifs de l'exposition d'Ivanov ont commencé, a vraiment été la bienvenue. J'apportais une aide en échange de laquelle, j'aurais accès au musée dans la plupart de ses aspects. L'arrivée du conservateur n'a pas seulement permis

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[44] Pour pouvoir retracer et raconter ces « histoires du devenir « , le concept de « biographies d'objets » a été progressivement utilisé comme outil analytique et narratif pour comprendre la vie sociale et culturelle des choses, proposé par Igor Koyptoff et Arjun Appadurai dans les années 1980 (Kopytoff 1986 ; Appadurai 1986). Malgré les critiques selon lesquelles la notion de « biographie » pourrait induire en erreur en ce qui concerne la compréhension des biographies des objets en tant que linéaires, ou en tant qu'attribuant l'objet intentionnel et l'agence individuelle (Hahn 2015 ; Joyce et Gillespie 2015), le concept a servi de point de départ progressivement populaire pour retrouver et analyser les relations entre les personnes et les choses dans le temps, décrire les réseaux socio-matériels qui s'entrecroisent et montrer comment des choses durables vont bien au delà des systèmes de compréhension (Joy 2009) et leur vie au musée. Utilisés en anthropologie comme en archéologie, de nombreux exemples de biographies d'objets existent aujourd'hui. Pour des revues de la littérature et des discussions sur les biographies d'objets, voir par exemple (Hirschauer et Doering 1997 ; Gosden et Marshall 1999 ; Hoskins 2006 ; Brower Stahl 2010 ; Chua et Salmond 2012 ; Samida, Eggert et Hahn 2014), pour les monographies et volumes édités traitant de biographies d'objets particuliers voir par exemple (Daston 2000, Bonnot 2002 ; Daston et Galison 2007 ; Tythacott 2011, Bonnot 2014 ; Förster et Stoecker 2016).

[45] Ivanov avait suivi le cheminement de carrière pour devenir anthropologue de musée en Allemagne. Dans les années 1990, elle avait été *Volontär*, apprentie de musée, travaillant dans le département Afrique avec le commissaire Hans-Joachim Koloss. Elle a terminé son doctorat en anthropologie historique sur les récits de voyage coloniaux (Ivanov 2000). Elle a ensuite travaillé et co-commissaire de l'exposition permanente « Art from Africa » au Musée Ethnologique, avec Peter Junge, nommé commissaire du département Afrique en 2001, en remplacement de Hans-Joachim Koloss. L'exposition a été présentée au Musée Ethnologique de 2005 jusqu'à sa fermeture en janvier 2017.

de se faire une idée du processus de réalisation de l'exposition, mais aussi d'entrer dans les différents départements et activités du musée : la bibliothèque, les archives, les réserves, la conservation et la numérisation. J'ai donc pu travailler avec des conservateurs, des muséologues, des commissaires et designers d'expositions, des archivistes, des restaurateurs, des magasiniers notamment. En tant que récipiendaire d'une bourse *Staatliche Museen* de Berlin, j'ai eu les privilèges d'un apprenti de musée, un *Volontär* : j'ai payé le prix de personnel à la cantine du musée, j'ai eu accès à la communication interne par courriel, j'ai travaillé à mon propre bureau sur mon ordinateur, et surtout, j'ai eu accès à la collection du musée en ayant les clés des réserves du musée ainsi qu'en recevant les droits d'auteur de la base de données du musée. Grâce à l'entrée du musée par les pratiques curatoriales, faire une ethnographie de la future exposition permanente s'est étendue à une ethnographie du musée dans son ensemble.[46]

Dans cette fonction, je me considérais comme l'ethnographe d'une exposition, dans laquelle, comme dans beaucoup d'autres domaines, il semblait possible de prendre une certaine distance par rapport au terrain. Cependant, ma place contrôlée sur le terrain m'a été en partie enlevée lorsque j'ai décidé de saisir l'opportunité de co-créer l'exposition *Object Biographies*, deux mois après avoir commencé mon travail de terrain. Cette position privilégiée au sein du personnel du musée m'a permis de travailler sur l'exposition, avec l'apprentie Verena Rodatus, dans le cadre du Humboldt Lab Dahlem. Par la suite, j'ai continué à travailler pour le Lab à travers deux conférences afin de financer mes recherches. Pour moi, c'est le moment où ma position sur le terrain est passée de « l'observation des participants » à « la participation observatrice ».

Etre affecté
C'est la théorisation par Jeanne Favret-Saada de son travail de terrain sur la sorcellerie par *l'être affecté* qui m'a aidée à réfléchir aux particularités de mon terrain, même si le domaine de l'anthropologie muséale est très différent, et peut-être, moins dangereux, que la sorcellerie en France (Favret-Saada 1977). Le risque de se faire tuer, par exemple, est relativement faible dans les musées. Pourtant, le concept de Favret-Saada d'*être affecté* remet en question le rôle et la relation entre « observation » et « participation » d'une manière comparable à mon domaine. Favret-Saada affirme que les récits sur la sorcellerie

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[46] Parmi les limites, il y avait le fait que les possibilités d'assister aux réunions, par exemple, dépendaient du fait que les personnes avec lesquelles je travaillais le plus étroitement - Paola Ivanov et Verena Rodatus, assistante au musée du département, en particulier - pensaient m'inviter et m'informaient ensuite des heures et lieux. Je ne faisais pas partie « naturellement » de la communication interne par courriel.

étaient généralement écrits du point de vue d'anthropologues qui s'intéressaient à l'observation, plutôt qu'à la participation. Elle rappelle que les universitaires avaient depuis longtemps réduit leur analyse de la sorcellerie à l'accusation, la décrivant comme « une médecine pour les analphabètes et les ignorants » (Favret-Saada, 2012). Par contre, dans sa propre expérience sur le terrain, elle décrit que les gens qu'elle a rencontrés voulaient qu'elle devienne une « partenaire ». Ils ne communiqueraient avec elle qu'une fois qu'elle aussi aurait été, comme elle le dit, « prise ». Elle décrit ce sentiment de participation sur le terrain comme un « sentiment d'être affectée », sans savoir si oui ou non elle était réellement ensorcelée elle-même.

Malgré le fait que les métaphores d'être « pris » n'étaient pas absentes de mon domaine - l'ancienne directrice de musée Clémentine Deliss m'a un jour demandé publiquement si j'avais été « tournée » par l'anthropologie des musées, tournée comme un zombie[47] - le domaine des musées ethnologiques, et la façon dont il était décrit et perçu lorsque je suis entrée, était façonné en termes binaires, comparable à ce que Favret-Saada décrit par rapport à son terrain. En 2013, l'opposition croissante au Humboldt Forum et l'activisme contre celui-ci ont créé une atmosphère dans laquelle l'*extérieur* du musée a été opposé à l'*intérieur* de l'institution. Une polarisation entre les « bonnes » et les « mauvaises » pratiques a été construite. Lorsque je suis arrivée, la « réduction à l'accusation », décrite par Favret-Saada, semblait dominer le terrain en ce qui concerne le Humboldt Forum et, en particulier, ceux qui travaillaient au musée. Ces impressions reflétaient ce qu'Andrea Witcomb décrivait comme un « climat » dans lequel les musées étaient décrits comme « des institutions hégémoniques, profondément ancrées dans les relations coloniales, bafouant les droits des minorités et protégeant le statu quo » (Witcomb 2015, 132). En entrant dans le musée, ces binaires ont été immédiatement décomposés. Au sein du musée, la vision manichéenne opposant le bon et le mauvais, ou le décolonial et le néocolonial, ne pouvait être maintenue. Dès mon premier jour, je me suis rendue compte que la critique du Forum était omniprésente, les commissaires se sont prononcés en faveur du moratoire du Forum et ont appelé le Humboldt Forum « un projet ultra-conservateur mené par de vieux hommes blancs »[48]. Outre le fait d'avoir affaire à un champ polarisé, le fait d'*être affecté* implique également de devenir un participant observateur, et donc, d'affecter délibérément le champ, ainsi que d'être personnellement affecté par ce champ.

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[47] Discussion sur la présentation du projet de thèse de l'auteur au Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac dans le cadre du séminaire « Ecologie des collections », 07 mai 2017.

[48] Extrait du journal de terrain du 14 octobre 2013.

De l'observation participante à la participation observante

Le fait d'être affecté signifiait un passage irréversible de la position de «l'observateur participant » à celle de « participant observateur ».[49] Dans mon cas, au-delà de mon rôle dans le musée en tant qu'assistante de recherche de Paola Ivanov et du rôle de commissaire du Humboldt Lab de 2013 à 2015, je continue d'être positionnée comme chercheuse *et* conservatrice sur le terrain et de contribuer aux processus et à l'intérêt croissant pour le Humboldt Forum, comme modératrice, animatrice ou panéliste. En même temps, étant donné que j'allais moi-même être confrontée à la possibilité de « faire les choses mal », j'ai regardé différemment le travail des commissaires de musée. Pour dire les choses simplement, je ne me suis pas concentré uniquement sur la déconstruction de leur travail en essayant d'identifier les « erreurs », une approche communément appelée « bashing » sur le terrain (en allemand et en anglais), et qui semble toujours être implicitement impliquée dans la réception des expositions, en particulier dans les musées ethnologiques. Les questions que j'ai posées sont devenues plus complexes et plus ouvertes aux contradictions, parce que j'avais moi-même besoin de trouver des solutions explicites pour faire face à la collection du musée et à son histoire, et de le faire en public. Implicitement lié au passage de l'observation participante à la participation observatrice, le chercheur « affecte » délibérément le domaine. Cela signifie que le chercheur participe et contribue, voire co-produit des développements du champs. Dans le cas de *Object Biographies*, la contribution consistait en une tentative de faire avancer le débat sur le colonialisme allemand : c'était la première exposition du musée qui, dans la tradition de la critique institutionnelle, mettait au centre de l'exposition les histoires violentes du pillage et de la dépossession sous le régime colonial allemand (Oswald et Rodatus 2017). En tant que chercheur, la proximité du terrain et de la recherche était très étroite, tant sur le plan personnel que géographique. J'ai participé au projet de recherche « Making Differences. Transformer les musées et le patrimoine au XXIe siècle » depuis le début de 2016, organisé par le nouveau Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) de l'Institut d'ethnologie européenne, situé à cinq minutes à pied du Humboldt Forum. Des spécialistes des musées, des anthropologues des musées et d'autres professionnels des musées - du Humboldt Forum et d'autres institutions - étaient des invités actuels et anciens du CARMAH. A part *Object Biographies*, c'est donc par l'étude et l'analyse, ainsi que par l'organisation d'événements académiques (ateliers,

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[49] Pour une discussion du débat sur la « participation observatrice » et « l'observation participante », voir (Bastien 2007).

conférences, colloques) que j'ai souhaité contribuer et « affecter» les développements du domaine et des institutions associées.

« Comparative involvement »

Outre mes propres efforts pour saisir, comprendre et analyser ces complexités superposées et ces distances qui s'effondrent, y compris la comparaison via un séjour de recherche de six mois au Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale en Belgique, un voyage de recherche au Bénin et au Togo, ainsi que de nombreux entretiens officiels et échanges informels avec des commissaires et directeurs des musées ethnologiques européens et américains, ce sont les chercheurs et invités du projet « Making Differences » au CARMAH qui ont considérablement enrichi et accompagné mon projet de recherche.[50] Conçue comme une ethnographie multi-chercheur et multi-sites du paysage muséal berlinois, l'équipe de recherche s'est régulièrement réunie et a discuté des développements dans leurs domaines respectifs.[51] Le projet a reflété mon approche méthodologique et a constamment aidé à réfléchir à nos projets respectifs, en particulier en ce qui concerne les « frontières floues » du travail sur le terrain. Comme dans le cas du projet de recherche sur les champignons Matsuake, la « collaboration étroite » - la collaboration dans la recherche, la réflexion, la rédaction et la présentation - a donc été au cœur du projet,[52] ce qui a mené à ce que Christine Gerbich et moi-même avons compris comme une *comparative involvement* (Choy et al., 2009). Le *comparative involvement* a permis de partager des observations et des réflexions sur les développements sur le terrain, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'affect et l'éthique,

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[50] Voir l'annexe pour une liste des invités et des entrevues du CARMAH.

[51] Il s'agissait de différents musées nationaux et de leur politique (Larissa Förster : Musée ethnologique ; Christine Gerbich : Musée d'art islamique, Katarzyna Puzon : Musée des cultures européennes, Chiara Garbollotto et Tahani Nadim : Musée d'histoire naturelle, Sharon Macdonald : Musée de la ville), pour projeter des espaces et de l'art contemporain (Jonas Tinius : SAVVY contemporain, Institut des affaires étrangères, Galerie mariage ; Hannes Hacke : Schwules Museum), à des projets de recherche axés sur les archives alternatives et les sites commémoratifs publics (Nazli Cabadag : archives alternatives queer ; Christoph Bareither : Mémorial de l'Holocauste, Duane Jethro : pratiques de renommage des rues).

[52] Il s'agit par exemple d'articles (Macdonald, Lidchi et von Oswald 2017 ; Macdonald, Gerbich et von Oswald 2018), de présentations et de panels conjoints (avec Christine Gerbich " On collaboration and critique ", Ethnographieren Workshop, Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Berlin. 11.03.2017, avec Larissa Förster The'Restitution Report' - What's stake', entretien avec Larissa Förster, Conférence : Sensitive Heritage - Ethnographic Museums and Material/Immaterial Restitutions' GRASSI Museum für Völkerkerkunde zu Leipzig, 11.12.2018 ; co-animateur avec Jonas Tinius : The Future of Anthropological Representation : Art Contemporain et/ou au Musée Ethnographique, Conférence'Art, Materiality, and Representation' du Royal Anthropological Institute, British Museum) et a édité des livres (co-édité avec Jonas Tinius:'Across Anthropology', Leuven University Press, à paraître en 2020).

d'analyser comparativement le paysage muséal berlinois façonné par le chevauchement des politiques, des acteurs et des institutions.

Le rôle de l'affect

Le fait d'être « affecté » ou d'être « pris » est lié au rôle de l'*affect sur le* terrain. Prendre l'affect au sérieux, comme l'a affirmé Yael Navaro-Yashin, permet une « approche analytique qui permet d'utiliser *le sentir comme méthode* de comprendre et de conceptualiser son environnement » (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 20, je souligne). L'omniprésence des émotions sur le terrain, souvent décrites comme une « mauvaise atmosphère », m'avait frappé dès le début du travail sur le terrain. Différentes descriptions de l'humeur générale et des émotions des gens réapparaissent fréquemment dans mes notes de terrain : telles que « est enragé », ou « se sent désespéré ».[53] En travaillant sur ma propre exposition, j'ai pu mieux comprendre et analyser cette atmosphère, en saisissant les dimensions institutionnelles, politiques et culturelles que les descriptions de l'atmosphère mentionnées ci-dessus ont mises en évidence. Etre affecté signifiait vivre personnellement, physiquement, l'expérience des commissaires et donc *ressentir* ce qu'ils ressentaient.

Favret-Saada distingue le sentiment d'être « affecté » de l'empathie. L'empathie à l'égard de l'objectif de produire des connaissances diffère du fait d'être « affecté » de deux façons. Premièrement, l'empathie implique la distance, lorsqu'elle est définie comme une « expérience par procuration » des sentiments d'autrui. Etre affecté, cependant, se traduit par être soi-même dans la position de la personne sur laquelle l'anthropologue écrit en fin de compte. Deuxièmement, dans le sens d'*Einfühlung*, une communion émotionnelle, l'empathie aide à comprendre les sentiments de ces personnes sur le terrain. De l'autre côté, comme l'affirme Favret-Saada, le fait d'être touché parle au chercheur de ses propres sentiments, et pas nécessairement des sentiments de ceux qui font l'objet de la recherche (Favret-Saada 2012 ; 1977). Malgré la présence habituelle d'une « mauvaise ambiance » au musée, j'ai noté comment mes interlocuteurs interprétaient et décrivaient leur bien-être, ou la fréquence de leurs absences, mais aussi mes propres malaises, angoisses et craintes, notamment en ce qui concerne la réalisation de *Object Biographies*. Ces observations ont ensuite déclenché des réflexions et une analyse plus approfondie, par exemple, des implications des hiérarchies institutionnelles et des impasses

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[53] Des exemples de mes notes de terrain couvrent l'ensemble du séjour au musée, du 11 novembre 2013, 2 décembre 2013, 13 octobre 2014, 11 avril 2016, 7 novembre 2017.

bureaucratiques, ou des dimensions émotionnelles de la gestion du « patrimoine difficile » du colonialisme.

Para-ethnographies et gestion des impressions sur le terrain
Les différentes dimensions du fait d'être affecté impliquaient de remettre en question les hypothèses relatives à la distance scientifique et à l'objectivité. Pour reprendre les mots d'Annelise Riles,

> (...) une distance autrefois productive, maintenue ethnographiquement, implicitement ou explicitement, volontairement ou non, entre nous et nos objets d'étude, entre les choses étudiées (les données) et les cadres que nous utilisions pour les étudier (l'analyse), entre théoriser et décrire, est maintenant définitivement effondrée. (Riles 2006:3)

Ce poste complique la tâche de celui qui agissait à titre intérimaire, qui traduisait à partir du domaine, mais aussi qui l'interprétait. L'interprétation était au cœur de la pratique de mes interlocuteurs qui commentaient, analysaient et interprétaient de façon constante et récurrente l'évolution du domaine. C'est notamment l'omniprésence des anthropologues eux-mêmes qui a introduit une dimension para-ethnographique dans l'ethnographie (Marcus et Holmes 2010). L'utilisation du préfixe « para » qualifie l'ethnographie de « à côté ou à côté, à côté, côte à côte ». L'approche méthodologique ne se réfère ni à la recherche vers le haut, ni à la recherche vers le bas, mais définit le passage d'une définition des interlocuteurs d' « informateurs » et d' « autres » à « partenaires intellectuels dans la recherche », comme l'a dit Dominic Boyer (Boyer 2008, 40). Mon propre rôle peut donc souvent être décrit comme celui de documenter et de résumer, de situer, de contextualiser, de découper et de sélectionner les informations que le personnel du musée m'a fournies à travers leurs pratiques spécifiques, leurs analyses et leurs interprétations sur le terrain et sur le terrain. Ce processus de sélection comprenait une réflexion sur ce qu'il fallait divulguer et ce qu'il fallait retenir, en comblant l'écart entre la façon dont le Forum présentait sa façade apparemment brillante et les coulisses - parfois désordonnées - du Musée ethnologique dans une atmosphère politique chargée et en accordant une attention accrue aux développements du Forum.

Dans son ethnographie classique « Hindus of the Himalayas : ethnography and change » (1963), Gerald D. Berreman utilise le concept de « gestion des impressions » d'Erving Goffman pour conceptualiser et réfléchir sur la relation entre l'ethnographe, ses

interlocuteurs et la construction du champ de recherche. La gestion de l'impression de Goffman est basée sur une approche « dramaturgique ». Il analyse les systèmes sociaux comme étant divisés entre une « région frontale » (front region) et une « région arrière » (back région). Pour Goffman, les coulisses servent à *préparer* un spectacle, avec des politiques d'accès contrôlé, tandis que la scène de devant sert à *présenter le* spectacle. D'une manière générale, le Humboldt Forum pouvait être compris comme le front de la recherche sur le terrain, un front dont les représentants tentaient de maintenir l'image d'un projet culturel maîtrisé, ordonné et bien planifié malgré des controverses publiques récurrentes.[54] Les routines de travail auxquelles j'ai participé au Musée Ethnologique pouvaient alors être comprises comme l'arrière-scène du domaine, où des expositions et des projets de recherche pour le Humboldt Forum ont été développés, préparés et réalisés.

En même temps, cependant, l'ethnographe et ses interlocuteurs « sont à la fois interprètes et spectateurs l'un de l'autre », comme l'écrit Berreman, et les coulisses peuvent se transformer en avant-scènes au cours du travail de terrain (Berreman 1993, xxxiii). La division entre l'avant et l'arrière de la scène n'est pas claire, mais dépend plutôt de la « fonction que le lieu se trouve à servir à ce moment-là pour l'interprétation donnée » (Goffman 1956, 77). Comme décrit ci-dessus, les rôles que j'ai adoptés pendant mon séjour au musée ont souvent changé. De stipendiaire, d'assistante de recherche de Paola Ivanov, de commissaire, d'ethnographe, d'organisatrice de conférences, ma position a changé. Le rôle auquel j'ai adhéré était celui de l'ethnographe : je n'ai pas cessé de prendre des notes de terrain et de documenter le processus. Ce rôle exact d'ethnographe, cependant, a parfois échappé à l'attention des interlocuteurs parce que je travaillais au musée tous les jours et pendant une période prolongée. J'ai été - dès le début - pleinement intégré dans les processus de travail de Paola Ivanov pour favoriser ce que Gerhard Spittler a appelé une « participation épaisse », et j'ai également changé de statut en devenant moi-même co-commissaire d'une exposition après seulement deux mois de travail de terrain (Spittler 2001). Néanmoins, le rôle de l'ethnographe a

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[54] Il s'agissait, par exemple, de son manque continu de concept malgré le changement de direction et de positions dirigeantes, de sa structure organisationnelle chaotique et opaque, ou de son manque de prise en compte de l'histoire progressivement contestée du colonialisme allemand. Concernant la critique du Forum, voir pour le manque de recherche sur la provenance et le traitement du colonialisme allemand (No Humboldt 21 ! 2013 ; Artefakte///anti-humboldt 2013), le manque de transparence et le mauvais fonctionnement de la structure organisationnelle du Forum (Häntzschel 2017a ; 2017b), le manque de concept et de critique des positions de leadership (Walde 2016 ; Häntzschel 2018 ; Mangold et Timm 2018).

également été explicitement mentionné et négocié. Parfois, les gens me disaient explicitement de ne pas noter ou documenter des renseignements particuliers, ou ils me laissaient documenter en insistant sur le fait qu'ils ne voulaient pas qu'on les mentionne par leur nom. À d'autres moments, et ce n'est pas trop rare, on m'a pris à part pour parler, ou on m'a explicitement dit de prendre note d'informations particulières, et dans ce cas-ci, d'informations habituellement «chaudes ». Le personnel du musée m'a fait part de son expérience afin de l'intégrer dans mon analyse, car il se sentait parfois incapable d'exprimer une critique ou une analyse particulière de sa position professionnelle, mais il voulait qu'elle soit révélée dans le cadre des processus de travail dans lesquels je suis impliqué. Ainsi, et dès le début de mon travail sur le terrain, j'ai su que la négociation de ce qu'il fallait révéler et cacher sur le devant et le derrière de la scène serait délicate, car l'accès qui m'était accordé était basé sur la confiance et la croyance du personnel du musée en mon honnêteté, ma précision scientifique, mon intégrité et mon savoir-faire en éthique en anthropologue en exercice. Comme l'écrit Berreman,

> L'ethnographe évaluera probablement ses sujets en fonction de la quantité d'informations qu'ils lui révèlent sur l'arrière-région, tandis qu'ils l'évalueront avec tact en ne s'immisçant pas inutilement dans l'arrière-région et, à mesure que le rapport s'améliore, sur sa fiabilité comme celui qui ne révélera pas de secrets pour son arrière-région. Il y aura probablement des bases d'évaluation mutuellement contradictoires. (Berreman 1993, xxxiii)

C'est donc l'évaluation par l'ethnographe du *tact*, ou du « sens de ce qu'il faut faire ou dire pour maintenir de bonnes relations avec les autres »[55], qui est en jeu ici. Cela a été particulièrement difficile à évaluer. Le Musée Ethnologique, et le Humboldt Forum en particulier, sont des institutions publiques, et très particulières dans leur composition et structure. La généralisation et l'anonymisation de certains interlocuteurs de recherche se sont donc avérées difficiles mais aussi indésirables à maintenir, car leur *agency* a contribué de manière particulière au développement du champs. Certains d'entre eux ont aussi profondément façonné le Musée tout au long de leur carrière et souhaitent que leur histoire et leur rôle au sein du Musée soient documentés. Alors qu'exceptionnellement, j'ai choisi d'anonymiser ou de résumer et de fictionaliser des récits particuliers (voir chapitre II), les interlocuteurs apparaissent généralement avec leur nom. Lorsqu'ils le font, ils ont lu et nous avons négocié la façon dont ils sont cités. Je me suis donc appuyé sur les récentes directives éthiques des associations anthropologiques allemandes et

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[55] Définition tirée du dictionnaire Merriam-Webster Online, consulté le 10 septembre 2019.

britanniques, dans lesquelles l'objectif de réciprocité, l'option du feedback, ainsi que la transparence du processus de recherche forment le noyau éthique de la recherche (DGSKA 2009 ; ASA 2011).

En même temps, la réflexion sur l'éthique incluait la question de savoir s'il était important ou non de rendre transparent, ou du moins en partie compréhensible, ce qui se passait au musée à l'époque : le quotidien du travail muséal dans le contexte d'une attention accrue du public envers l'héritage colonial du musée, son implication dans le processus politique et la négociation du travail du souvenir concernant le colonialisme allemand, et enfin la réalisation du grand Humboldt Forum, institution publique. Ces considérations concernaient des institutions établies (SPK, SMB, Musée Ethnologique) et une institution en devenir (Humboldt Forum), toutes publiques et financées par les impôts. Ces institutions étaient sans doute aussi très contestées en *raison de l'*inaccessibilité à l'information, voire de la mauvaise information communiquée par ses représentants (par exemple sur les collections contestées ou, plus récemment, sur la situation des réserves du musée)[56], ou de l'inaccessibilité des représentants du Forum au débat public et au positionnement (voir chapitre I). La décision de répondre à cette situation, de l'évaluer et de l'évaluer était donc une décision où « le poids de la responsabilité de l'adhésion à une bonne conduite éthique incombe au chercheur anthropologue « (ASA 2011). J'espère que mon sens du *tact* a été assez sensible pour cerner les différentes exigences et intérêts impliqués dans cette thèse.

La structure et les arguments de la thèse
Working through colonial collections se structure en quatre chapitres. Centrés sur les pratiques, les chapitres de la thèse couvrent les activités et les tâches que le musée est

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[56] Dans les premiers échanges entre les militants des associations *Tanzania Network*, *Berlin Postkolonial*, et *UWATAB* et la SPK, la SPK a nié l'existence de restes humains dans les collections de la SPK (Prosinger, Mboro, et Kisalya 2013 ; Kathmann 2014). Ce n'est qu'après avoir insisté sur l'existence d'une collection de restes humains dans les musées nationaux de Berlin dans une lettre ouverte que les activistes ont reçu une deuxième réponse du président de la SPK, Hermann Parzinger, dans laquelle il reconnaît l'existence de restes humains au Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Prosinger et Mboro 2014 ; Parzinger 2014). L'exemple le plus récent consiste en la divulgation de l'état des dépôts de stockage du Musée Ethnologique. Alors que le journaliste Jörg Häntzschel a exagéré de façon frappante et, par conséquent, lésé les comptes rendus sur les espaces de stockage du musée, décrivant que les employés du musée avaient parfois besoin de marcher dans l'eau " jusqu'aux chevilles " des espaces de stockage du musée, Christina Haak, vice-directrice du Staatliche Museen zu Berlin nie l'existence de tout réserves du musée, une information qui était simplement fausse car les collections d'Afrique orientale y étaient entreposées (Häntzschel 2019 ; Peitz 2019).

censé remplir, selon la définition classique du Conseil international des musées (ICOM). L'ICOM, depuis sa création en 1946, définit la mission du musée comme l'*acquisition*, la *communication*, l'*exposition*, la *recherche* et la *conservation* du patrimoine matériel et immatériel de l'humanité (ICOM 2007). Cette définition a été contestée à plusieurs reprises, le plus récemment par l'ICOM elle-même (ICOM 2017 ; 2018 ; Sandahl 2019 ; voir aussi Small 2019). Néanmoins, la définition de l'ICOM semble toujours valable, du moins en ce qui concerne le Musée Ethnologique qui fait partie du Staatliche Museen de Berlin (SMB). La SMB continue de se profiler comme « l'un des plus grands musées *universels* du monde », qui « préserve, expose et fait connaître les trésors artistiques et culturels de l'histoire de l'humanité ».[57] La collection, l'une des tâches centrales du musée, n'est pas abordée en détail dans la thèse : le musée n'a collectionné qu'exceptionnellement, principalement en raison d'un manque de budget. Bien sûr, (non)collectionner aurait pu faire l'objet d'une discussion approfondie ici, mais comme la collection ou l'achat d'objets ne préoccupait guère pendant mon séjour au musée et ne constituait pas une partie importante de la vie quotidienne du musée à l'époque, je m'y suis peu intéressée (voir, par exemple, le chapitre II). La thèse s'adresse donc à différents professionnels, domaines de travail et domaines d'expertise, et lieux dans le musée. Il se concentre sur la façon dont le musée *communique* sur ses héritages contestés, comment il *expose* ses collections, comment il *recherche* leur provenance et comment les collections sont *mis en réserves* et *conservées*. Les différentes histoires liées aux pratiques du musée sont présentées dans chaque chapitre : l'histoire des *expositions* du département Afrique, l'histoire de l'*inventaire* et de la *numérisation*, *ainsi que l'*histoire des *réserves et de la conservation des* objets au musée. La thèse couvre donc les discussions relatives au numérique, au matériel, aux archives et à la conservation. Chaque chapitre inclut donc l'état des lieux de la littérature relatifs à ces sujets. En plus de l'accent mis sur les pratiques, chacun des chapitres s'axe autour d'une métaphore particulière me permettant de penser les processus et pratiques observés en dehors de leurs cadres de référence habituels. Les métaphores de *haunting*, de *repair*, *de l'avatar* et de la *toxicité* me permettent en particulier de mettre l'accent sur la façon dont les temporalités, l'action et l'affect s'articulent et sont mis en regard dans le musée.

La structure et les arguments de la thèse

Le premier chapitre est consacré aux luttes qui accompagnent les processus de *communication* sur la collection du Musée - collection qui n'a été que progressivement perçue et construite comme problématique qu'au cours de la période étudiée (2013-

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[57] Voir https://www.smb.museum/en/research/profile.html, consulté le 26 mai 2019.

2019). De manière chronologique, le chapitre identifie les développements relatifs aux collections et les négociations sur le rôle du passé colonial de l'Allemagne à différents niveaux politiques et institutionnels. En particulier, le chapitre se concentre sur le *making of* de l'exposition Biographies d'Objets (*Objektbiografien*), qui sert ici d'exemple pour comprendre comment les institutions publiques travaillent pour négocier les revendications de reconnaissance d'un passé difficile, luttant pour définir une position dans un terrain politiquement et diplomatiquement mouvant. Le chapitre situe donc les négociations relatives à la collection du Musée non pas comme une conséquence, mais comme une partie constitutive de la négociation et du rapprochement d'une norme morale et d'une position politique à l'égard du passé colonial allemand dans son ensemble. *Haunting* s'articule ici comme un moyen de décrire la présence persistante du passé colonial et, en particulier, aide à saisir sa dimension affective et intime: les inconforts, les incertitudes et les malaises qu'entraîne le travail avec un patrimoine difficile.

Le deuxième chapitre de la thèse concerne la pratique de l'exposition. L'exposition des collections dans les musées d'anthropologie est avant tout pratiquée comme une tentative de *réparer* l'héritage des représentations identifiées comme coloniales. L'analyse se concentre donc sur la façon dont la commissaire aborde ces représentations, l'histoire de l'exposition et, surtout, la *critique* de ces représentations afin d'élaborer et de mettre en œuvre des contre-narrations. Après avoir déployé l'ambitieuse démarche conservatrice visant à contrecarrer ces représentations, le chapitre se poursuit en examinant le processus dans lequel l'exposition a pris forme. L'analyse du processus montre comment la manière de produire des expositions dans les musées ethnologiques - décrits ici comme la « culture d'exposition ethnologique » - peut contrecarrer les efforts des conservateurs pour contester les représentations. Cette « culture d'exposition » se caractérise par le fait qu'elle est fondée sur la recherche, qu'elle fait autorité et qu'elle est centrée sur la collection. En se concentrant sur la façon dont ces caractéristiques s'articulent dans le processus de réalisation de l'exposition, l'analyse montre comment la culture d'exposition contribue à rétablir exactement ces modes de représentation qu'il tente de remettre en question. L'analyse montre que la culture d'exposition persiste malgré les critiques récurrentes en raison de son interaction et de son imbrication avec les « structures » de l'institution, des structures qui rendent le changement au sein de l'institution difficile voire l'entravent.

Suivre le processus de *recherche de la provenance* dans le troisième chapitre me permet d'analyser les infrastructures du musée qui l'encadrent - la base de données, l'inventaire, les archives et le classement des collections. Ces infrastructures favorisent la production de connaissances dans lesquelles les conceptions *passées* de la différence coloniale sont reproduites par le biais de l'infrastructure *actuelle* du musée. L'identification et la déconstruction des épistémologies coloniales dans la base de données du musée montre comment leur caractère instable, provisoire et fragile est continuellement consolidé, matérialisé et perpétué dans la base. Contrairement à un argument qui remet en cause la recherche sur la provenance en tant que méthode, ce chapitre met plutôt l'accent sur les luttes qui accompagnent et résultent du travail avec les infrastructures et les épistémologies qui découlent des pratiques coloniales et de la production de connaissances qui s'appuient sur celles-ci. Au-delà de la recherche et de la révélation de l'histoire coloniale, ce chapitre se concentre sur les luttes avec les mots mêmes, les catégories et la création de lieux qui décrivent, ordonnent et différencient les musées et les collections, mais aussi, plus généralement, les façons de penser et faire le monde. Il discute des difficultés d'être pris dans de telles épistémologies et taxonomies ; de l'impossibilité apparente de ne pas les reproduire ; tout en reconnaissant les efforts du personnel du musée pour " rester avec le trouble " (Haraway 2010). Penser ces présences numériques comme des avatars me permet non seulement de réfléchir sur ces inscriptions matérielles du passé dans les infrastructures actuelles, mais conclut par une réflexion sur le potentiel de la base de données pour introduire la désobéissance épistémique (Mignolo) au musée.

Le quatrième chapitre porte sur la pratique de *mise en réserves et de conservation* des collections. Ici, l'interrogation du musée en tant qu'héritage colonial se décompose en sa matérialité. J'utilise ici la métaphore de la toxicité pour décrire la fugacité du statut des objets tout au long de leur vie à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur du musée. En analysant les processus historiques et contemporains de conservation, le chapitre explore comment les collections en tant que legs coloniaux ont été traitées et abordées à la fois dans leur quantité écrasante et leur qualité toxique. Je montre comment le statut ontologique des objets en tant que sujet, personne ou être vivant a été éclipsé par leur identité en tant qu'objet de musée, ce qui implique de répondre aux règles et règlements dans un contexte que je définis comme le « paradigme de la conservation ». En même temps, le chapitre examine comment la naissance d'un objet de musée transforme sa substance matérielle et physique par la tentative de maîtriser sa matérialité - une substance qui

évolue continuellement et qui montre comment les objets sont matériellement, et irréversiblement, le produit de leurs histoires complexes.

Tout au long de la thèse, j'ai montré comment la production de connaissances et les pratiques muséales actuelles au sein du musée sont basées sur des paramètres qui remontent à la fondation du musée au XIXe siècle et continuent d'être influencés par ceux-ci. Dans le quotidien du musée, la façon dont un objet est pensé et défini, comme la façon dont il est nommé, ordonné et catégorisé peut être liée à des taxonomies coloniales avec le risque de les ré-inscrire et de les y reproduire. Sa définition maintenant limite, éclipse et, parfois, entrave le statut ontologique et la vie de l'objet potentiellement autre. Même si le personnel en identifie et en confronte explicitement la généalogie coloniale, le processus de contrer cet héritage est loin d'être linéaire voire clairement défini. Outre la persistance de taxonomies, ce processus est encore entravé par son positionnement dans un paysage muséal disciplinairement isolé, dans lequel des binaires continuent d'être produits et où des différences coloniales réapparaissent. Les définitions de « nous » et des « autres » sont renforcées par l'appellation « européennes » et « non européennes » des collections. Sur l'île des musées comme dans le paysage muséal berlinois, les collections sont même matériellement intégrées et architecturalement fixées en tant que tels – opposons un « nous » ou « autres ». Ces segmentations font allusion aux notions de « civilisé » et de « primitif » en réduisant la compréhension de la culture matérielle à « arts » ou à « culture ». De plus, la départementalisation régionale de la collection, tant au niveau de l'exposition que de l'infrastructure interne du musée, confirme la compréhension anthropologique historique de la conception de « culture ». Elle implique la conviction que la culture est confinée à l'échelle régionale et peut être représentée de façon holistique par la culture matérielle, ce qui constitue l'un des points de départ de la mission du musée au XIXe siècle.

En résumé, l'analyse a montré comment les structures et les infrastructures du musée s'enracinent et confirment les modes coloniaux de définition de « culture ». Ces conceptions en impliquent des particulières dans la façon de vivre ensemble, façonnées par les binaires coloniaux qui contribuent à reproduire les convictions et les récits de la supériorité occidentale. Ces conceptions ont été remises en question à plusieurs égards, tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur du musée. En même temps, elles continuent d'être enracinées dans le musée. Par la suite, elles soutiennent les processus de différenciation coloniale qui, à leur tour, reflètent plus largement les conflits et les frictions liés à la société allemande.

Métaphores

La thèse proposait quatre métaphores centrales qui permettaient de réfléchir et proposaient des alternatives sur la façon de s'attaquer au *working through* de l'héritage colonial. L'introduction des métaphores était une tentative de réorienter et de détourner les réflexions sur ces processus vers un terrain plus incertain et indéfini. Les métaphores de *haunting*, de *repair*, de l'*avatar* et de la *toxicité* mobilisent des bagages théoriques et des itinéraires divers. Les métaphores offrent ainsi la possibilité d'étendre les réflexions à une diversité de débats au-delà du musée en tant qu'héritage colonial *stricto sensu* - et de relier l'analyse à des débats plus larges et à la littérature sur l'ontologie, l'identité de genre, l'hauntologie, la réparation et le rétablissement.

Cette possibilité de l'*au-delà*, et de *l'ailleurs*, est cruciale dans le domaine de l'anthropologie muséale : besoin d'abstraction et de prise de distance, d'une part, d'empathie et de curiosité, d'autre part. Les réflexions tendent à rester dans les cadres de référence propres au domaine, potentialisés par les rebondissements de la « crise d'identité » du musée ethnologique. La commissaire d'exposition et ancienne directrice de musée, Clémentine Deliss, a un jour décrit le champ comme étant régné et monopolisé par une « société endogame d'anthropologie muséale » autoréférentielle.[58] En même temps, le champ est façonné par des binaires de « bonnes » et de « mauvaises » pratiques, de « bashing » (*dénigrement*), ainsi que, surtout, d'épuisement. Le travail muséal est jugé difficile par ses employés, non seulement en raison du traitement du « patrimoine difficile » et des attentes élevées, mais aussi en raison des structures trop complexes de l'institution, de sa composition hiérarchique, du manque de transparence et, des limites imposées à ses employés. Les métaphores sont donc une suggestion de penser en dehors des références habituelles, et d'indiquer les potentiels et les possibilités dans le futur.

Les métaphores soulignent en particulier la nécessité de repenser les temporalités du musée, le rôle de l'affect et l'*agency*. L'une des questions cruciales de la thèse était de s'interroger sur la relation entre le passé, le présent et l'avenir. A des degrés et des nuances différents, les métaphores questionnent ces relations, car elles déstabilisent et brouillent les démarcations entre elles. Il s'agit notamment de notions stimulantes telles que la « continuité », la description du « différent » ou du « nouveau », ainsi que les

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[58] Discussion sur la présentation du projet de thèse de l'auteur au Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac dans le cadre du séminaire « Ecologie des collections », 07 mai 2017.

promesses de « transformation » ou de « changement ». Les métaphores rendent tangible la *façon* dont le passé et ses héritages matériels et immatériels persistent dans le présent. Avec des références à la guérison, au rétablissement, à la réparation, les métaphores de *repair* et de *haunting* proposent différentes modalités de vivre avec et parmi les échos du passé. La métaphore de l'*avatar*, quant à lui, offre un moyen de réfléchir sur, mais aussi d'échapper à l'ancrage historique du musée. En même temps, ces images permettent par la suite de dépasser les impasses apparentes du passé et du présent, et de penser vers d'autres avenirs.

Les métaphores illustrent également la dimension affective du travail muséal. *Haunting*, en particulier, exprime l'angoisse, l'inquiétude et les malaises qu'entraîne le traitement des héritages coloniaux. La présence littérale des héritages coloniaux dans leur forme matérielle et immatérielle fait allusion à la présence persistante des corps colonisés, et les histoires que ces présences documentent et intègrent. Positionnées et écrites au sein d'institutions à prédominance blanche, tant universitaires que muséales, ces présences ont articulé pour moi une dimension affective particulière du travail muséal. Les réactions émotionnelles se rapportaient à celles associées aux privilèges, à la fragilité et à la honte blancs d'aujourd'hui. Ils ont révélé et ont fait référence aux asymétries de pouvoir historiques et actuelles. Nanette Snoep, alors directrice de musée à Leipzig, m'a raconté un jour dans une conversation : « Il ne suffit pas de parler un peu d'histoire coloniale, de la mettre dans une petite vitrine, et c'est tout. Le malaise reste. » [59] Les présences coloniales apparemment inintelligibles soulèvent alors des questions troublantes sur les conditions actuelles de vie en commun et de négociation de la société. Les présences nous confrontent aux violents passés coloniaux qu'elles intègrent et à la poursuite des structures racistes qu'elles désignent.

La considération et la reconnaissance de la présence d'esprits et de fantômes font en même temps allusion aux multiples subjectivités et identités qu'embrasse la collection. Penser avec les métaphores de l'avatar, de la toxicité, et du don en particulier, a déplacé l'attention sur l'identité des objets et les formes d'*agency* que le matériel déploie, tant dans sa quantité que dans sa qualité. Ils mettent en évidence les différentes transformations ontologiques que les objets ont traversées tout au long de leur existence, encouragées à la fois par la transformation de leur signification et par leur transformation de la substance. J'ai suggéré l'utilisation de métaphores pour penser l'au-delà et le contraire des

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[59] Retranscription d'une interview de Nanette Snoep au Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde de Leipzig, 19 avril 2016.

collections, mais elles comportent aussi le risque d'exotiser ou de banaliser les sujets d'analyse.

Je me suis employée à traiter avec sensibilité les problèmes liés à l'utilisation de métaphores. Car les métaphores invitent les lecteurs à ne pas tenir pour acquis le statut apparemment naturalisé des objets en tant qu'objets de musée passifs. Aussi, réfléchir avec des métaphores a troublé les apports sur les objets que cette thèse proposait, car elles ont problématisé les « arguments suggérés sur le monde à travers les choses » (Geismar 2018, xv).

Les musées ethnologiques et l'anthropologie des héritages coloniaux

Situer le musée en tant qu'héritage colonial peut paraître pour certains comme un encadrement trop rigide. Peut-on limiter la compréhension du musée à l'étiquette coloniale ? Alors que le musée a été reconnu comme une institution moderne, et comme une institution qui a contribué à l'édification des nations,[60] positionner le musée comme un héritage colonial pourrait encore causer de l'irritation. Réduire les collections à être « coloniales », c'est ignorer, par exemple, les cultures et les sociétés qui en sont à l'origine. Elles existaient avant le colonialisme et indépendamment des structures du pouvoir colonial. Cependant, considérer le musée comme colonial, et le musée ethnologique en particulier, fonctionne ici comme une lentille particulière. L'accent est mis sur les relations historiques du musée avec le projet colonial et son rôle au sein de celui-ci, ainsi que sur les séquelles, les échos et les implications de ces relations dans le présent. Ce positionnement est donc une reconnaissance des facteurs structurants que le passé colonial a sur le présent. Il met l'accent sur la façon dont le colonial parcourt l'histoire du musée et se répercute dans son présent. La définition du musée en tant qu'héritage colonial se concentre ensuite sur l'endroit et la manière dont ses effets structurants se manifestent - comme c'est d'ailleurs le cas dans des modes évidents et moins évidents.

La thèse contribue à l'anthropologie des héritages coloniaux dans la mesure où elle se concentre sur la manière dont une institution occidentale centrale - enracinée et constituée par la gouvernance coloniale - travaille sur son passé et son présent. Le musée ethnologique s'est offert comme *un* moyen de réfléchir à la relation de l'Allemagne avec son passé colonial, en particulier parce que l'héritage colonial du musée n'est pas contestable. Les relations coloniales se matérialisent dans la constitution du musée, les

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[60] Pour le musée moderne, voir par exemple (Greenhill 1992 ; Bennett 1995), pour la relation entre modernisme et colonialisme voir par exemple (Quijano 2007 ; Mignolo 2011).

collections et leur documentation témoignent des échanges coloniaux dans leurs différentes formes, souvent violentes. Ce n'est peut-être qu'en raison de la dimension matérielle du colonialisme, en combinaison avec les représentations contestées du Humboldt Forum, que la discussion autour du colonialisme allemand pourrait surgir avec une telle intensité et de multiples formes pendant la période couverte par la thèse, dans un contexte national et notamment politique qui a longtemps été façonné par l'oubli et la négligence publique de son passé colonial. En tant que telle, la recherche était en soi souvent sujette à contradiction, car ceux qui travaillaient au musée participaient activement, à la fois, à aborder, à travailler, et à révéler les legs coloniaux du musée, tout en les reproduisant, entretenant, et confirmant.

La dynamique du champ et les perspectives de la recherche

Tant dans leur intimité que dans leur caractère public et politique, les confrontations avec les collections coloniales à Berlin témoignent d'une dynamique plus large dans la construction de la société, le renforcement des institutions et la culture de la mémoire. Ces dynamiques comprennent le désir politique d'être plus « inclusif » et « diversifié », et l'appel - étroitement lié - à la « décolonisation » des institutions occidentales. Les grandes institutions culturelles occidentales ont fait l'objet d'un examen attentif en ce qui concerne leur relation à la « diversité » intersectionnelle, en ce qui concerne leurs publics, leurs programmes et leur personnel en particulier. Les controverses à cet égard ont été fréquentes ces dernières années. [61] Après des institutions comme la Tate Modern Britain à Londres ou le Whitney Museum of American Art à New York, le Musée d'art moderne de New York, récemment rouvert, a témoigné de cette demande, puisque l'expansion et la ré-installation de ses collections ont suivi la mission de « mondialiser » et de « diversifier » son récit sur les histoires de l'art moderne au XXe siècle. Le Humboldt Forum, à cet égard, occupe une position ambiguë. En ce qui concerne le « programme », l'institution annonce répondre à ces questions. Toutefois, son cadre général et sa structure reflètent et cimentent les différences et les concepts muséaux enracinés dans la pensée coloniale qui, à leur tour, remettent en question les conceptions inclusives et égalitaires de la société. Le Forum n'a pas encore de « public » régulier, qui pourrait être examiné en termes de « diversité ». Les décisions politiques concernant le

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[61] En ce qui concerne le personnel, il s'agit notamment des réactions scandalisées au Brooklyn Museum après la décision du musée d'engager une femme blanche, Kristen Windmuller-Luna, comme conservatrice conseil pour l'art africain (Greenberger 2018). Cet emploi a eu lieu dans le contexte d'un débat sur la restitution de l'art africain des musées occidentaux, alimenté par le film récemment sorti " Black Panther ", qui mettait en évidence une scène dans un musée imaginaire (Candy 2018 ; Ragbir 2018 ; Cascone 2018 ; Haughin 2018).

« personnel » semblent avoir contourné les appels à la diversité et à la décolonisation. Les décisions relatives au personnel ont plutôt confirmé la réputation du Forum en tant que « maison des vieux hommes blancs » (Rollhäuser 2017 ; Bloch et Soh Bejeng Ndikung 2016 ; Holfelder 2018).[62] Reste à savoir comment l'institution répondra à ces revendications et à ces attentes pour être plus diversifiée et inclusive.

Une partie de cette dynamique réside également dans la relation changeante entre la mémoire et les politiques identitaires, y compris le défi de définir et de favoriser une culture de la mémoire inclusive et « multidirectionnelle » (Rothberg 2009), et non compétitive. D'une part, il s'agit de la politique architecturale - de construction et de démolition - sur le *Schlossplatz*. Le fait d'être pour ou contre des visions architecturales particulières pour la *Schlossplatz* a, au moins depuis la chute du Mur, indiqué des visions particulières de la nation et de l'identité allemande. La politique de reconnaissance impliquée dans ces négociations semble articuler le désir de certains d'une politique de mémoire restauratrice et conservatrice, vénérant l'héritage prussien et royal de l'Allemagne, étroitement liée à la mission impériale de l'Allemagne. En même temps, le conflit remplace l'effacement et le silence continus du passé socialiste de l'Allemagne. Cela ne s'est pas seulement manifesté par la démolition du Palais de la République, mais aussi par les doutes et le blocage de la construction de l'*Einheitswippe*, le seul mémorial allemand qui honore la Révolution pacifique de la RDA (*Friedliche Revolution*) et la réunification allemande (Fröhlich 2018 ; Balzer 2019). D'autre part, et plus récemment, l'accent mis sur la « provenance » des collections coloniales a suscité un débat sur l'Holocauste et les crimes connexes, et la crainte de remettre en cause sa position singulière dans la politique allemande de la mémoire (Koalitionsvertrag 2018 ; Kultusminister Konferenz 2019). Enfin, les revendications de reconnaissance du passé colonial et de l'histoire impériale ont été étroitement liées à l'évolution et aux débats sur la conception que l'Allemagne a d'elle-même en tant que « société d'immigration » (*Einwanderungsgesellschaft*), dans un contexte de présence croissante de la droite dans le paysage politique allemand, d'extrémisme et de criminalité de droite.[63] Façonnée par la conscience de s'attaquer à son « patrimoine difficile » en mettant l'accent sur son passé

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[62] Il s'agit de Hartmut Dorgerloh (directeur et directeur général du Humboldt Forum), Jan Lindner (directeur du programme et des événements du Humboldt Forum), Lars-Christian Koch (directeur des collections du Humboldt Forum, directeur du Musée Ethnologique et du Musée d'Art Asiatique), Gorch Piecken (conservateur en chef du Humboldt Labor dans le Humboldt Forum), Paul Spies (conservateur en chef du Land de Berlin au Humboldt Forum et directeur du Stadtmuseum Berlin) Alexis von Poser (directeur adjoint du Musée Ethnologique et Musée des Arts Asiatiques).

[63] Voir par exemple (Thiemeyer 2016 ; Terkessidis 2019 ; Thiemeyer 2019).

national-socialiste, la nation semble confrontée à la négociation sur la manière de rassembler et de réconcilier une diversité de groupes et de revendications à la recherche de la reconnaissance de « leur » histoire de marginalisation ou de discrimination. La thèse ouvre ainsi des réflexions et invite à réfléchir davantage sur la manière dont une culture de la mémoire nationale allemande est façonnée et ce qu'elle peut devenir.

Avec une nouvelle reconnaissance du colonialisme en Allemagne, les réflexions et les discussions intéressantes sur l'héritage colonial ne semblent s'ouvrir que maintenant, au lieu d'aboutir. En parallèle avec les débats et les développements dans d'autres contextes européens, il reste à voir et à étudier ce que les politiques et les processus associés en relation avec les collections de musées, et la politique de restitution en particulier, indiquent en matière de diplomatie internationale. Que peuvent indiquer ces politiques par rapport à la confrontation avec les histoires coloniales sur les désirs et les réalités des relations Nord-Sud contemporaines, et par la suite, les modes contemporains de coopération ? Que peuvent dire les politiques de restitution et de mémoire des relations intereuropéennes, où les avancées dans un pays provoquent clairement des réactions et la nécessité d'une position politique dans d'autres contextes européens ? L'accent mis sur une seule institution dans cette thèse m'a permis d'aborder ces questions de manière périphérique, mais notamment d'en poser d'autres. Les recherches futures devront explorer plus avant les multiples relations historiques et contemporaines dans lesquelles les collections se développent et s'étendent ; diversifier le type et les sites de travail sur le terrain ; et se concentrer sur ces relations en ce qui concerne les diverses formes de formations diasporiques qui se sont développées depuis lors, tant dans l'ancienne métropole que dans les colonies, et ailleurs.

Alors que les développements politiques actuels se prêtent à l'examen de grandes et importantes questions relatives à la politique de réconciliation, je soutiens que l'interrogation de cette thèse sur les pratiques du musée est tout aussi valable. Comme je l'ai montré, les défis et les contradictions inhérents à la confrontation avec les héritages coloniaux à travers le quotidien du musée, touchant aux mots mêmes, aux ordres matériels et aux interactions dans le musée, montrent l'ancrage irréversible des mondes contemporains dans le colonial. Je pense donc qu'il n'y a pas de sortie facile, ni de solution simple à la crise du musée ethnologique. Des questions émergent et plutôt que de recevoir une réponse, elles demeurent. Quel type de critique est possible au sein d'institutions telles que le Forum Humboldt, qui confirme la critique à laquelle le travail d'exposition tente de s'opposer ? Le droit du musée ethnologique d'exposer et de

représenter l'altérité peut-il jamais être brisé, et si oui, comment le faire dans un contexte où certains croient que ce droit est toujours valable ? Le but premier du musée devrait-il et peut-il être de *garder les* choses pour les générations futures ? Ou faut-il utiliser les choses pour le présent et les *resocialiser* ? Et pour conclure très généralement : Comment ces collections et questions peuvent-elles rester pertinentes et accessibles dans un contexte contemporain ?

Rester en crise, *rester dans l'ambivalence*

Cette thèse nous invite à embrasser l'ambivalence que l'on rencontre au musée. Au sein du Musée Ethnologique, certains membres du personnel ont saisi l'occasion d'accorder une attention politique accrue à leur musée afin de s'attaquer à des problèmes abordés de longue date mais sous-financés. Les commissaires du département d'Afrique, Paola Ivanov et Jonathan Fine, par exemple, ont profité du besoin général de projets liés au colonial. Ils ont réussi à obtenir des fonds pour plusieurs projets de collaboration, et potentiellement à long terme, en Angola, au Cameroun, en Namibie et en Tanzanie, ainsi que pour la numérisation des archives du musée, en étant pleinement conscients de l'utilisation politique à laquelle ces projets seront confrontés. L'examen des collections coloniales suggère de s'en tenir à la crise du musée et à son ambivalence. Il s'agit de vivre avec le passé dans le présent, d'être conscient de ses échos et de ses séquelles, tout en embrassant les potentiels que ce travail offre pour se réconcilier dans le futur.

Selbstständigkeitserklärung
Statement of authorship

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