Working Through Colonial Collections

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I entered the Ethnological Museum’s Africa department in 2013, 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. The interest in representations stemmed from my former research in the field of contemporary art, 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 these narratives continue to be produced in these fields. I was aware of the origins of these representations in colonial ideology and had learned about the entanglement of colonial rule, anthropology, and colonialism in the mainly Anglophone literature about ethnological collections that constituted the state of the arts. However, I started to work in the Ethnological Museum a few months after the foundation stone ceremony of the Humboldt Forum, during which the activist group No Humboldt 21! stressed the colonial origin of the Museum’s collection and requested the return of the Museum’s objects, highlighting how Berlin related to both the slave trade and colonial rule. In the Museum, I was asked to join a research project about collections acquired in the former German East Africa, in today’s Republic of Tanzania. Encountering German colonialism, I realised that I didn’t know anything about it. I myself had not learned about German colonialism in school. I was unaware that Germany had governed colonies, and I was even less aware of how Germany had governed those colonies.

My situation reflected a common diagnosis at the time. Germany was suffering from ‘colonial amnesia’ (Kößler, 2006; Zimmerer, 2013b, p. 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. In this chapter, I unravel the processes and histories of remembering colonialism in Germany, histories I needed to chronicle, reflect on, and
assemble to understand the historical dimension of my research subject. How to situate the remembrance of the German colonial past in Germany? What were the key moments of memory activism? How did the remembrance of colonialism in Germany and the Humboldt Forum relate to one another? What prompted change in this process?

‘A gap in memory politics’: The remembrance of colonialism in Germany

In comparison with other European nations, the conditions and genealogy of colonial remembrance in Germany is particular. As Britta Schilling stated, ‘part of what makes the German case unique is not only that the colonial period was so short, but rather that it was cut short’ (Schilling, 2014, p. 4). Germany’s main colonial efforts started after the Berlin conference in 1884/85, from which on it occupied German East Africa (in the region of today’s Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi), German South West Africa (in the region of today’s Namibia), Togoland and Kamerun in West Africa (in the region of today’s Togo, Ghana, and Republic of Cameroon) as well as concessions and protectorates in Kiaotschou (Jiaozhou Bay) in China, German Samoa (today’s Samoa) and German New Guinea (today’s Papua New Guinea), both located in the Pacific. These colonial efforts were preceded by individual German states with colonial ambitions, some of which had been involved in slave trade. Germany lost its empire with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. 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, small groups were engaged in continuous attempts to commemorate German colonialism up to 1945, efforts that 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’ (Schilling, 2014, p. 10). The destruction of several colonial monuments during 1968 student revolts, in solidarity with decolonisation movements in the Global South, left blank spaces in several cities’ public spheres, which led public discourse on German colonialism to be ‘laid to rest after 1968’ (Schilling, 2014, p. 10). Concerning its historiography, 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 & Reinhard, 2018). Different to European imperial powers like France or the UK, Germany’s immigration
politics were characterised by contract-based labour immigration, unrelated to former German colonies. This has had an impact on who writes the histories of (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.\(^2\) 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 reckoning with the Holocaust and the German Sonderweg (Eckert & Wirz, 2013, p. 508; Zimmerer, 2015, p. 22).

Although these different factors contribute to what has been termed an ‘absence of the colonial past in German remembrance culture’ (Lutz & Gawarecki, 2005, p. 10) and, more particularly, on a political level, a ‘gap in memory politics’ (Bauche, 2010), the term ‘colonial amnesia’ has been challenged. On one hand, recent research has shown that private colonial remembrance has always continued (Schilling, 2014), and debates and controversies on colonialism in the historiographies of both the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR resurfaced 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 memoriescape, 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 that particularly intensified in the years 2004 and 2005.

**Claiming recognition of Germany’s colonial past**

In activism and research, the years 2004 and 2005 have been described as pivotal 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 among European colonial powers. More importantly, 2004 coincided with the hundredth anniversary of the genocide committed on the Herero and Nama in Namibia (Zimmerer & Zeller, 2003; Böhlke-Itzen, 2004), and
2005 coincided with the anniversary of the Maji Maji war in Tanzania (Becker & 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.3

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 number of research projects related to German colonialism, concerning both its histories4 as well as its contemporary implications in Germany, such as language,5 popular culture and education,6 remembrance and lieux de mémoire.7 These developments were closely linked to each other, in the sense that activists were themselves academics or that academics were aware of and fostered the political aspect of their work. In 2010, the historian 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 share experiences as workers in memory sites remembering National Socialism; others come from anti-racism work’ (Bauche, 2010). In different German cities, associations that engaged with the call for the recognition of German colonialism were founded.8 Activists tried to render knowledge about German colonialism public, knowledge that was scientifically ‘acknowledged by specialists’ but ‘hardly present in public conscience’ (Bauche, 2010).

The negotiation of German colonialism has concentrated on Africa. The historians Andreas Eckert and Albert Wirz’s observed that colonialism and Africa have become ‘almost a synonym’ in Germany (Eckert & Wirz, 2013, p. 508). This was, for instance, reflected in the German contemporary art field, and cultural production more generally speaking, which I followed closely. Established and emerging artists and curators have made questions concerning Africa in the German cultural landscape visible, notably in regard to discussion of the colonial project and its afterlives – both concerning German colonies and colonialism in Africa more generally.9 What is meant by ‘Africa’ here is quite particular. Definitions usually explicitly or implicitly concern ‘sub-Saharan’ Africa, a seemingly regional depiction that continues to circulate despite virulent critique, as it implicitly refers to a racialised division of the continent into a ‘White’ North Africa, opposed to the southern part, long depicted as Black Africa (Schwarzafrika) in Germany.10 Finally, and crucially, contestations around museum collections in relation to colonialism were almost exclusively focused on collections from the African continent. In Germany, and at the Humboldt Forum in particular, this was notably reflected in the negotiation concerning specific objects and human
remains, but also in regard to the concentration of expertise and interest concerning ‘Africa’ in German ethnological museums and academia. Berlin played a particular role in this context, as it allowed convergences of activism with other fields to take place. These convergences, in turn, provided fertile ground for the protests against the Humboldt Forum to arise.

**Relating German colonialism and the Humboldt Forum in Berlin**

Two central controversies succeeded one another since the fall of the Berlin Wall with regards to the Humboldt Forum, and they continue to echo to this day: the debate on the reconstruction of the Stadtschloss versus the maintenance and renovation of the Palace of the Republic centrally evoke questions on the role of the public remembrance of GDR heritage in Germany. With the decision to devote the Berlin Palace to ‘non-European’ collections, the 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.

In 2002, the German parliament confirmed the reconstruction of the Berlin Palace, after more than a decade of debate (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin, 2002). The members of parliament based their decision on the recommendations of an expert commission appointed to imagine and design Berlin’s ‘historical centre’ (*historische Mitte*). The Berlin Palace, built and developed as the residence of the Hohenzollerns in 1443, was destroyed in 1950 by the GDR government after heavy war damage. In 1976, the Palace of the Republic was inaugurated to host the GDR People’s Parliament and served 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 Berlin Wall.

The parliamentary decision opened a debate on how, in a unified Germany, the government should deal 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 Stadtschloss was interpreted by many as an East–West conflict, symbolic of the difficulties surrounding the process of reunification (Binder, 2013, p. 106). The advocates of the Schloss presented the area around the palace – the Schlossplatz – as abandoned from an urban policy perspective, as 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, 2017b, p. 110). 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 valued in what was being increasingly constructed as the historical centre of Germany’s capital.

The decision to reconstruct the Berlin Palace 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). The expert commission’s concept supported and integrated the arguments of the Berlin Palace’s advocates: the commission suggested the name ‘Humboldt Forum’, with reference to the brothers Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, figureheads for Prussian science, culture politics, and their ‘cosmopolitan world view’ (Parzinger, 2011, p. 18). The commission also recommended a narrative for the Humboldt Forum that 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. As Jonathan Bach 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, 2017b, p. 115). Beyond the obvious link between the library and the university to the Humboldt brothers, the Humboldt Forum’s concept was centred on ‘the dialogue between European and non-European [außer­europäischen] cultures’ (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlin, 2002, p. 22) and based on a proposal by the then director of the SPK, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann.14

The combination of the symbolic politics of the Stadtschloss with the non-European collections shifted attention towards how Germany was to position itself with regards to its colonial past. Scholars and activists both in Germany and beyond translated and applied postcolonial theory to this particular constellation, an area of study which had hitherto received marginal attention in German academia. The Humboldt Forum was repeatedly presented as a ‘place for the world cultures’ by integrating the ‘non-European’ collections (Parzinger, 2011, p. 6). The museums associated with ‘Ancient and Modern Civilisations’ – ‘Islamic’, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and nineteenth-century European painting – are situated in opposition to the Humboldt Forum. The framing of the Humboldt Forum as representing the non-European established a dichotomy between the ‘European’ and the ‘non-European’, which continues to act on Museum Island. As Sharon Macdonald has argued, this particular ‘constellation of difference’
contributes to an understanding of the ‘European’ that is defined in terms of historic belonging, rather than in geographical terms. It implies the construction of these collections 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 that is excluded from the narrative (Macdonald, 2016; see also von Bose, 2013; 2016). The dichotomy was reinforced by the exclusion of the collections of the Museum of European Cultures, which remained in the former location of the Ethnological Museum, in Dahlem. The politics of place on Berlin’s Museum Island were accentuated by the architectural frame of the Schloss, further emphasised by the housing of the ethnological collections. Critics understood the combination of a royal facade and ethnological collections as a continuation of colonial dominance and the maintenance of Western supremacy, while incorporating and ‘strategically’ using ‘reflexivity’ to fit with contemporary museum discourse, as Friedrich von Bose argued (2017b). The collections’ regional division in the Humboldt Forum confirmed ordering modes traditionally associated with anthropology and the claim to represent certain ‘cultures’ in their regional delimitation, traditionally via grand anthropological themes. These different points of critique confirmed how the Humboldt Forum unambiguously reproduced classificatory systems and representational politics that decades of critique and (international) museum practice laboriously tried to dissect and counteract, validating instead presuppositions grounded in colonial thought.

As Beate Binder pointedly argued in 2013, those advocating for the Humboldt Forum reflected the political ambition for the Humboldt Forum to be perceived as a representation of the national by profiling itself as cosmopolitan.

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, p. 114)

This positioning reflected the contemporary trend to adhere to an idea of important Western museums as ‘universal heritage’, confirmed when the SMB signed the International Council of Museum’s ‘Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museum’ in 2002. Interpreted by many as a means to warden off restitution (see, for example, Abungu, 2004), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) declaration stated that the collections have become ‘part of the museums that have cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them’ (ICOM, 2004).
Understanding the collections as both universal and national reflections of the museum’s mission, as Andrea Witcomb put it, is to ‘encapsulate at the same time the world and the nation’ (Witcomb, 2015, p. 130). The signature also signalled the organisation’s general attitude that ‘all objects came legally into the collections’, as the SMB’s director Peter-Klaus Schuster confirmed in 2004 (Schuster, 2004).

**Berlin as postcolonial metropole**

Building on the above-mentioned research and activism on German colonialism, the intellectual and physical proximity of politics, academia, activism, 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 (see also von Oswald & Tinius, 2020). The foci of the Berlin-based postcolonial activism – material culture and heritage sites – 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, especially the return of human remains. On the other hand, they addressed the representation of colonial histories, both in their absence, such as in organisational narratives, as well as in their unacknowledged presence in everyday Berlin as a former colonial metropole (Heyden & Zeller, 2002; 2005). The most active associations – Berlin Postkolonial, Tanzania-Network, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland, AFROTAK TV cyberNomads, and AfricAvenir – confirmed the focus on German colonialism in Africa, encouraged by the fact that Berlin was home to Germany’s largest African diaspora, both of German and international nationality (Diallo & Zeller, 2013, p. 12).

The activist claims for the repatriation of human remains from Germany’s former colonies related those claims to 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 & Jöbstl, 2017). The relocation of the human remains in 2011 from the Charité, a university hospital in Berlin, to the Museum of Prehistory and Early History turned the SPK into a central target of critique for 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, & Winkelmann, 2013). The claims for repatriations went hand in hand with the request for the recognition of
and claims for (financial) reparation concerning the colonial war and genocide committed against the Ovaherero and Nama peoples between 1904 and 1908 in today’s Namibia. The genocide was recognised by the German government in 2016, but the government excluded any possibility of financial reparations at the time (see Kößler, 2015; Bundesregierung, 2016).²⁰

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 was 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) acknowledgement of histories of German colonialism in German public organisations. In Berlin, activists such as Tahir Della, Christian Kopp, Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, Manuela Bauche, Israel Kaunatjike, and Joshua Kwesi Aikins deployed different methods to make colonial histories visible in the first place and to develop counter-narratives. The activists used guided tours focused on the remains of colonial buildings and representations within the city, such as in Berlin’s ‘African Quarter’ (Afrikanisches Viertel), 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 informational and memorial plaques²¹ and by protesting against and changing street names honouring colonialists and colonial events.²² Joshua Kwesi Aikins, one of the initiators of 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, p. 42; see also Jethro, n.d.). Finally, activists have challenged narratives at exhibitions addressing German colonialism, and there have been interventions in already existing exhibitions, in museums, and in independent project spaces.²³

The activists’ focus on museums and heritage allowed the borders between professional 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 2009.²⁴ 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.²⁵ The exhibition was announced as a preview of the ‘making of’ the exhibitions to be integrated in the Humboldt Forum. A year after the Palace of the Republic had been completely demolished, the exhibition was located in the Alte Museum just opposite the demolition and 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 Humboldt Forum’s politics of representation. The event was also the occasion on which the collective
Artefakte/anti-humboldt was founded, which has continued to publicly oppose the Humboldt Forum. 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).

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, along with the significant number of (international) artists, curators, academics and other cultural producers who have opted for Berlin as their home or temporary city of residence. Colonial legacies within the contemporary art world were often negotiated with direct reference to the Humboldt Forum and the critique associated with it.

**Conclusion**

In 2018, Germany’s Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, 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). Contrary to Grüter’s statement, my observations show 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 Humboldt Forum itself. In particular, it was activism and cultural productions – often the result of unpaid, tedious, and risky work – rather than politics, that was involved in the ‘laborious excavation work’ of researching, addressing, and claiming Germany’s colonial past, as the anthropologist Larissa Förster depicted the process.
Notes

1. 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; see von Oswald (2016).

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

3. 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, p. 23), who publicly apologised for ‘[t]he atrocities of that time [which] were what would today be called genocide’ (quoted in Eckert 2007, p. 37). Immediately sanctioned by the responsible ministry, the minister’s reaction was framed as an ‘emotional outburst’ that ‘could cost taxpayers billions’ (Böhlke-Itzen quoted in Eckert 2007, p. 37). The minister’s apology excluded a juridical responsibility that would have possibly and eventually translated into valid repatriation claims from the Namibian side (Eckert 2007, p. 37). In contrast to the genocide in Namibia, the remembrance of the hundredth anniversary of the Maji Maji war in Tanzania hardly attracted any public media attention in Germany.

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

5. See, for example, for language, Arndt et al. 2004; Arndt&Ofuatey-Alazard (2011), and in particular controversies around the N-word in 2013, Zimmerer (2013b, pp. 22–25); Albrecht (2017).

6. See, for example, Bechhaus-Gerst and Klein-Arendt (2003); Kundrus (2003); Bechhaus-Gerst and Gieseke (2006); Langbehn (2010).

7. See, for example, Zeller (2000); Heyden and Zeller (2002); Förster (2010); Zimmerer (2013a).

8. 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, p. 50). Other associations were founded and continue their work in Munich, Hamburg, Dresden, Leipzig, Cologne, Augsburg, and Dortmund.

9. 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 institutionalising (and have been supported to do so) contemporary cultural production and art from Africa in Germany’s cultural landscape, in independent project spaces, biennales, and national museums. Public funding from the ifa or the Kulturstiftung des Bundes, some of it explicitly devoted to Africa (TURN fund), has supported these projects sustainably, such as the media platform and journal Contemporary And (C&), founded and directed by Yvette Mutumba and Julia Grosse.
10. For analysis and discussion on the concepts of *Schwarzafrika* and *Schwarzer Kontinent*, see Arndt et al. (2000, pp. 204–208), and for racist terminology in the German language more generally speaking, see Arndt and Ofuatey-Alazard (2011); Arndt (2012).

11. Examples of particularly contested objects include the so-called Benin Bronzes, confiscated in 1897 by British colonial forces, located in today’s Federal Republic of Nigeria. Christine Howald and Felicity Bodenstein have depicted these objects as ‘proxies’ (*Stellvertreter*) for objects acquired in colonial contexts (Bodenstein & Howald 2018, p. 533). 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, because 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.

12. 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 Afrikan, 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 (2015–2018), who replaced the africanist Klaus Schneider in Cologne in 2018; Christine Stelzig in Munich (2011–2017); and Clémentine Deliss (2010–2015) in Frankfurt. Most of these curators 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 forwards’) (Hamburg, since 2018); and Cologne’s permanent exhibition.

13. 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).

14. For a reproduction of Lehmann’s suggestions, see König and Scholz (2012, pp. 21–26).

15. See chapter two for a detailed account of the activists’ critique and, as key examples, see Artefakte/anti-humboldt (2013); No Humboldt 21! (2013); von Bose (2017b); Ndikung (2018).

16. 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 & 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, pp. 120–129).

17. My translation from the German.

18. These reflections, and in particular the notion of ‘convergences’, are based on discussions with Jonas Tinius and Larissa Förster.

19. Even though they were not stored at the Museum, the historic relationship between 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 & Jöbstl 2017). At the same time, human remains were still an important part of the Ethnological Museum, as many objects included human tissue, hair, or teeth, as a simple search in the database.
would quickly reveal. See, for example, the list of human remains identified by Berlin Postkolonial via the Ethnological Museum’s publicly accessible online database (No Humboldt 21!, 2014b).

20. 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 (as of May 2019).

21. Until today, there is only one official memorial plaque in Berlin commemorating the atrocities of German colonial rule in Namibia, on the Neuer Garnisonfriedhof 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 informational and memorial plaque in Berlin’s so-called African Quarter (Afrikanisches Viertel) (Kopp&Krohn, 2012).

22. 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 the feminist Afro-German poet, intellectual, and activist in 2009/2010. Ongoing is the fight in Berlin concerning the M*straße in Berlin-Mitte. A success of the initiatives has been the agreement to change the street names Lüderitzstraße, Nachtigalplatz, and Petersallee in Berlin’s so-called African Quarter (Afrikanisches Viertel) (DECOLONIZE BERLIN, 2018).

23. 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 Straßenamen. Postkoloniale Erinnerungskultur, curated by H. M. Jokinen and Christian Kopp (August Bebel Institut, Berlin; Münchner Stadtuseum; 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 in the German Historical Museum’s permanent exhibition. The tour was based on critical guided tours and was developed by the historians Manuela Bauche, Dörte Lerp, Susann Lewerenz, Marie Muschalek, and Kristin Weber; see https://www.kolonialismusimkasten.de/, consulted 3 May 2018.


26. 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).

27. Representatives of the Humboldt Forum or Humboldt Lab Dahlem were invited to events. Examples are the participation of the curator 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.

28. Discussion with Larissa Förster of an earlier version of this text, 5 April 2018.