Greeting

The Humboldt Lab Dahlem was a project of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) in cooperation with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). It developed new forms of presenting artefacts of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) of the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) in Dahlem for the planned Humboldt-Forum in Berlin-Mitte. The experiment began with the question of how objects accommodated in a museum can open up new perspectives on our globalized present. In its search for solutions, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem therefore collaborated with scholars, custodians, curators, and artists. The results were regularly presented in so-called "Probebühnen" during the opening hours of the museum. In this manner, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem provided stimuli for dealing with the current challenges of presentation and mediation that are also posed to other museums in Germany and Europe.

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(No) Place in the Sun / Teaser

The history of ethnological museums is intimately interwoven with the history of colonialism. Not least that is why the topic of colonialism needs to be dealt with in museums. Communicating the range of themes to children and teenagers is particularly challenging: they want to be approached on an emotive level as well as cognitively. Activity orientation, interactive elements, atmospheric aspects and experience play a major role in the exhibition design. But how can such a violent topic be adequately depicted for young people? Especially when, in addition to historical facts, the consequences, like everyday racism, need to be revealed? The project "(No) Place in the Sun" tried to find polyphonic solutions which, through a combination of facts, videos and games, seek to explain that colonialism and racism are part of German history – which can be told from a variety of perspectives.

(No) Place in the Sun / Project Description

Speaking the Unspoken

by Ute Marxreiter

"With one word: we don't want to put anyone in the shade, but we too demand our place in the sun." In a variation of the famous quote by the later Reich Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, with which he wanted to expand the colonial policies of the German Empire in Africa in 1897, the project "(No) Place in the Sun" deals with the German colonial history and its interconnection with the Ethnologisches Museum. The central focus is the question of how this topic can be best communicated to younger visitor groups.

In the future Humboldt-Forum there will be four areas explicitly created for children, teenagers and families, called junior areas. One of these areas is directly adjacent to the exhibition modules on Africa. Because colonialism will also be a topic in this area, it seemed apposite to use the adjacent junior area for a condensed presentation on this range of themes. While the other exhibition areas inspire you to look and contemplate, in

the junior areas touching, trying things out and being active is welcomed. This apparent discrepancy leads many museums to outsource displays into separate designated children's museums. It is therefore a courageous step on the part of the Ethnologisches Museum to integrate the junior areas into the exhibition flow.

Within the Humboldt Lab project, scenographic solutions focusing on the theme of colonialism were to be explored. The aim was to deal with topics and presentation modes that have a strong relevance in the everyday reality of young people today. Activity orientation, interactive elements, atmospheric aspects and experience play a major role in the exhibition design. But what is it that we want to communicate to children and teenagers on the topic of colonialism in Africa? In addition to a violent colonial history for which Germany was responsible in a variety of African regions and in which the Ethnologisches Museum, with its "acquisition" of tens of thousands of objects, is also implicated, to this day, in almost all walks of life, there are still a whole raft of clichés, racist undertones and exotifications on the topic of Africa to be found.

Project Development

As the initiator of the project I deliberately chose a small but heterogeneous team of five from different specialist backgrounds, who came together to develop ideas and strategies in various workshops. Three statements were important for us in defining our approach and attitude: Firstly, colonial structures affect us in our daily world to this day; especially in the day-to-day lives of many teenagers, the implications of colonial power, injustice, exploitation, racism, marginalization and violence still play a role. Secondly, we were acutely aware that the topic is dealt with only marginally in the German school curriculum. And last, but not least, we saw a particular responsibility for this issue at the Ethnologisches Museum, because all ethnological museums were founded within the context of colonialism.

A raised awareness, sensitization and discussing the commemorative aspects of culture are all themes we wished to target, which were derived from the core topic. In doing so we pursued a postcolonial approach, based on the assumption that colonialism does not end with the formal declaration of independence and that for dealing with the topic, a transparency about the "spoken" and the "unspoken" is essential. Equally the interdependencies and connections between different protagonists must be examined.

For our working methods, that meant we wanted to hand over the authority of definition, in part to activist protagonists who view the Ethnologisches Museum and the planning for the Humboldt-Forum in a highly critical light. This proved to be difficult in practice however: not everyone wanted to enter a dialog with us or to cooperate.

The Space

In "(No) Place in the Sun" we focused on German colonialism between 1884 and 1914 in order to be able to deal with the extensive topic adequately for teenagers on an area of 100 square meters and in order to emphasize the concrete connection to Berlin.

The result was an exhibition space with an intro and five different theme "islands," which depicted significant aspects of German colonial history in Africa. The theme islands are an invitation to interact: two stations visualize important historical facts; stations on the topic of everyday racism and on questions of decolonization form the bridge to the present. For example the video clips of the young German man of color, Sidney Frenz, who humorously talks about all the clichés he is confronted with in his daily life: "Can I touch your hair?" "Do you speak African?"

The relevance to the present also played an important role on the theme island about the genocide of the Herero. In fact current political events basically "overtook" the discussion dealt with here: in July 2015, just after the opening of the Probebühne 7, the genocide of the Herero and Nama was, for the first time in history, named and recognized as such in a Federal German Government press conference. For us it was a rare joy to be able to update our exhibition module accordingly: after all, part of the exhibition dealt with the history of the long and delicate struggle for this recognition in the German parliament, and an interview with Israel Kanautijke, a Herero descendent and activist, was shown, in which he talks about his view of the topic.

In order to depict historical connections we devised a timeline with different perspectives: what was important from the point of view of the German occupying forces? What did the story look like for the African resistance fighters? Five central events were placed as moveable markers on the timeline, in order to demonstrate the subjective ways that facts can be interpreted, and history told, as well as the lack of closure that is inherent in

history. Visitors can also trace the growing number of objects in the Africa collection of the Ethnologisches Museum during these years by means of symbols: from around 3500 objects in 1880 to an increase of over 60,000 objects in 1920.

A video game introduces the visitor to the heyday of German colonial activities in West Africa around 1900. The player slips into the role of an African king in the Cameroon Grasslands, in the process getting to know some background information on several objects in the Africa collection. The player also becomes aware of why King Njoya, who served as the role model for the king in the game, presented the German Kaiser with the throne that is now one of the highlights of the Africa collection in the Ethnologisches Museum. King Njoya tried, with this opulent present, to positively influence his relationship with the German Empire. In the game it becomes clear how precarious his situation was and to what extent he felt threatened by the violent conflicts with the German occupying forces.

Outlook

Whether this test run succeeds in communicating the topic of German colonialism in the context of the Ethnologisches Museum successfully to teenagers remains to be seen: from late autumn 2015 school children and experts are invited to explore the exhibit and to evaluate it.

We look forward to seeing if the connection between day-to-day racism and colonial history is revealed to the visitors, and whether they are emotionally affected by our exhibition. This aspect especially led to many discussions in the planning and development stages: how do we succeed in the balancing act between naming of violent historical facts and our pedagogic responsibility to the children not to traumatize them? What role does empathy play? How should we handle visual materials?

We look forward to further answers and suggestions to these and other questions that will flow into the development of the junior area in the Humboldt-Forum. Initial discussions on the project, held with groups of students and visitors, offer grounds for optimism: everyday racism, decolonization and "politically correct" language are obviously topics that everyone thinks about and that lead to emotional and highly charged discussions.

Ute Marxreiter is a research associate for education at the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst. Her focus is on the development of the junior areas for the Humboldt-Forum.

(No) Place in the Sun / Positions

"First till the earth, then sow the seeds"

Cassandra Ellerbe-Dück is a diversity trainer and a member of the team of curators for "(No) Place in the Sun." Israel Kaunatjike is a descendent of the Herero and introduced the topic of genocide into the discussion within the framework of the exhibition. In conversation they talk about the successes and difficulties of cooperation between institution and activists, missed opportunities and necessary revisions.
Interview: Anne Haeming

Mr. Kaunatjike, when you were asked if you would participate in the exhibition, what was your first reaction?

Israel Kaunatjike: I was very happy, because the history of German colonialism and the genocide of the Herero need to be more widely known. It is not enough to simply talk to adults; children need to be addressed too. Colonialism – and its results – affects us all.

And you, Ms. Ellerbe-Dück?

Cassandra Ellerbe-Dück: I welcomed the idea but I was also somewhat skeptical. Because I know that many people from the African community have a highly critical view of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Humboldt-Forum. But you have to deal with the fact that colonial thought patterns are still part of our everyday lives. My role was to make a contribution to the discussion on racist language and racist imagery.

Did you set any preconditions for your participation in the project?

Ellerbe-Dück: I said "I can only take part in the project if we succeed in communicating a critical perspective on racism". I think we have succeeded in doing that.

What were your favorite exhibits?

Kaunatjike: Oh, I liked everything.

Ellerbe-Dück: Above all I think it's great that we have succeeded in making a topic like everyday racism accessible to 14-year-olds. For example in the film project by the young Sidney Frenz from Berlin, which led the audience to reflect on why some people feel they have the right to touch a black person's hair, why there is another name for Schokoküsse (editor's note: "Schokoküsse"/"chocolate kisses" are chocolate covered marshmallows, until recently known as "Negerküsse"/"negro kisses"), and why someone says, "It looks like a Hottentot hut in here." I also wanted to use lots of texts, examples, films from the African diaspora – but the copyright holders refused permission.

Why?

Ellerbe-Dück: Between the lines I was told: "We like you and your work – for a different institution, sure. But there? No way."

Which institution: the Ethnologisches Museum or what will become of it in the Humboldt-Forum?

Ellerbe-Dück: They don't want to have anything to do with the Humboldt-Forum. I can understand that. But my experience with the Humboldt Lab was very positive. We had lots of discussions within the team of curators, but we were all on the same wavelength in terms of ideas.

Herr Kaunatjike, how did your fellow campaigners react to your involvement?

Kaunatjike: They all respect that it is my responsibility to talk about the genocide and German colonialism in West Africa as often as I can. I am aware of the discussion surrounding "Humboldt 21" and the groups who are against it said to me: "Israel, do your thing." I haven't spoken about their issues – not in order to avoid conflict, but simply because that's not the focus of my work.

How would you describe the underlying problem? From the museum side there is and was a desire to work together with representatives of the community.

Ellerbe-Dück: I joined the curator group for the exhibition "(No) Place in the Sun" too late to be able to comment on what discussions took place and how. But what can be said is: the attempt failed. There has to be a *desire* to communicate. Many don't really understand what we're concerned about. Those who demand that we should only speak about "M*-Straße" without spelling out the whole street name...

... you mean "Mohrenstraße" (editor's note: Blackamoor Street) in Berlin-Mitte ...

Ellerbe-Dück: ... are quickly dismissed as "radical" by institutions.

Kaunatjike: The so-called "radicals" demanded something, and in response the other side said: No, we will protect our booty. From then on neither side listened to the other. The damage caused in the process won't be so easy to iron out.

Ellerbe-Dück: Despite the fact that the etymological root of "radix" means "origin": that's exactly what we want, to go back to the "roots" and then to see how we can rethink the situation.

How could this knotty problem be solved?

Ellerbe-Dück: One thing is clear: people of color must be brought in to participate in developing the concept of the Humboldt-Forum. The decision-makers should think about how it arrived at the point that the African diaspora wants nothing to do with it – instead of disqualifying us and our interests as too extreme.

Kaunatjike: The German-Namibian associations also consider me to be radical, simply because I claim the right to demand recognition of the German massacre of the Herero people as genocide from the Federal Government.

By the way: "(No) Place in the Sun" clearly states that it is "genocide." Was that undisputed from the start?

Ellerbe-Dück: We left it up to the children and young adults to decide for themselves in this part of the exhibition. We listed the facts and showed the images, so that they could think about it: this number of people

were murdered, their land was taken from them, they were herded into concentration camps – what category of injustice is that?

What do you make of this strategy Mr Kaunatjike?

Kaunatjike: I think it's good. I have been fighting for many years for the German government to recognize the genocide. It's a sign of progress that Mr. Lammert, the president of the Bundestag, has now begun to use the term.

One subject of the discussion is the objects in the ethnological collection itself. I was surprised that not a single one was displayed in the exhibition.

Ellerbe-Dück: The fact is: young people look at the objects and move right on. Nothing sticks in the memory. That's why we were consistent about making the exhibition interactive throughout: in this way they have to deal with the topic directly. Regardless of whether they read a text or try out the computer game about the Bamun conflict in the Cameroon Grasslands, in which, unusually, they have to make decisions from the perspective of a Bamun chieftain about how best to negotiate with the colonial masters.

Kaunatjike: Above all, it needs clarifying which of the 75,000 objects in the Africa collection in Dahlem should be designated as looted art. How an object ended up in the museum must, in future, be noted down in the object description and not merely "Namibia, 19th century."

Do you think that ethnological museums have a justification for their existence?

Ellerbe-Dück: That is a complex question. But the ethnological attitude and the institution need an update, an overhaul. One aspect of that must be to involve more voices and not to show just one side of the story.

Hermann Parzinger, the president of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, formulated it in a similar fashion: the Humboldt-Forum should show a "polyphonic narrative of an object from differing perspectives" – "ours and that of the others and perhaps a common one."

Ellerbe-Dück: But that is only possible if representatives of the communities are involved in the decision-making structures. That's the only way to break up the status quo. On top of that, it has been proven long since that diverse teams work better and more creatively. There are so many highly qualified people of color, active in cultural and museum fields, regardless of whether in Africa or in the diaspora!

Kaunatjike: It often fails when the people taken on board simply nod through the narrative that the decision-makers want anyway. While those of a different opinion are branded "radical" straight away.

Ellerbe-Dück: That is an expression of the tendency to see all Africans as a homogenous mass. The fact is overlooked that not everyone is up to the task – only someone who has a political consciousness and who is prepared to ask uncomfortable questions.

So the root of the problem is not the fact that the Humboldt-Forum has been designated as a new ethnological house as such, but rather "how" it will be planned, organized and realized?

Ellerbe-Dück: The idea of bringing together all the collections in one place, is not a bad one as such. But I can't simply move the objects from A to B without having checked the provenance at site A. If I am planning a vegetable garden, I have to till the soil, before sowing the seeds again.

Kaunatjike: I agree. Most of the objects don't even belong here and should be returned to Africa. After that one could perhaps start a new collection – legally. We don't take issue with the museum per se, but only with the history of the objects. A museum has the responsibility of being historically and politically just.

Put another way: The Ethnologisches Museum has to see itself as a historical museum whose expression is found in art and other objects?

Ellerbe-Dück: Exactly. It is a socio-political construct and that has to be dealt with in a self-reflective way.

And how?

Ellerbe-Dück: I have too little insight into the structure of the institution to be able to express a qualified opinion.

Is that a part of the problem? Would it help to say: look these are the infrastructural framework parameters,

let us take a look together at what is achievable?

Ellerbe-Dück: The structure of the institution...

... that is, the institutional connection between the Humboldt-Forum, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem and the Ethnologisches Museum within the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz as well as their various fields of responsibility...

Ellerbe-Dück: ... is indeed opaque. An open dialog, on exactly that issue, would be a prerequisite.

Kaunatjike: Both sides would need a moderator or mediator. It doesn't have to be the UN Secretary General but someone would need to mediate in order to bring the two groups back together.

How would that take place? Publicly, or behind closed doors?

Kaunatjike: It can't be a secret meeting, as the museum is part of the public sphere; we live in a democratic country.

Ellerbe-Dück: Of course I want to be part of that. My taxes go towards paying for our museums! It can't always be peace and harmony. Sometimes sparks will fly. But we have to be determined enough to see it through together with commitment. I've always been convinced: where there is a will there's a way.

In how far could a more progressive definition of the Humboldt-Forum concept be an opportunity for debating Germany's colonial past in a public context?

Ellerbe-Dück: For a revision of German history it would be important. The voices of those who were colonized and their descendants must finally be heard and respected. Our exhibition "(No) Place in the Sun" was a first tentative step: like a drop in the ocean, that begins to make waves.

Dr. Cassandra Ellerbe-Dück is a cultural studies specialist and anthropologist, as well as a diversity trainer. She was a fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies as well as mentor of the specialist forum "Anti-racist Empowerment & Anti-racist Education in the Post-migrant Society." She is currently a board member of Eine Welt der Vielfalt e.V. Berlin. For the Humboldt Lab Dahlem she worked in the curatorial team for "(No) Place in the Sun."

Israel Kaunatjike is an activist representing the Herero people in the association "Völkermord verjährt nicht" (No statute of limitations on Genocide). The exhibition "(No) Place in the Sun" showed a video interview with him on the issue.

Dr. Anne Haeming wrote her doctorate on post-colonial literature and works as a cultural and media journalist in Berlin.

(No) Place in the Sun / Credits

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Installation view "(No) Place in the Sun," photo: Uwe Walter

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Visitors at the opening, photo: Sebastian Bolesch

Visitors at the opening, photo: Sebastian Bolesch