

{ **The Museum as a Site of Unlearning:
Materials and Reflections on Museum
Education at the Weltkulturen Museum** }

**The Museum as a Site of
Unlearning? Coloniality
and education in
ethnographic museums,
a study focusing on
Germany, Austria and
Switzerland**

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»What are all of these things?« a seven-year-old in an ethnographic museum asks the facilitator on her way through the exhibition.¹ »Did you make them all yourselves?« What can the facilitator say in response except »no«? The many possible answers, what they emphasise and what they omit, necessarily make assertions about the people who produced the objects, about research, about colonial history and about the definition of the museum. They indicate stances on questions that have been wrestled with in museological debates both inside and outside of ethnographic museums² in response to postcolonial critiques: questions about property relations and the control over objects that came to Europe during the colonial era, questions about representation and about the power of definition in narratives about culture and difference³.

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Against the self-conception of museum educators, against their typically marginal positions within institutional hierarchies and the precarity of their working conditions, this study will describe museum education as an activity that is invested with power. As such a powerful field of work, the debates concerning the future of ethnographic museums⁴ cannot continue to treat museum education as a secondary activity that only communicates pre-existing content.

Whether in a classic guided tour or in a participatory project, the museum is created performatively through interaction with the participants⁵ – one possible version of the museum.

1 > This paper is first published in German in the volume: Einführung in die Museumsethnologie, ed. Larissa Förster and Iris Edenheiser, 2019. Translation: Joel Scott, Gegensatz Translation Collective.

2 > In the museum sector in German-speaking countries, there are traditionally two types of museums dedicated to ethnographic collecting and research: the *Völkerkundemuseum*, dedicated to peoples from around the world (except for the museum's home culture), and the *Volkskundemuseum*, dedicated to the study of local traditions, customs and folk art. Ethnology therefore has a traditional split along the lines of self and other into two different disciplines. The museums discussed here are the heirs of the ethnographic museum in the tradition of *Völkerkunde*, the study of world cultures.

3 > Kazeem, Belinda and Martinz-Turek, Charlotte and Sternfeld, Nora (eds.), *Das Unbehagen im Museum: postkoloniale Museologien*, Vienna, 2009; Ogbachie, Sylvester Okwunodu, »Who Owns Africa's Cultural Patrimony?« in *Critical Interventions*, vol. 4(2), 2010, pp. 2–3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19301944.2010.10781383>, [accessed 10.11.2015]; Förster, Larissa, »Öffentliche Kulturinstitution, internationale Forschungsstätte und postkoloniale Kontaktzone: Was ist ethno am ethnologischen Museum?« In Bierschenk, Thomas; Krings, Matthias; and Lentz, Carola (eds.) *Ethnologie im 21. Jahrhundert, Ethnologische Paperbacks*, Berlin, 2013, pp. 189–210.

4 > Harris, Clare and O'Hanlon, Michael, »The future of the ethnographic museum.« In *Anthropology Today*, vol. 29(1), 2013, pp. 8–12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12003>, [accessed 14.04.2017].

5 > Garoian, Charles R, »Performing the Museum.« In *Studies in Art Education. A Journal of Issues and Research*, Vol. 42, Nr. 3, 2001, pp. 234–248.

In the process, a version of the world is produced that museums claim to give access to when they take on names like *Weltkulturen Museum* (museum of world cultures) *Weltmuseum* (world museum), or *Museum Fünf Kontinente* (Museum of Five Continents).

What the museum offers to visitors are subject positions, for example when young people are invited to »travel the world«.



Depictions of the trope of the »travelling world in the museum«

Travelling the world is a very popular format for framing educational programmes in ethnographic museums. In programme announcements and on websites, children – usually boys, occasionally girls, and mostly *white*⁶ – are often shown bent over maps or holding a globe in their hands symbolising the world. In the texts that go along with these programmes, they are sent on »expeditions«, provided with »equipment«, addressed as »adventurers« who set out to discover »mysterious islands« or explore »nature, culture and society in Asia and Oceania«. The objects of their research are culture and society, or in other words, the people of Asia and Oceania.

Regardless of the intentions of the facilitator, in this model an educational project is being perpetuated which is historically inscribed in the museum: the European imperial project.

Which subject positions are being proposed here? Children (and occasionally also adults) in Europe are interpellated as individuals who are capable of making the world

6 > The italics indicate the constructed character of this label (cf. Eggers 2005).

their own, who as discoverers and explorers have unquestioned access, with all the allure of adventure, to the rest of the world. Here, something is being perpetuated that can be described through the concept of ›coloniality‹. As opposed to colonialism as political domination, ›coloniality‹ is defined as epistemic violence that contributes to the production of subjectivities (coloniality of being) and of knowledge (coloniality of knowledge).⁷ According to Grosfoguel and Castro Gómez in their introduction to the volume *El giro decolonial* (The Decolonial Turn), with formal decolonisation, we saw »a transition from modern colonialism to global coloniality, a process that has certainly transformed the forms of domination deployed by modernity, but not the structure of centre-periphery relations on a global scale«.⁸

This structure reproduces itself through distinctions between subject and object; between those who *have* culture and those who *belong* to a culture; between those who seem to have no skin colour and others who are constantly reminded of theirs. As this example shows, »postcolonial questions« are not just one topic among others that can be dealt with in special programmes, as they underlie all educational activities in museums, and the very pedagogical mission of the museum itself. This example also shows that these problems cannot be resolved by simple gestures, since the mode of »discovery« is linked to impulses such as the desire to know and to learn, which are so central to learning. When educational programmes in ethnographic museums address culture and difference, coloniality is also thematised, and potentially perpetuated. Which position, which view of the world do I offer as education? Considered as a site of subjectivation, education in ethnographic museums is also a sphere in which these regimes can be reworked and revised. I contend that the pedagogical mission of the museum should be situated in this context.

For if ethnographic museums are a place where powerful distinctions are made visible and negotiable, they are also a site in which we can unlearn coloniality.

EDUCATION IN ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS IN GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES TODAY – DISCURSIVE POSITIONS

How do museum educators interact with this context? Even in German-speaking countries, where postcolonial issues and theories were taken up much later than in other regions, ethnographic museums are currently engaged in a controversial debate around how to deal with their colonial heritage. Despite the centrality of edu-

7 › Quijano, Aníbal, ›Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina‹, in Lander, Edgardo (eds.) *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires, 2000, pp. 201–246, http://bvirtual.proieibandes.org/bvirtual/docs/quijano_colonialidad.pdf, [accessed 06.05.2018].

8 › Castro-Gómez, Santiago and Grosfoguel, Ramón, ›Prólogo: Giro decolonial, teoría crítica y pensamiento heterárquico‹, in Castro-Gómez, Santiago and Grosfoguel, Ramón (eds.), *El giro decolonial: Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global*, Bogotá, 2007, pp. 9–23, here p. 13, emphasis in original (translated from the Spanish by Joel Scott).

cational activities, there is almost no contribution to the debates about the future of ethnographic museums issuing from the education departments.⁹ We have seen only a handful of publications dealing with postcolonial relations in education related to ethnographic collections.¹⁰

Between 2011 and 2015, I carried out a qualitative, interview-based study on how museum educators conceive their work in ethnographic museums, the goals pursued by museum education, and the challenges that the postcolonial museum poses for educators. In conversations with stakeholders from 12 major museums in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, different and even competing views of museum education work emerged. These ways of understanding the museum, their own work and education can be described as ›discursive positions‹ – different »regimes of knowledge« that facilitators employ to describe their work.¹¹ In what follows I would first like to describe three dominant discursive positions that shape this field, in order to then look into postcolonial museum education as an emergent position, and to work through the difficulties and contradictions described by facilitators who seek to engage critically with the museums colonial heritage.

EXPERIENCE AND VISITOR-CENTRED MUSEUM EDUCATION

One of the dominant discursive positions that can be identified when educators speak about the objectives of their work is that of experience and visitor orientation. In this position, the focus is on ensuring a positive experience in the museum. In this case, children and young people are the primary audience. The objectives and qualitative criteria do not differ in this regard from those in art or other cultural and historical museums, insofar as access to the museum as a space of education and pleasure, fun and enjoyment is a primary concern.¹² According to this perspective, the specific collections and themes addressed by ethnographic museums often take a back seat in order to prioritise visitor experience of the museum: the important thing is to make sure »that the children leave with a good feeling« and that »their attitude towards the institution of the museum« is transformed into a positive one, as one facilitator described in an interview.¹³ The central factor here is that which Carmen Mörsch has called the reproductive function of museum education, namely educating the audience of tomorrow and thereby ensuring the continued existence of the institution.¹⁴

9 › See, for example: Kraus and Noack 2015; Chambers 2014; Harris and O'Hanlon 2013; Audehm et al. 2015; Förster 2013; Kazeem, Martinez-Turek and Sternfeld 2009.

In the German-language literature, Endter and Rothmund 2015b and Kamel and Gerbich 2014; in the English-language literature, Golding 2009; Golding and Modest 2013; Baird 2011.

10 › In the German-language literature, Endter and Rothmund 2015b and Kamel and Gerbich 2014; in the English-language literature, Golding 2009; Golding and Modest 2013; Baird 2011.

11 › Methodologically, the study is based on discourse-analytical approaches in educational studies, especially the analysis of discursive practises in educational contexts by Daniel Wrana (2015; 2014).

12 › See Deutscher Museumsbund, Bundesverband Museumspädagogik e.V. 2008, p. 6.

13 › I04, 26.3.2013.

14 › Mörsch, Carmen; (2009). »At a Crossroads of Four Discourses: documenta 12 Gallery Education in Between Affirmation, Reproduction, Deconstruction and Transformation«, in: Mörsch, Carmen/research team of documenta 12 education (Hrsg.): documenta 12 education #2: Between Critical Practice and Visitor Services, Zürich, Berlin: diaphanes, 9–31

PARTICIPATION

An experience and visitor-centred approach often goes hand in hand with a focus on participation. The evolution of pedagogical approaches in museums and exhibitions from knowledge transfer and empathy to participation and co-determination¹⁵ can also be discerned in ethnographic museums. Many facilitators who were interviewed emphasised longer term projects with groups as the highlight of their work. References to spaces for participation and co-determination appear frequently in the literature about educational work in ethnographic museums.¹⁶ One of the goals of this approach is that something emerges which couldnt have been planned, and that the group dynamic »takes on a life of its own.«¹⁷ Accordingly, many museums carry out medium and long-term co-operation projects, the results of which are sometimes visible in the exhibition space. As is currently being developed in other types of museums,¹⁸ intersections between curating and education are becoming increasingly prevalent.

REFLEXIVE ETHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION

While the two previous rationales and modes of argument concern the institution of the museum in general, the third relates specifically to the ethnographic museum and foregrounds teaching about culture(s), cultural difference, and diversity. According to this perspective, the task of museum education is to contribute to reflections on identity, on one's own cultural background and on our images of self and other, as well as to encourage visitors to interrogate their prejudices and values. What is essential in these formulations is that they explicitly reject showcasing of the »foreign« and the »exotic«. Such showcasing, as I will outline below, still exists as a practice in some museums. However in the objectives outlined by education staff in the interviews, it certainly serves as a kind of negative image to be resisted. Accordingly, the dominant position can be described as *reflexive* ethnographic education, which aims to counteract simplistic images of the foreign and the other.

This approach represents an understanding of museum education that emerged out of the debates about the educational function of ethnographic museums that began in the 1970s. To explain this, a brief historical excursus is necessary. In the discussions that took place at that time around the guiding principles of the ethnographic museum, whose representation of the »other« was disputed by the internal critique of ethnologists and by external criticisms in the age of decolonisation, the educational function of the institution was central. In the late 1970s in West Germany, solidarity and/or tolerance were discussed as principles that would guide the reshaping of the ethnograph-

15 › For a definition of different forms of involvement, see the chapter ›Wie wird vermittelt?‹ in the Institute for Art Education's publication *Zeit für Vermittlung: Eine online Publikation zur Kulturvermittlung*, 2013.

16 › Mesenhöller 2012; Cohn 2007; Endter and Rothmund 2015b; Bystron and Zessnik 2014.

17 › I02a, 22.10.2012.

18 › Mörsch, Carmen; Sachs, Angeli; and Sieber, Thomas (eds.), *Ausstellen und Vermitteln im Museum der Gegenwart*, Bielefeld, 2016.

ic museum.¹⁹ The focus was on an educational model that would promote a reflexive approach to alterity and to the relationship between the »first« and »third« worlds, such as when the problem-oriented exhibition was designed as a model.²⁰ West Germany's new directions in museum concepts and educational objectives had parallels with museum pedagogy in the East, such as the approaches in Dresden and Herrnhut, which focused on societal developments in newly independent former colonies, albeit with clearer – socialist – political objectives.²¹ In the West German debate, however, the transmission of knowledge about economic contexts and the pleas for »solidarity« that were decisive in the proposals made by Volker Harms lost relevance in the following decade. Instead, the discussions that ensued focused on cultural difference as a central element for the educational mission of the museum. From these debates, three essential educational objectives and goals emerged that continue to shape museum education to this day. The first is the education of tolerance and recognition; the second is the presumption that »cultural defamiliarization can lead to a reconsideration of our own unquestioned cultural behaviour, thereby leading to an »overcoming of ethnocentric perspectives« (as explained in Jacobs with reference to Greverus);²² and the third is the interrogation of stereotypes, the deconstruction of prejudices,²³ and de-exotification.²⁴ According to these criteria, a reflexive approach to culture is to be conveyed, which goes hand in hand with a self-reflexive questioning of how ethnographic knowledge is produced. With these aims in mind, ethnographic museums have developed a broad spectrum of methodologies. These deal with the construction of self and other, for instance through exercises where visitors categorise objects in the museum and then reflect on the attributions they've made. Other techniques highlight the constructed nature of the representational modes employed in the museum, for example, by explicitly naming sources, or by smuggling a new object into the collection to uncover the »truth effect« of the museum. And they relate cultural identity and its complexity back to the visitors themselves, for instance by talking about style and belonging in youth cultures.²⁵

There is another aspect that has persisted in the debates on museum education since the 1970s: the discussions about migration in ethnographic museums. One of the first »problems« that was addressed in the new »problem-oriented« exhibitions was migration, for example in the exhibition *Turkey: Home for People in our City* in Bremen (German-Turkish Working Group, quoted in *ibid.*: 93). The connection »foreign objects – foreign neighbours« from the perspective of the cultural majority has since developed into a constant trope for museum education, where the experience of cultural difference in the museum is connected with the experience of social heterogeneity

19 › See the debates in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 1976; Harms 1976; Lohse 1976.

20 › Kelm, Münzel, *Museum für Völkerkunde Frankfurt am Main* 1974.

21 › Schützenmeister 1989. The development of museum pedagogy in the ethnographic museums in the GDR, which was also marked by conflicting concepts, would demand a separate discussion – here I am concerned with the evolution of concepts that are currently influential, and which can be traced through West German publications.

22 › Jacobs, Doris, *Interkulturelle Museumspädagogik: internationale Bemühungen der Museumspädagogik in ihrer Relevanz für das ausländische Vorschulkind*, Weinheim, 1989, p. 186.

23 › Ganslmayr, Herbert, »Völkermuseum und Vorurteile«, in *Museum, Information, Forschung: Rundbrief* (4), 1975, p. 21.

24 › Kelm 1973, quoted in Stötzel 1981: 38. Volker Harms, among others, called for an economic view based on the notion of »solidarity«, which highlighted the necessity »of demonstrating the structures of interdependency between the industrialised countries and those countries providing the raw materials« (Vossen et al. 1976: 204) and thus of counteracting the exploitation of the third world by the first world. This approach was not widely taken up in the standard understanding of museum education.

25 › The strategies mentioned are examples given in the interviews.

through migration. Intercultural pedagogy, an approach which takes »culture« as a central element of difference in a society shaped by migration, and which emphasises the interstitial spaces and the translation processes between cultural characteristics (»inter«), was a crucial reference point for museum education in ethnographic museums in the 1990s and 2000s²⁶ and continues to be influential today. »Intercultural competence can be taught with the aid of selected exhibits« writes Sonja Schierle from the Linden Museum Stuttgart.²⁷ Schierle connects knowledge about cultures outside of Europe in the museum with the fact that »people from different cultures ... are often our next door neighbours«. ²⁸ At the same time, the interviews I conducted show that a radical change is currently taking place here. Doubts emerging in educational practice combine here with the incorporation of political and academic critiques of intercultural pedagogy. For example, by looking at cultural identity, participants can be made foreign again – and thus an order of »belonging« and »not belonging« can be maintained.²⁹ This critique is also mirrored in the interviews, with the majority of the interviewees problematising the act of addressing visitors as representatives of a culture. According to the interviews, intercultural pedagogy is a residual discourse that continues to shape the field, but is currently subject to significant critique and reshaping. As a means of distancing themselves from »interculturality«, museum educators increasingly refer to the concept of transculturality.³⁰ Global learning³¹ and diversity³² are also mentioned as new guiding concepts, although in the interviews the attendant methodological approaches are largely yet to be fleshed out. Migration remains a central theme for programming in museums.

POSTCOLONIAL MUSEUM EDUCATION

In this panorama, museum education from a postcolonial perspective is an emergent discursive position. It problematises the colonial heritage of the ethnographic museum and of society more broadly. As one interviewee phrased it:

*The museum also has its history in a kind of human zoo, right? So basically you're showing the riches that were brought back from the colonies. And I ... just ask myself how a museum can come to terms with something like that, a history like that. Or how we can deal with that responsibility in the future.*³³

26 › Kunz-Ott 2008; Jacobs 1989; Bolduan, Gemmingen 2009.

27 › Schierle, Sonja, »Blick über den Tellerrand: Museumspädagogik im Völkerkundemuseum«, in *Kunst + Unterricht*, 349/350, 2011, pp. 16–18, here p. 16.

28 › Ibid., p. 18.

29 › See Mecheril, Paul *Migrationspädagogik*, Weinheim, 2010.

30 › (Interviews in texts gathered in Cohn 2007; Menrath 2013). The concept of transculturality, which actually dates back to the Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz (1940), was largely shaped by Wolfgang Welsch (1997). In contrast to multiculturalism and interculturality, which continue to carry a problematic understanding of culture as a self-contained unit, he emphasises the way processes of diffusion and change produce culture.

31 › For an approach to global learning informed by postcolonialism, see, for example, Andreotti 2006 and Danielzik 2013.

32 › For an introductory look at the potentials and problems of diversity-based approaches, see Mecheril 2007.

33 › I01, 06.07.2012.

The concrete goal for educational work in this discursive position is to critically teach the history of museums and collections. This is supplemented by another perspective that addresses the material and intellectual/epistemic legacy of colonialism in the present. One of the facilitators interviewed described the goal of having participants understand that their city itself and its institutions »would be inconceivable ... without colonies, without this interwoven history«.³⁴ Here, the focus of educational work is on conveying (post)coloniality in the present and in everyday life. As an emergent discourse, postcolonial museum pedagogies are yet to crystallise into concrete methodological approaches and practices - they manifest rather as a way of working with and in contradictions. In what follows I will elaborate on two of these contradictions and the question of how to deal with them productively.

CONTRADICTION: CRITICAL MUSEUM EDUCATION – AUDIENCE

INTEREST

The contradiction most frequently mentioned in the interviews is that between the facilitators' own objectives and the interests of the audience. This contradiction can be seen in statements such as the following:

I find it very, very challenging to combine critique with [the involvement of visitors]... because the expectation is: now I'm going to learn how the Chinese live and how the Indians live. What did the Indians do, and now can you explain to me how they live now? Do they still eat out of these clay pots? Those kinds of things. How do I deal with them? So I let that happen, actually... so I let that happen, well I can't really stop it from happening. But how do I get to a point where something »clicks«, and they start to think differently?³⁵

Here the stereotypes and exoticised expectations that visitors bring to ethnographic museums are problematised. It is a question of a contradiction between different perspectives on what education work in a museum entails, a contradiction between the discursive positions identified above: between the position of a visitor and experience-orientated approach on the one hand, and reflexive ethnographic pedagogies and postcolonial education on the other. This contradiction presents itself as a catch-22, as becomes clear in the following interview quote:

Because of Karl May there is an unbelievable affinity with the Indians of North America, with all the clichés that go along with that There is a strong affinity with Africa, with all kinds of exoticism, and accordingly, our Africa exhibits are usually well visited. That always makes me feel a little queasy...³⁶

As a concession to these audience interests, programmes are designed and continue to be offered despite the fact that the facilitators are uncomfortable delivering them:

34 › I05, 14.5.2014.

35 › I05, 14.05.2014.

36 › I12, 5.11.2014.

programmes that romanticise and homogenise indigenous people from North America, and which construct the continent of Africa as a strange and foreign realm. Both examples were named repeatedly in the conversations, and they appear as a persistent

pattern in museum education that continues against the will of those responsible for delivering the programmes.

Museum education departments are under increasing pressure to prove that the exhibitions receive high numbers of visitors. It is difficult to break with established programmes in this situation. As real as these effects are, for example when teachers request »something about Africa«,³⁷ I would like to argue that the opposition »visitors' wishes vs critical education« is nevertheless a specific construction. This construction restricts the development of museum education.

At first, the audience here appears to be homogeneously *white* and uneducated in matters of racism and critiques of representation. When the contradiction between audiences and critical approaches is stated as in the quotations above, there is no regard for the potential visitors who cannot/do not want to use an ethnographic museum precisely because of these programmes, which allegedly serve popular interests. For example, the continued display of objectifying and exoticising images of Africa is violent for visitors of African descent and for others who reject this form of violence. Such exclusion contradicts any arguments made about visitor orientation.

Another aspect that requires closer investigation is the fact that when describing the problem, interviewees attribute exoticising ideas and expectations to the public, positioning the museum clearly as the agent seeking to counteract these ideas. The interview partners depict the visitor as a figure who expects exoticisation. Programmes that respond to this actually end up triggering exactly these expectations, and ultimately fulfilling them. Conceiving of visitors in this way allows the museum and the facilitators to play the role of the forces that oppose this expectation, but are ultimately forced to submit to it. Two things are obscured by this approach: firstly, the exclusions of the aforementioned visitors who do not conform to this figure; and secondly, the history of the ethnographic museum itself, which was historically one of the central actors in the creation of these images of objectified and desired others. If the same paradigms are perpetuated today, the contradiction will become a cycle that ensures that the problematic desires which facilitators distance themselves from will continue into the future.

But even though this discussion has demonstrated that a clear break is needed, the problem is somewhat more complex. For it is not only the romanticising and exoticising educational programmes that can be traced far back into the history of museums, but also their denunciation. As early as 1909, Karl Weule, director of the Leipzig Museum and proponent of the popularisation of ethnographic museums over purely scientific or scholarly collections, saw the public's perception as an essential problem:

For many of our fellow countrymen, by the way, these collected goods still [occupy] the role

37 › These visitor expectations even provided the title for the Weltkulturenmuseum Frankfurt's publication on museum education (Ender, Rothmund 2015b), in which the facilitation team presents its counter-proposals for educational work from a postcolonial perspective and reflects upon the challenges this entailed.

*of curiosities today. ... In the best case they are amazed that those pathetic savages, who despite all education are still more or less considered to be half-animals in our public sentiment, produce utensils at all, let alone in such astonishing diversity and abundance».*³⁸

And this was »despite all education,« according to Weule. The museum thus saw itself as an educational institution counteracting this image of the »savages« and their exotic »curiosities«. Weule is not an isolated case. Georg Thilenius, who was the director of the ethnographic museum in Hamburg at the same time, lamented the fact that visitors only find ethnographic exhibits »curious« and »strange«,³⁹ and tried to avoid any proximity to the »cabinet of curiosities« and other popular spectacles of the foreign in his public collections.⁴⁰ From a scholarly perspective, the public and its exoticising scopophilia were declared a problem as early as 1900, with counteracting this tendency being figured as a part of the museum's bourgeois disciplinary function.⁴¹ In his history of German ethnographic museums, Glenn Penny identifies a dilemma in the ethnology of the time: on the one hand, the scientific project, embodied above all in the figure of Adolf Bastian, who wanted to create a non-hierarchical archive of human cultural expressions; on the other hand, the audience, who requested an exotic spectacle.⁴²

The dilemma formulated by facilitators today seems to be a long-standing one.

But the extent to which there actually is an opposition between »critical scholarship« and the »audience« begins to appear questionable if we take a closer look at the discourses of science, which placed itself on a moral high ground above the prejudiced »public sentiment«. In the same text, Karl Weule calls African, Australian and South American cultures »miserable tumours« in contrast to the »unique summit of the white man's culture«. ⁴³ The distinction between »primitive« and »civilised« people,⁴⁴ which was at that time a formative scientific norm, taught the very hierarchy that Weule rejected in its popular form - symbolised by the word »savage«. A few years later, Thilenius declared »race« to be the determining factor for culture and not only set up a racial exhibition, but also published a brochure for schools so that teachers could carry out »racial biological studies« on their pupils and judge »talent« by »racial characteristics«. ⁴⁵ Certainly by the time the second generation of German ethnologists after Adolf Bastian had arrived, »pure« science was at least as problematic as the visitor expectations it condemned. The ostensible opposition was merely a division in

38 › Weule, Karl, »Die nächsten Aufgaben und Ziele des Leipziger Völkermuseums«, in *Jahrbuch des Städtischen Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 1908/1909, 1909*, pp. 151–174, here p. 155.

39 › Thilenius Georg, *Völkerkunde und Schule: Einführung in die Ausstellung des Museums für Völkerkunde Hamburg 1.-7. Juni 1925*, Munich, 1925, quoted in Penny, 2002, p. 205.

40 › Ibid.: 209f.

41 › Bennett, Tony, [et al.] *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*, London, 2005.

42 › Ibid., 2015.

43 › Weule, op. cit., p. 157.

44 › Translator's note: the German terms *Naturvolk* and *Kulturvolk* differ slightly from the English equivalents of »primitive« and »civilised« peoples, though the parallels are clear.

45 › Thilenius, op. cit. For an analysis of the development from »culture« to »race«, see Laukötter 2007: 292 f.

terms of vocabulary and forms of expression, that is, one informed by class and education. Werner Schwarz has elaborated a similar effect of social distinction in relation to the history of showcasing human beings in »ethnographic expositions«, describing the exhibitions as a venue for making a division between science and popular culture. »The denigration of ›seeing‹ as a cheap, anti-emancipatory amusement was also associated with the devaluation of traditional forms of entertainment as amusement for the uneducated, broader population«. ⁴⁶ The exhibition became »a doubly exotic place, since for an educated audience it also became a place for observing the ›primitive‹ inclinations of the masses«. ⁴⁷ Schwarz reveals how the simultaneous critique of scopophilic curiosity and the employment of scientific methods to research the people in the shows functioned as a Bourdieuan process of distinction.

In the early history of the museum, the way in which non-Europeans were dealt with also contributed to the construction of a compounded scholarly superiority: a superiority not just over the distant others, who were turned into objects of research; but also over the emerging mass culture in their own country, which was characterised by a class distinction. Invoking Stuart Hall's theorisation of repression and fetishisation in ›The Spectacle of the Other‹, we could say that the »scientification« of the gaze functions to sublimate the scholar's own scopophilia, allowing the immoral aspect to be attributed to the masses. ⁴⁸ The moral rejection of popular exoticisms is revealed as a split, as a rejection of the desire, fascination and ›impurity‹ that racism in science produces.

This historical detour shows that there is a tradition in ethnographic museums of blaming the public for problematic and ideological perspectives on the ›foreign‹. The tradition of this separation and its blame-shifting should give pause for thought when today a contrast between postcolonial approaches and visitors' expectations is postulated. The current problematisation of the public's desires also creates ›others‹, namely the unreflective visitors, who are themselves exoticised in their class and education-inflected ideas. The museum can thus be validated as the site of ›correct‹, ›critical‹ knowledge. Is it not precisely the ascription of this power of interpretation to the museum that postcolonial critique should seek to interrogate?

TAKING ACTION: WHAT KIND OF FUN?

How can this contradiction be challenged? The opposition between ›science and scholarship‹ on the one hand and ›amusement‹ and fun on the other is already evident in the historical discourse, and it remains present today. ›Critique‹ and ›postcolonial approaches‹ are opposed to the need for entertainment and fun. But one wonders whether or not the desire for fun always has to be bound up with exoticism and clichés. One might be tempted to ask: what kinds of fun and desire are there that don't come at the expense of others?

For example, in *Alarm, Alarm! Die Welt steht Kopf in ›Zone X‹* (Alarm, Alarm! The World's

46 › Schwarz, Werner Michael, *Anthropologische Spektakel: zur Schaustellung »exotischer« Menschen, Wien 1870 – 1910*, dissertation, Universität Wien, 2000, p. 21.

47 › Ibid.

48 › Hall, Stuart, ›The spectacle of the ›Other‹, in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, London, 1997, pp. 223–279, here p. 268; see also Gilman, Sander, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Ithaca, 1985.

Gone Topsy-Turvy in ›Zone X‹),⁴⁹ children at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin developed and filmed a story based on an end-times scenario which included aliens and zombies as protagonists. Objects in the museum's collection became a part of the story told by the children – not as representatives of »one culture« or of people in a region, but as things with a social function that were transferred to a fantasy world. Science fiction is a possible starting point for a joyful and at the same time deconstructive approach. In an interview, the museum educator David Dibiah emphasised that it was important to him that the works of art could take on a role in a new context. One could extrapolate on this point and ask: is it possible that instead of reproducing fantasies about people from other parts of the world, cultural knowledge can have the function of producing other worlds of fantasy?

CONTRADICTION: CEASING TO »TALK ABOUT OTHERS« – MEDIATING CULTURES

*We talk about people, but we aren't people... At least not the ones we talk about.*⁵⁰

The interviewee corrects herself here, but with her struggle to describe the people »we talk about« and those who speak, she makes a crucial point about the issues of subjects and objects. In doing so, she touches upon the central contradiction that *white* facilitators who are not from minority groups must tackle when they engage with critiques of representation. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbachie summarises the fundamental question of the illegitimacy of museums thus: »Who can assume the right to own and represent the material culture of others?«⁵¹ How can we take this question seriously and stop talking about and for others when this is precisely the job description for educational work in an ethnographic museum? »Speaking about others« is so closely connected with the ethnographic museum that one interviewee objected that anybody who had a problem with it should not work in ethnographic museums at all.⁵² From a postcolonial perspective, this would have to be formulated the other way around: having a problem with »speaking about others« is fundamental for a reflexive form of museum education in this context. Given the colonial configuration of the ethnographic museum, it is not possible to »speak about others innocently«. ⁵³ According to Gayatri Spivak, a postcolonial pedagogical approach is associated with criticising the structures in which one is integrated and on which one's own position depends.⁵⁴ As is evidenced in the interviews, such an approach is manifested when facilitators stum-

49 › Holiday programme by Jugend im Museum e.V. in co-operation with the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, 2014, directed by David Dibiah.

50 › I03, 30.05.2013

51 › Ogbachie, Sylvester Okwunodu, ›Respondenz zu Susanne Leeb: Zeitgenössische Kunst, ethnologische Museen und relationale Politik, in *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 23(91), 2013, pp. 73–81, here p. 79.

52 › I06_1, 17.6.2014.

53 › Endter, Stephanie and Rothmund, Carolin, ›Im Spannungsfeld von Erwartungen, Strukturen und der eigenen Haltung, in (eds.) ›Irgendwas zu Afrika‹: Herausforderungen der Vermittlung im Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt, 2015a, pp. 4–21, here p. 9.

54 › Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, ›The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, and the Future of Culture Studies, in *New Literary History*, vol. 21(4), 1990, pp. 781–798, here p. 795; Castro Varela, María do Mar and Dhawan, Nikita, ›Breaking the Rules: Bildung und Postkolonialismus, in Mörsch, Carmen and the documenta 12 education research team (eds.), *Kunstvermittlung 2: Zwischen kritischer Praxis und Dienstleistung auf der Documenta 12 – Ergebnisse eines Forschungsprojekts*, Berlin/Zurich, 2009, pp. 339–353.

ble over their words, interrupt themselves, search for a way of speaking that critiques its own speech acts. The contradictions that result from having a dominant position as a speaker cannot be resolved, but they can be shifted, challenged, or reconfigured in order to find new possible forms of action. The shift begins by asking:

What can I talk about from my position? What do I want to talk about? And do I have to remain the only speaker?

TAKING ACTION: THE MUSEUM AS A SITE OF UNLEARNING

This shift not only means replacing the phantasm of having to represent an entire culture – a phantasm that is still inscribed in museum education, even though ethnographic research would hardly make this claim any more – with educational content that is more concrete, historically defined and forward-looking, as is already happening in many museums. It means following the request that Gayatri Spivak formulated for a *white* male student from the global North who believed he could no longer speak after engaging in a critical confrontation with postcoloniality: »Why don't you develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?« (Spivak 2008: 597)

The point would be to move beyond self-interruption, to develop a rage against that which makes one's own speaking a dilemma.

A rage against the history that has produced positions from which it is impossible to speak, such as the position of a facilitator amidst cultural assets from former colonies that have been shipped to Europe, who is supposed to make her job fun as well. Museum educators can address the structures that take away their voice, the history that has produced the museum, their own privileges, and the way the contemplation of cultural alterity is interwoven with racialisation and inequality. Thus, the museum can become a site of unlearning not only for the facilitators themselves, but also for the public it attracts. As an institution in which the legacy of colonial history becomes materially and symbolically tangible, the ethnographic museum is perhaps better suited than any other educational institution to take up the task of unlearning this legacy.⁵⁵

55 › For the concept of unlearning in museum education, see also Castro Varela, Dhawan 2009; Sternfeld 2014.

Some museums have already begun discussing these colonial paradigms in their work with visitors.⁵⁶ One example of how complex this endeavour is can be seen in the *Störbilder* (Disruptive Images) programme at the Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt, which invites school classes to engage with the museum's image archive.⁵⁷ What do the classification systems of such an archive reveal? How are different people depicted in the images? A comparison with contemporary images from the media permit discussions about how colonial paradigms are reproduced in today's image production. Such a discussion is not possible without problematising one's own way of seeing: for example, can we look at anthropometric photographs again (and do we want to), and to what extent is violence analysed or perpetuated in doing so? How should we deal with the fact that the historical situation is only accessible to us through the one point of view that we are seeking to question?⁵⁸ In this sense, unlearning cannot be understood as simple subtraction. The conventions of Europe's gaze on its ›others‹ cannot be removed from our reservoir of knowledge, rather they must first be understood. As Grimaldo Rengifo Vázquez, a Peruvian educator from the tradition of liberation pedagogy, writes, unlearning colonial knowledge means ›curiously, learning it anew‹ (Rengifo Vázquez 2003: 29). This means returning to the knowledge one has learned in one's own life - but in a critical fashion. Unlearning is a deconstructive operation.

It also becomes clear that decolonial unlearning is not synonymous with the critique of stereotypes, which plays such a central role in the objectives of reflexive ethnographic education (see above). When clichés and stereotypes are discussed, the opinion persists that the problem is a lack of knowledge. As Danielzik, Kiesel and Bendix point out, ›the suggestion is that things would change if only we all had a better and less simplified picture of each other‹.⁵⁹ Yet it is precisely the accumulation of knowledge about others, in other words the subject-object relationship that this implies, that should be subject to negotiation. In addition, by focusing on clichés and prejudices, the problem is framed as a universal one that all people use to deal with complexity. What does not take place here is an ›interrogation of the asymmetries in power relations created by colonialism, that is, that ›our‹ images of ›others‹ ... have an incomparably greater impact globally than is the case vice versa‹.⁶⁰ Instead of criticising how

56 › In Cologne's Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, an installation forces viewers to reflect on their own perspective when the African continent and racism are addressed (installation *Der verstellte Blick* [Distorted Gaze], <https://www.museenkoeln.de/rautenstrauch-joest-museum/Dauerausstellung-Vorurteile>, [accessed 14.07.2017]). In Hamburg, ›ethnological expositions‹ and their legacy in the museum collection are the subject of a school programme (*Die Darstellung der Anderen* [The Representation of Others], <http://www.voelkerkundemuseum.com/793-0-Die-Darstellung-der-Anderen.html>, [accessed 24.12.2017]). In the same museum, students have addressed its colonial past for visitors in a virtual exhibition project *Colonialism and the Museum*, in a co-operation between the Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg and Prof Dr Jürgen Zimmerer, head of the research centre Hamburgs (post-) koloniales Erbe (Hamburg's (post)colonial heritage) at Universität Hamburg. 2014-2015. <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/koloniale-hintergr%C3%BCnde-the-museum-f%C3%BCr-v%C3%B6lkerkunde-hamburg/3gLSWkBPqslwahl=de>, [accessed 14.08.2017]. In Basel, the effects of a ›colonialism without colonies‹ (Purtschert/Lüthi/Falk 2012) in the museum and in the city was addressed in both city excursions and school programmes (school programme *Koloniales Basel vor der Linse* (Colonial Basel on Camera), <http://www.museenbasel.ch/de/institution/schulangebotdetails.php?id=12702>, [accessed 14.08.2017]).

57 › Designed by Stephanie Endter, Esther Poppe and Berit Mohr. The programme was originally developed as part of the exhibition *Ware und Wissen, or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger* (2015), but is now permanently established in the educational programme.

58 › See also, with reference to the Frankfurter Bildarchiv, the video and text work *Unearthing: In conversation* by Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski (Kazeem-Kamiński 2017).

59 › Danielzik, Chandra-Milena; Kiesel, Timo; and Bendix, Daniel, *Bildung für nachhaltige Ungleichheit*, Berlin, 2013, p. 29, <http://www.glokal.org/?edmc=826>, [accessed 04.08.2016].

60 › Ibid.

people deal with clichés, the central question here must be who produces knowledge about whom, and how the production of knowledge about »the world« is inextricably linked to economic and political factors.

TAKING ACTION: PLURIVOCALITY AND COOPERATION

Focusing attention on the »discontent in the museum«⁶¹ allows for a shift in the speaker position of the facilitator. A second shift is initiated with the question: can and must *white*, European educators really solve the problem on their own? Whose knowledge is needed to interrupt the monologue of European, Western knowledge?

Working toward this shift is first of all a matter of personnel policy. The majority of my interviewees who are responsible for staffing in the museums stated that they would like to see more diversity in the education team – at present, however, the diversity of society is hardly reflected in the staff. Where staff with a migrant background are employed, they often have to struggle with being confined to experience-based knowledge and being assigned to representing a geographical region, for example by being asked to demonstrate traditional techniques. One interviewee, for example, explained that he had learned drumming in Germany in order to work in a museum. In addition, there are often other barriers standing in the way of the desire for diversity. For example, in some cases very specific qualifications are required, ignoring other relevant knowledge, or institutions will only admit people who have already overcome barriers in other institutions – for example, when a degree in ethnology and a completed museum traineeship are prerequisites for employment. Internationally, the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg led the way during its founding phase under the direction of Jette Sandahl. It conceived its education programme as a series of »exercises in democracy«⁶² and discussed exhibition themes with »as many different voices as possible«, as Pernilla Lutropp, the head of the education department at the time, explained.⁶³ This meant building a heterogeneous team in terms of their origin, their experiences of being confronted with racism or not, as well as their age, gender and forms of expertise, including personal experience with the theme of an exhibition. Developing anti-discriminatory hiring practices is not a question of geographical representation in which »talking about others« is replaced by »authenticity« and cultural self-representation.

Instead, museum educators should be able to speak from different positions on racism and have different geopolitical reference points – and this goes for speaking about all content in the museum.

61 > Kazeem, Belinda; Martinz-Turek, Charlotte; and Sternfeld, Nora (eds.), *Das Unbehagen im Museum: postkoloniale Museologien*, Vienna, 2009.

62 > Sandahl, Jette, »Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Participation«. keynote paper to the debate *Negotiating differences - a responsibility of artists and cultural institutions*, Brussels, 2008.

63 > Pernilla Lutropp, Interview, 16.5.2014.

As Sandrine Micossé-Aikins formulated in her ›how-to guide‹ for less racism in the cultural sector:

*If you are a cultural producer with a staff and some influence, try to put together a crew that contains all kinds of people. That also means different kinds of black people/POC, for being black/POC is usually not the only quality/identity aspect a person has, so one cannot be enough to truly open up new vistas/perspectives for your entire team/project.*⁶⁴

Critical diversity development is not limited to the selection of personnel but also includes the creation of a reflexive working environment – here, it is not just the education departments of museums which have a part to play.

In addition to personnel development, cooperation and networking are crucial. Collaborative museology – which initially emerged from indigenous communities demanding self-determination and access to their cultural heritage in museums in their own countries, predominantly in Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia – is currently taking hold in Europe as well, albeit with delays. While Boast⁶⁵ writes that in the English-speaking context there is hardly a museum with ethnographic, anthropological or archaeological collections that processes and exhibits these collections without some form of consultation with representatives from the original contexts, in German-speaking countries, collaborative projects are still more the exception than the rule. Work within the collaborative paradigm⁶⁶ also offers the possibility for museum education to directly include international co-operation partners in educational activities, or to indirectly build upon their knowledge. In her widely acclaimed text on collaborative museology, Ruth Phillips sees collaboration as an essentially pedagogical activity, a mutual learning process.⁶⁷ However as the interviews with museum educators show, the opportunities for such learning processes in co-operation with international stakeholders have not yet been sufficiently taken up. Instances of facilitators participating in international projects and allowing this to inform their programmes with visitors are an exception. Several interviewees reported that they were not included in international research collaborations and that they were not even informed when international delegations visited the museum to discuss their cultural heritage. The museums' efforts to co-operate with source communities brings with it the possibility of genuinely replacing the institutional monologue with a diversity of voices in their interaction with visitors – these possibilities should be used in a much more concerted fashion.

In contrast to international co-operation, participative or collaborative projects in museums with *local* diaspora communities and migrant groups are often firmly located in the field of education and outreach. Cultural self-representation (festivals, cultural

64 › Micossé-Aikins, Sandrine, ›7 Things You Can Do To Make Your Art Less Racist – A comprehensive How-To-Guide‹, in Heinrich Böll Stiftung (eds.), *Heimatkunde: Migrationspolitisches Portal – Dossier The Living Archive – Kulturelle Produktionen und Räume*, 2013 <https://heimatkunde.boell.de/2012/12/18/7-things-you-can-do-make-your-art-less-racist-comprehensive-how-guide>, [accessed 05.05.2018].

65 › Boast, Robin, ›Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited‹, in *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 34(1), 2011, pp. 56–70 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01107.x/full>, [accessed 21.04.2015].

66 › Phillips, Ruth B, ›Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Toward a dialogic paradigm, Introduction‹, in Peers, Laura and Brown, Alison K (eds.), *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge reader*, London, 2003, pp. 155–170.

67 › Ibid.

techniques) and the integration of different lifeworlds and experiences are often the focus (see above on migration as a core topic of museum education). However, among the diverse landscape of networks and collaborations, it is rare to find co-operations with people who through their experiences of migration or perspectives as people of colour have acquired knowledge from outside the museum on the core themes of representation, postcolonialism and critiques of racism. Christian Kravagna has formulated a pointed critique on the matter: the efforts to integrate »other voices« in the museum remain problematic as long as *other* »other voices« - the critical ones - are ignored.⁶⁸ Not only in the direct confrontation with ethnographic collections, but also in working through the legacies of colonialism and in anti-racist educational work and organisational development, museum education departments should be working with independent initiatives and associations that have developed methodologies and produced knowledge from minority positions.⁶⁹ In this area, there would be many potential partners for co-operation in the development of educational activities in museums. Such collaborations are not easy. They can only succeed if decisions about design and content are actually made collectively. For collaborative work, this also means »planning resources for reflecting upon and addressing power relations and conflicts of interest when cultural institutions cooperate with groups that are endowed with less capital, be it economic or symbolic«.⁷⁰

If these shifts – towards unlearning, towards cooperation and a diversity of voices - succeed, museum education will genuinely become a space for interrogating difference and knowledge in a global context. Reflecting upon contradictions is part of this – what we need to do now is progress from reflexivity to action. As bell hooks writes: »Acknowledgment of racism is significant when it leads to transformation«.⁷¹ Reflection on museum education and its postcolonial dilemmas is significant when it leads to changed practices.

68 › Kravagna, Christian, ›Konserven des Kolonialismus: Die Welt im Museum«, in Kazeem, Belinda; Martinz-Turek, Charlotte; and Sternfeld, Nora (eds.) *Das Unbehagen im Museum: Postkoloniale Museologien*, Vienna, 2009, pp. 131-142, here p. 99.

69 › To name just a few examples with a decidedly pedagogical component: Postcolonial educational approaches were developed in Germany in exhibitions outside of ethnographic museums, for example in the project *Freedom Roads*, which is about colonial street names (<http://www.freedom-roads.de/>, 17.11.2017). Other current examples include projects such as *Here and Now: Kolonialismus und Kolonialrassismus im Schulunterricht* (ARiC Berlin - Antirassistisch-Interkulturelles Informationszentrum Berlin e. V. and IDB | Institut für diskriminierungsfreie Bildung, http://www.aric.de/projekte/hier_und_jetzt/, [accessed 17.11.2017]) or *Connecting the dots*, a project by *glokal.eV* in which an e-learning tool on development, colonialism and resistance was developed (http://www.glokal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WSTS_Methode_2017_12_15-1.pdf, [accessed 19.11.2017]). Education and exhibition projects from the Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland (Initiative of Black People in Germany) (<http://isdonline.de/homestory-deutschland/>, [accessed 17.11.2017]) are just as important to mention in this context as the projects on colonial history in educational institutions outside of museums such as »Ein vergessenes Erbe? German Colonial History« at the Anne Frank educational institution in Frankfurt (http://www.bs-anne-frank.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Slider/Publikationen/Deutscher_Kolonialismus.pdf, 17.11.2017).

70 › Institute for Art Education, ›Zeit für Vermittlung: Eine online Publikation zur Kulturvermittlung«, Zurich, 2013.

71 › hooks, bell, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, Boston, 1984, p. 54.

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