Transforming the Post/Colonial Museum

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Much has been said in recent years about the colonial origin and enduring legacy of former ›anthropological‹ or imperial museums. Programmatic attempts to decolonize them by opening up (Snoep 2020, 2021), worlding (Modest et al. 2019; de Cesari et al. 2020), mobilizing (Oforiatta-Ayim 2015ff.), unlearning (Azoulay 2019), repairing (Attia 2014), and restituting (Sarr/Savoy 2018) have multiplied in the museum sector. At the same time, new centers of museum work have emerged, especially on the African continent; be it in Dakar, Accra, Cape Town, or Nairobi, artists and curators have been working successfully to redefine the museum and to establish new hotspots of an increasingly globalized art scene. This issue of the *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* invited museum practitioners and curator-activists from the African continent who have been working together with these influential and highly visible initiatives. Situated in the archives, depots, and museums of formerly colonial institutions, Nelson Abiti, Mary Mbewe, Paul Tichmann, and Lynn Abrahams take the challenge to rethink ›ethnographic collections‹ and undo the problematic category of the ›ethnographic object‹ in their day-to-day work. Their contributions are supplemented by papers by Richard Fossi and Bernard Müller that deal with the historical conditions and surviving memories of colonial collectivism and violence. These conditions and memories continue to shape the work in and on colonial collections and bring about this sense of urgency that characterizes the ongoing museum debate. A third focus is on the historical trajectories, contemporary challenges, and utopian designs of museum work on the continent. To this end, Sabrina Moura looks at the long history of the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar. Conversations with the former Director of the Musée des Civilisations, Abidjan, and currently Directrice Générale de la Culture de Côte d'Ivoire Sylvie Memel-Kassi and the director of the art space Bandjoun Station, Barthélémy Toguo, then explore transformative in(ter)ventions on the continent, and the contours of a future museum take shape. The thematic section ends with a close reading of the exhibition *Beyond Compare. Art from Africa in the Bode Museum in Berlin* by Helen Verran, who reflects on the challenges of a decolonizing curatorial practice. Last but not least, the *Adapter* was designed by the activist-artist Catarina Simão and contains a meticulous reflection about her long-term project on the German-Portuguese researchers Margot and Jorge Dias. Her compilation of text and images explores the production of

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anthropological knowledge and the afterlife of images across space and time, unraveling violent encounters and forms of resistance in the ethnographic archive that question concepts such as ›authenticity‹ and ›coloniality‹. Distancing herself from the intended use of Margot and Jorge Dias' photographs of Makonde culture as an object of scientific studies, she excavates invisible micro-histories on the reverse side of the official narrative.

All of the contributions engage with objects and object practices in order to reach out to people. They can be read as part of the struggle to find new ways of »federat[ing] around a conversation« that researchers and artists such as Kader Attia and Felwine Sarr have identified at the actual core of the restitution debate (Attia/Möntmann 2021). We are therefore grateful that the authors of this issue help us widen the focus of the heated debate in Europe and thus remind us to not turn it into another form of navel-gazing. Instead of adding to the debate on the (im-)possibilities of addressing the colonial specters within collections in Europe, their contributions zoom in on this other phantom of the colonial past, the anthropological museum as it was implemented on the African continent as part of colonial governance and control. Nelson Abiti in Kampala (Uganda), Mary Mbewe in Mbala (Zambia), and Paul Tichmann and Lynn Abrahams in Cape Town (South Africa) have not only dug deep into colonial archives and unraveled the history of the collections for which they have taken responsibility, they have also engaged with different stakeholders and communities that relate to the objects (Karp/Kratz 2014), or rather, as Erika Lehrer and Michael Rothberg would have it, that find themselves related »by implication« (Lehrer 2018; Rothberg 2009). To be sure, as Tichmann/Abrahams (in this volume) acknowledge, as insiders to the very institution they want to transform, they cannot avoid some sort of complicity and continuously risk reproducing some of the institutional knowns ingrained in the institutions' postcolonial histories. But their work testifies that and how anthropological museums can turn into what Helen Verran (in this volume) describes as sites of »multiversal relationality« – by creating spaces for »epistemic incommensurability« and »ontological happenings« – in terms of what objects »are«, how they are categorized or »known«, and what they allow for, once they cease to be merely modern »lumps of matter with particular attributes and qualities« (Verran in this volume, p. 149), that illustrate and characterize ›ethnographic cases‹ (cf. Ingold 2017).

The Post/Colonial Museum

We decided to call this issue *The Post/Colonial Museum* to emphasize the difficulties and obstacles that come with the museums' colonial legacy and that remain part and parcel of a transforming museum. The violence and racism, the history of dislocation and loss that underlie their collections continue to spawn conflicts and to create phantom pains up to the very present, as Bernard Müller describes in recounting oral histories of severed thumbs from Togo and as Silvie Kassi and her project *La Collection Fantôme* in the Ivory Coast remind us (Müller; Kassi/Snoep/Zillinger, in this volume). The injustice and trauma that is imbricated in these collections cannot be easily addressed, let alone undone in the different postcolonial contexts at stake. With Helen Verran, we contend that, to envision a postcolonial museum, it is necessary to describe its colonial modalities and search for a postcolonial impulse that consists of and enables »different epistemics

and their practicalities [to] come together to abut and abrade, to interrupt or to offer affordances« in past and present (Verran 2019: n.p.). Such impulses create a museum that is not only transforming, but that may also incite transformation well beyond its walls, as Abiti, Mbewe and Tichmann/Abrahams (all in this volume) demonstrate by engaging communities and their object practices in their museum work. We speak of a *Post/Colonial* museum to mark these and other attempts and ongoing struggles to deal with and ultimately oppose the colonial make-up of former anthropological museums and to interrupt the musealized epistemic, ontological, and social orders they embody.

›White Spaces‹: Museums as Citadels of Colonialism

While the papers collected for this issue deal with museums on the continent, it would be misleading to speak of an ›African museum‹. The historical, political, and economic contexts of the various museums, collections, and curatorial practices vary, as do the ways they remain entangled in the bequeathed transnational history of dominance and control, but also of cooperation (cf. Laely/Meyer/Schwere 2018). All of them, however, struggle with colonial legacies and the continuous purification work of modernity that has separated ›art‹ from ›ethnographic artifact‹, ›culture‹ from ›nature‹, ›subject‹ from ›object‹, and ›matter‹ from ›spirit‹ (see also Moura and her discussion of the Museum of Black Civilizations, Dakar, in this volume). Built and run by white colonialists, anthropological museums on the continent served to define the ›Other‹ within and, for a long time, have presented the deprived communities and their material culture in an everlasting ethnographic present (Fabian 1983), classified, ordered, and controlled by the invention of categories such as ethnicity, tribe, and tradition (Abiti; Tichmann/Abrahams, both in this volume). By transplanting the modern museum into colonized regions, the administrators and missionaries translated European imperial discourse on the ›Other‹ into the societies they had to control. As we learned from Tony Bennett in Europe, the public museum served to provide »objects lessons in power« to allow people »to know rather than be known« (Bennett 1988: 76), and to thus interiorize the regulating regime of modernity and modern statehood. While object lessons in power were pursued by museum practitioners-cum-colonialists on the continent, too (cf. Abiti; Mbewe, both in this volume), in many ways, the museums they founded remained until very recently spaces of being known and were, for good reasons, perceived as the »museums of the whites« (Kassi/Snoep/Zillinger, in this volume). The local communities were well aware that the objects were taken from them with the intention to store them out of reach and out of sight for most of them. Other collectors, such as the French-Canadian priest Jean Jacques Corbeil among Bemba communities, envisioned the museum as a place of knowledge transaction among and towards the communities they worked in and integrated the »salvaging« and displaying of artifacts in their proselytizing activities (Mbewe, in this volume). Both forms of museum work were part of technologies to turn people into colonial subjects that needed to be »civilized« (Simão, in this volume) and adapted to the needs and constraints of extractivist colonial regimes.

Europeans implementing the extractivist policies were often aware of the destruction they caused, but saw this as inevitable accompaniments of their civilizing mission.

As Richard Tsogang Fossi elaborates in detail in his analysis of diary entries of the German ›explorer‹ Zintgraff in Cameroon (in this volume), the colonial matrix did not include African communities' rights to their own material culture. Artifacts were either gathered by the colonizers to become objects of culture, and thus precious for anthropology and the colonial administrators, or they were not only not worth being preserved, but often, in a gesture of brutal demonstration of power, demolished and smashed.

With independence, the museums of the colonizers passed into the hands of the postcolonial states. The racist and modernist regimes that structured the archives, the collections, the display, and the architecture of these citadels of colonialism have endured into the present and have long continued to prevent the appropriation of the holdings by the very people whose former »subject-objects« (Sarr 2019) they hold and whose histories and futures they claim to administer. The *Post/Colonial Museum* is therefore marked by a painful and paradoxical relation to the social place it inhabits. For the visitors, who often encounter objects from and histories of a past they have been deprived of, the museum experience oscillates between total alienation and intense affinity.

Resisting the Alienating Museum

The colonial archive and the enduring categorizations of objects and people twists and erases memory and leads to forms of »unremembering« (Tichmann/Abrahams, in this volume) that are difficult to undo. Modernity's epistemic framework reached out far beyond the museum walls and distorted African knowledge practices and cosmologies, erasing, for example, histories of women, arts, and technologies from the public record until today (see Phiri Chitungu 2021). With the founding of museums, scientists and administrators implemented infrastructures that produced what they sought to describe: an Africa in the image of the »colonial library« (Mudimbe 1991) through which colonial officials, anthropologists, and missionaries, but in extension also art historians, geographers, political and social scientists, and economists have invented, essentialized, and continuously reproduced African identities that fitted seamlessly into the differentiation narratives of modernity. The political, religious, and scientific performance of dominance and control has pervaded museums on the continent and continues to draw its authority from the intellectual fields and colonial imaginaries that shaped their foundations, as Mudimbe lucidly noted (ibid.: 8). As Felwine Sarr (2019: 18) reminded us recently, the »hideous face of the Other« (Césaire 2001) has thus not only become constitutive of its epistemic orders and curatorial displays, it also evokes a form of Du Boisian double consciousness (cf. Du Bois 1903), through which societies on the continent perceive themselves in a distorting mirror. Museums have been instrumental in alienating communities from their past and material culture and were part and parcel of the overall imperial project to disseminate the idea of white supremacy.

This have never gone unchallenged, however. Orders of knowledge and the making of colonial truth have met with resistance, as we know through the work of anti-racist and anti-colonial thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon. Apart from the work of these and other anti-colonial authors, resistance came to the fore in manifold ways – through non-hegemonic epistemic, social, and artistic practices engaging with the

violent present and memories of colonialism (see Bernard Müller and Catarina Simão, in this volume). With her multi-layered juxtaposition of photos, documents, and films, the artist Catarina Simão unearths histories excluded from the colonial narrative. She explores the work of the German-Portuguese anthropologists Dias, who headed an ethnographic mission to the Macondes. While their work is deeply enmeshed in the colonial matrix of applied anthropology of the time, Simão regards the collection generated by their mission as an »original creative act«. Although the photographic inventory fostered concepts such as »authenticity« (sought by the anthropologists) and accounted for »coloniality« (enacted through their work), she uncovers seeds of resistance in the documents of their cooperation with research assistants and translators, and particularly in art practices they encountered. Collected as »Makonde sculpture«, these artworks from colonial contact zones turn our gaze back to the colonizers. They oscillate between sarcasm and resisting humor – or so it seems as suggested by the varying emotional reactions that range from loud laughter (in today's Mozambique) to embarrassed silence (in today's Portugal). Simão's experiments with different audience reactions to the sculptures of white Portuguese colonizers demonstrate that, today, the »ethnographic object« cannot be perceived in any way near to the way its originators or its collectors saw it. The responses to the art works are situated in space and time, they differ from setting to setting and are part and parcel of the different ways a historical »truth« is remembered.

Bernard Müller leaves the colonial archives and engages with memories of colonialism that are pursued, lived, and handed down outside of it, if that is possible at all. He visited regions in Togo that were renowned for their fierce resistance to German and French armies and traced the widespread rumors of severed thumbs that, according to oral history, were taken by colonizing militias to disable young men from operating the bow and joining the armed resistance. On their journey through the former colony »Togoland«, Müller and the Togolese writer Kangni Alem traced and documented an oral history that is told and retold against the grain of the official records. What has been called local knowledge reverses the clear-cut redistribution of agency and passivity in the bequeathed history of dominance and control and can complicate narratives of victimization. Müller and Alem met schoolchildren strolling around neglected graveyards of colonial soldiers, who turned memories of resistance and defeat into compassion with the fallen colonial soldiers – and with their families, who, as their young interlocutors see it, have failed to connect with their past and take care of their dead children. Forgetting and remembering, Müller states with Jorge Luis Borges, are equally inventive and carry the seed of resistance.

Resistance can also take the form of disinterest, when local communities ignore the museum as an inaccessible elitist place or a space that may be good enough to entertain tourists (cf. Kassi/Snoep/Zillinger, in this volume). Indeed, the effects of the physical (cf. in particular Fossi; Müller, both in this volume) and epistemic violence (cf. Abiti; Mbewe; Tichmann/Abrahams, all in this volume) of the colonial endeavor are mirrored in uncanny ways in local perceptions of museums as zones of danger, as »burial grounds« for »objects« – at times discarded in the religious register as cemeteries of fetishes (Silvie Kassi, personal communication, cf. Kassi 2020) or as places of black magic, as reported by Barthélémy Toguo (in this volume; for a discussion of the emergence of iconoclastic movements on the continent, see Brus/Knecht/Zillinger 2020). These perceptions and

forms of resistance relate to a white historiography and its underlying evolutionism that manifests in alienating museum spaces. The damage these narratives and institutionalized orders have caused and the recklessness with which they were enforced finds its perhaps cruelest manifestations in human remains, thousands of which have been shipped as trophies and scientific material to museums and repositories in Europe, but were also stored across the continent (cf. Legassick/Rassool 2000; Förster/Stoecker 2016; cf. Sattler 2018). The »unfinished business of the dead« (Rassool 2015) continues to pervade the international networks of anthropological museums, natural history museums, and so-called scientific collections alike, testifying to the dehumanizing history of colonial collections that more often than not combined artifacts, specimen of nature, and the bodies or body parts of dead persons. As Paul Tichmann and Lynn Abrahams describe in their contribution to this issue, post-Apartheid museums such as the Iziko Museum in Cape Town have inherited these human remains and struggle to find a way »to restore dignity and humanity to these remains as well as to the descendants« (in this volume, p. 49), inciting a new dialogue between institutions, communities, and families, who try to regain the dead bodies of their lost loved ones.

The Transforming Museum

Museums are also perceived as spaces of death for the objects they draw together and for the social functions and practices these objects symbolize and contain. The dynamics of ritual practice and the delegation of authority, the memorizing of events, genealogies, and tradition, and the transmission and reinvention of knowledge constitute material objects as relational objects (cf. Küchler/Carroll 2021) and stand in stark contrast to the frozen and static storage of museum depots and the ethics of preservation that characterize the material culture in Europe's imperial museums. Much of the current debate on decolonizing the museum centers on how the immobilized and devitalized objects confined within museum walls (see for example the renewed interest in the film »Les statues meurent aussi« by Marker/Resnais/Cloquet, 1953) can regain an agentive quality and help rebuild the social fabric that has been distorted and disfigured by colonial and postcolonial violence.

In their contributions, Abiti, Mbewe, and Tichmann/Abrahams describe how objects in museums can be known, be enacted, and come to the fore differently from the way they were »known«, preserved, and practiced in the long history of their colonialized, institutionalized, and museumized existence.

Nelson Abiti describes how, after the civil war that ravaged Northern Uganda ended in 2006, the team of the National Museum of Uganda reached out to communities that had suffered from experiences of extreme violence. By bringing a double-headed, royal spear to the communities that no longer have these regalia in their possession, they enabled mediation and reconciliatory rituals during ceremonies of reburial for those who died far away from their ancestral lands. During the rituals, Abiti notes, these spears »are transformed from an artefact into a spirit« and become the medium of ancestral authority (in this volume, p. 41). In a situation in which communities have time and again been disconnected from their past through colonialism and civil war, that mourn the disap-

pearance of their members and struggle to locate the remains of their beloved, but that also have to face profound social frictions that extend into each family, artifacts from the museum depots helped to reach out to chiefs, elders, and religious leaders. With the help of these objects, community memorials can be organized. Used in rituals to overcome the deficiencies, violence, and cleavages of the postwar and postcolonial social fabric, the artifacts gain a new power, a new form of agency, and the ability to enable cooperation. Reintegrating perpetrators of violence and enabling grief as much as forgiveness, this ritual cooperation ultimately becomes a cooperation for ›life‹, as Arthur M. Hocart (1970) put it once, by establishing mechanisms of justice and reconciliation. As Abiti emphasizes, the life of the artifacts brought to the villages was renewed in this process, as it renewed the life of the village. What was known as an artifact of warfare and stood in for a history of tribal wars in the colonial narrative became an object of memorialization, a medium for delegating ancestral authority, and a subject that performed »repair« (Attia 2014) and »healing« (Abiti, in this volume).

Mary Mbewe explores a collection that was used by the missionary Jean Jacques Corbeil in his proselytizing activities to gain knowledge of secret initiation rites for girls. As she emphasizes, these rites prepared girls for womanhood and were »at the heart of ensuring the health and progress of society« (in this volume, p. 62). By putting pressure on a woman of standing, Corbeil gained access to information that he was not entitled to as a foreigner, as a representative of the colonizing West as much as of the Catholic Church, and as a man. Mbewe situates Corbeil's activities within a wider field of ethnographic work produced by missionaries such as the White Fathers, to whom the priest belonged. Ethnographizing in this context, guised as a way to protect and preserve indigenous practice, she argues, also meant classifying, fixating, and controlling dynamic, centuries-old practices and devaluing them in order to spread the Gospel and prove the superiority of Christianity. Moreover, the collection of sacred objects, the recording and archiving of sacred songs, and the incremental pervasion of the traditional transmission of knowledge through which women defined and maintained their authority in society over time, are all examples of the epistemic violence enacted through ethnography that helped not only the colonial, but also the postcolonial governments to exercise control over women's bodies and sexuality (in this volume, p. 68). Corbeil used his ethnographic collection and the Moto Moto Museum he established to create knowledge about women's rituals and their place in society, but he also tried to train the people of his parish to become »modern knowers« by developing an ethnographic gaze onto their own culture, as the (self-)documentary on Corbeil and the Moto Moto museum clearly demonstrates (Owens/Corbeil n.d., see minute 27:50ff.). Until today, the Moto Moto Museum is an educational institution, and Mary Mbewe lucidly describes how its colonial legacy finds repercussions in the modernizing agendas of transnational actors and funding agencies forging new forms of cooperation between the museum, educational experts, and development workers with the so-called traditional authorities and the local population. While the devaluation of local knowledge and practice continues under various guises, these new forms of cooperation also provoke new conversations that escape the modernizing narratives of health education and development work and that can reinvest the *chisungu* collection with new meaning. The museum collection is thus folded into various attempts to change and improve the

situation of women in terms of HIV/AIDS, gender relations, and reproductive health. Once knowledge transaction multiplies around collections, the question whether epistemic incommensurability and a multiversal relationality can emerge may be less a question of educational programs and, ultimately, control (e.g. through funding institutions) than of practices and conversations that unfold – and, therefore, of perspective.

Paul Tichmann and Lynn Abrahams turn to another form of community engagement in the museum. The colonial South African Museum had collected objects, photographs, and human remains since the 1820s, and the collection represents a colonial epistemology that was thrust on groups like the Khoi/San and/or ›Bushmen‹ – designations that are themselves a controversial part of this history. The Khoi-Boesman-Nguni Coalition successfully campaigned to close the ethnographic gallery that had remained part of what are today the Iziko Museums in Cape Town. One of the problems the gallery had perpetuated since colonial times was the representation of Khoi/San history as natural history, placing the communities outside of culture. As Tichmann and Abrahams describe, the controversy that unfolded around this campaign involved actors with very different backgrounds, opinions, and interests and accounted for what Erika Lehrer called »communities of implication« as »those mutually constitutive entanglements […] with ›significant Others‹ whose own experiences of and reaction to us make up the other half of the dialogue that always co-constitute our identities« (Lehrer 2020: 307). In discussing access to and the significance of the objects in the collection, representatives of the Khomani and San communities, the Khoi-Boesmann-Nguni Coalition, and the museum created a space to address the colonial violence the communities had to endure and the misrepresentation they have had to face in the encounter with white settler societies. At the same time, the complex relations between historical impositions of and contemporary claims to ethnic identity, land issues, and language policies came to the fore. During this process, the interests, perspectives, and concerns did not necessarily coincide. The museum representatives, for example, saw the conversation as part of a broader endeavor to rethink the colonial epistemic order and to reframe the collection from Khoi/San communities within the wider museum setting. The Khomani representatives, on the other hand, evaluated the objects as part of their ongoing struggle for political recognition and the rebuilding of their communities. The diverging viewpoints remained to a certain extent incommensurable and created uncomfortable insights into the inevitable epistemic violence enacted through any form of categorization and the »orders of justification« (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006) they invoke. The »awkward objects« (Lehrer 2020: 307) from the collection, with their painful histories and controversial present, draw together actors who and groups that are affected in different ways by their sheer presence in the museums, the histories they embody, and the controversies that unfold around them. They not only bring about »communities of implication« (Lehrer 2018; 2020) and »spark publics into being« (cf. Marres 2005); perhaps even more importantly, the objects foster forms of care from museum professionals and the Khomani communities for the deceased depicted on colonial photographs and their memory, but also for the specific knowledge that was articulated and the cultural practices that were reconstructed in the encounters and conversations.

A decolonized and decolonizing museum takes shape, then, when objects are allowed to »happen« (Verran, in this volume) in new ways. All three contributions explore

pathways of a transforming museum that moves out of the depot, forges new forms of cooperation, and creates new forms and formats of knowledge. A transforming museum as described by Abiti and Tichmann/Abrahams allows emotions and memories to set in where colonial knowledge is deconstructed and enables forms of care and healing where epistemic and spatial control is relinquished. As Mbewe demonstrates, working towards a transforming museum demands foregrounding practice and resituating knowledge outside the classificatory regimes of colonial, national, or transnational institutions that perpetuate modernity's predicaments of extractivism, development, and control. This ›outside‹ ceases to be the ›other‹ of a universalizing Western episteme. It enables to confront the »colonial difference« (Mignolo 2002) and forms a space from which to undermine the systematic subalternation of epistemic, material and social practices by repositioning the very practices itself and their colonized histories in a pluralizing present (cf. Hammoudi 2021: 289). As Mbewe makes poignantly clear, this is an arduous task, full of pitfalls and drawbacks, since it upends the world of acting subjects, on the one hand, and objects that are acted upon, on the other (cf. Mbembe 2021: 371).

Decolonizing Knowledge and the Post/Colonial Museum

Salvage anthropology and the museumification of culture have put the »colonial library« into practice and helped establish access to people and artifacts, rendering them controllable in the post/colonial order of things. For people, signs, and things to become agentive in new, unprecedented ways and a source of resistance, epistemic practices need to run at cross purposes to the institutionalized routines and normative classifications that have tamed and controlled them. This is why Helen Verran rightly insists (in this volume) on the necessity to create moments of epistemic incommensurability in order to decolonize the museum and, by extension, our post/colonial world.

Anthropological museums – and by extension anthropology as a discipline – have produced knowledge that continues to be in dire need of decolonization, as critical social and anthropological work has emphasized for decades (see, among many others, Assad 1973; Restrepo/Escobar 2005; Fabian 1983; Ganslmayr/Paczensky 1984; Harms 1984; Leclerc 1972; Owusu 1979; Rabinow 1977). But it is perhaps not by chance that museums are currently both: hot spots of political and social controversies over colonialism and its afterlife, and spaces where initiatives are drawn together that work towards decolonizing knowledge. These spaces can perhaps emerge whenever anthropology is pursued in a mode of mutual learning that aims at generating »knowledge with«, instead of generating »knowledge of« (Ingold 2017), at establishing »partial connections« (Strathern 2004) rather than universalizing classifications, and at decentering established orders of knowledge rather than legitimizing them (cf. Schüttpelz 2005; see also Kramer 2018, 2019; Schüttpelz 2017a and 2017b). Foucault famously saw anthropology as forming this »perceptual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation« (Foucault 2002: 407). Do not be mistaken, neither is this principle often realized in anthropological museums, nor does it come straightforwardly with the more far reaching plea for epistemic incommensurability. What we can see is that, today, not least due to the digitalization and the increasingly »unbounded historical resources, [which]

swirl in abundance around the global public domain« (Edwards 2016: 53), expertise and epistemic practices are diversified, and awareness of the multiplying, problematic legacies of colonialism is growing.

The contributions to this issue make it clear that the challenge of decentering cannot be confined to colonial knowledge orders of the West. Already in the early days of post-colonial theory, criticism of its own blinders and white spots emerged from within the postcolonial movement itself. Recently, Abdellah Hammoudi noted that the postcolonial critique of anthropology as it developed in the Global North after Said's *Orientalism* (1978) left him »rather little in the manner of how postcolonial societies may generate knowledge about themselves« (Hammoudi 2021: 288) when he was working in and on Morocco. Evoking and rethinking the notion of »double critique« from the work of Abdelkebir Khatibi and Abdallah Laroui from the 1970s, who stressed the colonial legacies for both, colonizers and the formerly colonized, he makes a plea for generating knowledge from outside the European canon »besides«, but also »in critical exchange« with the Western episteme. Going beyond the deconstruction of colonial histories, as they appear from the perspective of European metropoles, this critical exchange re-appropriates the »massive colonial knowledge« (ibid.) and its ambiguous engagement of local life-worlds. As Kader Attia (2014) has reminded us, this re-appropriation can turn into an act of resistance, which creates a critical distance not only from the colonial past, but also from the postcolonial present.[1]

Restitution is crucial in this regard, precisely because it enables control to be relinquished and permits »ontological happenings« to change the way objects, persons, and epistemic things are »known«. But since this comes with a profound delegitimization of the expert culture of the museum, and may even call for an ethics of de-collecting, as Simão remarks, restitution does not come easy. Museum representatives, academics and politicians have fielded many arguments why restitution demands cannot or should not be met. What the contributions by Abiti, Mbewe, and Tichmann/Abrahams unanimously show is that the importance of restitution is neither established nor negotiated solely in the conference halls of academics, politicians, and curators. It is vital to all those groups, small communities, and often marginalized actors that struggle to revisit the past in order to build a future. As we infer from Hammoudi's recent intervention, the recirculation and re-appropriation of colonial collections can help to create this productive »outside«, that allows social, material and discursive practices to ›happen‹ differently and thus to work for multidirectional forms of decolonization. The production of knowledge »besides« the European episteme is crucial for decolonization, but no less crucial is the engagement with

1 Writing in Germany, we stress this point, since the at times fierce public debates in Europe too easily project the history of colonialism and its ongoing violent effects onto ethnology in disciplinary terms, onto former anthropological museums in institutional terms, and onto the past in temporal terms, as Elizabeth Edwards lucidly noted (2016). The current upswing of postcolonial activism and public scrutiny of enduring forms of racism has disturbed this comforting creation of an »elsewhere« that, as Edwards rightly observed, has denied the relevance of colonial legacies for knowledge formations other than in anthropology, and relegated it to past academic and social realities in Europe. The distance and distancing Hammoudi proposes is a productive one, that does not prevent, but helps to perform critique.

forms of knowledge generated in the colonial archive, and in the long and bequeathed history of transcultural encounter. Hammoudi situates the »outside« that is needed to decenter dominant knowledge orders in the very confrontation between non-Western knowledge traditions and local epistemes, on the one hand and Western knowledge, on the other. Decolonization, then, is not a break with colonialism, »when a particular ›us‹, who are not ›them‹, suddenly coalesces as opposition to colonizers« as Helen Verran noted some 20 years ago (2001: 38), reflecting on the possibility of critique in postcolonial times and places. It can be performed only in and through »the ambiguous struggling through and with colonial pasts in making different futures« (ibid.). Decolonizing knowledge emerges, then, in the reflection of the epistemological and methodological conditions of knowledge production in contact zones of the post/colonial encounter. These encounters take place in the former colonies as much as in the former centers of colonial empires – and the »disconcertment« (Verran this volume) that currently (or shall we say: finally) seizes curators, administrators and visitors in exhibitions and depots of anthropological museums in Europe as well as in Africa may indeed nurture »other« knowledge and epistemic practices than those that have been remade and institutionalized in museum spaces for decades.

Restitution and the Future Museum

Claims for restitution have been made throughout the colonial and postcolonial history in order to regain and re-appreciate what was not only robbed and bartered, gifted and exchanged within the colonial matrix, but also devalued and alienated. The current demands for restitution are far from novel and have been preceded by recurring efforts to bring lost regalia and important ceremonial objects back to the continent. One of the first official claims directed at Germany to regain looted royal objects was made as early as 1935 by the Oba Akenzua II, who tried in vain to buy back from the Völkerkunde Museum in Berlin two throne stools that had been in his ancestors' possession (Peraldi 2017). With the independence of the postcolonial states and the growing resistance to Western political and economic domination and interference, a new awareness of the importance of rebuilding a sense of cultural dignity emerged and ignited a debate on restitution that, particularly in Germany, came to a peak in the 1960s and 1970s (see Ganslmayr/Paczensky 1984; and for the meticulous reconstruction of these debates, Savoy 2021).

Particularly in Europe and North America, today the renewed upswing of the debate is fueled by a critical reassessment of colonial history and its afterlife in persisting forms of structural racism and, as discussed in this issue, diverging interaction orders of race across postcolonial settings (see Duck/Rawls, in this volume; cf. Brus/Knecht/Zillinger 2021). Despite the often-heard critique that restitution will most likely amount to a neo-colonial endeavor, since actors from the so-called Global North will continue to impose the terms, conditions, and results of this process, all the authors in this issue strongly support restitution. They stress that African communities are intellectually, politically and emotionally highly invested in African objects currently based in Europe, and they clearly formulate the challenges that come up when the communities, the curators and all other actors involved try to come to terms with these objects and their colonial histories.

It is noteworthy that the role of the museum in future restitution processes is discussed controversially. As the artist and director of the art space Bandjoun station, Barthélémy Toguo, emphasizes (in this volume),

»If an object arrived and it was an object from Batcham or Bangangté or Foumban, which was used for a ceremony, it […] should not return to a closed, glassed-in space, such as a museum, because from the outset it was not intended for museums. Such an object was intended for ceremonies, for practices, for acknowledgements by a chief who wanted to appreciate the arrival of his host, offer him a stool and ask him to sit. So put the stool back there, in the chiefdom. That's what [the people from the communities] think, they don't think about returning these objects to museums, they want them to be able to return to their usual functions in society« (Toguo/Brus/Müller, in this volume, p. 145).

For Silvie Kassi, a postcolonial museum that is run by Côte d'Ivorians instead of European colonizers has the obligation to offer communities the possibility to partake in and to write themselves into the museum space – by actively choosing objects to be safeguarded in the museum and by providing the information they want to see archived together with the objects. She vividly describes the challenges and problems she encountered as director of the Museum of Civilizations in Abidjan, but also the hopes and aspirations she and the various actors involved have had for building a contemporary museum of local as much as transnational importance. By turning the »embattled terrain, in which those who are being represented and those conceptualizing the representation seem to perform very different claims and very different interests« (Rogoff 2002: 64) into a space of dialogue and cooperation, her work also translates a history of loss and violence into the ongoing histories of communities and the equally ongoing nation-building process of Côte d'Ivoire.

As Tichmann and Abraham note, a transforming museum should depart from established conventions and be pursued not by filling gaps and providing ever more add-ons, but by the performance of loss that extends to the museum and its predicaments itself (cf. Rogoff ibid.). The efforts described in this volume to re-humanize collections by engaging anew with individuals and communities and by using the museum as a site of debate and education, of reconciliation and hospitality, are indicative of broader political and social processes. They shed light on transformative museum dynamics on the continent, which are part of a transnational conversation that, to paraphrase Latour (2005), is local at all points and thus manifests differently in different social settings. Barthélémy Toguo's Bandjoun Station is a case in point: a center for art and culture he founded in Cameroun's Western Region, it was built as a nonprofit organization that brings contemporary artists and experts in various fields into exchange with the local population. It explicitly sets itself apart from the Western concept of the museum. Bandjoun Station goes beyond the museum by offering a space for festivities, education, and sustainable agriculture. Performing the inversion of modernity and the modern separation of art from life and of culture from nature, the center fosters communities of practice in forms of mutual inspiration and assistance that are provided for and emerge through cooperation in fields such as arts, techniques and technologies, and health care. In this way, a museum turns

into a platform for conversations about histories different from those told by the colonial archive (see Müller, in this volume), and it enables visitors to confront experiences of violence and military destruction (see Fossi) by translating them into new forms of agency and transnational cooperation.

In her paper on the history of the making of the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar, Sabrina Moura describes the various attempts to build a museum that »refuses to uphold a subaltern position regarding its Western counterparts« (in this volume, p. 111). In a transnational conversation, curators, researchers, and artists have tried to reassess the epistemologies of art history, ethnography, and the like and struggle to define – in the words of the philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne – a »mutant museum« (see ibid., p. 113) that escapes Eurocentric classification work and representation. As Moura's critical reading of the debates about the museum demonstrates, the making of a transformed museum needs to engage both with the transnational history and entangled present of African art as art and with the various cultural traditions of which art and artifacts have been part – be it craftsmanship, ritual, or ruling – and which, throughout the history of colonialism, have been continuously reinvented. A close analysis of the exhibitions after the opening of the museum, their presentation, and their reception shows a museum space that is first and foremost designed and celebrated as mobilizing. Reflecting the past and reassessing the present, it opens a »look toward the future« that has always been »a key principle for the different expressions of Black emancipation« (in this volume, p. 117), as Moura emphasizes.

As we noted at the outset of this introduction, programmatic attempts to decolonize have multiplied in the museum sector. At the core of all of these attempts is cooperation, the willingness to listen, to find new means to interact, to elaborate new procedures, and to decenter and rethink institutional, collective, and individual positionalities. The museum has become a privileged space for experimenting with new epistemic practices and for allowing the emergence of new publics, characterized by multiplying connections instead of differentiation and exclusion. As we learn from the contributions to this issue, the post/colonial museum has evolved out of entangled histories of dominance and control, but bears the seeds of resistance and, perhaps even more important, of other histories and creative futures that are written by the communities themselves (cf. Mbembe 2002). Given the dynamics in the African museum landscape, museums in Europe will evolve towards those on the African continent and elsewhere in the Global South, if they are to pave the way for a future, decolonized museum (cf. Jean and John Comaroff 2012). While the current attempts to bring about a radical change in transnational museum cooperation are impressive, it remains to be seen whether this process will put an end to the long history of self-assuring forms of remembrance and forgetting in the post/colonial museum, and successfully contribute to decolonize knowledge and institutions on the continent as much as in Europe.

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