

DFDK CONFERENCE
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23 -
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2023

GOETHE-UNIVERSITÄT FRANKFURT
CAMPUS WESTEND, IGF BUILDING
FRANKFURT AM MAIN

THE MUSEUM AS A PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE?

GERMAN FRENCH DOCTORAL SCHOOL
“REPRESENTING THE ‘OTHER’: MUSEUMS,
UNIVERSITIES, ETHNOLOGY”

ORGANIZED BY LAURA FELICITAS SABEL, ESSOWASSAM ABIKA,
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CONTENT

OUTLINE	1
CONFERENCE SCHEDULE	2-3
ADRIANA CALABI: CAN YOU HEAR US? - INDIGENOUS VOICES AND CULTURAL DIALOGUE AT THE MUSEUM OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES - SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL	5
FANTAW SETARGEW KENAW: ETHIOPIA'S FIRST ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM: COMPETING MEANINGS ON REPRESENTATION	6
ANJA LAUKÖTTER: PATHWAYS TO OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE	7
SUSANNE LEEB: WHOSE KNOWLEDGE? A PLEA FOR THE PLURALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGES	8
FRANCOIS MAIRESSE: THE MUSEUM AS A RHIZOME	9
FOGHA MC CORNILIUS REFEM: AGREEING TO DISAGREE: ARTICULATING A POLITICS OF REFUSAL. WAN MPKFE WO LAYIR	10
LÉONTINE MEIJER-VAN MENSCH: MUSEUMS AS AGENTS IN RE-CONNECTING	11
ROMUALD VALENTIN NKOUDA SOPGUI: PHOTOGRAPHIE COLONIALE ALLEMANDE AU CAMEROUN (1884-1918): DE LA PERCEPTION DE L'AUTRE AU TRANSFERT DE SAVOIRS	12

CIRAJ RASSOOL: AFRICAN HISTORY, ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY: RETHINKING MUSEUMS, RESTITUTION AND THE FUTURE OF DISCIPLINES	13
OHINIKO M. TOFFA: L'ORDRE COLONIAL ALLEMAND FACE À LA COMPLEXITÉ DES SPIRITUALITÉS ÉWÉ AU SUD DU TOGO (1884-1914) : UNE RÉFLEXION ÉTHIQUE SUR LE FÉTICHISME ET L'ANIMISME DANS LE DISCOURS COLONIAL ALLEMAND	14
CÉLINE TRAUTMANN-WALLER: ART ET SAVOIR AU MUSÉE DES ARTS APPLIQUÉS AUJOURD'HUI	15
FABIEN VAN GEERT: LES TRANSFORMATIONS DU MUSÉE EN TANT QUE LIEU DE SAVOIR	16
ELKE ANNA WERNER: TRANSCULTURAL COMPARISONS IN MUSEUMS – CHALLENGES AND REWARDS	17
GERMAN-FRENCH DOCTORAL COLLEGE	18-19

THE MUSEUM AS A PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE?

In modernity, museums are defined as places of production and representation of knowledge. Since the emergence of such museums in the 19th century, this knowledge has also been linked to a certain relatedness to the world – which is, for example, the separation of man and nature. Such ideological „world views“ at the time of the enforcement of the colonization of industrial capitalism were thereby shaped by nationalism and colonial, Eurocentric ideas, which were especially reflected in the so-called „World Exhibitions“. Thus, these events were not only to propagate European superiority, but also to manifest the production of the „other.“

In the context of colonial and imperial expansion of European countries, the massive activity of collecting and (violent) appropriating of „objects“ of all kinds from various places in the world also began around 1900. Museum collections of material culture, naturalia, and human remains became the starting point for scientific research and knowledge production, which nonetheless served ruling interests. Exhibitions were supposed to serve the supposedly „objective“ observation and representation of societies and their „cultures“. And so, against this background, museums took the objects to be viewed into their service, manipulated and arranged them in order to make and prove intended statements with the help of the display.

By „taking things into service“ and „showing things,“ museums not only make statements about which images and ideas of cultures and identities exist, but also use a special kind of knowledge that can be described as „materialized knowledge“. The basis for this is the collection and storage of objects, as well as their classification, categorization, and sectioning as data, in vitrines, and through texts. These practices are central modalities of modern forms of knowledge, and the museum acts as a site of selection and repression or marginalization of certain knowledge contents and forms. This raises the question of how much and what agency museums should grant their collections.

In the context of the conference, not only the new ICOM definition will be questioned with regard to its topicality, but also, on an epistemological level, the continuities and ruptures of the (colonial and modern) knowledge production of museums will be examined. By reflecting on ideological and cultural epistemologies in the context of the museum, multiperspective perspectives will be explored and contribute to a deeper understanding. Here, the question arises whether these are merely ideological interpretations or whether the idea of museums as such is an epistemological problem. Therefore, the conference also asks about transformations of museums: could museums – as knots in a network – connect not only things, practices, and narratives, but also people? This includes the question of their future, and the validity of established knowledge: What knowledge and how should it be communicated in museums? How do museums as places of knowledge deal with the questions of the past and the future?

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2023

WELCOME

(NOVEMBER 23, 2023, 9.45 AM - 10.00 AM)

Hans Peter Hahn

PRESENTATIONS OF THE DOCTORAL PROJECTS WITHIN THE DFDK

(NOVEMBER 23, 2023, 10.00 AM - 10.30 AM)

Laura Felicitas Sabel

Essowassam Abika

Philipp Müller

Dyoniz Kindata

Leonie Maurer

PANEL 1: COLONIAL CONTINUITIES

(NOVEMBER 23, 2023, 10.30 AM - 1 PM)

We will discuss which colonial continuities are evident in the production of knowledge, but also of culture and identity as objectified essentialism in the museum in the past and present, and how we can counter this. In doing so, we ask ourselves the following questions: How is knowledge exchanged, stored, and transmitted? What practices frame knowledge and how do they determine it? Knowledge as a commodity? How does knowledge find its application, in what way and in what context?

Speakers: Anja Laukötter, Ciraj Rassool, Setargew Kenaw, Valentin Nkouda, chaired by Philipp Müller and Dyoniz Kindata

**PANEL 2: ENTANGLED HISTORY; ENTANGLED KNOWLEDGE
(NOVEMBER 23, 2023, 2.30 PM - 5 PM)**

We invite discussion on the extent to which not only the history and present of museums, collections, and actors are entangled and interconnected, but also the knowledge or nonknowledge produced with them. We ask ourselves the following questions: What makes the museum a place of knowledge? What can (museums as) places of knowledge achieve? What do places of knowledge mean outside the museum context? What role should collaborative knowledge generation and perspectivation play here?

Speakers: Celine Trautmann-Waller, Ohiniko M. Toffa, Fabien Van Geert, Elke Werner, chaired by Laura Felicitas Sabel and Leonie Maurer

**EVENING LECTURE
(NOVEMBER 23, 2023, 6 PM - 7PM)**

Speaker: Fogha Mc Cornilius Refem, chaired by Essowassam Abika

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2023

**PANEL 3: THE FUTURE OF MUSEUMS AS PLACES OF
KNOWLEDGE
(NOVEMBER 24, 2023, 10.30 AM - 1 PM)**

We invite you to a discussion in which we want to summarize and generate an outlook on the basis of the previous panels and the perspectives of individual actors, which role museums will play in the generation of knowledge in the future or which already existing approaches can be pursued further.

Speakers: Francois Mairesse, Susanne Leeb, Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, Adriana Calabi, chaired by Laura Felicitas Sabel and Leonie Maurer

SUMMARIES OF CONTRIBUTIONS

ADRIANA CALABI

**CAN YOU HEAR US? - INDIGENOUS VOICES AND CULTURAL
DIALOGUE AT THE MUSEUM OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES - SÃO
PAULO, BRAZIL**

The Museum of Indigenous Cultures - MCI, created by the São Paulo State Department of Culture in June 2022, has established a system of participatory governance which differs from other public museums in Brazil. Through the creation of the Aty Mirim Council, indigenous representatives from six different ethnic groups participate in the museum's management, in collaboration with the Department of Culture and other partner institutions.

Representatives of the Aty Mirim Council have been using the concept of "Tava" - a Guarani Mbya word that means House of Transformation - to guide the creation of the museum towards a space capable of transforming the people through sensitive experience and actual relationships, a place of mutual and permanent learning where everyone can grow and change together, similarly to the traditional ways of knowledge's transmission. Also a place where indigenous peoples representatives can tell their histories and talk about their cultures by themselves and according to their own perspectives.

The presentation will focus on the results of the shared management experience and the curatorial processes in this first and a half year of the Museum of Indigenous Cultures, highlighting the aspects that contribute to improve the practices and accomplishments of counselors, curators, educators, managers, technicians and researchers, either indigenous and non-indigenous, at the museum and other institutions.

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**ETHIOPIA'S FIRST ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM: COMPETING
MEANINGS ON REPRESENTATION**

This contribution addresses the interpretive flexibility of meanings of the Ethnographic Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia). European at both its genesis and expansion, the museum has been portrayed variously. For the first curator of the museum and other European experts that contributed to its organization, this ethnological museum was meant to demonstrate the material culture of the various ethnicities that the country houses. Majority of the staff of the IES and some Ethiopian visitors apparently endorse this image. (If there is any issue among the latter, the question is how much representative the museum could (couldn't) be on account of the index of diversity.)

The other import is an expression of surprise and absurdity from many ordinary Ethiopian visitors for they stumble on a mirror image of the environment around and in their homesteads. Besides, two polarized significations revolve around the issue of representation itself. We have on the one hand the view that readily assumes that the museum correctly stands for the cultural diversity of the country. In stark opposite to this, we have critical voices that accuse such an ethnographic endeavour as objectifying people and their cultures. After comparing these views to each other, this contribution will bring materiality (such as the articulation of the turn to the things themselves) into our understanding of museums.

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ANJA LAUKÖTTER

**PATHWAYS TO OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE. STRATEGIES AND
PRACTICES OF A 'POSSESSING CULTURE' IN THE
ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH
CENTURY**

This contribution attempts to sketch out relevant structures and practices of ethnological museums at the beginning of the 20th century. In a first step, the history of the development of ethnological museums is described as a strategy of 'possessing culture', in which asymmetrical relations between the German colonial rule and the colonial countries were inscribed on many levels. In a second step specific practices of this 'possessing culture' are examined. The contribution focusses here on a moment that every object, be it later an exhibition object or a deposit object, had to pass through: the object's entrance into the museum. The question of how objects were classified, evaluated and transformed in the museum is neither trivial nor easy to answer.

By a close reading of some sources, the talk will outline how the transformation of objects from the colonial countries to scientific objects took place. In doing so, the contribution tries to illustrate some significant aspects of how the ethnological museum as a place and as a producer of knowledge worked. In this way, the contribution understands itself as a plea to take a closer look at the everyday history of the collected material culture in order to better understand the paths of knowledge.

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SUSANNE LEEB

WHOSE KNOWLEDGE? A PLEA FOR THE PLURALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGES

Via decolonial and anticolonial critique a lot of museological so called objects have changed their status: from ethnografica to admired artworks to world heritage to documents of colonialism - let alone the meaning they had and have in their communities of origin. Furthermore, already museologization changes the kind of knowledge an object/subject conveys. Since Lothar Baumgartens seminal work "Unsettled Objects" (1968/69) researchers have described the "protocols" which it needs to turn an object/subject into a museological item. Since the foundation of museums they have served different regimes of knowledge: educating colonial officers, producing ethnographic knowledge, learning about the "other". And now? My contribution deals with different forms of knowledges and approaches that these objects/subjects have or might have in different contexts, and asks how to deal with these sometimes even contradicting forms of knowledge. I also talk about artistic approaches that seek relations beyond (western forms of) knowledge.

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FRANCOIS MAIRESSE

THE MUSEUM AS A RHIZOME

ICOM's definition of the museum in 2022 continues to emphasise its research function. Yet the museum landscape has changed considerably in recent years, not only in technical terms, with the development of new projects and the use of social networks, but also in terms of their own structure and operation. The fragmentation of museum functions, and in particular the radical transformation of the relationship with the object, which has long been at the heart of the museum's preoccupations, bear witness to this. The pursuit of the neoliberal model and the radical social, technological and climatic transformations that result from it, provide the backdrop for potential radical upheavals. These are prompting museums to rethink themselves in depth, and to question the links that bind them to society and to other institutions, particularly research institutions.

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**AGREEING TO DISAGREE: ARTICULATING A POLITICS OF
REFUSAL. WAN MPKFE WO LAYIR**

In lieu of an abstract, I will offer a provocative introduction. I have taken a long time to think exactly what this lecture might do, and what qualifies me for such a lecture. I have no professional credentials and yet I have learned, I am very learned on museum machinations. I agree that it is a place of knowledge, in fact, everywhere is a place of knowledge including the toilet seat upon which I conceived what to write in the place of an abstract. The question here is not what a place of knowledge is, or whether the museum could conceivably be such a place of knowledge. The question is how exactly it imparts that knowledge to the learners. The biblical dictum might be useful here “Spare the rod and spoil the child”. Trust me, the museum has spared no rod when it has come to me “this child” the infantilized other, the child who is displayed as the other for the pleasure of museum guests. Being banned from the museum is the only thing that has qualified me for this lecture. That and my ability to cry in intelligible ways. It is not enough to cry therefore, there is a particular way in which one must cry, perhaps in a performative lecture like this one. The other question here therefore is a question of the epistemology of the museum, how that knowledge is produced as we have seen that its pedagogy is violent. I do have temptations to revolt against the museum and if I were not being paid to cry like this, I probably would advocate for burning it down. There is yet a more serious reason I do not ask for its burning, it is a question of safety. I, the other, was trapped in the museum storage and display glasses. Burning a museum therefore might not be such a liberation, we must therefore consider the ontology of the museum or perhaps the ontological risk it spreads as if holding human (artistic and cultural) shields to protect itself from fading. In this performative lecture then, we will agree to disagree that the museum is a place for learning, a classroom where the students are held under duress by the teacher but no less a classroom. We will start by questioning what it means to agree to disagree, an obsession of mine, does it mean we agree that there is disagreement or that we disagree that there is an agreement, or perhaps we postpone disagreement by living in momentary agreement? Finally, one has to consider what ways even exist to counter this idea of a museum as a place of learning. Why does the sun need to prove that it is a (the) source of light and how does one go about rejecting such a proof? Would a politics of refusal not be me refusing to even participate in this conference? Or writing a bold NO across this page and then striking it through? Does refusal always have to be intelligible, if so, to whom? What are the conditions a politics of refusal must fulfill? Who defines them?

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LÉONTINE MEIJER-VAN MENSCH

MUSEUMS AS AGENTS IN RE-CONNECTING

In recent years, the role of knowledges vis à vis audiences has become subject of increased polarizing views, especially within the museum context. What kind of strategies can overcome this dichotomization? Can museums in the Global North re-learn and incorporate new and different perspectives on professionalization? How can transdisciplinary approaches and community perspectives contribute to a re-calibration of the museum concept? This presentation wants to advocate the museum as network(ed) organization. It will use the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde (Leipzig) as case study. Key question is how an ethnological museum can (and should) profile itself in a post-migrant and post-colonial society, and how ethnological collections can serve as a means for a sustainable re-connection with a variety of implicated communities.

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ROMUALD VALENTIN NKOUDA SOPGUI

**PHOTOGRAPHIE COLONIALE ALLEMANDE AU CAMEROUN
(1884-1918): DE LA PERCEPTION DE L'AUTRE AU TRANSFERT
DE SAVOIRS**

De nombreux musées et archives en Allemagne disposent des collections photographiques de l'époque coloniale. Ces images constituent à la fois des traces et des sources visuelles d'une collection des savoirs sur l'Autre. Dans le processus colonial, la visualisation du monde colonial constituait une forme de culture de masse répandue en Allemagne. La création de l'Empire colonial allemand se déroulait alors parallèlement à la naissance d'un phénomène moderne, celui de la culture visuelle. Par le biais de la photographie, la colonisation allemande trouvait un ancrage médiatique dans la mesure où elle était diffusée à travers une multiplicité de genres. La présente communication traite des images coloniales allemandes sur le Cameroun. En m'appuyant sur les photographies ethnographiques, je vais montrer que ces images ont servi de support à la propagande coloniale. Toutefois, la circulation des images et leur présence dans les musées autorisent à s'interroger, au-delà de la production et de la consommation coloniales, sur les usages et les enjeux postcoloniaux des collections photographiques. Une telle préoccupation invite à un décentrement des archives et des musées.

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**AFRICAN HISTORY, ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY:
RETHINKING MUSEUMS, RESTITUTION AND THE FUTURE OF
DISCIPLINES**

Starting with the anticolonial disciplinary field of African history, this presentation examines the ways anthropology and ethnology have manifested themselves in different societies, in the academy and the museum, depending on the presence or absence of confrontations with colonialism. This in turn has influenced the course of arguments about decolonisation and restitution as well as the future of the museum itself. Drawing on case studies of restitution from South Africa, Austria and Germany, this presentation tries to build an argument about the potential meaning of restitution and why it has implications for the future of the museum itself.

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**L'ORDRE COLONIAL ALLEMAND FACE À LA COMPLEXITÉ DES
SPIRITUALITÉS ÉWÉ AU SUD DU TOGO (1884-1914) : UNE
RÉFLEXION ÉTHIQUE SUR LE FÉTICHISME ET L'ANIMISME
DANS LE DISCOURS COLONIAL ALLEMAND**

Il ne faut pas seulement voir dans le fétichisme / l'animisme un simple rejet (cf. Foucault, 1971, p.11). Il faut y voir aussi la manifestation d'un désir de domination qui infériorise, hiérarchise et catégorise un savoir trop complexe et qui ne peut être maîtrisé par la simple raison humaine (Cf. Foucault, 2015, p. 19, Cf. aussi Horkheimer et Adorno 1944). Le fétichisme est à cet effet l'ombre qui accompagne l'Europe dans l'histoire de la production de ses savoirs (Cf. Bitterli, U. 1991). Dans le contexte de la colonisation allemande, c'est l'ordre colonial qui constitue la manifestation de ce désir de contrôle et qui structure les relations de pouvoir colonisateurs-colonisés. Il fonde avec le temps, une ignorance savamment constituée sur l'histoire des peuples colonisés.

Mon propos porte sur la complexité des savoirs qui fondent les spiritualités au Sud du Togo dont le pouvoir colonial allemand n'a jamais pu rendre compte dans la production du savoir sur les colonisés. En m'appuyant sur le principe de « reliance » dans la pensée complexe du philosophe français Edgar Morin (Cf. Weinmann, Morin, 1994), je vais tenter d'expliquer « l'animisme » comme une dynamique relationnelle entre l'homme et son environnement où l'objet fait le sujet et le sujet fait l'objet. En fait il s'agit de définir l'Homme-(Nature-Culture), l'Homme en interaction avec son environnement, l'Homme comme un sujet-objet. Je prendrai exemple sur des formes de spiritualités éwé mal expliquées dans les archives du musée de Leipzig en 1910. La dévalorisation que constitue « l'animisme » / « le fétichisme » au temps de la colonisation allemande au Togo a eu pour conséquence une destruction de l'éthique environnementale des peuples colonisés et avait permis aux colonisateurs d'atteindre le but de l'accès aux terres et aux ressources naturelles.

L'objectif visé ici est celui qui, dans la logique des pratiques de décolonisation des savoirs colonialistes, propose la création de nouveaux liens. La pensée complexe d'E. Morin est ici un défi et une invitation à briser les limites du savoir postmoderne (Cf. Lyotard, 1979, 2018) et à réformer les musées dits ethnologiques.

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CÉLINE TRAUTMANN-WALLER

**ART ET SAVOIR AU MUSÉE DES ARTS APPLIQUÉS
AUJOURD'HUI**

Cette communication aborde la catégorie de musée des arts appliqués, née au XIXe siècle, à partir de l'exemple du musée de Francfort en 2022 et 2023 du point de vue d'une visiteuse. Comment ce musée s'y prend-t-il pour présenter une partie de son fonds historique de manière innovante ? Quelle relation établit-il entre ce fonds historique et de nouvelles thématiques ou de nouveaux artefacts, notamment ceux relevant du design ? Que nous disent ces pratiques curatoriales de l'évolution (ou pas) des notions d'art et de connaissance depuis le XIXe siècle ?

This communication is dedicated to the category of the museum of applied arts, which was created in the 19th century, taking as an example the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main in 2022 and 2023 seen from the point of view of a visitor. How does this museum manage to present part of its historical collections in an innovative way? What relation does it establish between these collections and new questions or new artefacts, especially those falling under the category of design? What does this curatorial practice tell us about the evolution (or non-evolution) of the notions of art and knowledge since the 19th century?

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LES TRANSFORMATIONS DU MUSÉE EN TANT QUE LIEU DE SAVOIR

Cette communication souhaite revenir sur les principales transformations qui se sont produites au cours des dernières années dans la conception du musée en tant que lieu de savoir, à partir de l'exemple des institutions ethnographiques.

Principaux lieux de production et de diffusion du savoir pendant plus d'un siècle et demi, depuis leur institutionnalisation à la fin du XVIIIe siècle jusqu'au début du XXe siècle, les musées ethnographiques ont connu d'importantes transformations depuis, en s'éloignant largement de l'université, devenu lieu principal de production de savoir, pour se rapprocher des réflexions gestionnaires et de celles orientées vers les stratégies d'attraction et de communication vers le public, dans un souci plus général de présentation de ces institutions comme lieux de mise en valeur de la diversité culturelle. Face à la pression constante des taux de fréquentation et à une demande croissante d'accessibilité de ses contenus au grand public, comment le rôle originel de création de savoir de ces institutions s'est-il transformé? De lieux de production et de diffusion du savoir, il apparaît ainsi qu'ils sont largement devenus depuis les années 1990 et 2000 des lieux de réflexion et de mise en perspective, souvent critique, de cette production du savoir et de sa diffusion à laquelle ils avaient contribué, en mettant en exergue les liens qu'ils ont entretenus avec la propagande coloniale, avec l'affirmation de la science moderne et ses préceptes, ou encore avec le patriarcat et plus généralement le capitalisme, au travers de modalités spécifiques de représentation du monde et de ses différentes cultures visibles au sein de leurs expositions et de leurs politiques d'acquisition de collections.

Parallèlement à cette réflexion théorique, épicerie de la recherche ethnomuséale actuelle, ces institutions ont également pu développer des domaines de réflexion jusqu'alors largement inédits, menés souvent par et depuis le musée, à l'instar des recherches actuelles portant sur l'origine et la provenance des collections, mais aussi de leur histoire institutionnelle (parfois complexe), dont les conclusions peuvent désormais faire l'objet d'expositions ou de publications.

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ELKE ANNA WERNER

**TRANSCULTURAL COMPARISONS IN MUSEUMS – CHALLENGES
AND REWARDS**

Through cultural comparisons, dichotomies between identity and alterity can be emphasised, but also overcome and similarities can be highlighted. So far, however, in museums cultural differences have mostly been reinforced through comparisons, for example by positively emphasising the commonalities of Europeans against the negatively judged, incomparable otherness of non-Europeans. In doing so, temporal levels often become mixed up and we too quickly associate ourselves with the European seafarers, military leaders or explorers of the 18th to early 20th centuries as a common "we".

From a critical reflection of the exhibition "Unvergleichlich. Kunst aus Afrika im Bode-Museum" (Berlin, 2017-2019), the talk will ask whether and how we can work out through comparisons the historical difference to both groups of actors, to the members of the non-European source communities as well as to the Europeans. Ethnological objects would then be witnesses or traces to an encounter between two communities whose specific practises were conditioned by the historical context of both cultures. Even though it is undeniably a history of colonial power, such a perspective could emerge historical knowledge on encounters as a shared knowledge, as resonance in a history of world relations.

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REPRESENTING THE 'OTHER': MUSEUMS, UNIVERSITIES, ETHNOLOGY

GERMAN-FRENCH DOCTORAL SCHOOL

In a cooperation between the Univ. Paris III and the Goethe University, funded by the DFH, the doctoral school investigates during four years (2023-2026) the particular challenges that museums with ethnographic collections face in the present. Starting from the observation that such museums are places of representation, the aim is to explore in more detail what social functions museums have in the 21st century, what role collections play in this, and finally, what principles can be used to curate adequate exhibitions.

The aim is to contribute to the internationalization of the debate on museums, and precisely not to limit itself to the dominant Anglophone discourse. Other questions of interest are: What are the particular achievements that distinguish museums in German-speaking and Francophone countries? What particular challenges do they have to contend with? What recommendations can be made for the further development of museum concepts and museum practices?

These are the questions that the participating scholars as well as a small group of selected doctoral students will address during this period. They are looking for convincing and sustainable answers to them through specific research in the individual doctoral research projects funded, as well as through exchange in workshops and conferences.

https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/126088232/DF_Doktorandenkolleg

DOCTORAL PROJECTS 2023

ESSOWASSAM ABIKA (PARIS/FRANKFURT)

Regards sur les représentations des femmes dans les colonies allemandes d'Afrique : Exotisme et colonialisme à travers les collections iconographique (1884-1918)

DYONIZ EMILIAN KINDATA (LÜNEBURG/PARIS)

Pratiques poétiques et photographiques dans les journaux coloniaux en Afrique Orientale Allemande de 1885 à 1918

LEONIE MAURER (HEIDELBERG)

Recherche de provenance sur les collections océaniques dans une perspective transculturelle

PHILIPP MÜLLER (FRANKFURT)

Patterns of Legitimation of German Collectors of Ethnographica among the Indigenous Societies in German South-West Africa

MARTIN NADARZINSKI (FRANKFURT)

Polyvalent Things. The Ethnographic Collection of the Badisches Landesmuseum, 1875 to the Present Day

LAURA FELICITAS SABEL (LÜNEBURG)

Praxes of the Transitory: Restitution, Museum Practice, and the (Im)material Cultural Heritage of the Tairona's Descendants in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia