
SANKOFATIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION: The Rapprochement of German Museums and Government with Colonial Objects and Postcolonialism

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how three national museums in Germany are dealing with colonial objects in their spaces. It also explores the German government's recent rapprochement with scholars in its ex-colonies on how to deal with its colonial past within a discourse of evidence and sankofatization. Sankofatization is defined as a Ghanaian-Akan ideology that signifies the selection of past ideas for retention within a type of renaissance paradigm. In December 2015, the German Federal Foreign Office invited delegates from Togo, Ghana, Namibia, Tanzania, and Cameroon to take part in a unique program dubbed "A Themed Tour of German Colonial History." Reporting on this tour, the paper assesses the activism of German civic organizations and museums in their ongoing attempts to decolonize colonial cityscapes, street names, and exhibits. But this discussion is much more than an ethnographic report. The implications of this rapprochement policy for discourses on the archaeology of German colonialism and the anthropology of colonial museums denote significant changes in transnational cooperation. Overall, the themed tour recalled that silencing of negative past experiences and past misdeeds is never permanent. Generational change often influences a renaissance, or sankofatization, of past realities to serve emerging postcolonial needs. [museum anthropology, Africa, Germany, decolonization, repatriation]

Until 2015, Germany had been reluctant to address its colonial past. This article deals with legal, cultural, and social evidential claims for the reparation of African artifacts acquired during the colonial era and the recalibration of colonialist imagery. Interviews with members of German civic society revealed that German authorities have been preoccupied with several historical contingencies postdating the First World War that put the postcolonial political engagement with their colonial past on the back burner. Such

contingencies include the use of evidence in coming to terms with the dismantling of German colonial hegemony after the Versailles treaty in 1919 and the rise of the Third Reich dictatorship, which explicitly invoked the colonial past to brainwash its members and to agitate for the recolonization of Africa (Erichsen and Olusoga 2010). In addition, there has been the matter of confronting the Nazi Holocaust, one of the grimmest repercussions of the Second World War in Germany (Conrad 2012). Finally, other issues that were considered more urgent than the colonial past included coming to terms with the effects of the Cold War era and the East-West political division of Germany until the Berlin Wall was torn down in 1990.

The realization that the Nazi Holocaust was a genocide against 5.6–6.3 million Jews, people of color, Roma, Sinti, and homosexuals necessitated the establishment of programs and payment of compensations after long negotiations and legal proceedings, to appease and placate families of victims of the Holocaust. These reparations also included the construction of memorial spaces for the remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust (Assmann 2006). To a considerable extent, with efforts aimed at redressing the wrongs of the Holocaust now established, German authorities began confronting issues stemming from the Cold War, current geopolitical circumstances of migrants, and silences from the colonial past.

This essay offers a postcolonial examination of how large, national, node three museums in Germany are dealing with the hydra-headed problem associated with the demands for and repatriation of colonial objects in their storage and the growing need to decolonize their exhibits. It also assesses the ongoing German Federal Foreign Office's recognition of its colonial past in Africa and the activism of German civic society groups in their ongoing attempts to decolonize the cityscape and colonial exhibits (Coulthard 2014). The implications of this new rapprochement, a foreign policy stance promoting the interrogation of the anthropology of colonial museums, is also reflected in my efforts to unpack the discourse on the archaeology of German colonialism in Africa (Apoh 2013a, 2013b, 2019). My ongoing research on the archaeology of German colonialism in Togoland offers an eclectic avenue to examine tangible and intangible German colonial entanglements vis-à-vis the unfolding attention to the resurging

ghosts and tactile relics of the German colonial past (Apoh 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION AND SANKOFATIZATION

The politics of recognition is an essential process and practice in the decolonization process. Within this process, evidence of hitherto silenced subaltern or minority groups needs to be recognized within national and global geopolitical discourses. Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard revealed that although the politics of recognition was useful during the decolonizing process in Canada, he feels that its application today is counterproductive to indigenous people (Coulthard 2014). Specifically, it was useful when the cultural rights of hitherto disenfranchised, silenced, and assimilated indigenous people were finally given state recognition and accommodated “within the framework of the Canadian state and its capitalist mode of production” (cited in Gardner and Clancy 2017). However, he critiques this politics of recognition and process of acknowledgement as currently counterproductive, benefitting the state more in terms of having greater access to indigenous land and resources. Alternatively, he champions the notion of the politics of art based on the framework of self-recognition, education, and grounded normativity as a more productive way for indigenous actors to “create change in their lives at both the structural level as well as at the level of identity and culture” (Gardner and Clancy 2017). I argue that this approach to museum evidence works best among indigenous people who are still within transformed states of settler colonization and whose identifiable material culture has been locked up in the museum storages of their ex-colonizers. German colonial holdings in Africa included Togoland, Namibia, Cameroon, and Tanzania. With the exception of Namibia, Germany has been silent until recently.

The lack of recognition of the historical injustices of the German colonial past in this postcolonial time is at the core of the discussions in this paper. The use of the sankofatization paradigm to foreground my discussion is revealing in many ways. It is derived from the semantic ideology of the ethnolinguistic group in Ghana known as the Akan(s). Most of the sub-languages spoken by the people of this larger Akan group are mutually intelligible. Within this group are the Asante, Fante, Akyem, Akwapim,

Kwahu, and Bono ethnic groups. The Akan verb *sankofa* means “return for it.” *Sankofa yenchi* is an Akan saying that means “recalling or going back for something is not an abomination.” Thus, when this term is used in its proverbial sense, it signifies the recalling or selection of abandoned ideas, practices, and things to be memorialized and advocated for within a renaissance paradigm. This ideology is symbolized in a mythical bird whose head is turned backward, as well as other ideological symbols.

In the case I discuss here, the concept is applicable in three related ways. First, the German government’s and German museums’ developing postcolonial enthrallment with their colonial past and exhibitions is unique. Their efforts seem to be geared toward making amends and seeking some kind of closure and common language to come to terms with the historical injustices associated with German colonial excesses. The second dimension applies to the demands being made by local societies and original owners for the return of looted objects currently held in European museums. In this dimension, these objects become material evidence of the colonial past. The sankofatization or recalling of such patrimonies belies the repatriation and restitution issues explored in the ensuing sections. The third perspective of the concept was, from my view, ill applied when the Third Reich dictatorship invoked the deeds of the German colonial past, as a kind of negative sankofa ideology, to agitate for the recolonization of Africa (Erichsen and Olusoga 2010). Examples of this third negative dimension still linger in German cityscapes and museum discourses. In the ensuing sections, I explore the sankofatization paradigm in examining how the German government and German museums are coming to terms with the colonial past. I argue that the ensuing practices of hesitation, denial, need for dialogue, counter arguments, calls for provenance research, delayed restitutions, and negotiations with various agents and agencies in their ex-colonies are all emerging and experimental ways of making evidential claims that address the ills of the German colonial past in Africa.

THEMED TOUR OF GERMAN COLONIALISM IN HAMBURG AND BERLIN

In December 2015, seven delegates representing Togo, Ghana, Namibia, Tanzania, and Cameroon

were invited to Germany by the German Foreign Office through their respective ambassadors. Representing Ghana, I met with six colleagues from these ex-German colonies in Hamburg to experience the unique visitors' program that the Foreign Office dubbed "Themed Tour of German Colonial History." Several activities were planned and facilitated by the office of the Goethe Institute in Berlin. Initially, all the delegates were at a loss as to the rationale behind the invitation to experience this themed tour. Key questions came to mind: What was the government's official position regarding the colonial history of Africa, especially in Ghana and Togo? Why are there no German political or diplomatic activities regarding this matter? Why do activities of the Foreign Office seem to be limited to scholars of the ex-colonies with no impact on policy? And what are the key plans of the German government toward the rehabilitation of tangible German colonial heritage remains in the ex-colonies?

Several reasons were suggested by some of my colleagues. First, perhaps the upsurge in immigrant issues in 2015 compelled German authorities to enter strategic partnerships with Africa to contain the migrants at home. Second, others maintained that Germany was using this engagement with scholars as a way of toning down issues of reparation for colonialism. Third, this themed tour, which happened a year after the German Parliament for the first time in history accepted that their colonial practice in Namibia was genocide, was a way of furthering the rapprochement with this issue. I was of the view that the schedule of events and the tour package would be educational and afford me the chance to network, especially with scholars in German colonial studies, museum officials, government officials, German civic organizations, and above all with my delegate colleagues, to better understand the nature of the unfolding rapprochement. Notably, my involvement was based on a last-minute intervention by the German Ambassador to Ghana, Mr. John Rüdiger. He and his staff realized that I was involved in conducting archaeological research and publishing articles on the German colonial past in "Togoland." This exposure came to light when the king of Kpando (the late Togbega Dagadu VII) and I paid a courtesy visit to the ambassador to present a petition for the return of stolen cultural regalia (e.g., an ivory side-blown horn

with human jaw bones, smocks with amulets, and drums) from the Kpando Palace by German colonial agents in 1914 (Apoah 2015; Dzamboe 2016). The key sentiment of the Kpando people was based on the evidential claim that it was unethical to store these ritual objects in the Ethnologisches Museum in Germany given that these royal objects, within the ideology of sankofa, continue to have indigenous spiritual utility and cultural symbolism to the Kpando people. Thus, being mindful of the new postcolonial stance of the German administration, I was invited not as a representative of a German colonized territory, i.e., Western Togoland in Ghana, but as a scholar who specializes on the archaeology of the colonial past in the Volta Basin (Apoah 2019).

The reasons for our invitation to Hamburg and Berlin became clearer as the weeklong activities progressed. Eventually, we learned that the motivation behind our invitation by the Foreign Office was to assess how the colonial history of Germany should be appropriately dealt with today. Representatives of the Foreign Office also expressed the view that the engagement of German cultural institutions with visiting delegates was a way of including as many actors as possible in order to encourage a culture of co-production of knowledge based on lively discussions. A meeting at the Rathaus (town hall) in Hamburg began with an official briefing by State Secretary Wolfgang Schmidt. He was of the view that, in the same way that scholars in Africa were concerned with the German colonial heritage on the African continent, they are now also confronted with what to do with African relics held by museums and archives in Germany.

It is an undeniable fact that the commercial and defensive confederation of Hanseatic cities, including Hamburg, played a dominant role in German colonialism, and it is no wonder that their legacy and heritage are still found within the cityscapes of Germany. Hanseatic firms such as C. Woermann, managed from the Woermann Afrikahaus in Hamburg, provisioned their ships and carried colonial goods, soldiers, and officials from the port city of Hamburg to the colonies (Figures 1 and 2). Similarly, African cash crops, slaves, minerals, commercial goods, and cultural objects, as well as human skulls, were offloaded at Hamburg (Short 2012; Starzmann 2014). Many institutions built in Hamburg during the colonial

period, such as the Emperor's Hall inside City Hall, as well as monuments and streets named after colonial agents, served the colonial goals of the city. The state secretary thought that the development of a sister city agreement with Tanzania, among other things, was a means of dealing with Hamburg's colonial past. He supported the view that Hamburg needs to investigate its colonial past to engage in a more permanent critical dialogue when it comes to dealing with evidence of negative remembrance, such as the monument with Togo Askari Warriors and German colonial troopers commissioned by the Third Reich in Hamburg. This is a practical example of how the positive sankofatization process is on course in Hamburg.

Furthermore, our visiting group had a presentation on the current economic relations between Hamburg and Africa at the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, the discussion was not productive since the representative, Susanne Kuchmeister, the head of the Business Division, did not speak initially on the issue of German colonialism.



Figure 1. The Woermann Afrikahaus in Hamburg. (Photo by the Author)
[This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

She held back on the history of the Chamber in terms of its support for colonial trade in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She finally alluded to the fact that some of its registered companies, such as C. Woermann, now DAL (Deutsche Afrika-Linien), had historical ties with colonial trade and profited from them, and that they are still operating in Ghana and Angola.

PERSPECTIVES OF GERMAN SCHOLARS

Internal postcolonial debates are also raging among university scholars and civic organizations. This development was revealed in a presentation by Prof. J. Zimmerer as part of the themed tour. He holds one of the five chairs of Modern African History in Germany and heads the research center called "Forschungstelle Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe/Hamburg und die frühe Globalisierung" (The Research Center on Hamburg's (Post)colonial Legacy/Hamburg and Early Globalization). Zimmerer noted that his research center and Hamburg civic organizations are championing the decolonization of some of the colonial sites in Hamburg, as well as questioning the reproduction of street names and monuments evidencing colonial memory and its glorification.

As a specialist on German colonial history of Namibia, he questioned the seriousness of the German government in dealing with issues of colonialism, such as the Nama-Herero genocide in Namibia, which requires the repatriation of human skulls as well the restitution of other cultural materials needed for intensive research. The Namibian genocide was denied by the German government for more than a century. Only in August 2004 did a British newspaper, *The Guardian*, state in one of its online headlines, "The German Minister Says Sorry for Genocide in Namibia." The article qualified:

Germany apologised for the first time yesterday for a colonial-era genocide which killed 65,000 Herero people in what is now Namibia. "We Germans accept our historic and moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time," said Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Germany's development aid minister, at a ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the Hereros' 1904–1907 uprising against their

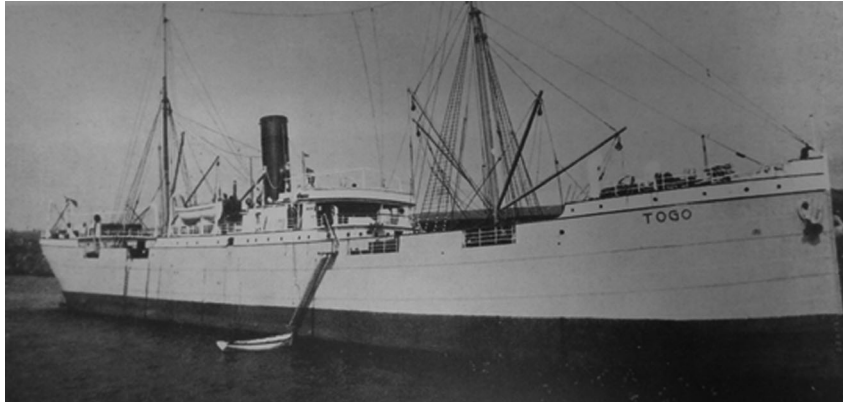


Figure 2. One of the Woermann ships, christened “TOGO.” (Credit: Goethe Institute Photo Book 2006)

rulers. “The atrocities committed at that time would have been termed genocide,” she said, according to Associated Press. (Meldrum 2004)

The full statement was also published on the homepage of the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Windhoek (German Windhoek Embassy, <https://windhuk.diplo.de/na-en>, retrieved December 2015). According to scholars (Kößler 2015; Schwelling 2012), the minister experienced a backlash and condemnation in the German press in 2004 for advancing her opinion. She was also lambasted for trivializing the role played by Germany by not mentioning the brutalities of the concentration camps in Africa as well as uncomfortable aspects of German history that were comparable to the Nazi Holocaust (Erichsen and Olusoga 2010).

Despite this apologetic stance offered more than ten years ago, Professor Zimmerer, in his speech to the delegates, expressed doubts about the seriousness of the German government’s stance on the Nama-Herero genocide. He claimed that the federal government has blocked initiatives to acknowledge the genocide on legal grounds, advancing the legalistic evidential claim that the Genocide Convention only took effect from 1948 and therefore did not apply to earlier actions. With this statement, Zimmerer revealed the double standard and inconsistency of the federal government, which was highlighted in April 2015 when the German parliament chastised the Turkish government for its denial of the Armenian genocide of 1915. He argued that if the German parliament had the moral right to chastise a foreign government over a 1915 event, then it has no moral right

to misapply the 1948 legal convention over the issue of the Namibian genocide of 1904. Notably, during the centenary celebration of Anglo-German rule in Namibia on July 9, 2015, the German Foreign Office declared what happened in Namibia during German colonial rule a genocide. This is a clear example of the application of the sankofa philosophy to make amends after a series of deliberate denials.

One of my Namibian colleagues was critical of how the Namibian colonial-era skulls had been mistreated by German museums and collectors. He was of the view that the skulls have been demeaned to the point that their names and identities have been replaced with lab and museum inventory numbers. He noted that these skulls belonged to genocide victims, concentration camp victims, and prisoners who received death sentences from the German colonial administration on Shark Island. Before they were shipped to Germany, the skulls, being human, had names. However, after having been taken through eugenic investigations and experiments as scientific objects and comparative samples, they lost their human embodiment and identities. My colleague was particularly concerned about the nature of the research and the accessibility of the results to the German and Namibian publics.

Professor Andreas Eckert, who also held a chair of African History at Humboldt University and was head of the Institute for Asian and African History, gave a scholarly presentation as part of the themed tour. Importantly, his presentation answered some of the questions that my Namibian colleague posed. Eckert stated that Namibia has now taken center stage in the memory work carried out on German

colonialism because of the gravity of the crimes and brutality associated with colonial hegemony there. He noted that the official acknowledgment of and reasons given for the crimes leading to the Nama-Herero genocide brought out the fears of the German right-wing press. Such deep-seated anxiety, mostly held by the “colonially” minded German public (Starzmann 2008, 2016), is that once official and public acknowledgment of—as well as an apology for—the genocide was issued, the floodgates would open for calls for and lawsuits as evidential claims for the payment of compensation and reparations.

Although some of the skulls have been returned, Eckert pointed out that the skulls (mostly from Namibia), which had been subjected to analysis during the colonial period, are currently stored in archives at several universities, at the Charité Medical School’s anthropological collections of human remains, and at various museums in Germany (Charité Berlin 2014). Research on provenance is currently underway at the Charité to determine their identity and origins for restitution. In answering my colleague’s questions, Eckert pointed out that scholars, such as Felix von Luschan, Eugen Fischer, Gustav Fritsch, Rudolph Pösch, Rudolph Virchow, and Hans Virchow, gained prominence from the study and publication of findings about the skulls. At the time, their research results gave credence to racist theories, which were seen as a scientific “success,” even though this led to further degradation of the victims (Silvester 2015).

Berlin also bears the scars, memories, and institutional history of the German colonial enterprise. It hosted the headquarters of the colonial soldiers, or Schutztruppe, and some streets, continue to bear demeaning names, such as Mohrenstraße (Moorish Street). Berlin is also famous as the venue for the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, held in the City Palace, and its hosting of colonial exhibitions, such as the 1896 exhibition at Treptower Park (Zimmerman 2001). Such colonial exhibitions treated Africans like zoo animals, created and reinforced racial stereotypes, and empowered popular media, the right-wing press, and scientists to shape German ideas about the colonies (Short 2012; Starzmann 2014).

Eckert admitted that he had mixed feelings regarding the ongoing debate about the Humboldt Forum, which is a museum space that is currently being

developed in the refurbished Berlin City Palace at a cost of six hundred million euros (Figure 3). The museum will showcase colonial objects currently held in several museums and archives across Germany. How these objects will be interpreted in this new context remains to be seen; the exhibition is scheduled to be opened to the public in 2020 or thereafter. Several criticisms have been leveled against the project by academics, civic organizations, and mainstream German media. The central one is that those in charge are not allowing critical dialogue and engagement with key voices from Africa, which serves as the source of most of the exhibited objects. According to the project website:

The Humboldt Forum sets out to generate a public debate appropriate to the multi-layered relationships between Germany and the rest of the world. Using a wide range of perspectives, rhetorical points of view, and narrative forms, it is designed to do justice to the diversity and values of world cultures. For this to work, the key driving forces here are inquisitive curiosity in place of prejudice and clarity in place of ideology. . . . [T]he Humboldt Forum’s wealth of resources provides the essential prerequisites for a dialogue with the world. In a close collaboration of academia and art in the broadest and most accessible sense, three users of the building will be operating together: the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the Humboldt University Berlin, and the Federal State of Berlin. . . . [T]he Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation will exhibit the unique non-European collections of its National Museums in Berlin on the second and third floors. Occupying the first floor, the “Workshops of Knowledge,” will be the intellectual archives of these museums, parts of which are classified as UNESCO World Heritage assets. They will be joined by the Humboldt University’s Humboldt-Lab and the exhibition World.City.Berlin by the Federal State of Berlin. . . . The project is named after the Humboldt brothers, Alexander and Wilhelm. As a much-travelled researcher and citizen of the world, Alexander represents the diversity of the non-European collections. Wilhelm, a man of universal learning, represents the idea of combining



Figure 3. Ongoing construction at the site of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. The “Humboldt Box” is visible in the front, and the reconstructed City Palace is in the back. (Photo by the Author) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

different educational establishments and academic disciplines under one roof. As the two brothers did before, the Humboldt Forum will in the future unite cultural and natural science. (Humboldt Forum 2015)

On the issue of the restitution of objects, most critical scholars (Apoth and Mehler 2018; Opoku 2018, 2019; Zimmerman 2001) are of the view that when it turns out that an object in a German museum has been procured through illicit means, it must be returned without any conditions attached. The procedure must be akin to the restitution of art objects looted during the Nazi period. The argument that most of these non-European objects were procured within a colonial legal framework that was in effect at the time is problematic because the so-called legal framework of colonialism cannot be used as evidence by today’s international legal standards. Cross-cultural debates involving joint African-German commissions should engage in sustainable dialogues on these issues.

An Afro-German literary scholar from Bayreuth University, Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard, offered her perspective during the closing roundtable held at the Foreign Office in Berlin. She mentioned that Germany has been in denial of its colonial past. However, she believes that this German standpoint is changing, and she offered three reasons. First, she felt there is a burgeoning consciousness that colonialism did not happen “over there”—in Africa—without having any effect on the colonizing

societies. The German government now views colonialism as a history of entanglement that must be researched and discussed in a dialogical way. Second, even though there are emerging shifts in public dialogues, she noted that postcolonial engagement with German colonial discourse is still principally championed by political and intellectual elites. However, such elite perspectives tend to inform grassroots projects. She pointed out that the Afro-German community and the African migrant community view colonialism and racism as linked entities since they legitimize each other. A great deal of postcolonial activism has emerged from German antiracist movements.

Ofuatey-Alazard also mentioned that there are shifts on the German communal level. As in Berlin, Hannover, and Hamburg, the cityscape and museum spaces of smaller cities, such as Munich, are being decolonized (L’Internationale Online 2017). A huge symposium was organized in Munich to reevaluate the archives, which was attended by the first generation of the Cameroonian diaspora. Ofuatey-Alazard was surprised that the mayor of Munich quoted Frantz Fanon to make his point on the issues of decolonialization, which is being demanded on the level of knowledge production (e.g., changes in the language and contents of schoolbooks, literature, media, and street names). Additionally, Ofuatey-Alazard pointed to shifts in the arts realm in terms of its postcolonial engagement with colonialism. Members of the arts, academic, and activist communities are all engaged in locating evidence of the colonial past and

reviving lost voices. She calls this “the Triple A” initiative on postcolonialism in Germany today.

PERSPECTIVES OF GERMAN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

The themed tour included interactions with civic groups, including Savvy Contemporary, Berlin Postkolonial, and AfricAvenir in Berlin. Savvy Contemporary describes itself as “a lab of conceptual, intellectual, artistic and cultural development and exchange; an atelier in which ideas are transformed into forms and forms into ideas, or gain cognition in their status quo” (<http://savvy-contemporary.com/>, accessed December 15, 2015). On issues surrounding the Humboldt Forum, participants stated that the name “Humboldt” should not be associated with a museum exhibition that is meant to decolonize the subject. They argued that one of the Humboldt brothers, Alexander, was a privileged German male who traveled the world as a geographer. He was also criticized for disregarding indigenous people in his writings since they were viewed as “savages” at the time. Similarly, he was ambivalent when it came to taking a stance against slavery in Latin America and was not, in any way, an anticolonial hero (Pratt 1992). As a Humboldtian, one of our colleague delegates from Togo disagreed with the viewpoint of Savvy Contemporary. In reaction to this stance, a German colleague viewed this as a kind of Western influence on colonized contexts, exemplified by an African scholar defending Humboldt (Starzmann, personal communication 2016; see also Fanon 1967). For another German scholar, critics of Humboldt do not acknowledge the nuances of Humboldt’s writings in comparison to those of a multitude of his contemporaries (e.g., explorers, scientists, and novelists).

The official guided tour through Berlin-Wedding’s Afrikanisches Viertel (African Quarter), which was included as part of the program, was very revealing. The tour offered us a “critical look at the traces of colonialism in Berlin’s public spaces as well as at the history (or histories) of the city’s black residents and their resistance to racism and colonialism,” as announced in our tour program brochure. Important executives from the Berlin Postkolonial civic society were present. According to the 2015 brochure:

Berlin Postkolonial was founded in 2007. It was established to be a critical voice in divulging

Berlin’s seldom discussed colonial past. The non-profit association presents historic sites and introduces important personalities in contemporary history, as well as events in the city’s history related to the deportation of enslaved African peoples. Moreover, Berlin Postkolonial operates an online platform on colonialism and the history of the resistance and migration of persons of African descent. It also initiates interventions such as “Genocide has no Statute of Limitations.”

From a sankofatization perspective, the on-site lecture by Christian Kopp, one of the key leaders on the tour, which mentioned that several streets in the Afrikanisches Viertel have been named to reminisce about the colonial past in Africa, was revealing. Notably, the street named Ghanastrasse was inaugurated a year after Ghana gained independence in 1957, and, as such, it evidences a positive memorial and commemoration label. The rest of the street names in the Quarter, however, are negative since they were inaugurated in the past as a way of reproducing the colonial hegemony by keeping the names of the ex-colonies alive (e.g., Togostrasse and Kongostrasse), as well as keeping the names of the architects of the colonial enterprise (e.g., Luderitzstrasse, Nachtigalplatz, and Petersallee) active in public memory (Starzmann 2008, 2016) (Figure 4).

The group championed a crusade to replace the names of all these streets with the names of more

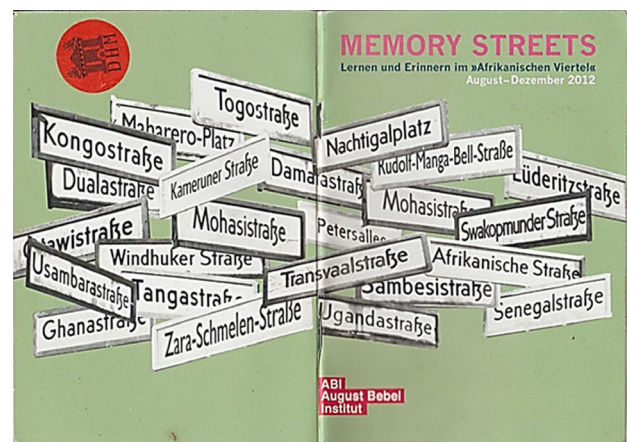


Figure 4. A book cover issued by the August Bebel Institute showing some of the problematic street names in the African Quarter of Berlin. (Photo of book cover by the Author) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

positive and inspiring personalities. So far, they have been successful with one name change, from Gröbenufer to May-Ayim-Ufer. According to the Afro-Europe International blog:

A Berlin Street is renamed after the internationally renowned Afro-German poetess, educationist and inhabitant of Kreuzberg, May Ayim (1960–1996). Ayim fought against ongoing racism in Germany and was active in the women's movement, and she continuously highlighted Germany's forgotten colonial past. "This renaming also challenges people to deal with the close connection between colonialism and racism," says Luise Steinwachs of Tanzania Network (TNW). "The renaming of Gröbenufer into May-Ayim-Ufer will not make the topic of colonialism disappear from the map," emphasizes Joshua Kwesi Aikins from the Black organisation ISD, "but rather it provides a change of perspective in remembrance." (AfroEurope Blogspot 2009)

AfricAvenir is another civic organization that has promoted postcolonial activism in Berlin. A statement on their webpage, captioned "Decolonial Objections against the Humboldt Forum," sums up their perspective on German colonialism and the decolonization of the Berlin culturescape:

The so-called "Humboldt-Forum," the centerpiece of the reconstructed Berlin Palace, will host the ethnological collections from Africa, Asia and the Americas. But what kind of symbolism is being created when the ethnological collections, which to a considerable extent are the result of looting during colonial times, are shown behind a Prussian façade, Prussia being the architect of German colonialism? In order to raise this question and to stimulate a public debate about German colonialism, AfricAvenir will host Dialogue Forums and a touring exhibition which take a critical and decidedly decolonial look at recent developments from September 2013 onwards. To prevent—or at least scandalize—the inauguration of yet another Eurocentric and restorative museum, the colonial history of ethnological objects will be discussed, and the project "Berlin Palace –

Humboldt Forum" will be questioned in content and form from African and Afro-European perspectives. . . . The Hohenzollerns were primarily responsible for the enslavement of thousands of people from Africa as well as genocides and concentration camps in Germany's former colonies. Therefore we roundly reject any presentation of objects in the Berlin Palace which were brought to Berlin during colonial times. (Africavenir 2015)

In his statement during the closing roundtable held at the Foreign Office in Berlin, the chair of AfricAvenir?, Eric Van Grasdorff, expressed mixed feelings about the Humboldt Forum debate. He was of the view that the head of the forum, Professor H. Parzinger, discouraged critical dialogue from the onset since an intended public forum to thrash out these issues was called off at the last moment. According to Van Grasdorff, as an international cultural project, many of which exist across Europe today, the Humboldt Forum's first concept exhibition would not have been changed to include issues of repatriation of cultural objects and human remains had it not been for the initial activism and pressure from AfricAvenir. Van Grasdorff observed that German national museums that feed and feast on looted artifacts have not played a positive role in educating the German public.

PERSPECTIVES OF GERMAN MUSEUMS

As part of the program, the themed tour enabled us to interact with the administrative staff of two museums in Berlin: the Ethnologisches Museum in Dahlem and the German Historical Museum in the center of the city. At the Ethnologisches Museum, one of the head curators, Dr. Jonathan Fine, took us on a tour of the African exhibition. As we entered the dark spaces at the beginning of the African section, he immediately rendered an apology for the dark walls and space, with only restricted lights positioned within the showcases to illuminate the objects and sculptures. His reason was that the dark nature of the space and its black walls were meant to cover up defects on the walls since the building itself needed renovation. For the delegates, the reason was obvious. The deliberate blackening of the African exhibition hall was meant to project the view of "Africa, the Dark Continent" (Classen and Howe 2006). If this were not the

intention, the museum staff could have easily draped the walls with white curtains to hide any building defects.

Histories of objects and their meanings change in time and space. As a curator in charge of exhibiting the controversial Benin collections and the collections on German colonialism at the proposed Humboldt Forum, Dr. Fine planned to move all the collections (including 75,000 inventoried African objects, out of which only 3,500 objects will be exhibited) from Dahlem at the outskirts of Berlin to the Humboldt Forum in Berlin's city center. This move is a case of museum transformations similar to the examples discussed by Jules-Rosette and Osborn (2020, 7–22). However, Fine was cautious about showcasing human remains. In responding to some of the criticisms leveled against the Humboldt Forum, he reiterated the point that even though museums are highly bureaucratic institutions, there is now an increased openness in the museum space in Germany for critical dialogue on its collections, and a new generation of curators is taking up positions that redefine the role of museums. Fine shared the view that museums are places of knowledge production. To produce knowledge about Africa in the Humboldt Forum, he claimed, they are going to increase the engagement with multiple voices, especially African experts, to deepen discussions on the findings and to better contextualize the collection.

On the question of restitution, he mentioned that the museum received fewer requests than expected, although I was unable to verify his assertion. His statement suggested that the descendants of the original owners should have been making more requests for the return of objects in the collection. But such requests have indeed been made. A case in point is the active request for Akpini royal objects. According to oral accounts, these royal objects were stolen by Dr. Gruner from the palace of the king of Kpando, Togbega Dagadu III, in 1914 during his arrest and subsequent exiling to Cameroon. He was returned to Togo by the British in January 1915. Some of his royal items have been catalogued and stored in the database of the Ethnologisches Museum. I had the rare opportunity of seeing some of the objects in the museum's storage room during one of my archival research trips to Berlin in 2014 (Figure 5). I documented this personal experience, coupled with archival records of the



Figure 5. The Kpando royal horns kept in the storage room of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin-Dahlem (June 2014). Looking on are the author and Boris Gliemann, an official of the museum. (Credit: Lukas Bosch, research assistant) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

royal objects (ApoH 2015). The late king of Kpando, Togbega Dagadu VIII, added a cover letter to my report and made the official request to the German Ambassador H. E. John Rüdiger in October 2015 for the repatriation of these royal items.

According to Fine, he received a copy of the request letter. In complying with the museum's policy, such requests are taken through a formal process involving evidential claims. First, the head curator of the museum examines who is making the request. For example, the exhibited controversial Benin objects are often requested by people who are not attached to the Nigerian National Museum or the court of the king of Benin City, where the objects originated. In such cases, the requests are not heeded. Second, the museum seeks to establish the historical basis of the request and the arguments being made for wanting to collect the objects. Finally, the museum tries to determine the overall cultural significance of the objects. Based on these findings, the head curator makes recommendations to the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), currently headed by Professor Hermann Parzinger, who also presides over the Charité's skull collections. In the case of the Kpando royal objects, Fine noted that, after extensive research, he believed that one of the items might be linked to the event. However, Fine hypothesized that some of the items being requested were procured before the events associated with the exiling of King Dagadu III in 1914. This opinion from a museum gatekeeper on an active request needs to be

further investigated with thorough provenance research on the objects in question in order to clarify the evidential claims.

Our interactions with the curators of the German Historical Museum were even more intense. As part of the themed tour, an entire day was devoted to visiting this museum. Half of the day was spent touring their current exhibits related to colonialism and participating in a concept presentation delivered by the curators of a 2016 exhibition on German colonialism. The rest of the day was spent in a photo workshop, where we looked through their colonial photographic collections on the ex-colonies to try to identify the African contexts and advise them on evidential issues arising from the workshop findings.

The concept presentation threw light on the exhibition entitled *Past and Present of German Colonialism*, which opened in October 2016. The sincerity with which the curators opened up to the delegates showed their willingness to engage in critical dialogue and to include African expert opinions in their final exhibition. Notably, I was asked to contribute a scholarly piece to the exhibition catalogue (Apo 2016a). The opening sentence of one of the printouts of the German historical museum made clear that in Germany today, “there is evidence of a heightened social consciousness regarding the colonial past in Germany, yet its significance is still in dispute.” More specifically:

Controversies about “blackface” in the entertainment business or about whether to retain the original vocabulary in children’s books—although it might be considered pejorative today—have focused on the powerful effect that racial stereotypes can have. Civil initiatives and self-organizations of people involved in the Black Enterprise raise questions about the acceptability of certain terms and find references to current migration. Many post-colonial history workshops have been established that mark the visible and invisible legacy of colonialism in present-day urban space and gather local knowledge of the past. Ethnological and anthropological collections are being criticized because of their unreflected acquisition practices in the colonial era, while these positions call for a reassessment of the manner of dealing with the

colonial past. At the same time, it is the experience of globalization that steers our interest towards the pre-history of colonialism and raises questions about its structural consequences. Not least of all, the ongoing debates in Germany about recognizing German conduct during the war against the Herero and Nama as genocide underscore the troubling nature of the topic.

WRAPPING IT UP AT THE GERMAN FOREIGN OFFICE

At the tail end of our themed tour, a roundtable discussion was organized in the conference room of the Directorate-General for Culture and Communication at the Foreign Office in Berlin for the invited scholars, representatives of the Foreign Office, and members of the German public. I had mixed feelings when I stepped into this building. Being aware of this site as the German colonial metropolis from which colonial policies were directed for implementation in the colonies made me realize the extent of the postcolonial rapprochement. Furthermore, I felt a sense of achievement in receiving an opportunity to express critical postcolonial issues emanating from my research in “Togoland” to the assembled representatives of a former colonial institution.

The key discussion at the meeting centered on dealing with the colonial past. This was where the sankofatization of key elements of the German colonial past were recalled as a way of unpacking history to serve historical justice. This process showed how the German government is now engaging historically silenced voices into the narrative to construct and narrate a fuller and more historically accurate account. The meeting was facilitated by German government officials: Georg Schmidt, regional director for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel, and Michael Reiffenstuel, director for Cultural Relations Policy. According to Reiffenstuel, reviewing the history and culture of remembrance is an important topic that serves as a good foundation for future cultural respect and education. He tried to lay out the main reasons why we were invited from Africa as part of the final meeting with officials of the Foreign Office and civic organizations. He pointed out that Germany has a long tradition of dialoguing with its international partners in history, especially in the context of World

War I and World War II. He bemoaned the lack of knowledge among many members of the German public about the nation's historical past in Africa. He viewed the Humboldt Forum as an opportunity for analyzing postcolonial identities, answering questions concerning the appropriation of ethnological artifacts, and addressing the colonial conditions as an integral part of the permanent exhibition. He believed that such a place in the heart of Germany would enhance education and encourage dialogue by including transnational perspectives on colonial issues.

Another forum for such education was the major exhibition on German colonial history organized in 2016 by the German Historical Museum. Reiffenstuel mentioned that the Foreign Office sponsored two heritage experts from Tanzania and Namibia to play in-residence roles in the planning and execution of the exhibition. In detailing this plan, Reiffenstuel also reflected on Achille Mbembe's views on the concept of racism (Mbembe 2001, 2015), which, he claimed, lie at the heart of contemporary global political and economic inequalities. In this respect, Reiffenstuel suggested that understanding the colonial past offers a way to tackle global inequalities. Furthermore, he supported Mbembe's views that the colonial experience is a history of entanglement, which means that it cannot be told from a single perspective that is exclusively African or exclusively European (Mbembe 2001, 2008, 2015). In light of this view, the Foreign Office is striving to include the perspectives of partners outside Germany to develop an understanding of the historical narratives that have been produced about each other, which Reiffenstuel considered a form of cultural intelligence gathering. He reiterated the view that the Foreign Office wanted to listen to the guests and learn about what colonialism means in Germany today, as well as what it means in the African context.

Reiffenstuel indicated that another reason for the desire for rapprochement concerning issues of colonialism is the fact that Germany has an immigrant population of about 20%, which includes a growing African community. He believed that this diversity has an impact on outlooks on German society, its cultural narratives, and its imagined communities, foregrounding a notion of a state that resembles a colorful mosaic integrating multiple elements.

Georg Schmidt laid out the key debates of the German government on the colonial question. The officials wanted a discussion in the Foreign Office—not just outside of it—as part of a foreign policy dialogue in which state actors talk with non-state actors and vice versa. He mentioned that the meeting could have been larger, involving representatives from the other ex-colonies in Asia or Latin America, but they first wanted to initiate a dialogue with African nations to assess the colonial experiences of the delegates. He said German colonialism cannot be limited to the short period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries since it began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and did not end in 1919, at least not for many Germans who still long for the colonial past (Apo 2016a). Even if colonialism has officially ended, it is still difficult for many people to accept that cultural forms of colonialism still need to be addressed in postcolonial times.

Schmidt quoted Chinua Achebe's proverb that "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter" (Achebe 1994). In this regard, he viewed the 2016 exhibition by the German Historical Museum as an important space to assess different perspectives on colonialism, the history of colonial violence in all its shapes and forms, issues of anticolonial resistance, colonial extermination practices, and the long history of racism and lingering stereotypes. There are also ongoing discussions on how to decolonize the curriculum and textbooks used in German schools, and how to decolonize the cityscape of Berlin as a beacon of colonialism.

Schmidt speculated that, in terms of foreign policy, issues surrounding colonialism will be the next important concern. This is because of colonialism's prevailing effects on issues of borders, languages, physical structures, museum exhibitions, and psychological infrastructures. The way out is to examine them, not only to see how they work, but also to outline what we can do. He stated that we cannot rewrite history from scratch, but rather that each generation has the capacity to add new chapters by looking at the past from a distinct perspective. He thanked us for giving the Foreign Office a sense of common language to guide its emerging policies on German colonialism. Or, to put it in other terms, he thanked us for engaging in sankofatization of the past in a

meaningful way. He supported the return of remains to Namibia and activities of a special envoy set up by the German government to deal with the Namibian situation. He posed an open-ended question, asking us where we will go from here, once we have arrived at a common language. In dealing with the solutions, he remarked that engaging civic society is paramount. Similarly, reforming the museum space to be more critical is also vital in this postcolonial change (Kazeem et al. 2009). Schmidt ended by quoting a Kenyan scholar's view of keeping the right balance by looking forward as well as back through the rearview mirror while driving, especially when the car behind has its headlights on full beam. This perspective indeed epitomizes the need for the pursuance of the sankofatization paradigm in this discourse on museum evidence.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT RAPPROCHEMENT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GERMAN COLONIALISM AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF MUSEUMS

An indirect form of ongoing rapprochement is evident in the funding of my research on the archaeology of German colonialism in "Togoland." My senior postdoc project entitled *The Archaeology of German Colonial Heritages in Ghana: Repackaging Shared Relics for Strategic Ghana-German Partnership in Development* was funded through a competitive Volkswagen Foundation's Humanities Postdoc Initiative for North and Sub-Saharan Africa. This project was judged to be meaningful in reexamining evidence of the German colonial past in West Africa. Notably, in delving into the cultural diversity of West Africa's immediate past and a strategic partnership for the future, the archaeological and anthropological appraisal of the German colonial legacy in Africa cannot be marginalized. The overriding questions of this research include: (i) Why are there silences on the discourse on the archaeology of German colonial heritage in West Africa? (ii) Why has evidence of the historical archaeology of German colonial sites in "Togoland" not been the focus of German scholars and institutions? And (iii) what is the evidential status of colonial relics and residues for developing a productive outcome?

These questions are pertinent when compared with research and literature on the archaeology of the British and French colonial legacies in West Africa.

By problematizing the issues at stake, more multiperspectival attention and thorough dialogue can be focused on this discourse (Apoth and Lundt 2013). My project, from the sankofa perspective, offers a view on history that comes not only from German archives, but also from African ethnographic and archaeological expertise. In this regard, it goes far beyond and complements what historians can reconstruct.

Several ex-German colonial stations and mission sites in "Togoland," namely Kpando, Ho, Abutia, Adaklu Waya, Nkonya, Amedzofe, Kete-Krachi (all in present-day Ghana) as well as Kpalime, Bassar, and Sansanne Mango (all in present-day Togo), have been successfully excavated and researched. I have conducted this work in partnership with my graduate students (Amedekey 2018; Ayipey 2016; Fiador 2017; Ocloo 2017; Owusu-Ansah 2018, Senyo 2015) and my German postdoc partner (Apoth and Huesgen, forthcoming; see also Apoth 2008, 2010, 2016a, 2016b). One of the aims of this research is to seek complementary data on how specific precolonial daily cultural practices, settlement patterns, and domestic technology transformed as a result of German colonial and missionary political and economic pressures. It also assesses the extent to which the official status and boundaries of the German colonial and missionary officials were blurred by local cultural pressures. In presenting the extent of German colonial and missionary relics in the area, as well as their potential for redevelopment in the long term, our findings (tangible artifacts such as ceramics, faunal remains, metal objects, glass, materials for making pottery and pipes, as well as documented intangible oral accounts) will constitute meaningful evidence for the conservation, protection, and redevelopment of these shared heritage sites. Constructing these sites as living museums will promote heritage tourism and sankofa education. In the interim, the materials are being processed and curated for exhibitions in the Museum of Archaeology at the University of Ghana and in regional museums in Ghana and the Republic of Togo.

Overall, the themed tour of German colonialism ended well. As a visitor to Germany, I gave a critical statement detailing the current situation in the Volta Region and the northeast regions of Ghana, which constitute the western half of German Togoland

(publication, forthcoming). My African colleagues were equally effective in voicing their findings and critical perspectives on how the colonial legacies make themselves felt in their respective countries. The camaraderie that characterized our interaction from the onset crystallized in the end. It seems that we, the visitors from the ex-colonies, are now being tasked to help our former colonizers to do the decolonizing and sankofatization work.

The assessment of the postcolonial perceptions and agency of the key actors revealed above drums home a key point. It is my opinion that the postcolonial activism of German and African nongovernmental agencies, scholars, museum curators, and politicians should coalesce our collective visions in agitating for a decolonized landscape and culturescape in Germany and in the ex-colonies through sustained critical dialogue and realistic actions. One such critical dialogue occurred during a Volkswagen Humanities workshop organized in Hanover in November 2015, where I had a fruitful interaction with the curators of Hanover Museum. They were also brainstorming on how to decolonize their museum space, and one of their strategies was to organize a critical exhibition on some of their colonial artifacts in November 2016. To include multiple voices in the dialogue, I was asked to produce a scholarly piece for the 2016 exhibition catalogue on German colonialism (ApoH 2016b).

Indeed, the ongoing engagement between German and African government officials, scholars, museologists, activists, and artists to decolonize the discourse and elevate our shared history is certainly not a given. The momentum gained through an African artists' exhibition in Berlin in 2010 needs to be sustained among the German public. The exhibit, which was dubbed *Who Knows Tomorrow?*, ignited a level of public perception and debate on the simmering impact of colonialism and racism, both historically and today. The varied interpretations given to African art became center stage in Berlin during 2010. The opening statement of Horst Köhler, then-federal president, in the voluminous catalogue (Kittleman et al. 2010) echoes the sankofatization paradigm while envisaging a future in which the shared history of Germans and Africans can be contemplated in a collective quest for both historical justice and a better future:

What is special about this exhibition is that the artists were invited to grapple with places of historic significance and to convey their personal views about them. Four different branches of the Nationalgalerie will be given over to the artists: the Alte and Neue Nationalgalerien, the Friedrichswerdersche Kirche, and the Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum für Gegenwart, each of which is specifically interwoven with our self-image and our national identity. . . . And it was art's primary mission to teach the Germans who they were. Today, artists from Africa hold up mirrors, giving us an opportunity to take a different look at the past and present. . . . Each piece takes its own approach to connecting the past with the present and the future. Herein lies an ability possessed by African cultures from which we can learn. It is striking to see how Africans are able to look ahead positively, despite their painful experiences with slavery and colonialism. . . . It was particularly young Africans who pointed out repeatedly that the importance of looking back should not obstruct our vision of the future. (Köhler 2010:361–63)

For me, ongoing experiences with the unfolding events surrounding Germany's postcolonial rapprochement with its ex-colonies are remarkable. These insightful experiences have offered me diverse perspectives on methods and evidential discourses, extending beyond archaeology to reveal the silences of the past regarding postcolonial issues (ApoH 2019; Trouillot 1995). I firmly believe that the ongoing rapprochement will ultimately enhance the discourse on critical museum education and the history of German colonialism. This themed tour brought to mind that the negativization (Meskell 2002) of the past is never permanent since generational change often generates a renaissance, in which a "sankofatization" of past realities serve emerging postcolonial needs and influence museums of the future.

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