

Humboldt Lab Tanzania

Veranstalter: Goethe-Institut Tanzania; Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

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Bericht von: Paola Ivanov / Lili Reyels, Ethnologisches Museum / Humboldt Lab Tanzania, Berlin und Dar es Salaam

The multi-disciplinary project „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“ has placed at the center of its research-oriented „laboratorial“ work so-called ethnographic objects from Tanzania which have been appropriated in the context of anti-colonial wars of resistance during German colonial rule 1885–1918. The artifacts in question – such as drums, weapons, musical instruments and ritual objects – have been at the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany, for over a hundred years. „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“ is funded by the TURN fund of the Federal Cultural Foundation.

The wider focus is the creation of the „Humboldt-Forum“ as a new centre for art, culture and science that is set to open in the historical heart of Berlin in 2019. This new and publicly controversially discussed space will partly showcase the Ethnologisches Museum's collection, with objects from present-day Tanzania to feature in a special exhibition part dedicated to the history of East Africa in its embeddedness in the religious and commercial networks of the Indian Ocean.

Therefore, the controversial notion of a „shared heritage“ and the meaning of material culture and objects in a historical perspective – both in Tanzania and Germany – were up for discussion in a conference at the Goethe-Institut Tanzania among cultural practitioners and scholars.

The conference was opened by the director of the Goethe-Institut Tanzania, ELEONORE SYLLA (Dar es Salaam), followed by the German Ambassador in Tanzania, EGON KOCHANKE (Dar es Salaam). While both stressed their support for the chances of the „Humboldt Forum“ as a platform for intercultural future dialogue between Tanzania and Germany, they also referred to the long historical interconnectedness already ex-

isting between the two countries. EGON KOCHANKE (Dar es Salaam) pointed out the multiple and divergent assessments in Tanzanian culture of remembrance of German colonialism. But this remembrance, he said, is mostly „spinned“ in Germany due to the fact that most historical sources and material culture is physically „administered“ there up to today.

Keynote speaker DONATIUS KAMAMBA (Dar es Salaam), Director of Antiquities Department, took this on by directly addressing the controversial questions of a „shared heritage“. „It is not a one-way road“, he said, „but drives its values from the creation, conservation and interpretation of objects of cultural heritage – either at community, at national or even at world heritage level.“ The audience was convinced by his highly plastic suggestion for a „shared heritage“ between Germany and Tanzania: the German administrative architectural buildings that have remained in Tanzania, mostly the so-called „Bomas“¹. While they were certainly colonial buildings of suppression, they physically bring together materials from Germany and then Tanganyika/German East Africa, which were used by local experts and their special techniques. From there derives a new construction of an architectural heritage which is a „shared“ one through materials, common use and believes, Donatius Kamamba pointed out. However, the question was raised by the audience how the so-called ethnological objects in the storage in Berlin are being „used“ and if they can be „useful“ in Germany and Tanzania. The audience was certain that they shape the identity of the ethnic groups they have been originally from, but also may provide a benefit to those who will exhibit them to a wider public.

The next panel gave insights into the concepts, exhibitions and the research for the emerging „Humboldt Forum“ in Berlin. MORITZ WULLEN (Berlin) gave insights into the „philosophy“ of the Humboldt Forum. By

¹ „Boma“ is the Swahili word for a fortified building. Traditionally an Eastern African Boma was the fenced protection of the dwellings by thorns or stockades. During colonial times the centres of administration or the police were located in fortified buildings. Therefore this term is used for the colonial buildings of that time and even other administrative buildings nowadays.

„Thinking outside the box“, he explained, the Prussian Cultural Heritage foundation wants not less than to open a new chapter of museums in Germany. According to HERMANN PARZINGER (Berlin) the „Humboldt Forum“ is planned to be partly a post-ethnographic museum in which the historic objects are illuminated in the kaleidoscope of the present. There should not only be space for historical and cultural references, but also for diverse identities, achieved by collaborating with people from the so-called countries of origins. This „multi-perspectivity“, PAOLA IVANOV (Berlin) is convinced, is to prevent old colonial prejudices and even out-dated museological structures and to open up to different narratives. She stressed that „German East Africa“ was appropriated through the multi-faced process of „collecting“ by the museum (facilitated through colonial conquest) – and also through what was NOT collected, therefore shaping the very image of a „primitive“, ahistorical Africa. Hence, the responsibility of the museum’s custodians to provide accessibility and the possibility for research is taken on by the start of a Tanzanian-German research project about the „biographies“ of the Tanzanian objects in the museum’s collection. Ideally, for Paola Ivanov, an important part of the „Humboldt Forum“ will be a regular and institutionalized exchange with scholars, artists and curators in residence.

In the following discussion the head of department of history at the University of Dar es Salaam OSWALD MASEBO (Dar es Salaam) questioned the ambitious nature of the project. How did the Ethnologisches Museum intend to do justice to the Africans, even though the exhibitions were made partly of objects that had been violently appropriated? The methodological suggestions from Berlin to do justice were multiple: In showing aspects of African culture of today, in opening the eyes for the German public to the various dimensions of colonial rule, in using a respectful language and, finally, in sharing the „curatorial power“ and therefore the „power of opinion dominance“. This is the start of a process, HERMANN PARZINGER (Berlin) said, but needs sustainable institutional collaboration in which objects like the ones in question may be the „link“ of discussion between

the cultural heritages of two countries. Tanzanian artist DOUGLAS KAHABUKA (Dar es Salaam) made clear that the people at the „grassroots level“ in Tanzania had to understand that these objects have been in Germany for over 100 years. „Is it rational to have so many objects in Germany – and for what reason keep them there?“ he asked. The Tanzanian performance artist and choreographer ISACK PETER ABENNEKO (Dar es Salaam) then gave another interpretation of a fruitful collaboration: „giving and getting“. But with the „Humboldt Forum“ already there, the concepts being elaborated in the „Humboldt Box“, how will this be „shared heritage“?, the audience erupted. Was this not yet another alibi for the exhibition of the collections in the future „Humboldt Forum“, even perpetuating the injustices of the past by appropriating these objects a second time – but this time enriched and therefore upgraded with more information through Tanzanian-German research?

The artists AMANI ABEID (Dar es Salaam) and NICHOLAS CALVIN (Dar es Salaam) drew attention to their research in the storage of the Ethnologisches Museum and the difficult problem of accessibility for Tanzanian citizens. They had also recently seen the construction site of the „Humboldt Forum Building“ in Berlin. Visual artist Amani Abeid, however, was not convinced that the building in itself physically did justice to its content, the objects to be exhibited. The director of the House of Culture, ACHILES BUFURE (Dar es Salaam) reminded that the Tanzanian National Museum itself is in the process of reconstructing its history gallery, but lacks funds and collections for display. Could objects from Germany be lent for this on a long-term basis? Hermann Parzinger answered directly by stressing that the museum in Berlin had an educational task and was aiming at a long-term digitalization of collections. He referred to the notion of „giving and getting“ by ISACK PETER ABENNEKO (Dar es Salaam): this primarily meant the exchange of ideas, with the „Humboldt Forum“ as a place for a permanent exchange. But it is not excluded that the collections will travel one day, Parzinger said. Paola Ivanov added that joint educational material should be produced, in-

cluding a tour of a virtual reality through the storage in Berlin. EDGAR LUSHAJU (Dar es Salaam) from the Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage „DARCH!“ shifted the focus of the discussion by asking what had been done by the National Museum of Tanzania itself to protect and showcase its own collections. Could there be the possibility of an exhibition curated by Tanzanians about Germany, even with appropriated collections, but this time from Germany, in 2017? In Tanzania, the audience replied, there is not enough information on collections from Tanzania in Germany other than at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin.

The next panel focused on the appropriated objects themselves. OSWALD MASEBO (Dar es Salaam) made it unmistakably clear that Tanzanians do not use the concept of „shared objects“ when they interpret the colonial remnants, but regard it as pure injustice of colonial and epistemological violence who undermined African institutions, caused famines and had larger cultural implications. These „orphan“ objects were taken from their real context, then decontextualized in Europe and put into a box, he stressed. With this „objectification“ and „re-naturalization“ of appropriated objects, the African voices and actions became inaudible – a silence in Tanzanian history. By making these objects speak again – for example by showing that Tanzanians coped with colonialism in many ways – value and relevance can be given to them, pointing at growth from a past that leads towards the future, Masebo ended.

Professor of history of art ELIAS JENGO (Dar es Salaam) agreed in his presentation that the colonial shipping of traditional objects from Tanzania must absolutely not be seen through a lens of custodianship. He asked the Federal Republic of Germany to support Tanzania in her efforts to selectively return some of these objects to places where they belong. Professor of archaeology and anthropology BERTRAM MAPUNDA (Dar es Salaam) presented an analytical report of the field research of the „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“, conducted on three sets of objects: a bag of a ritual specialist containing medicines, a brass plate or „Gong“ (with Arabic scripts on it), and a neatly decorated cylindrical drum.

The results show that all three sets of objects shifted from traditionally used ritual objects to objects of possible resistance and even alternative methods of warfare. The research of the „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“ has revealed that some objects, artistic as they may look, could have been produced and/or used for other functions, including important socio-cultural activities. As such they do bear cultural affinities with some societies today. Therefore, Mapunda is convinced, further and long-term research deserves to be emulated.

The final panel focused on „Shared Heritage“ in Practice, giving insights into cultures and representations of memory in Tanzania and Germany. Professor for African History ANDREAS ECKERT (Berlin) urged Tanzanian historians to reoccur as more vibrant voices in the production of knowledge. He focused on three historic movements of anti-colonial resistance against German colonial rule: the Maji Maji War, the genocide of the Herero and Nama in Namibia and the resistance of the Douala chief Rudolf Manga Bell in Cameroon. While in the German public at that time, the expenses of this warfare were critically discussed, the white superiority and the overall objectives of colonialism were never questioned, Eckert stressed. Tanzanian heritage and museum expert PHILIPP MALIGISSU (Dar es Salaam) explained that with the representation of the Maji Maji War of Resistance in the National Museum in Songea, a partly open-air and on-site accommodation of African traditions is offered to the public. Tanzanian heritage experts are finding ways of conserving culture and offering opportunities to share and to understand cultural diversity via the museum display.

The conference ended with the presentation of the director of Bookstop Sanaa Visual Arts Library SARITA MAMSERI (Dar es Salaam) and the four artists of the artistic research group of „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“. The group presented the different project-related activities and the work in progress for the final exhibition in January 2017. Various project reflections revolved around the deeply-felt emotions, re-lived stories and quasi-political issues this project had roused.

„After all this information and discussion

- what next?“ asked RICHARD SHABA (Dar es Salaam), moderator and program coordinator of the Tanzania-office of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, in his concluding sentences. The conference of „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“ is ended. But it has only just begun its achievement of connecting people for a long-term, more trustfully collaboration – an ongoing intercultural process of coming to terms with the legacies of the past. Shared heritage starts with a shared debate.

Conference overview:

Moderation: Richard Shaba (Program Coordinator, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Tanzania Office)

Greeting and Keynote Speech

Eleonore Sylla (Director Goethe-Institut Tanzania): Greeting from Goethe-Institut

Egon Kochanke (German Ambassador in Tanzania): Colonial History and Tanzanian-German Relations today

Donatius Kamamba (Director Antiquities Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Tanzania): „Shared Heritage“ between Tanzania and Germany

Introduction to the Future Humboldt Forum in Berlin: Concept, Exhibitions and Research

Hermann Parzinger (President Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin): Introduction to the Humboldt Forum

Moritz Wullen (Commissioner of the Founding Directorate of the Humboldt Forum, Berlin): Short Presentation „Thinking outside the Box: The Humboldt Forum“

Paola Ivanov (Curator of the Collections from East, Northeast, Central, and Southern Africa, Ethnological Museum, National Museums in Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation): Provenance Research at the Ethnological Museum Berlin and Representation of Colonialism in Africa/Tanzania in the Future Humboldt Forum

Research in Tanzania: Field Trip to Places of Origin and Source Communities from objects of anti-German centers of resistance

Oswald Masebo (Head of History Depart-

ment, University of Dar es Salaam): Cultural Objects, History and African Resistance against German Colonialism in Tanganyika 1890-1907

Elias Jengo (Professor at Department of Creative Arts, University of Dar es Salaam): Artistic Merits of some Looted Objects: The Case of Tanzanian Appropriated Ritual Objects in Germany

Betram Mapunda (Professor at Department of Archaeology, University of Dar es Salaam): Symbolism and Ritualism in Pre-Colonial African Context: the case of German East Africa

„Shared Heritage“ in Practice: Memory, Research, Representation

Andreas Eckert (Professor for African History, Institute for African Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin): German Culture of Remembering Anti-Colonial Wars of Resistance

Philipp Maligissu (Senior Assistant Curator Ethnology and History, National Museum and House of Culture (NMHC), Tanzania): Representations of Colonialism and Anti-Colonial Resistance in the National Museum in Tanzania

Interim Show and Discussion with the Artistic Group of the „Humboldt Lab Tanzania“ at Goethe-Institute

Introduction: Sarita Mamseri (Bookstop Sanaa Visual Arts Library, Dar es Salaam)

Tanzanian Artists presenting: Amani Abeid, Douglas Kahabuka, Pia Rutaiwa and Nicholas Calvin

Tagungsbericht *Humboldt Lab Tanzania*. 22.11.2016, Dar es Salaam, in: H-Soz-Kult 18.04.2017.