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Imperial Legacies in the Discourse on the Establishment of the Humboldt Forum

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Abstract

Moving the ethnological collections to the newly reconstructed Berlin Palace inspired heated international discussions over the ethnological collections and the remembrance of the German Empire. The Humboldt Forum is intended as a place of national identification and aims to open a dialogue on the imperial past of Germany, but the form and substance this discussion took is also subject to criticism. Based on the concept of imperial practices, as described by Burbank and Cooper, this paper argues that the legacy of empires impacts the discourse on the Humboldt Forum today. A discourse analysis reveals that imperial imaginaries and practices of imperial knowledge production are still in place, constructing a distorted narrative of the history of the German Empire, which marginalizes the participation of the source communities of the objects displayed, making the debate around the Humboldt Forum unequal.

Keywords: Humboldt Forum, imperialism, ethnology, knowledge production, discourse analysis

Introduction

The reconstruction of the Berlin Palace as the new location of the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art has involved the German public and the respective scientific communities for more than two decades. As of Summer 2020, the new building already stands: three sides of its facade mimic the original palace as it looked before 1945, crowned by a widely criticized Christian cross on the top of the cupola. The palace has a modern interior and contains the Humboldt Forum, a cultural institution (named after Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt), as well as the two museums mentioned above. An exhibition on the history of Berlin and research units for the Humboldt University are also situated in the building. The expert committee which initially laid out the project imagined the Palace as a “place of dialogue” between different cultures, the sciences and the public (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlins 2001: 18). The idea of establishing the Forum was presented as an opportunity to engage with the complex and troubling history of the ethnological collections (Lehmann 2002). Meanwhile, scholars and activists criticize the project for excluding certain actors from the design and planning process, such as experts from the communities where many of the objects originated from, as well as post-colonial activists in Germany (Friedrichs and Jana 2017: 75).

Current discussions on racism and the colonial heritage of Germany make one wonder about the nature of this “place of dialogue”. Under which circumstances was this institution designed and how is this dialogue supposed to take place? The Humboldt Forum constitutes a re-imagination and re-settlement of the ethnological collections, but does it do the artifacts justice placing them into the Berlin Palace, a reconstructed symbol of German Imperialism? Does the public (and expert) debate on the Humboldt Forum allow for a just

and equal “dialogue between cultures” as it aspires to, or will it lead to a reinforcement of the already existing power structures?

This paper argues that the debate surrounding the Humboldt Forum shows how empires have a long-lasting impact, even after they cease to exist and how their practices have far-reaching consequences and can be traced to the present day. Like other ethnological museums, the Humboldt Forum also tries to critically assess its collection by offering a “dialogue”. I argue that while attempting to offer a dialogue, it reinforces patterns of imperial differentiation between cultures. Moreover, the name of the project, named after the Humboldt brothers, places it in a legacy of imperial knowledge production. Scientific discourses, research and categorization of the “other” were constitutive in forming relationships between the core and the periphery of empires. Western knowledge is still built on insights created from within imperial contexts (Tilley 2011). Critically assessing the foundations of knowledge production therefore allows one to not only contribute to the decolonisation of museum exhibitions but also to the notion and understanding of culture, heritage and race, as they are understood in Germany today. There is an ever-increasing need for an integrated understanding of heritage and its influences on the integration of society today, replacing a “dialogue” between “different” cultures, which perpetuates colonial patterns of othering. Decolonizing the social construction of knowledge allows us to problematize the understanding of Germany as a “facilitator of the dialogue” and to reconsider its role in the international community.

A discourse analysis in the tradition of the “sociology of knowledge” will be employed as the analytical framework to understand how the impact of imperial legacies is still present today. In the following chapter, I provide the theoretical foundation of the analysis, basing it on the ideas of Burbank and Cooper on ‘imperial practices’, showing how these practices were utilized by the German Empire. Recognizing that these practices apply power by impacting discourses, I show how discourse theory can be operationalized to critique the debate on the Humboldt Forum. Following the steps proposed by Diaz-Bone, I introduce my sample and show how a qualitative coding connected to the theoretical literature on imperial practices uncovers the impact on the discourse done by the rule of difference, imperial imaginaries and Western knowledge production.

0. Tracing the Legacies of Empires through Discourse Analysis

0. Imperial Practices

Empires played a crucial role in the construction of the social and political order of the world as we know it today. Their practices of conquering and incorporating vast and diverse groups of people in different territories under one rule created unequal social and economic networks which still have an impact in defining international relations today. For this analysis, I rely on the theoretical framework by Burbank and Cooper (2010) to describe and understand imperial practices. In this subchapter I review the five features of imperial governing. While Burbank and Cooper consider these to be universal practices, used by various empires in

different eras, I provide examples how these practices shaped the German Empire, mostly in the 19th Century, illustrating why these features are crucial to understanding the discourse on the Humboldt Forum.

First, empires rely on incorporating territories but at the same time constructing difference between them (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 13). The metropolitan core serves as the political and economic centre and profits from the unequal political economy of the empire. The political incorporation is connected to the spread of the empire's dominant culture. At the same time, the imperial administration upholds the difference between the colonizer and the colonized: the empire's territories are distinct political entities and people living in different places are subject to different jurisdictions. The distinction between populations relies not only on a territorial, but also on a racial basis, as the example of German colonial history shows: White settlers were understood to be superior to Africans, creating a caste-based society in the colonies (Gründer 2004: 27).

Second, the core stabilizes its rule with help of imperial intermediaries. Burbank and Cooper argue that imperial practices cannot be understood as a relationship between two groups: the colonizer and the colonized. Imperial governments often relied on private actors from the core, such as settlers, farmers, industry, researchers and merchants to establish influence over a certain territory (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 14). On the other hand, they also co-operated with indigenous elites and used their networks to establish power. In the German Empire (like in most 19th Century European empires), it meant that the incorporation of territories was primarily based on unequal legal contracts between German merchants and the local elites which were later violently enforced by the empire (Zimmerer 2004: 3f.).

Third, empires are governed in relation to each other, and exist in an international system which is constructed by other empires, which Burbank and Cooper call "imperial intersections" (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 15). Their relationships lead to competition, the exchange of practices by ways of imitation and innovation, allowing them to keep up and develop new practices of domination. One empire's ability to conquer and incorporate was legitimized and enabled by others, for example through international treaties.

Fourth, imperial governance also operates on the instrumentalization of imagination and knowledge. When establishing and popularizing concepts like "civilisation", the core dictated the social norms and forms of living (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 16). Spreading language, culture, theories of race, gender and law were all parts of the imperial repertoire (Cooper and Stoler 2001: 12). The production of knowledge is initiated in the core through institutions like universities, but it is in the periphery of empires where the research was often carried out, under unequal terms. Ethnological collections were central to the colonial production of knowledge. Exhibitions were put on display in the metropolitan cores, Berlin had the biggest ethnological collection of the late 19th century (Penny 2002: 2). These museums were used to underline the otherness and difference of the colonized people to the colonizers and to construct an unequal relationship between cultures (Penny 2002: 10f). Even if ethnology cannot be considered as a solely colonial endeavor, ethnological museums played a crucial role in securing the power of the empire.

Fifth, Burbank and Cooper argue that the repertoires of power which empires rely on are multiple and variable in different territories: they are able to adjust and modify them to ensure the continuance of their rule (Cooper and Stoler 2001: 16). Therefore, the history of empires should be understood through forms of sovereignty, which were "shared out, layered and overlapped" (Cooper and Stoler 2001: 17). To analyse the legacies of empires, this assumption helps understand the multiplicity of experiences people living under empires had and provides an explanation as to how different patterns of remembrance of the German Empire can be present at the same time. There are two radically different narratives on this area: the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century are both remembered as the *Belle Époque* of culture and 'progress' but also as the heyday of colonialism, when the most brutal act of the empire took place, the genocide of Herero and Namaqua in 1904-1908.

The Method of Discourse Analysis and the Sample

Burbank's and Cooper's concepts show how empires rely on a variety of practices and that most techniques of domination operate not through military action but rather through an imperial discourse, which assigns difference along colonial and racial lines by penetrating and shaping people's imagination of the world. Michel Foucault argued that a discourse arises out of a system of knowledge at a given place and time. There is always only one system of knowledge, which defines the "mode of being" and provides a basis of knowledge for various subjects for a specific moment in time (Foucault 2006 [1966]: xxiii). This underlying assumption helps us understand that the *Belle Époque* of the core and the simultaneous genocide enacted in the periphery arose from the same epistemic foundations. Accordingly, the discourse surrounding the Humboldt Forum with all its arguments is a product of our current system of knowledge, which can be traced to the same epistemic foundations. Foucault argued that knowledge systems are subject of transformations, where the change of concepts and knowledge items can be traced from one system to the other (Foucault 2006 [1966]: 11ff). Based on this assumption, analysing the current discourse can lead us to find legacies of imperialism.

Foucault´s ideas have a complex reception in the social sciences, as he never developed an explicit operationalization of discourse analysis and there are contesting traditions on how his work should be understood and utilized (Kerchner and Schneider 2006). The use of discourse analysis in this paper is based on the sociology of knowledge approach (Wissenssoziologie) (Keller 2006). This operationalization focuses on the "social construction of knowledge" (Keller 2006: 227), aiming to capture social processes and interactions unlike some other, more language-based approaches. By placing knowledge production into the centre of this analysis, it captures the educational nature of the museological project and its aim to facilitate "a dialogue between cultures". Looking at it as a social process allows us to thematize the crucial role of actors. In a debate like that surrounding the Forum, where there are clear in imbalances of power regarding race, heritage and access to the project, it is especially crucial not only to look at the discourse as a "collection of statements" as more linguistic approaches do, but to include the speakers into the analysis to understand that the statements come from different positions of power.

For the concrete application of discourse analysis, I follow the analytical steps proposed by Diaz-Bone, who conceptualizes statements as the primary category of analysis. These statements are constructive, as they articulate knowledge and reproduce practices (Diaz-Bone 2017: 132). The aim of discourse analysis is to understand the rules under which the statements are organized. These rules, however, are not designed by the actors articulating statements, but produced through historical processes (Diaz-Bone 2017: 133), and actors obey these rules in a way comparable to how we speak a language without entirely understanding its grammar. Organizational elements in discourses can be understood as collective symbols (Diaz-Bone 2017: 134). These are symbols which are understandable to a significant number of actors and provide context for concepts. Different positions in a discourse can be identified, for example, by the usage of collective symbols.

This paper relies on three types of material to map the discourse on the Humboldt Forum. The sampling process aimed to capture the wide variety of the actors participating and their respective statements. The first group of material contains the official documents by the expert committee on the Berlin Palace and other self-representations of the Forum. The second group consists of the expert literature on the issue of moving the Ethnological Museum into the Palace, including both academic and activist literature. Actors of these two groups are relevant stakeholders and can claim expertise on the topic, but they are differentiated regarding their access to the planning process. In these first two groups I have included material that was produced since the recommendation of the first expert committee in 2001 until the present day.

The third group of material is the reporting on the case in mass media. To gain a sufficient representation of the discourse, but also to reduce the amount of material and keep it manageable for this analysis, I have decided to focus on print media. The selection aimed to capture a wide variety of statements on the topic. Therefore, the analysis draws on two national papers, with opposing political orientation: the more liberal weekly *Die Zeit* and the more conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as well as one local daily, the *Berliner Morgenpost*. A keyword search for the term “Humboldt Forum” between the 1st of January 2001 and the 1st of March 2020 shows how frequently this issue was discussed and provides a clue to its relevance. For this analysis I have decided to reduce the sample and only analyse articles published between the 1st of January 2019 and the 1st of March 2020. (See the appendix for a full list of articles analysed.) Discourse theory argues that the underlying system of knowledge is subject to slow change and therefore the most relevant statements should be present in the chosen time period as well.

	Die Zeit	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Berliner Morgenpost
2001 - 2020	226	490	2167
2019 - 2020	22	61	216

Table 1: Number of articles published on the Humboldt Forum

A superficial analysis (after Diaz-Bone), meaning a survey of all three types of material, showed that the statements can be organized in the following categories:

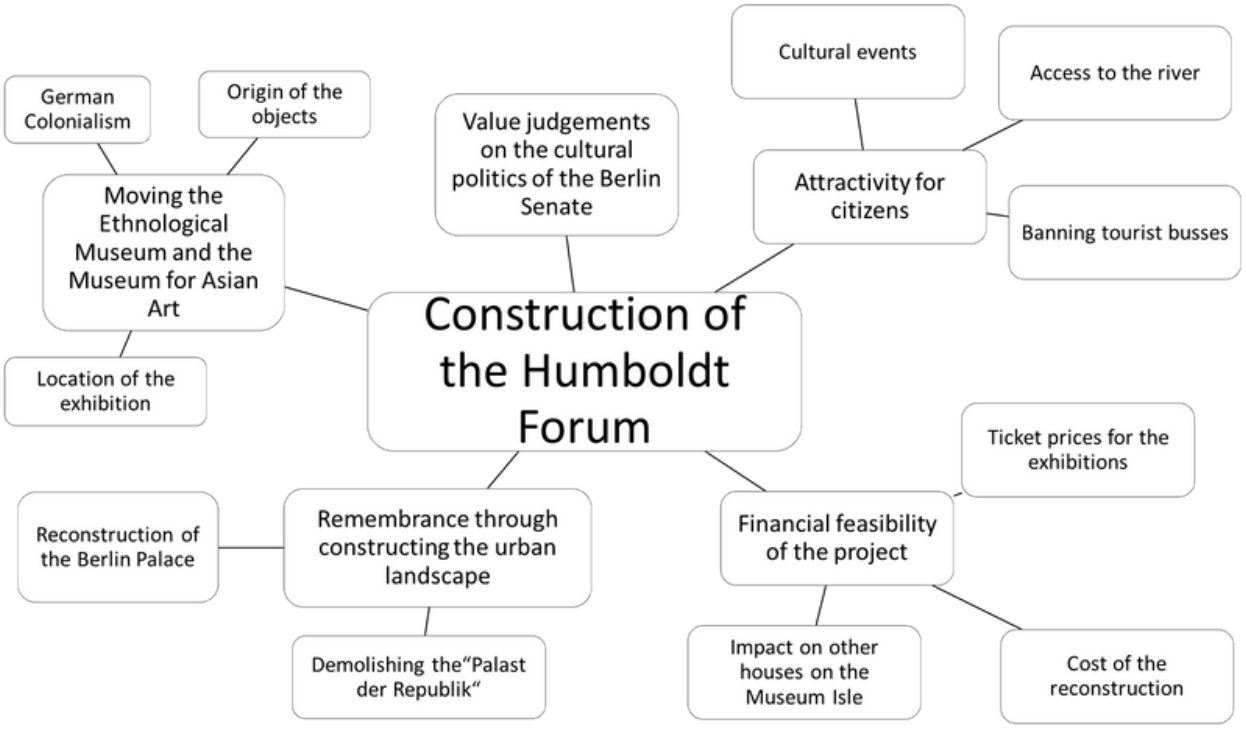


Figure 1: Thematical categories of statements made on the Humboldt Forum; the selection represents the focus of this analysis

Figure 1 shows how the statements on the Humboldt Forum can be clustered around a wide variety of themes. In order to analyse the impact of imperial legacies, I have decided to concentrate only on the most relevant topics, meaning on statements concerning the reconstruction of the Berlin Palace, the move of the two museums from Dahlem, the origin of the objects in their collections, German colonialism and the new location for their exhibitions. This thematic reduction lead to a reduction of the sample-size: 12 articles were taken from *Die Zeit*, 18 from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and 78 from the *Berliner Morgenpost*. In order to analyse this amount of qualitative data I have used the software MAXQDA. [1]

0. The Discourse on the Humboldt Forum

0. Statements in the three Areas of the Discourse

0. The Official Representation

As of June 2020, the construction on the Humboldt Forum is almost finished, but the exhibitions have not opened yet. There is a small exhibition placed in front of the building, designed to inform visitors about the project. Here, volunteers inform about the reconstruction of the palace, telling the story of how the German Democratic Republic (GDR) destroyed the original building and replaced it with the "Palast der Republik" which "obstructed the landscape of the city", as well as being poisonous due to the asbestos used in its construction. For this reason, it had to be demolished to make room for the reconstructed Berlin Palace.[2] The story presented by the volunteers and the small exhibition focuses solely on the architecture of the Berlin Palace, containing nostalgic sentiments towards the state of Prussia. They distribute promotional material that celebrates the architectural achievement of the reconstruction of the palace and place the focus on the historical beauty of the building. One of these is a free-of-charge publication, the *Berliner Extrablatt,* published by the Association for the Berlin Palace (Förderverein Berliner Schloss e.V. 2019) which features pictures of the Palace from different time periods, showing its destruction in the Second World War and comparisons of the Palast der Republik and the Berlin Palace and their respective place in the cityscape of the Museum Island, thus trying to prove how much better the Palace will fit in the city landscape when finished. It does not offer any information on the future exhibitions to be hosted in the Palace, which is surprising especially in the light of the vivid discussions held on the Forum and its future contents

This absence of details on the content of the future exhibitions is also striking when compared to other representations of the Humboldt Forum. The website opens with the announcement: "In an area covering more than 30,000 square meters, you can experience world-famous collections featuring more than 20,000 exhibits from Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania. Bringing together contemporary research and science with Berlin's history…", by connecting both the artifacts and the history of Berlin (Humboldt Forum 2020). This description mirrors the idea of a dialogue between cultures, presented in the recommendations of the expert committee on the Berlin Palace. The document argues that the aim of the project should be the "integration of the arts and cultures of the world, science, defined by a broad scope of events and programs" (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlins 2001: 18). This report imagines the Humboldt Forum as a place of "dialogue" and "civil participation" (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlins 2001: 18). The dialogue is to be achieved through an exhibition of "non-European cultures" placed in the direct neighborhood of other rooms in the museum representing "European culture" in the tradition of the Humboldt Brothers (Internationale Expertenkommission Historische Mitte Berlins 2001: 22). This conceptualization the difference between cultures by focusing on a dialogue between two imaginary poles, instead of an integration or exchange.

Lehmann, president of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, also argued that Germany has an important role to play in the world as an "intermediary" between cultures, which must be represented in the new palace (Lehmann 2002: 17). Responding to the critiques that the ethnological collections are a product of colonialism and imperial domination, he argued that this was only partially true and that these collections have to be seen as the result of the "meticulous scientific discoveries of German researchers since the middle of the 18th century" (Lehmann 2002: 19). Lehmann argues that ethnological collections are not reinforcing colonial narratives as the critiques say, but that they are a place, a place where issues like racism could be thematized (Lehmann 2002: 19). Lehmann is responding to the longstanding critique of ethnological exhibitions, which is by no means unique to Germany, but is a global discussion on dealing with the cultural heritage of colonialism.

Expert Criticism

In the last 20 years, various experts have produced a large volume of criticism on this self-representation. Binder argued that the project constructs a "great history of Prussia" and celebrates its achievements in culture and education, contributing to the production of a collective identity. (Binder 2009: 294). She states that the Humboldt Forum itself became a place of identity construction for Germany, with its intentions to balance between the local, national and the cosmopolitan, a place of discussion on the "future of the nation" (Binder 2013: 107). Von Bose observed the planning process of the move of the Ethnological Museum and argues that it became the focal point for not only a national, but an international discussion on ethnological practices and collections (Bose 2016: 35). These statements underline the importance of the Humboldt Forum project and extend the problem beyond the question of the shape of future exhibitions.

In the case of the Forum, the construction of an overly positive remembrance of Prussia meets a long-time neglect of the reconciliation with its colonial past, which Zimmerer calls "the colonial amnesia" (Zimmerer 2015: 22). Zimmerer argues that for a long time the remembrance of national socialism and the Second World War overshadowed the attention given to colonialism, which has only gained more attention in the recent years (Zimmerer 2015: 23). As Apoh (2020) points out, the topic of the German colonialism in Africa is under-researched, especially when compared to British and French colonial legacies, and argues that more research and a tighter cooperation between academics and activists both in Europe and Africa is essential for reconciliation (Apoh 2020: 41). Apoh suggests the use of the "sankofatization paradigm", a term derived from an Akan word meaning that "recalling or going back for something is not an abomination". This will help develop ways in dealing with the colonial past (Apoh 2020: 30). This concept achieved little or no attention in the German discourse so far. In fact, the conceptualization of the Humboldt Forum still seems to be lagging behind the ongoing discussions on decolonization, in comparison to other museums in Europe, such as the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (Huis 2019), as well as the German Historical Museum, which, by being pressured by both academics and activists, offered an exhibition titled "German Colonialism" in 2016.

Many academics articulated strong criticisms of the project of the Humboldt Forum, most notably art historian Bénédicte Savoy, whose resignation from the scientific council of the project caused upheaval both among

experts and in the media. She criticized the project for being anachronistic, not transparent and not delivering its promise of a critical assessment of the artifacts. In an interview she called the whole project an unsolvable paradox: the reconstruction of the Palace symbolizes a "turning back in time" but at the same time the ethnological museum is reluctant to give up its artifacts, claiming that "history cannot be undone" (Häntzschel 2017). Savoy polemically compared the Humboldt Forum to Chernobyl, claiming both the scale of the project as anachronistic and criticizing the process of its decision making. These statements inspired other critical assessments, von Bose arguing that the planners of the Humboldt Forum are unable to reflect and draw on the post-colonial debate for ways on how to handle the ethnological collection (Bose 2017).

Experts of the group Berlin-Postkolonial argue that the idea of the Humboldt Forum carries colonial implications in itself, as it places stolen artifacts into the Palace of the "mass murderer Emperor Wilhelm II" (Friedrichs and Jana 2017: 75). The group No Humboldt21! argues along similar lines. They demand that "the work on the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace be ceased and that a public debate is to be held" (No Humboldt21! 2013: 1). The reasons behind these demands are: The museums are not the legitimate owners of these collections and their objects, the project redeems Berlin's colonial past, it marks the cultures represented as "other" and "strange", the research done in the museum is not problematized and the exhibition of the objects in Berlin means that they remain in the possession of people of the global North and are not accessible for descendants of cultures that they originated in. (No Humboldt21! 2013). Another group called Africavenir has similar demands and aims to "scandalize the museum", calling it "eurocentric and restorative" (Africavenir 2013). They are planning to introduce alternative tours in the Forum to showcase its colonial heritage.

Mass Media

The statements discussed in the mass media rely predominantly on the official representation of the project, as well as some academic criticism such as that of Bénédicte Savoy. The more radical critique, like that of No Humboldt21!, has not been reported on (neither in the sample period nor before). An overwhelming majority of the coverage of the *Berliner Morgenpost* concerns the history of the Berlin Palace. The paper launched a series titled "Ausflüge in die Geschichte des Schlosses" [Excursions into the history of the Palace] where a variety of topics were discussed, such as everyday life in the palace and the lives of Prussian rulers. They offer a sympathetic depiction of the life of "great men" and occasionally that of some women, concentrating overwhelmingly on the elites. The articles offer a romanticizing view on the Palace and celebrate its return to the "heart" of Berlin. In this series, there is only a single article concerning colonialism, which does not talk about the late 19th century but about Brandenburg-Prussia's involvement in the slave trade in the 18th century (Kulke 2019a). This article downplays the role of Prussia in the global slave trade and shifts the question of responsibility by claiming that African leaders "willingly extradited" those sold into slavery. The focus of the article lies on the economic aspects of trade, the imperial assumption that human beings can be traded as goods is not criticized.

In connection to the Humboldt Forum, the historical role of the Humboldt brothers is discussed, most notably that of Alexander von Humboldt. His research provides the foundation for the current ethnological collection. He is represented as a mostly positive figure, emphasizing his scientific achievements. In response to critiques of von Humboldt, the historical series in the Berliner Morgenpost argues that he had an ambivalent relationship to the rulers and cannot be regarded as an "agent of the crown" (Kulke 2019b). In most articles concerning Humboldt's involvement in colonialism, his collection practices are criticized, but the focus lies on his scientific achievements, and the newspapers are mostly sympathetic towards the "challenge" of exhibiting the artifacts with an imperial past. In an article on the brutal ethnological practices of German researchers in Eastern Africa, the tone of journalists is rather sympathetic towards the current challenges of tackling the issue of colonialist science and welcomes the fact that these collections will be exhibited to achieve "further resonance" (Radano 2019). The articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* are also mostly sympathetic towards the challenges of researching the past of the artifacts and not critical towards the way this research is conducted. There is little reporting on the question of returning the objects to the source communities. And there is a rather extreme counter-example, in an article concerning the throne Njoya (which will be exhibited in the Humboldt Forum), where the German colonizers are characterized as "adventurers" who built schools in Cameroon and had a good relationship with the local elites and, as the article argues, therefore legitimately received the throne as a present (Hermann 2020).

The Impact of Imperial Practices

As a result of a partly deductive (based on the concepts by Burbank and Cooper presented above) and partly inductive coding of statements the following code system emerged:

- Colonialism
  - Continuity of imperial collection practices
  - Impact of legacies, presence of colonial practices
  - Remembrance of the German Empire
- Remembrance of German History
  - Ausflüge in die Geschichte des Schlosses [Excursion into the history of the Palace]
  - German historical figures
  - Heart (of the city landscape)
- Dialogue
- Exhibits/objects
- The location for the collections
- World

Table 2: Code-System

The statements from all three groups of material can be grouped into these categories. Considering the concept of imperial practices as outlined by Burbank and Cooper, we can group these codes around two practices: the construction of difference and imperial knowledge production. A cluster like this shows that these statements in the discourse are connected to imperial practices: the statements discuss the clusters, relate to them or criticize them, the presence of imperial practices is felt, and actors react to them. Legacies of empires are therefore constitutive elements of the underlining knowledge system. The use of collective symbols, such as the “heart of the city”; “Alexander von Humboldt”; “colonial heritage”; “stolen art” [Raubkunst] also operate within the impact of these legacies.

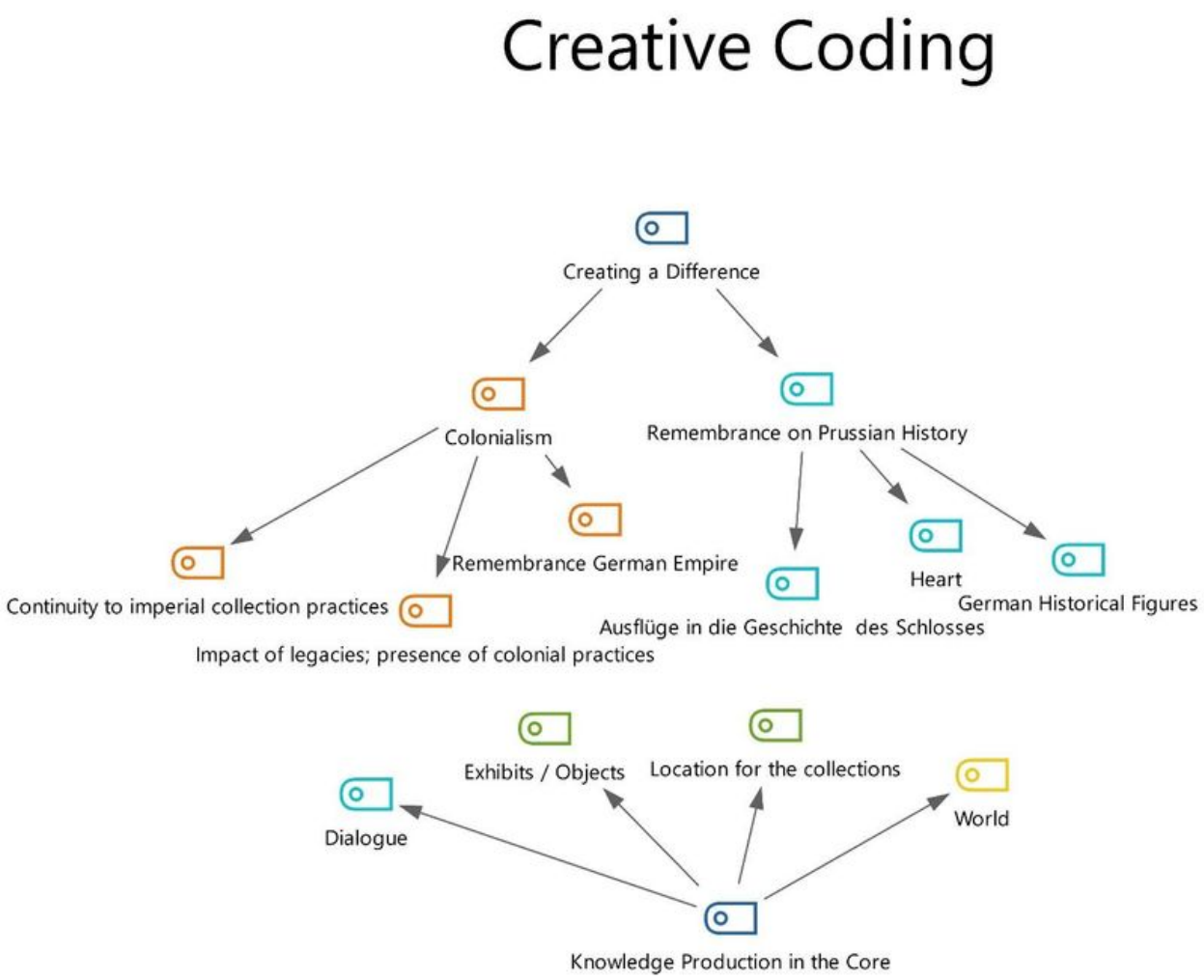


Table 4: The schematic map of imperial practices constitutive for the system of knowledge

What kind of knowledge system do these statements indicate? The short collection of statements above shows how the issue of the Humboldt Forum is tied in with questions of the politics of history and the remembrance of the German Empire. The overarching theme which emerges is the question of the positioning of the history of Prussia and colonialism in relationship to each other. The statements of the discourse have shown that these two issues are separated, and that this separation is not based on events, as historians like Andreas Eckert argue, but rather on the current culture of remembrance (Eckert and Wirz 2002). German colonialism, following Eckert, cannot be framed as a brief phenomenon between 1878 and 1918. Colonial thinking and imperial practices were present way before that, as Brandenburg-Prussia taking part in the Atlantic slave trade shows. The Humboldt brothers were part of a global Europe-dominated imperial knowledge production of the 18th century. As we have seen, these facts circulate in the discourse on the Humboldt Forum, but there is still a clear separation on what is regarded as German or European History and what is “World” history, and the history of colonialism clearly belongs to the latter.

It is striking that the press articles all have a clear theme: an article is either concerned with colonialism, or the history of Prussia. These two rarely ever mix and, when addressed at the same time, the complexity and the paradoxes are immediately pointed out as if the system of knowledge does not allow for a consistent narrative when combining these two aspects. The impact of this othering can also be observed in the actors who play a role in the debate: the experts are all German or European, representatives of "World" history are only able to speak when they are invited to participate in the dialogue (for example for an interview), but they are not part of the planning process of the Humboldt Forum. This impact is further deepened by the clear separation of the discursive strains. While academics are present in mass media and scholars were involved in the planning process of the Humboldt Forum, the official representation of Forum seems to be dissociated from the current academic discussions around decolonization. Sticking to the notion of the "dialogue between cultures", the official representation is not addressing the issue of the existing "colonial amnesia" as pointed out by Zimmerer, nor do the curators engage with the concept of "sankofatization" as suggested by Apoh. Furthermore, activists are not even present in the mass media reporting.

The second complex of practices can be observed surrounding the question of knowledge production. Non-European actors are not part of the planning process, the objects are only interpreted through agents of the core (meaning German experts). Even German majority society is better suited to participate (as the project stresses its interactive nature) than the source communities of the artifacts displayed. There is the claim that the project enables a dialogue between cultures, but this dialogue is not equal if only one party can dictate the rules. Even after this critique was articulated by the No Humboldt21! group, there has been no equal involvement. Statements like that of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which suggest that the objects were gifted by the source communities, only draw attention to the practice of imperial intermediaries. Imperial imaginations are not only transmitted through the conceptualization of the ethnological exhibition, but also by the representation of the project to the public. The palace is often referred to as the "heart" of the city, so that the artifacts are to be placed in the middle of the core, and that Germany is to play the role of the mediator between cultures, as described above. This description implies that "Germany" as a collective is the main active player in the knowledge production.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the discourse on the Humboldt Forum reveals the legacy of imperial practices in Germany. The impacts of the rule of difference are recognizable as there are still two historical narratives of the German Empire. That narrative of the imperial core, the process culminating in the German unification of 1871, and the *Belle Époque* following it are represented in the German Historical Museum. The other history, that of colonialization and exploitation are to be placed in the Humboldt Forum. This house is imagined as place of dialogue. These two histories, which will be placed in two different houses, that of Germany and that of the "World", should be in dialogue with each other but they shall not mix or integrate. The traces of imperial imaginaries and knowledge production can be observed in the planning process, in the unequal, hegemonic role

of the core in leading said “dialogue”. The sampling of material has shown how the official representation of the project, even though it has come under heavy criticism, still dictates the rules of the discourse.

This discursive impact of imperial legacies should not be overlooked but considered as a factor in the debate on ethnological collections. When aiming to create a dialogue, European scientists and intellectuals should reflect that such a dialogue is inherently unequal, unless they directly counteract it. An active counteraction against imperial legacies should deconstruct the rule of difference, by presenting a picture of a common, interwoven history rather than drawing on the differences between cultures. Furthermore, imperial patterns of knowledge production should be broken up by incorporating source communities into the study and presentation of artifacts.

The analysis has some limitations regarding its scope, as Figure 1 has shown, there are multiple themes in the discourse which were not considered here but would be fruitful as the subject of a further analysis, especially regarding the contested remembrance of the GDR and the German Empire. Still, identifying imperial legacies in today’s discourse offers a valuable lens to analyse and reflect on its impact on issues like racism and international inequality. The debate around the Humboldt Forum gave occasion to engage with multiple issues regarding heritage and societal integration in Germany. In order to tackle these issues, the impact of imperial legacies has to be recognized and counteracted.

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Appendix

List of Press Articles

Datum	Ressort	Titel	Zeitung

03.01.2019	Kultur	Ich bin für die Tropen geboren	Berliner Morgenpost
03.01.2019	Feuilleton	War Humboldt Kolonialist?	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
04.01.2019	Feuilleton	Halbe Fahne	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
06.01.2019	Berlin	Kultursenator: Kolonialgeschichte aufarbeiten	Berliner Morgenpost
06.01.2019	BIZ	Ein Keim von Berlin	Berliner Morgenpost
08.01.2019	Berlin	Mittes Bürgermeister findet das Berliner Schloss " grausig"	Berliner Morgenpost
20.01.2019	BIZ	Todesurteile im Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
27.01.2019	BIZ	Der Kurfürst und die Musik	Berliner Morgenpost
30.01.2019	Kultur	Dahlem wird das Schaufenster zum Humboldt Forum	Berliner Morgenpost
03.02.2019	Berlin	Neuer Schlösser-Direktor gegen "Blattgold-Tourismus"	Berliner Morgenpost
10.02.2019	BIZ	Mehr Pracht fürs Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
12.02.2019	Geschichte	Geraubte Stimmen	Die ZEIT
14.02.2019	Feuilleton	Einfach mal durch den Körper denken	Die ZEIT
17.02.2019	BIZ	Der Traum vom Gold	Berliner Morgenpost
24.02.2019	BIZ	Der Baumeister aus Italien	Berliner Morgenpost

27.02.2019	Titel	Humboldt Forum: Eröffnung 2019 ohne die geplante Berlin-Ausstellung	Berliner Morgenpost
28.02.2019	Feuilleton	Not kennt keinen Kulturgutschutz	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
03.03.2019	BIZ	Am Tisch des Fürsten	Berliner Morgenpost
24.03.2019	BIZ	Ein Garten für alle	Berliner Morgenpost
26.03.2019	Feuilleton	Sammeln, Sammeln, Sammeln!	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
05.04.2019	Feuilleton	Haltet die Lügner!	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
07.04.2019	BIZ	Giftige Gerüchte im Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
14.04.2019	Berlin	Das Humboldt Forum - Berlin und die Welt	Berliner Morgenpost
14.04.2019	BIZ	Die Festung in der Fremde	Berliner Morgenpost
18.04.2019	Kultur	Mit Cinderella und Sindbad um die Welt	Berliner Morgenpost
21.04.2019	BIZ	Der Baumeister des Königs	Berliner Morgenpost
28.04.2019	BIZ	Das Schloss der Intriganten	Berliner Morgenpost
10.05.2019	Neue Sachbücher	Wer nicht tauscht, ist ein Kannibale	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
12.05.2019	BIZ	Ein neuer König im Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
19.05.2019	BIZ	Zucht und Ordnung	Berliner Morgenpost
26.05.2019	BIZ	Das Schloss der Frauen	Berliner Morgenpost
29.05.2019	Feuilleton	Weltkunst in Ost-Berlin	DIE ZEIT
02.06.2019	BIZ	Das Gespenst im Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost

06.06.2019	Kultur	Die Objekte der Omaha	Berliner Morgenpost
07.06.2019	Feuilleton	Leere	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
09.06.2019	BIZ	Ein tierisches Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
13.06.2019	Feuilleton	Das ist kein Skandal!	DIE ZEIT
16.06.2019	BIZ	Das ungeliebte Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
19.06.2019	Feuilleton	Was genau geschah in den Kolonien?	DIE ZEIT
19.06.2019	Feuilleton	Durch die Metropole in fünfundvierzig Minuten	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
19.06.2019	Kultur	Eine alte Tür fürs neue Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
23.06.2019	BIZ	Ein neuer König	Berliner Morgenpost
23.06.2019	BIZ	Gute Aussichten	Berliner Morgenpost
26.06.2019	Feuilleton	Gewurstel im Barock	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
27.06.2019	Hamburg	»Das waren in Hamburg geplante Raubzüge«	DIE ZEIT
27.06.2019	Titel	Humboldt Forum soll ab Herbst 2020 schrittweise öffnen	Berliner Morgenpost
07.07.2019	BIZ	Der König und sein toter Sohn	Berliner Morgenpost
10.07.2019	Kultur	Humboldt Forum erhält Segelboot aus Fidschi	Berliner Morgenpost
14.07.2019	Kulturbesitz	Bachs Spuren führen ins Berliner Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost

14.07.2019	BIZ	Ein Schloss für Kinder und Gäste	Berliner Morgenpost
21.07.2019	BIZ	Der Berater der Könige	Berliner Morgenpost
25.07.2019	ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT	Humboldts Welt	DIE ZEIT
25.07.2019	Feuilleton	»Geschehen ist fast nichts«	DIE ZEIT
01.08.2019	Geschichte	Schluss mit Heia Safari	DIE ZEIT
01.08.2019	BIZ	Schüsse aufs Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
04.08.2019	Politik	Herr über 28 Schlösser	Berliner Morgenpost
04.08.2019	BIZ	Scharaden im Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
08.08.2019	Feuilleton	»Das fand ich unangemessen«	DIE ZEIT
11.08.2019	BIZ	Bilder für den König	Berliner Morgenpost
18.08.2019	BIZ	Der König und das Volk	Berliner Morgenpost
24.08.2019	Vermischtes	Berlins Herz für Berliner öffnen	Berliner Morgenpost
25.08.2019	BIZ	Wie die Könige speisten	Berliner Morgenpost
01.09.2019	BIZ	Ein Schloss stellt sich aus	Berliner Morgenpost
02.09.2019	Berlin&Brandenburg	Leserforum zur Kultur in Berlin	Berliner Morgenpost
08.09.2019	BIZ	Das Schloss wird kaiserlich	Berliner Morgenpost
08.09.2019	BIZ	Ein Berliner mit Fernweh	Berliner Morgenpost
11.09.2019	Berlin	" Die Freiheit der Kunst ist das größte Geschenk"	Berliner Morgenpost
14.09.2019	Kultur	Das Humboldt Forum feiert einen Geburtstag	Berliner Morgenpost

15.09.2019	BIZ	Dem Entdecker zum Geburtstag	Berliner Morgenpost
15.09.2019	BIZ	Die Schönheit mit den Feenflügeln	Berliner Morgenpost
15.09.2019	Berlin	Die verborgenen Schätze der Berliner Museen	Berliner Morgenpost
15.09.2019	Titel	Festakt zu Humboldts 250. Geburtstag auf der Schlossbaustelle	Berliner Morgenpost
22.09.2019	BIZ	Die Hofgesellschaft am Buffet	Berliner Morgenpost
13.10.2019	BIZ	Wie der Kaiser feierte	Berliner Morgenpost
20.10.2019	BIZ	Die zweitbeste Adresse der Stadt	Berliner Morgenpost
27.10.2019	BIZ	Ein Wettstreit mit dem Papst	Berliner Morgenpost
30.10.2019	Feuilleton	Sammeln und herrschen	DIE ZEIT
03.11.2019	BIZ	Ein letztes Mal preußischer Prunk	Berliner Morgenpost
10.11.2019	BIZ	Das Schloss wird umgebaut	Berliner Morgenpost
15.11.2019	Neue Sachbücher	Kuratierte Erinnerung	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
15.11.2019	Berlin	Neues Teehaus im Humboldt Forum	Berliner Morgenpost
24.11.2019	BIZ	Mit Jubel in den Abgrund	Berliner Morgenpost
01.12.2019	Titel	Berlin entwickelt sich zur " Food-Metropole"	Berliner Morgenpost
01.12.2019	BIZ	Eine rätselhafte Rede	Berliner Morgenpost

22.12.2019	BIZ	Vom alten zum neuen Schloss	Berliner Morgenpost
31.12.2019	Kultur	Bricht in Mitte auf	Berliner Morgenpost
31.12.2019	Meinung	Vorfreude auf 2020	Berliner Morgenpost
06.01.2020	Berlin	Stiftungschef: " Wer Nofretete sehen will, wird hingehen"	Berliner Morgenpost
09.01.2020	Berlin	Zu Besuch: Paul Spies	Berliner Morgenpost
19.01.2020	Berlin	" Die Touristen werden in Scharen kommen"	Berliner Morgenpost
26.01.2020	Kultur	Parzinger: Kolonialer Schuld mehr Aufmerksamkeit schenken	Berliner Morgenpost
28.01.2020	Berlin	Raus aus dem Elfenbeinturm, rein ins Leben	Berliner Morgenpost
13.02.2020	LITERATUR	Die Afrikaner fragt wieder keiner	DIE ZEIT
16.02.2020	Kultur	Der legendäre Große Kurfürst und sein Berlin	Berliner Morgenpost
23.02.2020	BIZ	Der Thron des Kaisers	Berliner Morgenpost
01.17.2020	Politik	Den Thron behielt der deutsche Kaiser	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
03.12.2019	Feuilleton	Preußische Planspiele	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
04.04.2019	Kultur	Fraktionen fordern Verantwortung für Kolonialismus	Berliner Morgenpost
04.10.2019	Politik	Kulturmittlerin	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
06.10.2019	BIZ	Die Kuppel über der Stadt	Berliner Morgenpost

13.05.2019	Kultur	Forscher untersuchen Herkunft umstrittener Benin-Bronzen	Berliner Morgenpost
16.09.20.19	Feuilleton	Murx den Europäer	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
16.11.2019	Briefe an den Herausgeber	Zuerst die Zweckbestimmung	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
17.12.2019	Meinung	Manchmal helfen nur drastische Schritte...	Berliner Morgenpost
21.12.2019	Feuilleton	Sperrige Wiedergänger	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
22.11.2019	Feuilleton	Odyssee im Weltwissensraum	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
29.02.2020	Feuilleton	Kraft und Charisma	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
30.06.2019	BIZ	Die Kammern des Königs	Berliner Morgenpost

Footnotes

0. Using this software supports the development of an inductive code-system for the analysis and does not interfere with the foundations of discourse theory as laid down by Diaz-Bone and Schneider (2003). ↩

0. This description is based on my visit to the Berlin Palace on the 20th of February 2020. ↩