

DEUTSCH-FRANZÖSISCHES DOKTORANDENKOLLEG (DFDK) CONFERENCE

German-French Doctoral School:
"Representing the 'Other':
Museums, Universities, Ethnology"

17-19 JUNE, 2026
GOETHE UNIV. FRANKFURT, CAMPUS WESTEND
17.06: NG 2.701 | 18.06: IGF-BUILDING 1.418

POSTCOLONIAL POWER STRUCTURES AND THE 'ETHNOGRAPHIC OBJECT'

Keynote: 17 June, 18:00 Kodzo Gavua (University of Ghana)
in conversation with Hans Peter Hahn

Coloniality and the Museum

(17 June, 14:00)

Jean Bertrand Miguoué
Markus Walz
Fabien Van Geert

Chairperson: Jean-Louis Georget

Museum Studies

(18 June, 9:00)

François Mairese
Gonçalo de Carvalho Amaro
Judith Zweck

Chairperson: Dyoniz Kindata

Cultural Diplomacy 2

(18 June, 14:00)

Kokou Azamede & Bettina Brockmeyer
Sarah Rausch
Martin Nafuka

Chairperson: Alena van Wahnem

On the Colonial „Object“ / Subject

(17 June, 16:00)

Emily Clark
Clementine Tholas
Carla Coimbra

Chairperson: Afreed Mehta

Cultural Diplomacy

(18 June, 11:00)

Aurora Hamm
Elias Aguiagh
Melda Demir

Chairperson: Philipp Müller

Decolonisation

(18 June, 16:00)

Maren Ziese
Shraddha Bhatawadekar
Chairperson: Camille Grapa

Conference wrap up (18 June, 17:30) Robert Heinze & Afreed Mehta

Guided tour at the Weltkulturen Museum (19 June, 10:00) with Director Larissa Förster

Guests are welcome! Please register your interest at – hans.hahn@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Organised by: Afreed Mehta, Philipp Müller and Prof. Hans Peter Hahn



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The starting point for the decolonisation of ethnological collections and museums is the recognition that the objects and bodies of the colonised which were appropriated in colonial contexts were used to justify colonialism and its power relations between the colonised and the colonialists through essentialising displays and framing.

It is important to recognise that the ethnographic museum was part of a larger administrative apparatus to collect data on the colonised, including censuses, surveys, archives that were further used in justifying colonialism. These categories and distinctions that were created back in time, informs our understandings of colonialism, writing of histories and museum displays. These histories have focused on one dimensional storytelling of single elements, compartmentalising it into political, social, economic or cultural, separating these elements into singular silos. This separation is further extended to a black and white, homogenous understanding of coloniser versus colonised, perpetrator versus victim, and today, the global north versus south.

In the present, not only activist circles, but also museums and States pursue strategies catered towards (re)assessing colonial histories and working towards decolonisation. While all these actors do it with different and sometimes contrasting aims and intentions, they critically refer to the colonial era, they want to make it visible, commemorate it, and practically counter its consequences. This has different meanings with every actor. One such example can be seen in the restitution of cultural objects, where former colonisers pursue it with different objectives, compared to former colonial States. We see further differences in the demands of the State versus the museum or the State versus the communities versus activist groups.

Besides the general necessity of restitution and reassessment of colonial violence, this way of “coming to terms with the past” comes up against the fact that global structures of exploitation and dominance changed but didn't vanish. Authors like Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank and Anibal Quijano have commented on these nuances in their critical analysis of the capitalist world system. So, how does the double-sided demarcation of former imperial influence and rule, the “decolonisation”, and the corresponding cultural-political and museum-based reassessment fit with ongoing inequality on the global level?

In addressing these complexities and questions, we focus on the contradictory nature of the diverse actors, interests and practices that are implicated in challenging “colonial continuities” and entanglements. It doesn't only encompass questions of identity and racism, but also political, economic questions and structures. The contradictions between states, different political parties, economic actors, museums and “indigenous” actors, which are often conflated in the discourse on restitution and decolonisation as if “us” and “them” actually existed as homogeneous and non-fragmented entities, are thus to be examined.

We look forward to contributions that take up these themes and relate them to recent research or current debates and present them as more abstract theoretical analyses. We welcome participants to look at the convergence of these elements, in the ethnographic museum/collection, finding ties between different groups, interests, objectives, States which not only help connect different dimensions of cultural politics, but also the past to the present in the ethnographic museum (collections).

Afred Mehta / Philipp Müller / Prof. Hans Peter Hahn