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Museums, Material Culture and Universities.

Reflections on the Parallelism and Contemporaneity of GDR/FRG Social Anthropologies in View of a Positioning with Future Prospects

In 1989 the “Wende” (the “Turning point”) reached the scientific landscapes of the GDR (German Democratic Republic or East Germany) and the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany, West Germany) and so also their ethnologies and ethnographic museums, which were similarly unprepared for it.[1] The disciplines of ethnology in both German states at the time had, following the post-war era, reoriented and consolidated themselves into the parallel scientific landscapes of the GDR and FRG. At the end of the 1980s – after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent thaw – something new had announced itself, although it was something that did not yet have a name (see Decker 2020). In both ethnologies and museumscapes the actors had positioned themselves according to the options available to them – funding, roles and institutions – with more or less affinity to the leading discourses in their respective niches.

In the early 1990s, with the FRG’s “Übernahme” (“takeover”) (Kowalczuk 2019; Milev 2020) of the GDR, a phase of accelerated change began; we call this phase the “post-Wende era” (“post- Turning point era”). During this, the federal German ethnology “expanded” institutionally into the universities and museums (Haller 2012) of the “new federal lands”. As regards content, at that point it only dealt hesitantly with the GDR’s “ethnography”[2] and ethnographic museums.

In 1989 the ethnologists in institutions in the GDR were not just passively responding to influences from these national and international developments which had been on the horizon for a long time. On the contrary, they stood enthusiastically ready with

their own ideas and aspirations (see Decker 2020; Dolz 1992). Many recall a marked euphoria which initially took hold of them, as well as discussions about how they could use the potential of ethnographic museums to react to the rapid social changes, and their hopes of being able to put into practice long-desired field research in those countries which until then they had not been able to travel to.

The ethnologist Wolfgang Mey (Hamburg) did field research on the Chakma of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The ethnologist Carola Krebs did research on the Chakma collection in the Grassi Museum in Leipzig in the GDR. Before 1989 both scholars could only encounter each other's research through their publications. Master carver Bandu Wijesooriya and Wolfgang Mey at Frankfurt Airport. Photo: Carola Krebs, 1993.

To a certain degree the representatives of both ethnologies knew about each other

in their particular branches of study through publications, conferences or visits before the or at the moment of the “Wende”. Thus, the “post-Wende era” began with an approximation of good colleagues on a par with each other. In view of the dramatic changes on the horizon, GDR ethnologists were on a level with their disciplinary community and opened themselves up with initiatives like founding the Society for Ethnography, a registered association, across the entire Germanophone space.

After 1989, Carola Krebs, Leipzig, participated in an East-West collaboration project on masks and ritual traditions, travelling for the first time to the southwest coast of Sri Lanka, where Wolfgang Mey had helped to establish a Museum of Masks. Carola Krebs and the Wijesooriyas, together with members of the dance school, on a pilgrimage tour to Kataragama. Photo: Anne Wischkowski Mey, 1994.

However, this mutually respectful attitude, as people in Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin perceived it, reverted during the "post Wende-era" into a "neo-colonial" one – a term that frequently emerges in discussions with ethnologists who were academically socialised during GDR times. Equally, the narrative of reunification as a "return of the East to the historically correct model" of society broke new ground in ethnology. It linked itself to a kind of exoticising fascination for the former GDR by simultaneously stigmatising its inhabitants (Milev 2020).

Thus, ethnologists from the GDR encountered various kinds of what Yana Milev has called the phenomenon of "hubris" (Milev 2020; see also Dahn 2019), that is, an exaggerated sense of superiority held by those in the FRG. Several representatives of Western German ethnology and ethnographic museums revealed that they were to a large extent blind – or at least powerless in the face of the sobering reality, that is, the disruptions and conflicts with which their colleagues who had been socialised in the GDR were all of a sudden confronted. Their profound unease with regard to their professional future, but also with regard to the appreciation of their hitherto-achieved work, as well as deep worries about their museum collections, and disappointment regarding rejections of their research project proposals still continue to have effects today. Many ethnologists report a sobering period following the "Wende", and of disillusion. Their experience of the "post-Wende era" has been too incisive, the transitions have been too short for the planned neo-orientation and so-called "reconstruction" in a "decoupled society" (see Milev 2020).

Furthermore, in the "post-Wende era" it became apparent that the generational transformation in ethnography and museology, as well as the crisis of ethnographic museums in Western Europe were being projected onto curators who had been trained in their jobs during GDR times and who found themselves at risk of being left behind due to allegations that they were not ready for the new era. Only by and by did the professionals affected realise that their own development had had particular qualities and had given them insights of which their colleagues from the FRG were

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totally unaware. Many of the GDR colleagues today, 30 years after the “Wende”, recognise in retrospect that, under different conditions, they would indeed have been able to proceed much further than conceded.

All of these ascertainments led the authors of this contribution – born roughly simultaneously on opposite sides of the border and thus, coevals parallelly ethnographically socialised – to discuss how the parallel GDR/FRG ethnologies stood in relation to each other. We have done this by asking the counterfactual question: What course could the history of the discipline have taken if in 1989 the disciplinary, methodological and theoretical strengths as well as the personnel resources of both ethnologies had been synergetically merged and used “peacefully side by side” (Hametner 2020)?

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During the collaboration project, the community from Sri Lanka joined the Leipzig museologists in identifying and defining the collection of masks created by Carl Hagenbeck in around 1900. Banduwathi with Christel Treumer, conservator at the Grassi Museum. Photo: Carola Krebs, 1991.

Only by acknowledging the parallelity and coevalness of these two ethnologies can we take a new look at the events and developments of German ethnology in general, as well as a particular focus of the past 30 years. Part of this history, for example, is that museums in East and West Germany covered the same topics. At different moments, museums in the FRG and GDR had to deal with the colonial past of their collections and came under fire from a postcolonial critical public (see e.g. Foroutan and Kubiak 2018). A better understanding of the contexts as the global historical and interdisciplinarily-situated GDR ethnography taught it, shows clearly that some postcolonial and museological debates were forestalled there (see Treide 1972; Stein 2009; Penny 2019).

It is one of the aims of this contribution to reveal the potential that was available in 1989 for an ethnography related to museums and collections and their common future. Currently, numerous publications are reclaiming and addressing the "late effects of the takeover" (Milev 2020) of the "GDR colony" (Holm 1998) and the liquidation of its academic and cultural institutions. A dramatic reduction of staff in the ethnographic museums since 1989 has led to a substantial weakening of ethnology in the "new" federal states. It is our concern to steer a new attention towards both German ethnologies and their museums. And this is also about a belated appreciation of the academic achievements of GDR ethnologists.

Parallel Ethnologies. The FRG and GDR as Mirror Images

We start by asking when did the ethnologies of the GDR and FRG separate, since

they actually both referred to a common history of the discipline, archives and collections? The split into two parallel science strands only gradually took shape as differing ideologies and concepts gained a grip, along with certain institutional and political decisions (Noack 2019, Treide 2012). Within the professional networks which continued to exist across the Wall, people took academic notice of each other and, in the long run, aligned themselves via "transmural" (Wolff 2018) communication.

With the consolidation of the scientific landscapes in the FRG and GDR though, parallel national and international systems of orientation and relatedness evolved. Longstanding intense relations developed in the GDR with ethnographic museums in Eastern European states. The numerous, often tight contacts, cooperation, projects and exhibitions with colleagues from Soviet Union and Eastern European ethnologies (see Hann, Sárkány and Skalnik 2005) shaped ethnology behind the "Iron Curtain".

After World War II, the museums in both German states were confronted with heavy damages and collection losses which determined their work with the collections for decades. Yet, ethnography in the GDR started early on. In the Dresden Zwinger, where the ethnographic collections were previously located, and whose collection had been nearly entirely preserved due to prompt relocation, the first special exhibitions were shown in 1949 and 1950 (Israel 1956). The Leipzig Ethnographic Museum had been almost completely destroyed during the war, along with about 30,000 objects. But in 1954, after the museum had been reconstructed, the first permanent exhibition was displayed there – on Oceania/Australia and Indonesia (Blesse 2009; Martin 2015).

In the 1970s new theoretical approaches and developments evolved with the end of colonialism and the beginning of the postcolonial era in ethnographic museums in the FRG and GDR. From then on they developed in parallel but differently, in terms of their mutual relations and in a kind of "systems competition" (Harms 2003), so this changed the ethnologies in both countries substantially.

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While in the West the '68 movement confronted ethnology with its colonial and national-socialist history, the victory of ideology over culture ended the "short summer of the GDR" in 1965 (Decker 2015) and with it the euphoria of the ethnologists there as well. Furthermore, the third reform of higher education in 1968 assigned ethnography to broader disciplines such as area studies and history. This initiated a comparatively frosty era.

Although engaged with common themes and comparable tasks, these developments led to systems-related differences. For example, the West German "crisis of museum ethnology" since the 1970ies, which led to a certain alienation of university ethnology from museums and a fundamental questioning of the function and meaning of museums, was not shared in the GDR. In contrast, ethnographic museums in East Germany, which categorically distanced themselves from colonialism and supported the political awakenings of anticolonial movements, experienced an increasing appreciation from the 1970s on. However, their focus on areas developing in a socialist direction led to a weaker fostering of research beyond such political centres.

Debates around the crisis of museum ethnology in the FRG, which ultimately led to museums' "boom years" in the 1980s, makes it clear that apparently ever-recurring discussions around the purpose of ethnographic museums, their functions and the subject of ethnology have been held over the last 40 years, which have responded in particular to fundamental deliberations in the Anglo-American academic sphere (Zwernemann 1991; Kroeber-Wolf and Zekorn 1990; Harms et al. 1990; Fischer 1991; Kraus 2015). Some of the few topics that have also been discussed in the Germanophone world since the 1970s (e.g. Ganslmayr and Paczensky 1984) include repatriation demands, which were more prominently addressed in relation to ethnographic museums just before and shortly after the "Wende" (Zwernemann 1991; Fischer 1991; Harms et al. 1990; Noack 2019). Especially since 2017 the "coloniality of museum collections" has taken up its central place in political discourse, which has

led to a stronger scientific impetus for, as well as public and financial attention to, ethnological provenance research (Förster 2019; Sarr and Savoy 2018).

Meanwhile, the field of attention unfolding in the GDR's ethnographic museums was an entirely different one. As state research centres of a Marxist ethnology under the control of the Ministry of Higher and Technical Education, they stayed marginal in cultural and educational policies. This became evident in the control asserted by the Ministry of Culture in the GDR, which was relatively hands-off in comparison to that in the FRG (Decker 2015, Schorch 2018; Noack 2019). At the same time political fluctuations and infighting led to university and museum ethnography having an ambivalent position within the GDR's scientific landscape (Treide 2012; Schorch 2018; Noack 2019). The museums in particular frequently became refuges for theoreticians who had come under criticism. Nonetheless, there were still some political interventions where, for example, exhibition projects could not be realised due to ideological reasons (see Tiesler 1992; Noack 2019), or they were dictated by local party executive committees, even against the will of the museum staff. Therefore, an explicit focus on collections research and development, – which, because of the lack of field research possibilities but good access to specialist literature took the FRG as its centre anyway – provided individual possibilities for curators to advance their research.

Aside from this historic research into the collections, the transmission of knowledge to an interested public – in particular to school classes – formed the focus of the work in ethnographic museums in the GDR which, by the 1980s, had become real visitor honeypots (see Blesse 2009, Germer 1965, 1969; Krebs, Müller and Wagenknecht 2009; Dolz 2020a). Contributing to these developments was also the fact that the museums had become involved with the Ministry of Culture's international relations efforts and its exhibition-exchange projects. As part of this, cultural agreements were signed with Mexico, Peru, Cuba, Chile, Vietnam, Japan, India, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Canada. Herein lay some of the core areas of the

understanding GDR gained of itself as a player in global ethnography.

Up until the first special exhibition in the Japanese Palace in 1977, the Dresden Museum had gone on tour in experimental ways by showing transportable small exhibitions in clubs and culture houses in the city and its surroundings (Dolz 2020a). This led to a broad popularisation not only of the ethnographic museums, but also of the academic discipline. The impact of the thematic and transregional travelling exhibitions cannot be overestimated, since it corresponded to a museum education task which reached far beyond the museums themselves.

Master carver Bandu and Banduwathi Wijesooriya in the courtyard of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig. Photo: Carola Krebs, 1991.

While the ethnographic museums of the GDR initially remained almost untouched by

the events of 1989 and the succeeding “post-Wende era”, and while their staff experienced the time as one of opening up new opportunities – for example, for field research in areas not reachable in GDR times (see Wyss 2009; Krusche 2009), at around the turn of the new millennium a restructuring became apparent. The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Research was founded in Halle (Saale) in 1999, which investigates and has held conferences about topics including post-socialist states and their ethnologies (Hann, Sárkány and Skalnik (eds.) 2005; Treide 2005; Lenz and Thomas 2015). Differing from universities and other research institutions, the ethnographic museums’ directorships had a longer continuity beyond the “Wende” years. Thus, Lothar Stein remained director of the Leipzig Museum until 2000, Heinz Israel in Dresden until 1996 (succeeded by Klaus-Peter Kästner as acting director until 1997), and Stephan Augustin stayed as head of the museum in Herrnhut until 2018.

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Opening of the joint exhibition ‘Gifts from the Gods and Mask Dances in Sri Lanka’ at the Grassi Museum of Ethnology. Photo: Unknown, 1993.

When these directors retired their senior positions were not filled by East Germans. But the staff of all ages who had been trained and been socialised in the GDR, including curators and custodians, remained employed at the museums and thus, during their careers, experienced “several museum turns” (Scheps-Bretschneider 2019).

Today the former ethnographic museums of the GDR are all in one federal state, Saxony, so they were concentrated in 2004 as the State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony (SES) under one general directorship, although the individual institutions

kept their existing names. The unification of the collections in Dresden, Leipzig and Herrnhut, with the Dresden State Arts Collections (SKD) in 2010, which is subject to today's Ministry of Science, Culture and Tourism, ended the long tradition of individual museums acting in relative independence.

Shifted Moments: Postcolonial Crises and Decolonising as a Research Topic in the GDR and FRG

The national liberation movements after World War II, which had led to an end of colonial rule in Asia and Africa, created entirely new challenges for the ethnologies in the FRG and GDR and contested the discipline on both sides of the Wall and in general terms.

Along with the '68 movement postcolonial political flows developed at the FRG's universities while – after a slight delay – the exhibitions in museums gradually turned to consider new everyday realities and conditions in all areas of the world (see Harms 2003; Haller 2012; Lenz and Thomas 2015; Münzel 2006; Harms 2003).

In the GDR the colonial system was understood as part of the global capitalist and imperialist economic system, and the anticolonial "national liberation movements" as the actors in a shift being produced in international power relations between the political blocks. Therefore, the nomenclature applied in East German politics and sciences did not follow a terminology of "decolonising", but one of "liberated peoples", of "national liberation struggles against any relations of exploitation", of "transitions into a socialist-oriented path of development", etc.

The state's support for national liberation movements provided a boost for applied ethnology. Furthermore, and separate from their activities in museums, its representatives were involved in manifold tasks of other state institutions and initiatives: as counsellors with regard to the social, economic, cultural, political,

religious or legal questions which emerged through cooperation with the national liberated socialist states (Dolz 2020a; Asamoah 1971; Ismail 1975; Mardek 1972; Mirreh 1978; Seiwert 1972; Stein 1969, 1972, 2009; Timm and Aalami 1976).

The first young nation states which achieved liberation included Egypt, Ghana, Mali and Tanzania, later followed by South Yemen, Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia. Accordingly, especially at the Leipzig Museum and with the focus on economic anthropology at the University Institute of Ethnology in Leipzig, prominent research topics were those which explored colonial relations in these countries from a historical perspective, as well as those which deviated from nation-building processes and questions of ethnicity respectively, i.e. processes of ethnogenesis (Treide 1965/67; Markov 1979).

Similarly, theoretical impulses related to the topics of colonialism and ethnography came from the Humboldt University Berlin. The first dissertation about the relations between colonialism and ethnography was published there in 1966 (Winkelmann 1966), incidentally, almost twenty years before a comparable study (Gothsch 1983) was published in the FRG (Penny 2019).

The ethnographic museums in Leipzig and Dresden were tightly involved in processes of decolonising – as one would call them nowadays. Since the 1960s in the GDR's ethnography there had been a fundamental preparedness to provide countries liberated from colonial rule with illustrative, teaching and research material, and eventually also to return objects from the museum collections (Treide 1965). It was believed that the preservation of, and research on material cultural property and creative arts should, as Treide put it, foster the emergence of a national consciousness in the young nation states. Over the long term these aims could be cooperatively implemented in those countries. Until the end of the 1980s there was intense international contact among the ethnographic museums, as well as bilateral discussions between the governments of the GDR and some African states about possibilities of knowledge exchange and mutual support on the installation of

collections, as the following example of Nigeria illustrates.

In 1985 the GDR's Ministry of Culture conducted conversations with the directorate of the Nigerian National Museum about possible restitutions. None of these were instantiated by 1989 as a result of the fundamental political differences between both states. However, in the 1980s there were collaborative exhibition projects with Nigeria in both German states. After the Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim in 1983 had shown the exhibition "Art Treasures from Ancient Nigeria", which was much admired in West Germany, a further exhibition, called "Treasures from Ancient Nigeria. Heritage of 2000 Years", followed two years later in the Berlin Pergamon Museum (see Eyo/Willett 1983). Both exhibitions were part of a worldwide travelling exhibition organised by the state of Nigeria, which provided objects declared as "masterpieces" from the Nigerian National Museum (Eyo 1977 [1990]) to be seen across the world – from San Francisco in the USA to Leningrad in the Soviet Union (Dolz 2020b, Savoy 2021).

A main focus of applied ethnography in the GDR in the context of African states' ambitions for independence was cooperation with what are called originator communities today, in particular in museum collaborations. One example of this is the project which ran for five years to conceptualise and install the Ethnographic Section of the New National Museum in Addis Ababa, as well as a regional museum in Naqamt (Nekemte), the capital of Wallaga (also known as Wollega or Welega) province in Ethiopia between 1982 and 1987 (Escher 1984; Escher and Treide 1985; Escher and Helmboldt 1986, 1988). This was a national-democratic government initiative to help socialist Ethiopia understand itself in the course of its nationality policies.

Here, the comprehensive understanding of a common national cultural heritage of what is today an "ethnic-federal" state is interesting, including the research, documentation and museum implementation. And within this, a field of tension was defined between the Ethiopian National Museum – where, with regard to the

exhibition concept, an ethnolinguistic structuring had replaced a regional one, and the regional museum, where the cultural particularities arrived conceptually anew. While academically-trained ethnologists have worked at the National Museum since it was founded in 1982, the regional museum did not have at its command adequately trained staff or any collections. Its photographic laboratory, stationary and tool equipment were imported from the GDR, and the museum staff were trained in methods of ethnographic field work as well as documenting and restoration. The collection was brought together in the course of an alphabetisation campaign by pupils, students, administrative staff and farmers, while a smaller number of ethnographic objects and photo documentation was given to Leipzig (Escher and Helmboldt 1988).

However, the hopeful beginnings of museum foundations in a first phase of national self-discovery after the independence of African states suffered heavy setbacks in many places, including there. This project took place at a time of political crisis and economic misery, particularly in the North of Ethiopia. Successive attempts at democratisation through establishing federal structures provoked unstable political hodgepodges in the strongly ethnically-polarised societies of most of the African states, which did more to embed societal debate than to preserve and foster cultural heritage. Since the last decade though a shift in direction has been noticeable, and contemporaneous art and culture is once again receiving greater attention.[3]

A further focus of GDR ethnologists' work with originator communities was, and still is, Australia. This regional emphasis was set at the latest on Australia's official diplomatic recognition of the GDR in 1972. Contacts with the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* had already led in the 1980s to collaborative documentation of the Leipzig, Dresden and Herrnhut holdings, including the human remains, stone artefacts and secret sacred objects (Cooper 1989). Cooperation with Australian museums and scientific institutions, as well as with representatives of originator communities in the time before the "Wende", had

laid the foundation stone for the current exemplary collaborative work at the State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony with Australian originator communities. It seems remarkable how the Leipzig Museum has successfully fostered a passion for this art in the Leipzig public since the 1990s, through regular exhibitions of Australian Aboriginal Arts, as well as through part of the permanent exhibition (Scheps-Bretschneider 2019).

It was part of the parallelity and contemporaneity of the ethnologies in the GDR and FRG that, under different frame conditions and political-cultural prerequisites, they addressed important questions of decolonisation and coming to terms with the colonial past at different times. In the GDR the discipline thereby experienced stronger state support – at least for some time – while also taking on associated obligations. It is to be remembered here that in 1969 the Ministry of Higher and Technical Education forbade the Leipzig Ethnographic Museum from celebrating its centenary, demanding that it must come to terms with its own colonial history first (Treide 2012; Blesse 2009; Schorch 2018).

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The exhibition 'Gifts from the Gods and Mask Dances in Sri Lanka' has also been shown at the Museum for Natural History and Ethnology Julius Riemer in Lutherstadt Wittenberg. Photo: Carola Krebs, 1993.

Curator or Custodian in East and West: Professional Practice, Formation, Future?

The formation of staff and professional practice at the ethnographic museums in both Germans states also stood as an interesting mirror image. The museum professions – like conservation, restoration, registry, storage management – were comparably structured. However, their relation to state cultural and scientific politics, institutional integration with teaching and research, the degree of closeness

between university ethnology and museums, and their actual positioning with the public, as regards their content, were all understood differently.

Ambitions to standardise the professions in ethnographic museums were on the horizon with the creation of corresponding research and training institutions at different moments and in differing places. In Leipzig a Professional School for Museum Assistants had already been founded in 1954, with a focus on museum pedagogics. This later became the Leipzig Professional School for Museology (Krebs, Müller and Wagenknecht 2009). The influence of the standards developed at this training centre for ethnographic museums was guaranteed through single actors, like for example Ernst Germer in the case of museum pedagogics (see Germer 1965, 1969). But, since ethnography was situated out at the professional school, Humboldt University Berlin introduced distance learning in ethnography in 1966, leading to a diploma for the further qualification of museum staff, which continued until 1992/93 (Mohrmann 1998).

As regards the realisation of professional museum skills, interesting differences can be identified between ethnographic museums in the GDR and FRG. Publications from ethnographic museums in the GDR also provide descriptions of technical museum professions. It would be particularly interesting to do some comparative research into restoration and conservation in museums in the GDR and FRG. As there were already in GDR times methods of research and near-collaborative restoration with originator communities, one could ask the question of when did this begin in the FRG, against the background assumption that it was a later development there (see Escher and Helmboldt 1988; Gabler 2019). But such activities in the GDR were more prominently reflected with regard to cooperation and professional structuring, with the strengthening of a theoretical museology in the early 1980s (see Guhr and Weinhold (eds.) 1989; Stingl 1989).

In the case of the professions of museologists as custodians the focus lay on an early and – compared to the training in FRG – incredibly intense theoretical and practical

approach to all departments, work schedules and tasks in museums and collections. The initial training consisted of a range of specific museum internships, which were organised for ethnologists, but also for general museologists, and furthermore for students from the collections' areas of origin (see Treide 2012, Stein 1989).

According to a general understanding of the role and training of custodians, that is curators in ethnographic museums in the GDR and FRG, they were just as responsible for the care of the collections in their museums as for displaying them to the public. Dealing with questions of materiality and history, they had to explore contexts of origin and provenance, with the social, material and technical concepts in the originator communities, and also with the intentions of the erstwhile collectors (see Bräutigam 1989). The knowledge developed over many years of practical experience with tangible collections was formed in dealing with a concrete local context, public, interest and setting (see Dolz 2020a).

Overall though, a different situation was reflected in the actual structural conditions of the GDR and FRG. If one looks at the ethnological development of a curator in the FRG more closely, it becomes evident that this remained more or less marginal in universities' ethnology training for museum work and object research. Exceptions to this were the universities of Tübingen, Göttingen, Mainz, Marburg, Bonn, and institutes where chairs pursued a particular interest in museums and collections or everyday technologies. The topic was transmitted as being altogether down-to-earth, but not sufficiently relevant to academic ethnology (Münzel and Kraus 2000; Münzel 1999; Münzel 2000). The museum internship or the German "voluntary service" (Volontariat) stayed the formation format for later curators.

In contrast, in the GDR the structure as well as the practice had already been constructed universalistically and in a historical-materialist approach, due to scientific theory (see Stein 1989). Field research in the objects' and collections' areas of origin was mostly not possible for the custodians, so ethnohistory – using a historical perspectivation, ergology and technology – generally formed the basis of

ethnographic research. The corresponding teaching was well-founded and organised, bringing research and museum practice together in unity. Thus, a diploma holder should be able to lead a small museum in all matters, including accounting and management, or else be able to immerse themselves in one of a larger museum's departments – storage, exhibition design or communication.

In the GDR museums had a clear remit of education, with visits to exhibitions serving as windows into alternative life- and world concepts, into "counter worlds" (Deimel 2009). Accordingly, visitors had challenging expectations of the information provided at the exhibitions. Moreover, the exhibitions reached, in particular through the travelling exhibitions – a topic that, as far as we know, has not yet been explored –a broad audience (Blesse 2009; Krebs, Müller and Wagenknecht 2009; Dolz 2020a).

Students from the Ambalangoda Dance School (Sri Lanka), founded to sustain the

local tradition by Bandu Wijesooriya, as guests of the Grassi Festival in 2006. Photo: Carola Krebs, 2006.

To be mentioned here are also the very early publications and initiatives concerning visitor research and the museum pedagogics that had already emerged in the 1960s in the GDR's ethnographic museums (see Streicher 1965; Holtzhauer 1971; Kiau 1988; Ave 1988; Augustin 1989; Enzmann 1989; Schützenmeister 1989). These specialisations existed in general for museums in the FRG as well, but ethnological museums there implemented them – reluctantly – much later, in the 1980s (see Harms 2000, 2003).

Even though there were possibilities of orientation within the ethnologies of the socialist countries, the custodians themselves deeply regretted the impossibility of undertaking complementary field research concerning the collections. "The living, practice-related side was missing," says Silvia Dolz, custodian of the Africa collections of the Ethnographic Museum Dresden (email 24.5.2020). She assumed that ethnologists in the FRG could do field research in all areas of the world. What was apparently not known in the GDR was that, with the relative distance between university institutes and museums in the FRG, the material research, object-historical and object-context training had fallen by the wayside. Astonishment came when, in the "post-Wende era", people became aware that there was actually limited historical-material and technical-informed object understanding among ethnologists socialised in the FRG.

Thus, a strong, museum-supported basic education in ethnology and the clear economic, social and cultural-historical development of GDR ethnology in Berlin and Leipzig (Treide 2012; Streck 1997, 2014) led – in line with numerous offers of excursions and practical internships – to a markedly more object- and technology-closer ethnographic structure than in the FRG. Furthermore, the closeness of universities and museums in the GDR was a basic prerequisite of the discipline – "in

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Leipzig university institutes and museums have always cooperated in good harmony" (Streck 2014) – the institutions referred to each other in teaching (Stein 1989), research, exhibiting and public relations, while area studies set philological benchmarks for ethnographic work about their areas of interest (Nentwig 2009; Flitsch 2021).

Museum and Material Culture: Contemporaneity as Chance

In her research about the development of European ethnology and cultural anthropology after the "Wende", the cultural anthropologist Victoria Hegner stated that her

> ...observations of the development within the discipline due to the fall of the Wall are to pick out as a central theme this historical situation as a moment of the biggest possible opportunities for a content-analytic extrapolation and innovation of the field: chances which were used, but which also elapsed or failed in the course of the implementation (Hegner 2020; translation by the authors).

This point also concerns the ethnologies which we have been looking at in this article. We reflect these, however, less with regard to their entanglement as in their parallelity and in the chances afforded at the moment of meeting anew under the conditions of the "Wende". This takes the actors out of their transmural entanglements and opens up the way for individual and self-conscious references to people's own experiences taken from GDR ethnography and, therewith to recognising an enriching professional simultaneity which emerged in the "post-Wende era".

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At the beginning of the 21st century, as we have shown, the picture has changed. The ethnographic museums have been set up in the "new federal lands" and newly established in a time of a growing tendency towards "de-professionalising" (Bertsch and Vahrson 2014). With each silent retirement of academically-socialised curators from the GDR, with each new appointment after retirement the contours of the "reconstructions" that are being accomplished (Milev 2020) become more visible.

A paradox of the era of the "takeover" of eastern German ethnographic museums ultimately lies in the fact that the object-interested ethnographic museum curators from the FRG are now moving closer to those academically-socialised curators from the GDR (see Münzel 2000). Furthermore, the "last Grassians"[4] are rarely consulted with regard to the themes about which they did research in GDR times, even though in many cases the preparation for current projects and reconsiderations of museum work was achieved by them (see Hegner 2020). The causes of this invisibility are, as has been shown, partly political and partly down to their research content. They also lie in the fact that the West German separation of university ethnology and museums – albeit a topic of ever-returning debates – is now more or less the same across all the new federal lands.

Thus, asking the question where would today's ethnology stand if, in 1989, one could have approached the other on equal terms has led to the insight that both ethnologies did not make use of a unique time of the "biggest possible opportunities" (Hegner 2020). Chances were missed, for example, to undertake projects in tandem, to sound out common ground and divergences, or to use the disciplinary, methodological and theoretical strengths as well as the personnel resources of both ethnologies. The GDR's methodological and historical-material, Marxist-social analysis and object-research capability, as well as its differing and experimental exhibition formats and particular expertise in communication, consisted of a manageable number of people in an ethnography where universities and museums were close. Hence, if this proficiency had been enriched by the practical experience

which they had been denied in the areas of their regional specialisations, they could have become an asset for the Federal Republican university ethnology. Museum ethnology would have been extended in its application-orientation with regards to methods and theory. Thus, the museums could have established themselves in the interest of decentring Europe from the old colonial powers and therewith – earlier on and certainly being better informed by objects and collections – have begun the necessary decolonisation efforts as a reformulation of knowledge through objects, moving beyond colonial assumptions to design and deliver their programmes.

On the basis of comparable perceptions of the role of the curator or of the custodian would most probably have been integrated quite easily and collaboratively, in the absence of the idea of a "colony GDR" at the museums. Still today, political will, positions and funding are lacking. Currently, the risk of the "execution" of the "takeover", thereby "deleting" (Milev 2020) the body of knowledge of GDR ethnography is real. We set this contribution against that risk, having found that there is, first of all, a fundamental lack of understanding of the opportunities which emerged in the "post-Wende era" out of a new simultaneity of actors and experiences from the parallel ethnological tradition lines. What is overdue is the acknowledgement of contemporaneity and of knowledge about these parallel ethnologies. The consciousness that knowledge generation throughout the professional formation in GDR times was valid is only now, 30 years after the "Wende", gradually coming to light.

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The collaboration of the authors on GDR anthropology *translates into shared research interests concerning the History of Knowledge and Science in the GDR and into a current joint project taking into account the post-Wende era history of former GDR museums and ethnography.*

Footnotes

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[2] With regard to the use of the term “ethnography” in the GDR see Noack and Krause 2005.

[3] We thank Silvia Dolz for this background assessment.

[4] See “Die Grassianer. Eine Völkerkunde” (The Grassians. An Ethnography), an in many ways problematic feature by Christoph Goldmann, broadcasted on 17.2.2019 on SWR2. www.swr.de/swr2/programm/broadcastcontrib-swr-26612.html and https://www.swr.de/swr2/programm/download-swr-11994.pdf. See also the open letter https://www.bundesverband-ethnologie.de/kunde/upload/all_files/Presseerklaerungen/190409_Fall_SWR_Radiofeature_Grassi.pdf (Date of access: 04.7.2021).

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