

# **African Culture and the Zoo in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**

## **The “African Village” in the Augsburg Zoo and Its Wider Implications**

**Report to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**

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## Executive Summary

The announcement by the zoo in Augsburg Germany that it was hosting an “African Village” set off a wave of controversy that received widespread media coverage. A global protest developed, fueled by the rapidity of e-mail communication, with concern voiced by African-German organizations, rights organizations, academic associations, a Nobel Prize winner, and concerned individuals from many countries. This report is based on attendance at the four day event, the “African Village” in the zoo from 9 June to 12 June 2005 and interviews with the various participants.

Our findings are as follows:

- (1) The event was not a village displaying people but a market in the zoo augmented by African singing, drumming, and “oriental” belly dancing.
- (2) The event was organized primarily to earn revenue for the zoo, the promotion company, and the exhibitors and performers.
- (3) The event organizers linked the zoo and Africans in an endeavor to attract visitors by an “exotic” event; they perceived the zoo with its “African panorama” as a perfect environment for an African fair.
- (4) Solidarity with African people and mutual understanding were not primary aims of the event.
- (5) After visiting the zoo, visitors frequently linked Africa, Africans, wild animals and nature.
- (6) Organizers and visitors were not racist but they participated in and reflected a process that has been called racialization: the daily and often taken-for-granted means by which humans are separated into supposedly biologically based and unequal categories.
- (7) The questions raised by protestors about the “African Village” in the zoo took the defenders of the event by surprise; the defenders equated racism with the atrocities of Nazism and attacks on Jews, Sinti and Roma and did not reflect critically on problems dating from German colonialism.
- (8) Images dating from those times contribute to contemporary exoticizing, eroticizing, or stereotyping of Africans and are sometimes promoted as multiculturalism.
- (9) Against this background the Augsburg zoo was an inappropriate setting to hold a market of African crafts together with forms of “traditional” African cultural performance.
- (10) The African exhibitors and performers bore the greatest financial risk and some felt exploited by the particular circumstances of the event; however in a situation of high unemployment and unequal power, they rely on the marketing of cultural difference.
- (11) The promotion of zoos through special events relating African culture, people and animals is not a phenomena limited to Augsburg or Germany; it is found also in other European and US zoos.
- (12) In the current global economy when marketing of difference is big business and when educational institutions such as zoos need to generate more revenues, there are incentives toward racialization.
- (13) The racialization processes facilitated by the Augsburg zoo and other zoos are not benign because they can lay the ground work for discrimination, barriers to social mobility, persecution, and repression.

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## **I. Introduction**

In May 2005, the news about a planned “African Village” in the zoo of Augsburg spread in the cyber-space. The widespread dissemination of initial letters of protest in German and English called the attention of scholars, academic associations, and various sectors of the media within Germany and internationally to the plan to put an “African Village” in the zoo. The initial protest letters were credentialed for international scholars because they were written by an African-German association called “Initiative schwarze Menschen in Deutschland” (ISD) and by a German historian, Norbert Finzsch, who is professor of German and Anglo-American history and currently Prorektor of the University of Cologne. These initial letters raised the specter of Völkerschau, summarized their history, and asked the question whether the choice of the zoo reflected racism and discrimination. The fact that the zoo event was to be held in Germany and that it was called an “African Village” contributed to raising the alarm internationally. Several associations of anthropologists wrote letters to the zoo director expressing their concern.

Meanwhile many researchers at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPI) had been contacted by our international colleagues and queried about our response. Department I, whose topic is Conflict and Integration, and contains many researchers specializing in African ethnography, discussed how we as anthropologists located in Germany could best contribute to the debate over the “African Village” in the zoo. The outcome of our discussion was a decision by MPI Director Prof. Dr. Günther Schlee, that three MPI researchers, Prof. Dr. Nina Glick Schiller, Dr. Data Dea, and Markus Höhne (Ph.D. candidate) should conduct a mini-ethnography of the event. The report they would write would be made widely available. This report, *African Culture and the Zoo in the 21st Century: The “African Village” in the Augsburg Zoo and Its Wider Implications* is the outcome of that project.

## **II. Methodology**

This report was prepared on the basis of ethnographic research conducted before and during the four days of the “African Village” event at the Augsburg zoo in Bavaria, Germany. The village actually consisted of two parts, a series of booths scattered throughout the zoo selling craft items or providing information or services and cultural performances of drumming, story telling, dancing, and music. The research team consisted of three researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, one German, one Ethiopian, and one from the United States, assisted by four German students of social anthropology from the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich.<sup>1</sup> Formal interviews were conducted with the people responsible for organizing the event, with 15 exhibitors, 18 visitors, 6 demonstrators, and a local representative to the

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<sup>1</sup> The student assistants included Anja Lochner, Rea Mair, Morgane Remter, and Carola Weidner. We gratefully acknowledge their contributions and the support and insights of their professor, Dr. Frank Heidemann. We also express our gratitude for the cooperation and kindness of Dr. Barbara Jantschke, Mr. Medhat Abdelati, Mr. Klaus Schwenk, Dr. Christian Ruck, Dr. Heinz Münzenrieder, Ms. Eva Leipprand, and Mr. Hans Peter Jaxt. Our special thanks go to all the exhibitors who were so generous with their time and insights.

Bundestag. In addition we had informal discussions with other visitors and exhibitors and a Nigerian diplomat who was assessing the event on behalf of his embassy. On Saturday night we visited the exhibitors in their camp and had a chance to listen to their discussions and have informal discussions with them. We conducted 65 exit interviews to obtain visitors' impressions after they had seen the zoo and the "African Village" events. Four exit interviews were conducted with exhibitors. We also observed event activities, read news reports and discussions in internet forums, spoke to reporters, accompanied children as they toured the zoo, and attended the demonstration staged the first day of the event. In addition, we took a "census" of exhibition booths to ascertain the origin of the exhibitors and the products being sold.

### **III. Origin of the Debate**

In May 2005 an e-mail circulated widely. It contained a letter of protest formulated by the ISD. The material circulated included the text advertising the event and a response by Dr. Barbara Jantschke, the zoo director, to a letter written by a Swiss citizen who had enquired about the event. This package became the starting point for a "global" engagement of various people and groups with the "African Village" in the Augsburg Zoo. In order to understand the debate some of the central points raised in this mail are summarized here: The advertisement for the "African Village" in the zoo spoke of African crafts surrounded by steppe and mentioned African food and music as entertainment for the whole family. Criticism arose because the linking of a display of African crafts in a zoo setting seemed to some to resemble the "Völkerschauen" (human exhibitions). This association was made even stronger by the use of the formulation "African Village."

ISD spoke of the "reproduction of the colonial perspective on Africans as exotic objects, as non- or sub-humans integrated in the animal-environment in the context of a timeless village." It mentioned the suffering of many of the people who were displayed in the "Völkerschauen" and the terrible fate of people of African descent under the Nazi-regime in Germany. In general, ISD saw this presentation of African culture in the zoo as completely inappropriate and called for protest against the "African Village", to end continuing colonial and racist traditions. In her letter the zoo director Dr. Jantschke stated that she could not understand the criticism of the event. Replying to a Swiss citizen she made it clear that despite the name "African Village," no village would be displayed. The event rather would feature African culture and African products. She presented the event as contributing to tolerance and mutual understanding. Dr. Jantschke defended the location by mentioning that an "African of black skin" was co-organizer and that this man was very enthusiastic about the zoo-landscape. Finally she emphasized that the zoo in Augsburg is "exactly the right place to procure the atmosphere of exoticism."

This reply provoked even more criticism. In Germany Prof. Norbert Finzsch wrote a letter in English that was widely circulated. He stated that the organizers of the event did not understand the historical implications of their project. Prof. Finzsch, who is specialized in recent German and Anglo-American history and who has published on nationalism and racism in both countries, pointed out that "the colonialist and racist gaze

is still very much alive in Germany. [...] People of color are still seen as exotic objects (of desire), as basically dehumanized entities within the realm of animals.” He also linked the history of the “Völkerschauen” to the later racist policy of the Nazis. In order to address the failure of the organizers to consider this history, Prof. Finzsch called for protests against the event in Augsburg.

Via e-mail lists and internet discussion forums this letter reached scholars and other people in Europe, Africa, the United States and Latin America. In institutes and in the internet the issue was discussed vividly. The scholarly concern reflected more than a decade of critical cultural studies that critiqued the histories of humans displayed in zoos and fairs. This research demonstrated that such events contributed to the development of Nazi science and eugenic movements in the US, Europe, and Latin America. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cultural displays and tableaux legitimated colonial ventures and popularized the belief that humans could be divided into a hierarchy of “scientific” categories called “races”. When the transnational community of scholars, sensitized by the cultural studies scholarship, heard of an African village in a German zoo, they immediately connected it to earlier processes of racialization (for further definition see Executive Summary and Discussion Section, p39).

Soon the press, both within Germany and internationally picked up on the story.<sup>2</sup> The reports reflected the statements and discussions outlined above. The tenor of the press reviewed was that nothing was wrong with marketing African crafts and culture in general, but that the location was not suitable because it produced a mistaken image of Africans and Africa. Most press articles also noted the demand of the zoo critiques to discuss publicly in Germany problems related to German colonial history. On the other hand the local newspaper, the *Augsburger Allgemeine* reflected the interests of the city in staging a harmonious and profitable event in the zoo.

In the two weeks before the opening of the “African Village” scheduled on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005, literally thousands of protest-mails reached the city of Augsburg and the zoo from various national and international directions. Official letters of concern were sent by distinguished academic associations such as the European Association of Anthropologists, the Royal Anthropological Institute, which is the professional association representing the broad discipline of anthropology in the UK and Ireland, and the Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth.

The zoo director and others involved in the event also received personal threats and threats against the zoo. The Berlin based newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* reported on 7<sup>th</sup> June that even Nadine Gordimer, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991, criticized the “African Village” in Augsburg.

This attention and outrage caught the organizers and the city of Augsburg by surprise. But they soon formulated an adamant and common defense of the event. On the 1<sup>st</sup> June lord mayor of Augsburg, Dr. Paul Wengert, who is at the same time the chairperson of

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<sup>2</sup> See: *Frankfurter Rundschau* 28.05.05; *Jungle World* 01.06.05; *die tageszeitung* 01.06.05; *Die Welt* 02.06.05; *Der Tagesspiegel* 07.06.05; BBC news 08.06.05; *Der Spiegel* 09.06.2005; Daily Nation 09.06.05.

the supervisory body of the Zoo GmbH, issued a press release. He pointed out that the event serves to bring African culture closer to the people in Augsburg. The lord mayor dismissed any similarities with the “Völkerschauen.” While he admitted that perhaps the name “African Village” could have been a bad choice, he described the event itself as an act of solidarity with Africans in the sense that (1) attention will be raised for a continent with many problems by several local humanitarian organizations/associations, such as the “Togoverein” which has aid-projects in Togo; and (2) African traders will get a chance to earn their living by selling their goods on the event (Presseerklärung von Oberbürgermeister Dr. Paul Wengert, 01.06.2005).

As we heard during our interview with the zoo director, the decision to defend the event in terms of humanitarian aims was partly but not completely in response to the critics. The poster advertising the event was endorsed by Afrika-Kultur München e.V., a small charitable association. This association was established by maxVita GmbH, the event organizer, which used it to raise a small amount for other charities in their Afrika Tag day in Munich. The brochures of Afrika-Kultur begin with the statement “Africa needs our help” but the association conducted no activities in the zoo event beyond distribution of its brochures at a table with event information. Another aid organization, the Christian Welfare and Development (CWD), a charitable organization with projects in South Africa, had been included among the exhibitors before the debate about the event began. However, CWD, however, was invited not because of their humanitarian goals but because they were fee-paying exhibitor. CWD Staff members told us that they paid maxVita 700 € in registration fees for a place in the zoo. The Togoverein, a local association, which raises money for development projects in Africa, was brought into the picture at some point and used by all the organizers as their main evidence of the humanitarian nature of the event. The stressing of humanitarian and multicultural goals was believed by the defenders of the event to strengthen their case that the event was nothing like a “Völkerschau”.

The protestors were criticized for condemning the event in the zoo without investigating to see whether or not Africans were displayed in the tradition of the “Völkerschauen”. They were said to be deploying “outrage without investigation“. Defenders and protestors took the word Völkerschauen to mean exhibiting people and parts of their culture in a cage or at least in a debasing way. Both sides agreed that this had been done in the past and was racist. Since the event in the zoo did not construct a site displaying African daily life and did not put people in cages, the defenders of the “African Village“ event maintained that there was no problem and the criticism was “ridiculous”. The term “ridiculous” to characterize any questioning of putting African cultural performances, art, or merchandise in the zoo was widely popularized by the zoo defenders. Anything that did not repeat the narrow characterization of the Völkerschau outlined above was defined by the defenders as not racism, not racializing, and not a problem. Voices criticizing the event by saying that even if it was not a Völkerschau, it still might reproduce problematic and even racist stereotypes of Africa and Africans were simply not heard or heeded because of the way first the organizers of the event and then the defenders framed the debate.

Consequently, the organizers saw no need to cancel “African Village”, as proposed by many protesters. A cancellation would have meant a complete financial loss at least for the maxVita GmbH which was responsible for managing the event including the advertisement and promotion.

A compromise seemed to have been found when the zoo director, in response to a proposal from Frank Heidemann, professor of social anthropology at the University of Munich, agreed to have a panel discussion held in the zoo on the topic of “colonial heritage” (Prof. Frank Heidemann, personal communication; *die tageszeitung* 01.06.2005). This panel discussion, however, never took place. Both sides, the protesters and the organizers, accused each other of having refused to help develop this proposal.

In a last attempt to prevent the opening of the “African Village”, a German of African descent living in Berlin initiated a lawsuit at the administrative court in Augsburg to prevent the opening of the event. According to the *Augsburger Allgemeine* he saw the African Village event as discriminatory. But on Wednesday the 8<sup>th</sup> June the judge declared that his claims could not be substantiated. In a press release from 9<sup>th</sup> June, the lord mayor of Augsburg declared that the decision of the court confirmed the city’s evaluation of the issue that no discrimination was involved here. He expressed his hopes that now even the protesters will realize that the goals of the “African Village” were commendable. This position was confirmed in an interview we had on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2005 with Dr. Münzenrieder, the city director (Stadtdirektor) of the city of Augsburg. He reiterated that the event was helping Africans to earn a living. Dr. Münzenrieder pointed out that he could not see any relation to colonialism or fascism, as some critics did. To the contrary, he characterized Augsburg as an anti-fascist city. And indeed we found that Augsburg in 2001 erected a memorial in the Rathaus to the 600 Augsburgers Jews who perished during the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> In general the City Director did not think that Africans had a problem in the city. Dr. Münzenrieder stated that the city was endeavoring to integrate minorities. He especially mentioned people from Turkey, Eastern Europe and Russia as the largest minority groups in Augsburg. “Somebody, who accuses us of fascism, has no clue about fascism”, said Dr. Münzenrieder in an interview.

To sum it up: The debate about the “African Village” very quickly was confined to the question of whether or not the event in the zoo was a Völkerschau in the sense that people and parts of their culture were displayed in a cage or at least in a debasing way. This concern was picked up by media and concerned people around the globe. The criticism was readily dismissed for two reasons. Firstly, it came from outside and before the event had begun. Secondly, the critics condemned the “placing of Africans in the zoo” and reminded the world of the history of the Völkerschauen. In response, the organizers of the “African Village” emphasized that:

- (1) Africans themselves had organized the event (pointing to Mr. Abdelati as head of maxVita, the promotion company).
- (2) Africans were the exhibitors not the subject of display. The zoo director summed up this position when she said, “The products are the focus, not the people.”

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<sup>3</sup> For more information see <http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/5960/mempro2.html>.



- (3) African culture in terms of drumming, singing, dancing, storytelling, arts and crafts, and food was part of the event as a way to promote cultural understanding and tolerance
- (4) the event in the zoo was helping Africans and promoting tolerance and mutual understanding, unlike the racist “Völkerschauen.”
- (5) Völkerschauen were not only held in zoos, but also in public places and world exhibitions.

In short, the logic of the organizers and defenders of the “African Village” was that there was no “Völkerschau”, therefore there was no problem. The discussion developed within a logic that silenced other issues about the nature of the event, its beneficiaries and its relationships to well documented processes of racialization. To the defenders of the event the idea that anything could be wrong with offering a “platform” for African culture and the selling of African goods in the zoo, apart from the name “African Village”, was ridiculous.

That the event was questioned at all reflected the power of activists and scholars connected to the internet to draw attention to certain questions and frame public debate. However, once the event began, it was the defenders of the event who influenced public perceptions and news coverage by continually pointing to the absence of extreme racist actions.

#### **IV. The Development of the Event: commercial interests and risks**

##### **A. The Initiators and Organizers**

###### ***1) The Businessman***

The idea of organizing an African event in the zoo was first suggested by Mr. Schwenk, a business man who owns all the concessions (except for a small kiosk) for selling food, drinks, and souvenirs in the Augsburg zoo. At the same time, he is an agent of a wine importing company. This company stages periodic wine promotions in the zoo, and had participated in the “Afrika Tage” festival in Munich, which was organized by maxVita GmbH. Having this relationship to the zoo and to maxVita, Mr. Schwenk thought it would be good idea to stage a smaller scale version of the “Afrika Tage” in the zoo of his home town, Augsburg. He proposed the idea to the maxVita and brought the zoo director and maxVita together.

###### ***2) The maxVita GmbH***

The maxVita GmbH with headquarters in Munich is a relatively young event-organizing and -management company. It organizes health promotion trade fairs and since 2004 it has been organizing cultural festivals, including a Mediterranean oriented event and Africa related festivals in different places such as Munich and Vienna. The head of maxVita, Mr. Medhat Abdelati, who originally comes from Egypt, told us that the idea of organizing an event in Augsburg fit well with the plans of the company to expand its program. The idea was to develop an event in a specific location with its own name “brand” with the understanding that after several years in the same location the event could become very profitable.

### **3) The Zoo**

The zoo had faced difficult times in recent years, as we heard in several interviews. Before the arrival of the current director, it was involved in scandals and faced economic problems. Sixty-six percent of the zoo's budget is raised by the zoo itself, including money given by the "Friends of the Zoo" to the zoo for special projects, such as the establishment of a new animal enclosure. Thirty-three percent of the budget was supposed to come from the city of Augsburg. However the city recently cut its contributions by 20%. This left the zoo with the urgent task of raising even more revenue. Additionally, the Augsburg zoo, as many other zoos in the world, faces declining public interest and attendance. After Dr. Jantschke became the new director of the zoo in 2002, she tried to increase the zoo's reputation and income through introducing special events to the normal zoo program. "Jungle-nights", guided tours at night and theater performances including one with a jungle theme were held in the zoo over the last few years. The proposal to have an Africa event in the zoo fit well into the new event-oriented marketing strategy. This type of strategy currently is being implemented by many zoos throughout the world.

A meeting of these three actors was initiated by Mr. Schwenk in Augsburg in November 2004. Their interests merged. The zoo expected to profit from a substantial increase in the number of visitors. Mr. Schwenk also could expect gains for his concessions from additional visitors coming to the zoo and the increased publicity for the zoo; furthermore, he and his wine-company could participate in the event with two stands promoting South African wines. The maxVita GmbH hoped to establish a new permanent zoo based event in Augsburg and thus to enlarge its business-spectrum.

An important part of the economic considerations of the organizers was their view that the zoo was appropriate for a market of African products and an exhibition of African culture because it has a special Africa panorama. A section of the zoo has animals from Africa placed together to invoke an African environment.

The arrangements between the two contracting parties regarding the organization of the event, the zoo and maxVita, were favorable for both of them. As we heard from Dr. Jantschke, the zoo would offer the location for free. Additionally maxVita would get 25% of each entrance-ticket. MaxVita would be responsible for the whole organization, including program, advertisement and caring for the exhibitors and artists. Therefore, if the number of the visitors to the zoo would increase at least by 25%, each additional visitor attracted would be a gain for the zoo. The risks for the zoo were relatively limited, because beforehand it did not invest financially in the event. MaxVita would gain from the participation fees of the exhibitors and from each ticket sold. The company faced at least short-term risk, if the money it made from ticket sales and exhibitor fees did not cover expenses.

According to the rules of the zoo GmbH, the event was proposed to the administrative council (Aufsichtsrat) and the shareholders (Gesellschafterversammlung) of the zoo. In the administrative council the representatives of the four currently ruling parties (CSU, FDP, Die Grünen and SPD) each have a vote; the lord mayor is the chairperson of this

council. Among the shareholders the city of Augsburg represented by the lord mayor holds 99.8%. Therefore it becomes clear that the city of Augsburg and the currently ruling parties had a strong interest in the financial success of the zoo and in relation to that, in the successful organization of special events organized to improve the zoo's financial position.

By December 2004, there was agreement on the particulars between all parties involved in organizing the "African Village" and a call was put out for exhibitors to apply to participate in the event.

## **B. The Exhibitors**

In describing the exhibitors in this report, we sometimes use the term "African" to describe those traders and artists who were black and originated in Africa and "German" for those participants who were white and born in Germany. However, we want to make clear that Germans can be either black or white and most of both the exhibitors and demonstrators were German. While the black German exhibitors called themselves Africans, many in fact had German citizenship, were married to Germans and had long term residence in Germany. Some of the white Germans exhibitors, on their part, had many years of experience in Africa and many were married to people of African descent. In contrast to the exhibitors of African descent, the demonstrators of African descent called themselves African-German. As in the case of the black German exhibitors, most of the African-German demonstrators were German citizens, spoke fluent German, and had lived a long time in Germany.

The exhibitors fell into three categories: (1) independent contractors offering goods and services, (2) organizations offering information and promoting their projects; and (3) artists exhibiting their art or performing during the course of the event. The organizations used the event to publicize their humanitarian activities and raise funds for their work. Many of the black German exhibitors were described by the event organizers as Africans rather than African-Germans. Some of the exhibitors also described themselves as Africans in this context of an "Africa" event, emphasizing their role of representing Africa. In addition to personal matters of identity, they also had commercial interests in this description. The exhibitors varied in their familiarity with contemporary Africa ranging from those who had not been back in decades to those who returned yearly.

All of the sellers, who did pay for entry into the "village" event, were professionals and most of them made their living by traveling from fair to fair and selling their goods. They are dependent on those who organize these activities and control admission. Organizers select from applicants to insure that there is a distribution of different kinds of objects sold. There are only a limited number of events that attract large numbers of people and the summer season is short.

According to the announcement of the event published by maxVita the minimum participation fees were 400 € for sellers and organizations and 700 € for food-sellers. Most of the exhibitors told us they paid much more than the minimum fees with

payments ranging from at least 400 € to 700 € for craft-sellers and 1000 € and more for food sellers. Some spoke of additional charges for tents, water, and electricity. The fees had to be paid in advance. Furthermore the announcement spelled out that in case of cancellation one month or more before the event an exhibitor would lose 50% of the fee; later cancellation would cause a 100% loss of the fee.

The main interest of the sellers was, of course, to make money on which to live. The organizations wanted to promote their projects and attract donations. The artists were interested in making contacts and performing. In this context, it is important to know that the painters did not pay a fee for their participation and that some of the musicians and dancers received a salary. The financial risks for the exhibitors, at least those who had to pay a participation fee, are obvious: they had to earn first the money invested before they would make any gain and their costs included both payments to maxVita and the costs of transporting themselves and their merchandise to Augsburg.

### **C. The Promotion of the Event**

MaxVita wanted to name the event in a way that would differentiate it from the larger yearly “Afrika Tage” it had held in nearby Munich. This was because they wanted to signal that the event was smaller and also different so that people who had been to one event might still be attracted to another. Mr. Abdelati proposed “Afrikanisches Dorf” (“African Village” in German). Dr. Jantschke said it would sound “more modern” if the name was in English. According to our interviews with the parties involved, no one at any stage of the development of the event made any connection between the use of the word village and the issue of the Völkerschauen. Mr. Abdelati stated that as he spent his youth in Egypt, he didn’t know anything about past histories of Völkerschauen. Dr. Jantschke said she did not give it a thought. Also none of the officials of the city of Augsburg, of the representatives of the parties in the administrative council, and of the exhibitors seems to have thought about this issue.

To advertise the event maxVita printed a large poster (see graphic below) and thousands of postcards. The graphic of the poster was also produced on the postcards. Both had an artistic rendition of eight zebras and an elephant and the words “African Village.” On the very bottom the seals of four organizations that endorsed the event were displayed. Two were actually directly part of maxVita (Afrika Tage München 2005 and Afrika-Kultur München e.V.) and two dedicated to the promotion of Augsburg (City Initiative Augsburg and RegioAugsburg). Both posters and postcards were distributed throughout the city and area by a subcontracted firm. The schools in city and the area received announcements about the “African Village” and some teachers scheduled school trips specifically to bring children to the event.



Once the controversy began, the Augsburg City website carried press statements from the lord mayor defending the city against the accusation that its zoo was hosting a Völkerschau. The maxVita website, by the time we examined it in the week before the event only contained a site that mentioned “African Village” as an upcoming event but it did not open. On the zoo’s homepage the very brief text mentioned above advertising the event could be found.

## V. The Demonstration

On June 9<sup>th</sup>, the first morning of the “Village” there was a demonstration outside of the zoo. The demonstration was organized by a network of organizations: ISD,<sup>4</sup> Adefra e.V.,<sup>5</sup> Phoenix e.V.,<sup>6</sup> and Karawane<sup>7</sup>. In total about 20 demonstrators were present, consisting of representatives of these organizations who did not come from Augsburg, and a small number of concerned inhabitants of Augsburg. A little more than half of the demonstrators were African-German in the sense that they had grown up or lived a long time in Germany. They spoke fluent German. The demonstrators placed themselves in a location provided by the police, who oversaw the event. They had a permit for the

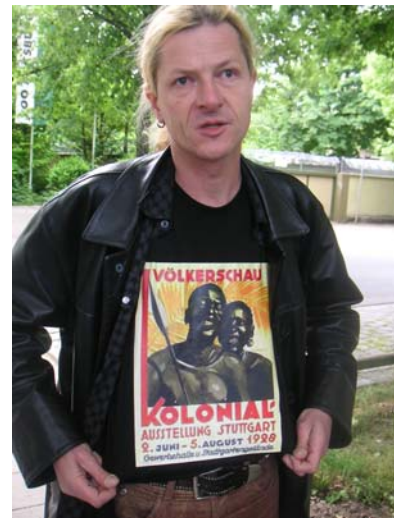
<sup>4</sup> See chapter II and [www.isdonline.de](http://www.isdonline.de).

<sup>5</sup> This is a German based organization of black women in Germany ([www.urbanspecial.org](http://www.urbanspecial.org)).

<sup>6</sup> Phoenix e.V. is working against racism and has its base also in Germany ([www.phoenix-ev.org](http://www.phoenix-ev.org))

<sup>7</sup> This is a Munich based pool of people and organizations fighting for the rights of refugees and migrants (<http://carava.net>).

demonstration and were obliged not to stand in front of the gates and hinder the flow of visitors. Instead demonstrators were placed between a parking lot and the entrance area. They held two banners that read: “No to the modern Völkerschau. Neo-colonial gaze instead of mutual understanding of peoples”, and “Resistance. Memory needs space, neo-colonialism needs a zoo. A village representing a whole continent.” Some people handed leaflets to people who had arrived by car or bus. These leaflets made the position of the protesters very clear: the event was not a classical Völkerschau, but it nevertheless continued parts of the heritage of these past events by exoticizing African people and culture; furthermore this event was seen as part of a wider European neo-colonial policy. This policy presented the “nice” sides of Africa, such as music, food and tourist art but dismissed or was silent about the real problems of the continent, which were related in many ways to policies in the West and resulted in refugees fleeing to Western countries. These refugees often have to live a very difficult life due to legal restrictions.



There was no picket line or speeches. Some protestors used a form of performance art: a couple with children dressed in pseudo-Bavarian costumes held a large poster that said in English, “Enjoy our zoo, visit a typical European village.”

Protestors tried to engage people in discussions but this did not seem to be effective. They were able to have long discussions with journalists and with the researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. Up to ten journalists were present, from local and national newspapers and television plus the BBC. Some protestors from Phoenix wore a t-shirt that had a picture of a June 1928 German “Colonial Völkerschau” advertisement with pictures of Africans without clothes and carrying a spear. One said that he could not look at the poster without shame.

In their discussions, as in the leaflet mentioned above, the demonstrators made several points that took the debate beyond the question of whether the event was a modern-day Völkerschau or not. First of all, they saw the need to break the silence around the implications and consequences of the way in which Africans are portrayed in Germany.

African-Germans wanted to make their voices heard. They wanted to speak publicly about what they saw as insensitivity to the daily experiences of black people in Germany and also to problems stemming from German colonial history in Africa. In their eyes these problems were still perceived as “minor” by many Germans because Germany was not a major colonial power. To prove their point, some protesters mentioned the Berliner Kongo-Konferenz of 1884, at which large parts of Africa were divided between European powers and the brutal suppression of the Herero uprising in what is today Namibia. Sometimes the protestors equated this insensitivity and the tendency to exoticize Africans with the word *Völkerschau*, not in the sense of putting people on display but in the sense of linking Africans to exhibits of animals by putting the event in the zoo. They felt that by applying the term “exotic” in the advertising in a way that linked animals and Africans in the zoo, the Augsburg Zoo contributed to the problems African-Germans faced on a daily basis. A member of Karawane said: “Latent racism can be unmasked here. Nobody will openly say ‘I am racist’ but it is clear that it makes a difference which skin color you have.” An African woman who had lived in Germany for twenty years believed that the German government was supporting the event because neither on the regional nor on the national level had any politician intervened on the side of the protesters. One key sentence of the demonstrators’ leaflet read: “This exhibition does not promote mutual understanding between peoples (*Völkerverständigung*) but uses racist prejudice against other people.”

A second and related point focused on the right to be heard. The protestors asked “whose voice was accepted as legitimate in identifying issues of racism and who had a right to define what was an act of racism or an experience of being treated as racially different and inferior?” A member of ISD, an African-German, born in Germany of Nigerian parents, said: “Everyone can have different opinions but the problem comes when these differences transform into hierarchy” so that only some voices have a right to be heard. The question for him was: why could the defenders of the “African Village” just ignore all the protest raised by African-Germans and accept the dubious justifications of Dr. Jantschke that an “African of black skin” was co-organizer of the event? It was clear for this man that his opinion was considered as less important or correct than the opinion of the “white majority”, to which most of the organizers of the event belonged. Talking about the way in which many Germans handle problematic parts of their collective history, he said that the suffering of Jews, Sinti and Roma, and homosexuals under the Nazis has been recognized but what the Europeans did in Africa was often not seriously discussed in public. In his eyes, this pointed to the fact that there were different classes of suffering and discrimination and that Africans belonged to the lowest class. “As a German of African descent, I would have been happy if the people would have been more sensitive. As a minority you want to be supported.” He said that he can understand that “not everybody is sensitive and realizes what the problem here is [with the African Village]. I have the perspective of the minority – just because I am black.” The demonstrators noted that the only black voices that were taken as legitimate were the exhibitors and those were people whose options for earning a living were few because of the discrimination Africans face in Germany.

A third concern was the effect on children who were brought to the zoo in significant numbers. A Nigerian woman who lived for 20 years in Germany and was working in a nursing service said: "If children come and see people displayed in the zoo, this will stay in their memory. When they come back to school and meet African children, they will have the wrong picture. African people are being ridiculed here."

A fourth concern was that Africa was only being represented in terms of its rural culture and wild animals, while the African experience both past and present is so diverse. According to a demonstrator, it is not possible to represent African culture in one setting, least of all in a zoo. The concern about the choice of the zoo was linked to a question of how and where Germans should learn about African culture. A middle age white German man born in Augsburg made this point. He felt that only a small part of African life was being addressed in the "African Village." Missing was the complexity of Africa from its cities to the wars currently being waged in Africa. An African-German woman who was aware that most of the displays were handicraft said that "idea of a village is being used to typify an entire continent and reduce its diversity to an image that can be consumed." This woman, and some of the other demonstrators, seemed aware of the debate about "cultural representation" that has been generated in the field of cultural studies.

A fifth concern was the reinforcement of stereotypes of Africans at a time when Africans feel themselves to be under attack in Germany. The protestors pointed out that more was at stake than ideas. They were concerned with fueling and supporting attacks experienced by Africans in Germany. The leaflet handed out by the demonstrators spoke of the difficult conditions that asylum seekers face and their treatment in asylum homes. A demonstrator who came from Augsburg said "I am shocked at the decision on the part of the zoo to locate Africans in the zoo at a time when people are hunted in the street because of their skin color."

Finally, the protestors were concerned with the subordinate role that Africans had in organizing the event and the choice of the zoo. The demonstrators saw the Africans who actually participated in the event did so from a position of relative powerlessness and this included few opportunities to earn a living. The exhibitors were not involved in the initial decision making that led to putting the event in the zoo. They needed places to exhibit their goods or work as performers. A woman from ISD said: "It is so degrading to be asked to present themselves in the zoo. We are here protesting and saying that there is a need for dialogue. Something is fundamentally wrong here."

We learned that at least some of the African population of Augsburg was afraid to participate in the protest or to speak out publicly. They have not experienced the city as welcoming to asylum seekers and for many of them it was difficult to obtain residency. African residents of Augsburg felt that they did not have enough of an established position in the city to speak out against the event. They knew that the lord mayor and city authorities were completely supportive of the event. We were told that there were African associations in Augsburg that did not participate in the event.



## VI. The Event

### A. Description of the Physical Setting

The entrance to the zoo was decorated with a big banner declaring “African Village in the zoo.” Inside the entrance gate were posters advertising the village and containing a schedule of events. A sign directed people to a festival ground where a stage and seats were erected and where three food stands had been placed: an African food stand called “Le Bantu”, a Caribbean food stand, and a German food stand.

There were about 40 booths scattered throughout the zoo. The booths were covered by tents that contained tables of merchandise and racks displaying goods. Most of the food was sold from caravans that contained facilities for cooking and refrigeration.

People paid 6 € for each adult, 5 € for students, and 3 € for children to enter the zoo. When entering the zoo one could turn left or right and then follow a walk that led around the whole zoo. The booths were located near to animal enclosures. For example the painters group was located at the lions’ house, a stand offering drums and other goods near the seals and so on. On one occasion an elephant was brought into the mix directly by walking along the path through the booths. In another case an exhibit was set up near a sign of a monkey wearing glasses.





The zoo also uses cultural stereotypes of people as part of the decoration of its children's playground and concession stands. There is a caricature of a Bavarian German as well as a black person. While both are caricatures, they evoke different images with the Bavarian image evoking rural nostalgia of a simpler German past. The one of the black male is part of a historic portrayal of black people as child-like with a set of physical features used to signal long held negative stereotypes.<sup>8</sup>



Africa is an important part of the mapping of the zoo, even when there is no "village." Visitors are given a map with a region marked "African panorama", a device that encourages visitors to imagine themselves in Africa. On the days of the exhibit, a sign immediately opposite the entrance gate contributed to this effect by announcing "Africa."

<sup>8</sup> The image of the black youth in the children's playground looks very similar to Jim Knopf, a famous character of the Augsburg Puppenkiste, which produces puppet shows for children on TV and also children books and cds.



Behind the sign one could see lions sunning themselves and this was the first stop of most visitors. Next to the sign was an announcement of the “African Village” with a schedule of events.

## **B. The Performers and Artists**

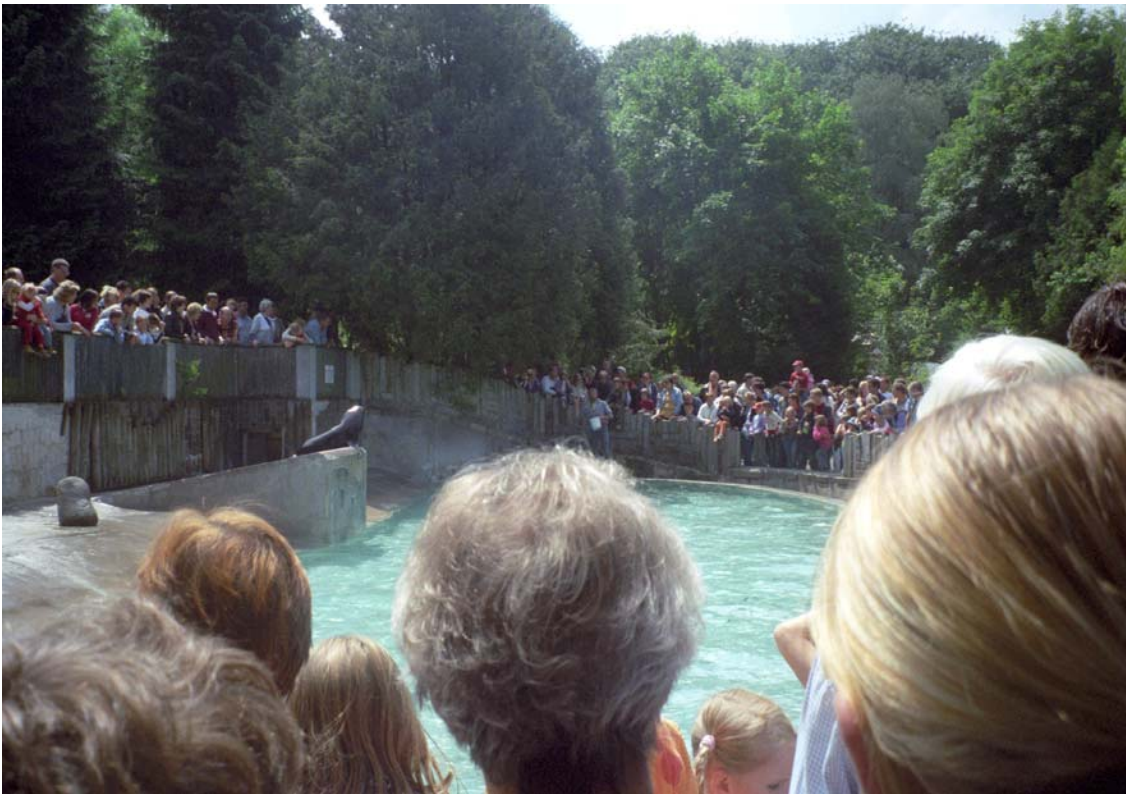
The performers included singing and drumming, story telling, and oriental belly dancing. There were also four painters who exhibited their own work. Not all the performers or artists were African by birth or by the content of their material. Among the musicians was a white man singing and playing a West African stringed instrument. He was dressed in a “traditional African” costume. As part of his show he told African folk tales using a mixture of an African language and German with slight Bavarian accent. The belly dancers came from a school of oriental dance in Augsburg. A story teller was a white German who had spent many years in Ghana and who was married to a Ghanaian. Two of the four painters were white Germans who had spent some years in Africa, in Mali and Zimbabwe respectively.

Whatever their background, the performers presented a certain kind of folkloric art that did not represent contemporary African music. Just as Bavarian folk singing is not the whole of German music, African contemporary music is far more than the folk drumming and singing presented in the zoo. As we heard from exhibitors, who had co-operated with maxVita before, at some earlier events the organizers had engaged popular African bands. But those acts were missing at this event.

Most of the performances took place in a “Festwiese” area where a stage had been constructed and food booths set up. Children and adults sat watching the stage and listening to music played by musicians. Some of the music performances attracted a large and interested audience but many visitors paid little or not attention to the program. The performances were competing with other more classical zoo attractions.



However, drumming instruction and playing was available along the pathways to the exhibits in an area where several paths intersected. Here eight or more drums were set up and both children and adults took a turn at drumming along with an African drummer. In addition, one of the painters who was also a musician wandered through the exhibits and assisted in enlivening them. On one occasion, a group of drummers placed themselves on the opposite side of the seals basin. They played several songs to entertain people. A large crowd of visitors gathered near to the drummers, but not to follow the performance, but to watch the feeding of the seals.



The story telling was performed by a white German man telling an original story. The story was cast as African because the main characters were large African land snails that he brought along with him to accompany his performance. This performance constantly attracted large numbers of children, sometimes accompanied by adults. The snails were portrayed by the story teller as illegal African immigrants who deserved to have a good home. This story was the only reference to the pressing questions of asylum, immigration, and permanent residence in the entire program. This performer has built a career of cultural performance for school children working with Africans to build multicultural education and tolerance.



In general one can say that the performers continued a growing tendency in multicultural performance to reduce cultural production to certain forms of folk art and storytelling that is attractive mostly to small children. The innovation in the program was the participation of white Germans in the cultural creation as well as performance.

The four graphic artists were grateful for the chance to be able to exhibit their work since access to gallery space or exhibit space is a constant challenge. They were organized as a group show that could bring African painting and sculpture to German viewers. The organizer of the group known by his first name, Ishmael, and originally from Congo-Brazzaville, said that this group show was a long term project of the painters that was finally seeing fruition. Recently the artists had had difficulties with the promoters of the well established African Festival in Würzburg. Therefore, when maxVita invited the group to display its art without charge, they saw an opportunity for long term cooperation. The artists were looking for sales and to make contacts for sales and exhibits

in the future. One of them, Mr. Bamgbola, was also promoting an art exhibit he had set up at MPI for Biochemistry and Neurobiology near Munich.

This group of artists was given the “Lion House”- an exhibit space with glass walls where one could see into a lion cage on one side and a leopard on the other. However, when there was little interest shown in their paintings and they realized that people were interested in the wild animals, not the art, they began to move the paintings outside in front of the Lion House.



The two black Germans in this group of painters were among the most vocal defenders of the Village. They argued that while the organization of the event was not perfect “everybody makes mistakes at the beginning.” In their perspective maxVita was just a young upcoming event-organizer and should be given a second chance. They said: “We need guys like them doing the African festival and then it is good for us.” Ishmael, the leader of the group of artists initially presented himself as comfortable with an “African Village” in the zoo. He said: “Africans know how to live with lions.” Several days later, perhaps as a result of the intense discussions that took place between the exhibitors who camped together directly outside the zoo gate, he promoted a more nuanced view of Africa. “Africa is not a country but a continent with much diversity just as Europe. You would not confuse Portugal and Germany.” The black German painter, Mr. Bamgbola, said: “It is a good chance for the Africans to promote their culture.” He liked the environment very much because it is green and healthy. About his position on this or

another Africa related event he said: “Everywhere where something related to Africa happens, I should also be there.” The artists provided art activities for children as part of their exhibit which gave children the opportunity to make something with paper maché.

### **C. The Booths**

We took a survey of the commercial, humanitarian, and animal rights booths to ascertain the following: how many exhibitors came originally from Africa, what items or services were offered, the origin of the products, and the current home base of the exhibitors. Our findings were as follows:

Roughly two thirds of the 39 exhibitors in the survey came originally from different parts of Africa that represented all regions of the continent. The rest were white Germans. The range of quality of crafts and clothing on sale was quite large. Most items were “tourist” art, objects one might buy as a souvenir and that were not that different from some objects in the souvenir shops in the zoo. There were bracelets, banks, carvings of animals and people. In the statues, the Africans were portrayed in “traditional” costumes such as Massai warriors or in rather caricatured features. There were also drums from West Africa of varying quality, from small cheap drums which could be bought as a toy for children to larger professional drums. About one third of the goods, such as clothes from India or just some “global” souvenirs, were not produced in Africa. Beside African food one could enjoy Caribbean and German food. The majority of the exhibitors currently lived in Germany. Two of the exhibitors surveyed came from France.

From the formal and informal interviews with the exhibitors we learned the following.

#### ***1) Disappointment about the Number of Visitors***

They saw the “African Village” as a normal market for making profits. But this did not work out. First of all, there were not enough visitors for the majority of them, at least until Sunday, the day on which the most visitors came. Consequently, through much of the event, many were discontented. The exhibitors said they had been led to believe by the organizers that there would be a total of 30,000 visitors over the four day period. For reasons difficult to differentiate – the weather was not favorable, the controversy may have kept people from coming, the event was not advertised widely enough,<sup>9</sup> or people were just not very interested in African culture in the zoo – in total only half of the expected numbers of visitors came. Of these only a bit more than 50% came especially for the “African Village”, according to our visitor interviews.

#### ***2) Commercial Problems with Exhibiting in the Zoo***

Many exhibitors told us that the zoo was bad for their business because people came to see the animals not to buy African objects. This was a bigger concern among those exhibitors who had expensive masks and carvings. Most exhibitors struggled to get the attention of the visitors who did not come expecting a commercial fair where they would

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<sup>9</sup> At least in the last two weeks before the event we could not find any professional advertisement of “African Village” in the internet, apart from the short notices on the zoo’s and on maxVita’s homepages already mentioned above. These notices were even not specially highlighted on the respective homepages.

be shopping for objects or consuming services. Over the four days we noticed that some of the exhibitors moved their displays directly into the path so that it was more difficult for visitors to ignore the shops and look only at the animals.



Some exhibitors stepped out of their selling role to reach out to the children and showed them how to beat the drums. Both parents and children saw the hair braiding as a form of entertainment and a good photo opportunity. Nevertheless, the hair braiders explained that they had to actively perform to attract customers. As one of them said “we have to put ourselves on display, something we are not used to do.” This was because the “visitors were ok but they did not have money. They paid 6 € at the entrance and they don’t want to pay again for service.” Normally, as we heard, Africa festivals do not cost entrance or are cheaper for visitors.

The quality of the background music was a cause of complaint of the exhibitors. They did not critique the folkloric nature of the performers directly but were angry that big name African bands were missing. Those would have brought in an entirely different crowd and would have made the event more pleasurable for visitors and exhibitors. Clearly, as exhibitors stated, Africa festivals in general benefit from sophisticated contemporary African music.





Furthermore, the majority of the exhibitors complained that the booths were scattered throughout the whole zoo. Therefore, people just walked by and if they did not decide to buy something immediately, they would not come back later. The exhibitors would have preferred a “village” in the sense that the booths and places of performance are close together, so that visitors can just walk from one stand to the next and easily can come back when they decided to buy something. The criticism of the exhibitors was summarized by one exhibitor saying: “In festivals, we do not complain: there is entertainment, music, and so on. Give us a good place with music and entertainment and we are glad to pay for it.”

### ***3) Coping with Financial Risk***

Most of the exhibitors said at least until Saturday night that they experienced a financial loss. They had to pay a considerable amount, depending on the size of the stand and the goods, food, or services offered). This was, as they pointed out, expensive compared with other Africa festivals. Additionally they had costs for transportation as well as for electricity and water, if they needed these resources. In most cases the total costs were greater than what exhibitors made during the first three, sometimes even during the four days. Since more active promotion of their specific merchandise was necessary on this event in the zoo as compared to other marketing settings, the few African exhibitors who did not speak German were at a particular disadvantage. Some of these were upset by the zoo setting, which did not attract people who were knowledgeable about high quality expensive African art.

Most of the exhibits were dependent for their yearly income on the money they could earn during the summer market season. This was true of both the African and the German exhibitors. The Germans, however, may have more economic opportunities, although given the high level of unemployment, some of them had been drawn into this exhibiting economy because it offered a chance for an occupation. There was one major difference however. The exhibitors of African descent found they were in a situation where they had to market themselves as part of the attraction in order to create a “brand” and an “African” image of culture. In general, the act of embodying Africa was linked to their business. And in this sense they themselves became branded.



#### ***4) Questions of the Location, the Völkerschau Issue, and Racism***

Most exhibitors were angry about the demonstrators. They were concerned that the protest would damage their business because it would keep people from visiting the event. Some said that it is good and important that there is discussion of the history of racism in Germany and continuing practices of racism. Regarding the location of the event in the zoo, a few of the exhibitors stated that they had not necessarily understood that the exhibition would actually be staged in the zoo rather than close to but outside it. Some of the Africans explicitly said that they liked the environment of the zoo. Many of the Germans saw the zoo as an appropriate place and the location of their booths near the exotic animals such as rhinos was perfect. Nevertheless, they were concerned about racism in Germany. One said:

Of course it would have been better if it were located in the middle of the town. But the purpose is just to sell things, and nothing else. Otherwise, neither the organizers nor the exhibitors were racist. But the racism is in the society and the protesters were reflecting about that. They protest to the racism in the society. The protesters have the right cause but were protesting against the wrong people.

Other exhibitors found “the location [zoo] is a bit strange” or were even adamant that the zoo was wrong both for their business and because they did not like being in the zoo. For example, a very angry exhibitor told us on the last day that “The location is not good. [...] We are not objects or animals to be seen. The city should give us the right place. This is not correct. The time to use blacks is over [...] slavery is finished.”

There were also those who were ambivalent. One African exhibitor said on the first day that he felt like a “traitor” because he is in the zoo while his “brothers and sisters demonstrate outside.” He did not know about these problems beforehand – neither about the Völkerschau issue in general nor about the controversy surrounding the “African Village” in particular. However, he did not see racism involved in the event.

As for the question of the Völkerschau, the exhibitors came to the event with various degrees of knowledge about Völkerschauen in general. Most of the exhibitors of African descent did not know about it before, while the German exhibitors declared that they heard about it but did not associate the event organized in Augsburg with this history. When asked about the current event in the zoo, all agreed that humans were not on display.

### ***5) Issues of Exoticism, Tolerance and Mutual Understanding***

Some exhibitors, such as a Tuareg man from Niger, made a conscious effort to build on exotic images by wearing his “traditional” dress while selling silver jewelry he produced himself. When asked about whether the event built tolerance and mutual understanding, his female partner said, half jokingly, that “female visitors get excited when they see a Tuareg man in his traditional dress. But, as she continued, this did not build real mutual understanding. This woman also said that Africa is presented as an “object” in this event. About half of the African exhibitors and some of the Germans were wearing African clothes as part of the attractiveness of their exhibit. Some completed their dress by “exotic” features such as feathers in the hair.



As many exhibitors noted, no detailed information about wider African issues was provided to visitors. Several of the exhibitors said that the visitors were cordial but they discounted the degree to which one could talk about achieving tolerance and mutual understanding in this setting because “real contact and exchange of information does not take place.” Almost all complained that the visitors were mostly interested in animals, not in the exhibits.

### **6) Role of the Humanitarians / Environmentalists**

There were three exhibits that were specifically organized to provide information about Africa, two concerned humanitarian issues and one about the protection of animals. The two humanitarian booths were very different in their relationship to the event. The Christian Welfare and Development (CWD), a charitable organization with projects in South Africa, had participated in the two previous “Afrika Tage” events organized by maxVita in Munich. They were trying to collect money for the organization’s activities as well as to increase the public knowledge of their organization. The three people who sat at this booth with pictures of African children and collection boxes were all Germans.

The Togoverein<sup>10</sup> is an Augsburg-based charity organization established 16 years ago by a German woman from Augsburg. It now has a membership of over 150 people who are almost all white Germans, except a few Austrian and Swiss members and two Togolese. The association was invited by the zoo director to take part in this event without charge. They had previously participated children’s events in the zoo to raise funds for the association. At the event they raised money and publicized their current efforts to build a house for fifty homeless mothers in Togo.

This association had been a focal point of the controversy before the event and had received over 200 e-mails, some critical and some encouraging. Much to their alarm among the encouraging messages was one from Nazi skinheads from England. On the other had, one international organization offered to provide a donation, if the Togoverein did not participate in the event. The Togolese ambassador sent a fax right before the event, distancing himself from the “African Village” by saying it was inhuman to have this exhibition in the zoo. The ambassador advised the Togoverein not to take part in the event. But, as a member of the association pointed out, they (the Togoverein) felt that they were in a better position to decide on the nature of the event than the ambassador sitting in Berlin. Our interview partners from the association, who personally suffered from the accusations and negative publicity they got over the last weeks, told us that “no human is exhibited here. We are not doing anything racist here. We are not racist. We would have done much better if we join our hands – black and white – like we do here and work for a better world.” In response to the concern that the use of the zoo would reinforce stereotypes about Africans, a member of the Togoverein said that every society has stereotypes about others.

The non-commercial aspects of the fair included a booth representing the Jane Goodall Society. This was not a maxVita linked exhibit but an organization that the zoo director had previously included in the zoo activities and which she seemed to find appropriate for this event. The woman at the booth did not understand the protests and did not want the society to be implicated in the debate. However, the society had been invited to an event that promised African cooking, bazaar, music and events and this seemed to her appropriate for her efforts to collect money to save chimpanzees.

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<sup>10</sup> For details see [www.togoverein.de](http://www.togoverein.de).

### ***7) Bring the Exhibitors' Issues Together: Saturday night debate***

On Saturday night, when we visited the exhibitors' camp where many of them stayed in tents and caravans, we listened to and participated in discussions relating economic issues with problems of discrimination and racism. About 20 exhibitors, half of whom were originally from Africa, sat around a campfire. Although there was a voice strongly defending the event organizers, the dominant opinion was that they were being exploited: they speculated that maxVita got the location for free from the zoo, while the exhibitors had to pay high fees, and yet the organization of the event was poor. One man linked this exploitation directly to racism and said that Africans in Germany are pressed into a niche. This is why they had to be in the zoo.

Also they complained that they had almost no means to put the organizers under pressure, because every exhibitor struggled on his or her own. They had no organized trade union. This made them easily controllable by the organizers; individual exhibitors could always be "kicked out" and replaced by just the next one looking for a chance to make some money on a fair or festival. A good number had already paid in advance for another festival organized by maxVita coming up in the next weeks. Now they were caught in the middle; on the one hand they wanted to talk openly with maxVita about exploitation and bad event-management; on the other hand they had to cooperate because they could not cancel their participation in the next festival without losing all their money paid in advance. The night session ended in a depressed mood. Some said that they wanted to talk to Mr. Abdelati tomorrow and try to get some of their money back.

The next day brought a change for many exhibitors. It was a sunny Sunday and the last day of the event. Many visitors poured into the zoo and business flourished. Mostly exhibitors said that if everyday would have been like Sunday, the event would have been a success. A substantial number of the exhibitors could cover the costs of their participation in the event from the Sunday-gains. It was interesting to see that some of the most outspoken critics of maxVita and its exploitive practices were now quite calm and even defended the event organizers. This change of position makes clear the dependence of the exhibitors on such event organizers: without them organizing Africa related events the exhibitors could not make a living. But not all exhibitors changed their mind on Sunday. Some stayed quite outraged by the mismanagement and the many mistakes surrounding the event, which had basically to be paid by the exhibitors. They clearly were the weakest link in the economic chain involved in the whole event.

To sum up our findings on the exhibitors' positions and roles, it became clear that the whole event was first and for all a matter of business for the exhibitors. They earned a living by marketing "Africa" and African products. When the exhibitors became aware of the problems surrounding the event and were confronted with the protest and the demonstration, most of them reacted as business people: what is bad for their business is bad for them. Therefore many of them did not like the protests and the demonstration. Nevertheless, they started to reflect on the issue of Völkerschau and possible discrimination involved in the whole event. One woman said simply, "Had I know all this history and the implication of this event, I would not have participated in this for any money."

## **D. The Visitors**

One of the African singers who had been in Germany for a long time and was married to a German defended the show saying “why should we be so sensitive? What you see here depends on what you expected to see.” Therefore we think that it is very important to ask: Who came to the zoo, what did they expect to see, and what did they think they saw?

The visitors came in several categories: classes of school children with teachers and parents, families, young adults on an outing with friends, and elderly and retired persons. In relationship to the black population of Augsburg, there seemed to be a sizeable number of mixed families with one of the partners from Africa. They came with their children to give their children some sense of “African culture”.

What the visitors expected from the event varied. Many said they expected a range of activities that included a market, cultural performances, and food and this is what they found. There were others who expected more culture and information about Africa. For a few of these people the concept of village resonated with something that met their desire to learn more about African culture in the forms of folklore, drumming, dancing in a specific village location.

To assess how the visitors responded to the event we observed various forms of interaction, listened to what people said as they walked through the zoo, conducted formal interviews with 18 people and conducted 65 “exit poll” interviews. From these observations we noted the following:

### ***1) The Question of the Event as Educational***

The zoo event was not organized to provide school children with education about Africa. The “cultural events” were organized as entertainments that were not coordinated with the school outings. Most of the classes of school children were led rapidly around the zoo, with few opportunities to participate in any activities that might be considered educational. MaxVita had organized the music and singing as a form of background entertainment for the food concessions and booths. This did not seem to be coordinated with the schools and therefore did not provide much opportunity for the children to actually participate in the event, even when teachers brought classes to the zoo because of the “African Village.”

We accompanied students from one class who toured the zoo accompanied by a parent, the bus driver, and a friend of the teacher’s. They had been told that there would be an African village that would contain things for them to buy. The children were not taken to any of the cultural activities. They spent most of their time looking at the animals. They found entertainment in discussing animals and remarking on their behavior. For example, they watched the goats and compared one to Michael Jackson and one to Elvis Presley. Then they searched for inexpensive souvenirs. Only some of what they bought was specifically linked to Africa or made in Africa. The booth they liked best had crafts with images of African giraffe and other animals associated with Africa, although the products came from Indonesia. We spoke to a mother who accompanied some of the children in

the class around the zoo. She said that they had been taught nothing about Africa before coming to the zoo and that Africa was not part of the curriculum. She admitted that she also knew almost nothing about Africa and that she could not readily distinguish a shop selling Indian from African objects.

### ***2) The Zoo as Place for an African Market***

There was a lack of interest in African goods. Most people gazed rather than bought. This seemed to fit into the kind of activity people were used to doing in the zoo. You look at exhibits, sometimes stop at interesting actions of the animals and occasionally point or remark at something unusual. And you might also buy souvenirs. Therefore, most of the visitors evaluated the art in the zoo in terms of the price and category appropriate for a zoo souvenir.

### ***3) Issues of Knowledge of Africa, Exoticism, and Stereotyping***

One mother of an eight year old compared Africans and Germans: “The German level of consumption is too high. People are always buying; down to the small children they insist on things like Levis jeans. Africans live a more normal life. They understand that you don’t need all these things. They have more time for each other.”

While this was a positive image of Africans, it also contained her understanding that African culture was not touched by the contemporary global economy. She therefore also went on to say that either the zoo or the Botanical gardens was a good place for children to come and learn about Africans. African culture seemed in her view to remain closer to nature.

The cultural performances in the zoo were accepted by some visitors as representative of African culture. Thus one visitor argued “The exhibitors are here for their free will to show the visitors their culture.” The extensive interviews revealed that many people had positive images of Africa and Africans but these were based on a limited repertoire of knowledge popularized by tourism and nature adventures. These were succinctly summarized by a middle age hairdresser living in Augsburg: “Wild animals, beautiful people, beautiful tall women, the Massai who are beautiful and tall for example, war between the tribes.” Similarly, a young couple who worked in social services told us “Yes [the event] is a good idea in the zoo. Things like this should be presented in the zoo. The Africans are natural folk. They fit well with nature. It wouldn’t be nice surrounded by concrete.”

Parental responses could provide, even unconsciously, lessons linking animals and Africans. In one case, a mother trying to comfort a crying child inadvertently but directly taught her child to make this link. In another situation, when an eight year old child did not respond to our question about what she learned at the “African Village,” we asked what did she think about when she heard the word Africa. When she still did not respond, her mother prompted: “elephants.” We asked two eleven year old children what they knew about Africa and they mentioned “a very hot place, animals, beautiful hair styles, and people with very little clothes.” Then we asked them, what they thought about

presenting African culture in a zoo. They said that they had not thought about it. Now that they heard it they said “it was a very good idea and that it fits perfectly well.”

#### ***4) Interaction of German Visitors with African Exhibitors***

At the micro-level everything was very pleasant and seemed fine. One of the main interactions was the drumming. Both adults and children enjoyed drumming with Africans. Some visitors were clearly glad that they had the opportunity to interact with “friendly” Africans. The event evoked a sense that the African culture they were sharing in the zoo was a break from the stress of German life. They appreciated the opportunity “to have a party” or a “holiday” with Africans. Photographs of these interactions were the ones most frequently presented in the newspaper accounts we saw.



#### ***5) The Issue of Connections between the Event and Racism and Colonialism***

In response to our question of the Völkerschauen, about half the visitors said they had never heard of them. Those who had heard about them distanced themselves from the Völkerschauen. Many of these people seem to have heard the debate that preceded the event, and reflected the terms of the debate. Völkerschauen were terrible because people were put on display or even in cages. They saw nothing in the event that resembled a Völkerschau.

For example, one visitor said “the demonstrators are just stupid people. There is nothing wrong about people in the zoo selling their goods. What could be discriminating about that? The Völkerschauen may have happened before the war but I would not have gone there.”

Another visitor, a female student from Augsburg expressed the separation between the wrongs done in the German past which were unacceptable and any question that there might be problems with the present event. “It is ridiculous this idea that people are



displayed as objects here. Here we are just looking at each other and this is nothing negative. This has nothing to do with German history which is partly really terrible.”

There was no recognition of the possibility that there might be a history or a current situation of racism that might exist aside from Nazism or neo-Nazism. It was this lack of recognition that made it so difficult for most of the visitors to understand the demonstrators. Almost all the visitors did not acknowledge that different cultures were differentially evaluated and respected in Germany. This was reflected in the statement made by a woman visitor that “it wouldn’t matter if African, Italian, or Bavarian culture would be displayed in the zoo,” or another visitor insisting that other cultures had been displayed in the zoo. (In contrast this assertion, we did not find evidence that the zoo had stage other cultures in this way before).

The history of Africa’s ancient and modern states and cities were mentioned by a minority of the visitors, several of whom were themselves from Africa. One middle aged woman coming out of the zoo with her African-German friends responded to the question about the image of Africa she held by saying: “Lagos is a big city. There are skyscrapers and everything. (Then she paused and started laughing). But it is really stupid, when I think about Africa, still what comes to my mind are people in grass skirts drumming and dancing. But this is not the reality. Africa is more than that.” Her reflexivity was rare.

Visitors generally felt that nothing problematic was happening in the zoo and they readily differentiated themselves from racists and Nazi style rhetoric. Perhaps because of this, these same visitors made comments that reinforced views of people of African descent as fundamentally different from other Germans. Thus a mother of three children could casually say: “Though the animals in the zoo are poor swine, but there is no connection with Africans... [thinking break], but Africans are also poor swine.”

### **E. Exit Polls of Visitors**

In addition to the more extensive interviews of 18 visitors, we spoke to 65 people, randomly selected, after they had finished or almost finished touring the zoo and its exhibits.<sup>11</sup> To obtain a profile of the visitors’ views, we have combined the two sets of responses in the following analysis.

We asked these five questions to all of the people.

- (1) Have you participated in or made use of any parts of the “African Village”-program here today?
- (2) Why did you come to the zoo today?
- (3) Did you learn anything about Africa and the life of Africans from this event?
- (4) What do you think about presenting African culture in a zoo?
- (5) When you think of Africa, what images come to mind?

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<sup>11</sup> The total number of respondents is 83; but not every respondent answered every question, so the total number of respondents varies for each question.

***(1) Have you participated in or made use of any parts of the “African Village”-program here today? And (2) Why did you come to the zoo today?***

About half of the visitors said they came to the zoo because of the African village. Forty-nine percent (41/83) said they did not notice or participate in any of the events, although they then went on to comment on aspects of the event in subsequent responses. Those who said they had participated in some way described the following activities: eating 19% (16); some form of cultural activity 19% (16); and buying an object or service 16% (13).<sup>12</sup>

***(3) Did you learn anything about Africa and the life of Africans from this event?***

Sixty-seven percent (52/78) of the people said that they had learned nothing. Thirty-three percent (26/78) said that they had learned something. Some of those who said they had learned mentioned learning about consumption. The representation of Africa their experience included “nice things to buy”, “good food”, “good wine”, “Nigerian beer”, “good quality things.” Culture was mentioned mostly in terms of music. One person learned something about musical instruments, another gained some new information about music, and a third reported that he learned that “the rhythm of the music is natural and the people are different.” There were only two specific comments about inter-cultural communication “the people are communicative” and a report of “conversation with Africans.” A few comments about learning stressed the radical difference that appeared so frequently in question six about images of Africa. Two retired women told us that they had learned that they were glad they did not have to live in Africa; another person pointed to Africa as a location of problems: “other people have a difficult life.” In the description of their experiences with “African culture” and in what they had learned, the snails displayed by the story teller were popular. Three people specifically responded by saying that they had learned about “giant snails.”

***(4) What do you think about presenting African culture in a zoo?***

Thirty-eight percent of those asked Question Five approved of the choice of the zoo because they thought that nature and African culture fit well together. More responded positively without specifically linking culture and nature in their answer. The significance of these positive responses becomes compounded when examined in relationship to question six.

***(5) When you think of Africa, what images come to mind?***

In response to this question, the majority of the people (79%) provided us with images of animals or nature. This is hardly surprising since they had just visited a zoo. Forty-eight percent of the respondents mentioned animals or some type of animals such as an elephant or giraffe and 32 % use the word nature or natural or mentioned some aspect of the natural landscape such as desert or steppe.

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<sup>12</sup> Some people reported several different kinds of activities.

Question 5: Responses about Africa as nature after zoo visit

Animals	Nature/ topography	natural/	Animals or nature	Total responses
38 (48%)	25 (32%)		63 (79%)	79

However, in response to the same question, the majority of the visitors (68%) mentioned people, culture, or a cultural trait such as music or drumming in relationship to the word Africa. This was perhaps more surprising, since they had just visited a zoo. However, it was a zoo with an “African Village” event.

Question 5: Responses about Africa as culture after zoo visit

People/culture	Cultural trait	poverty	People, or cultural traits or poverty	Total responses
31 (39%)	30 (38%)	23 (29%)	54 (68%)	79

Thirty three (42%) of the 79 people who answered this question responded with both images of nature and images of African culture after visiting the zoo.

**VII. Discussion: What can be learned from the event “The African Village in the Augsburg Zoo”?**

Upon our return we were asked by colleagues and friends “was it so bad?” and this question also was part of the assessment that appeared in the press after the event. The press reporting concluded that since it was only a fair and a series of cultural performances that were widely enjoyed, there was really “much ado about nothing”. We disagree. The event was not egregiously racist but our research reveals that it did raise issues that must be addressed.

**A. Contemporary Racialization and the “African Village” in the Zoo**

There is increasing interest in culture as a tool of marketing cities, tourism, types of products, and various localities whether they are amusement parks or zoos. This interest has consequences for ideas about race as well as culture that need to be addressed. It is easy for us to now look back and see what was wrong with the Völkerschauen and how they brought together commercial interests and ideas about exotic, dangerous, uncivilized, cultural difference in a potent package that contributed to racial thinking. It is harder to see how current day strategies of presenting culture might also have tendencies that contribute to ideas that categorize people and culture and that place them into a hierarchy of people who are more or less civilized. Displaying African arts and culture in the setting of a zoo has raised such questions.

In order to evaluate our findings it is first important to define the concept of race and racialization. These definitions are central to the evaluation because the organizers of the “African Village” in the zoo were truly horrified that they were being accused of racism. What they were doing, they maintained, had absolutely nothing to do with colonialism

and racism. They were just having a crafts fair with cultural performances in a zoo. The critics of the event spoke constantly of the insensitivity of the organizers to what they experienced as a racializing practice. In their eyes, the choice of the zoo reflected the racism of the organizers. Clearly the two sets of actors were talking past each other.

Most contemporary anthropologists repudiate the concept of race as it was developed during European expansion, the African slave trade, and colonization and then codified as science in the late 19th century and early 20th century. That is to say, Europeans as they expanded around the world through trade and conquest developed ways of labeling colonized and enslaved peoples. These labels were used to sort the world's people in terms of observable physical difference, as if these differences reflected the entire biological and psychological make up including intelligence of the categorized people. Cultural differences were also explained in terms of this categorization. Today, our knowledge of contemporary genetics and distributions of DNA makes it clear that humans are a single species with variation along a wide range of dimensions. This variety can not readily be categorized into discrete categories called races. Intelligence is not linked to physical appearance; humans are marked by their capacity to learn and create cultural variation, and cultures are constantly changing.

In short, race is a “social construct” that does not adequately describe human variation but rather originated as a means to justify and explain unequal power. Therefore, while race is not a useful way to understand biological variation, it still “matters” because ideas about racial difference are still used in situations of unequal power to justify differential access to employment, education, housing, promotion, and positions of power and responsibility. Racism is the placement of people into discredited racial categories, discriminating against people who are seen as racially inferior and justifying their differential treatment in terms of their inherent differences.

However, to understand how racism works we need another word and that is “racialization.” That is because the discredited racial categories are constantly being reinforced, reinvented, relearned, and reconstituted through various actions in daily life. The term “racialization” is used to speak about the process of constantly reinforcing ideas about race. Examining processes of racialization focus on power relationships that structure the contexts within which people interact and come to value and even see each other. Within these processes, people with more power are able to define what is normal, what is acceptable, what is civilized, and what the defining characteristics of various cultures are. Racialization can be observed within what schools or museums teach about history and culture, the way news is reported, and the kinds of images used in films, videos, news reporting and advertising. Racialization can be present in discussions of who belongs to a nation and how we can recognize foreignness. Efforts at multicultural education can sometimes inadvertently contribute to racism by linking culture to physical appearance. Thus in the United States, multiculturalism is often equated with programs about people who have different skin colors. In this version of multiculturalism, culture and biology are merged. This recreates categories of race.

## B. The Issue of “Völkerschauen” and Colonial Heritage

The organizers were mostly concerned with defending themselves against the accusation of staging a “Völkerschau.” This was, as becomes clear from the letters of ISD, Prof. Finzsch and other protesters, only one among several points of criticism raised; but surely it was the most alarming. Therefore we will briefly delve into the issue of “Völkerschauen” as the basis for understanding and evaluating the claims and counter-claims of protesters against and defenders of the “African Village.” In the heated discussions about “African Village”, “Völkerschauen” were mostly summed up as putting humans on display. The scientific literature on the issue shows a more differentiated picture.

The literature points at three main characteristics of “Völkerschauen”: 1) the embodiment of European superiority; 2) the various business-interests involved; 3) the claim for authenticity, reifying a certain perspective on other cultures. In her analysis of the “Völkerschauen” in the 19th and 20th century Eißenberg<sup>13</sup> (1994) differentiates between the motives of the visitors and those of the organizers. The visitors were, according to this author, driven by curiosity and the desire for the exotic. Exoticism was related to categories of people who were seen as closer to nature than Europeans, dangerous, and sexually attractive. Among the motives of the organizers was an effort to realize concrete commercial interests. Politicians and businessmen promoted those shows to popularize colonial politics and the need for colonial expansion. Both organizers and visitors saw the Völkerschauen as educational events that benefit those who came to look and those who were exhibited. Visitors were supposed to learn about foreign cultures and those on display would learn civilization. They would be able to return home and become agents of European colonization. Underlying all claims and the enactment of the events were European assertions of their superiority towards the “exotic” strangers.<sup>14</sup>

Völkerschauen became an important part of zoos in Europe and the United States when the zoos began to face difficult economic times. Zoo administrators found that hosting traveling shows of exotic people attracted people back to the zoo and proved to be extremely profitable. Unlike investing in a new animal exhibit, which then became permanent and had to be supported after public interest waned, shows of people traveled and new attractions could be booked every year.<sup>15</sup> Economic interests were sometimes also part of the motivation of the people who agreed to participate in the shows as “exotic objects.” Acting out of a position of vastly unequal economic power they agreed to a

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<sup>13</sup> Eißenberg, Gabriele 1994: “Die Wilden sind unter uns.” Völkerschauen während des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland, in: *Infoblatt der Gesellschaft für Ethnologie e.V.* 9, S. 43-72. See also Corbey, Raymond 1993 “Ethnographic Showcases 1870-1930” *Cultural Anthropology* 8(3):338-369.

<sup>14</sup> Eißenberg, Gabriele op. ; Schmidt-Gross, Caroline 1999: Tropenzauber um die Ecke. Völkerschauen bei Hagenbeck, in: Heiko Möhle (Hg.): *Branntwein, Bibeln und Bananen. Der deutsche Kolonialismus in Afrika – Eine Spurensuche*, Hamburg, S. 81-86.

<sup>15</sup> Jonassohn, Kurt 2000 “On A Neglected Aspect Of Western Racism.” (Paper presented at the meeting of the Association of Genocide Scholars, 9-12 June 2001 in Minneapolis), website of Montréal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies

contract because they had already entered the cash economy but had few ways to earn money.<sup>16</sup>

As we mentioned above the organizers of the event completely dismissed the possibility that there was any relationship between the historical Völkerschauen and their event. Nevertheless, 1) by staging the “African Village” the organizers and exhibitors followed economic interests. “Africa” and “African culture” were thought of as “magnet” attracting many visitors to the zoo, from which all parties involved in the event would have benefited. 2) The desire for the “exotic” was clearly a factor calculated by the organizers and, at least partly by the exhibitors, and visitor’s response to it positively. 3) The organizers spoke their intention to promote education and tolerance. But the whole event was organized in a way that nothing of serious educational content was presented. Instead, images thought by Europeans – in this case Germans – to be “typically African”, were reinforced.

On several occasions we discussed some of our questions and observations with the organizers and a few of the visitors. We asked whether they thought that without the event being a Völkerschau, there still might be the possibility that the event in a zoo might continue or reproduce colonial stereotypes. We asked whether such reproduction, however unintended, might reinforce discrimination and racialization. It was striking that all of our discussion partners, including Dr. Heinz Münzenrieder from the city of Augsburg, the zoo director Dr. Barbara Jantschke, Dr. Christian Ruck who is chairperson of the working-group on economic cooperation and development on behalf of the CDU/CSU fraction in the German Bundestag, and various visitors did not see the need to reflect critically on these issues.

There could be two reasons for this response: 1) Either we, the researchers, were seeing problems where there really were none (as one visitor put it); or 2) there was a general lack of sensitivity and willingness to consider these problems seriously. From all the evidence we assessed we conclude the latter. Our interview partners made it clear to us that they understood racism almost exclusively in the context of what the Nazis did in Germany and Europe. Apart from that, they would see a problem with the current event in the zoo only if a “real Völkerschau” was staged; but this obviously was not the case. Against this background, the criticism of the “African Village” was considered to be nonsense. To the contrary, the zoo was defended by all these discussion partners as an appropriate place. Dr. Ruck said that the zoo is a place where leisure and learning can be combined. “If you have people [exhibitors and visitors] in the zoo you can lead them in various directions”, in the sense, as Dr. Ruck added, that even more complex issues regarding, for example, social and economic problems in many African countries could be discussed.

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<sup>16</sup> Thode-Arora, Hilke 2002 “Abraham’s Diary - A European Ethnic Show from an Inuk Participant’s Viewpoint” *Journal of the Society of the Anthropology of Europe*, Fall/Winter (Originally published as “Das Eskimo - Tagebuch von 1880. Eine Völkerschau aus der Sicht eines Teilnehmers“ in *Kea: Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* 2 1991: 87-115.)

To us it nevertheless remains an important question as to why the organizers, the city officials, and national politicians did not recognize the need to look more deeply into possible problems with the event. Historically, zoos were places where, among other “exotic” people, Africans have been displayed. When today again Africans and African culture is linked to the zoo, even if not in the same manner as 100 years ago, the consequences of making such a connection requires scrutiny. Our finding is that while the discussion in Germany about the times of Nazism reached a high level of reflection and openness in recent years, the discussion of problems of discrimination and racism not directly linked to the “Third Reich” is still considered to be of minor or even no importance. And it is this tendency to dismiss as unimportant processes of racialization that are not on the level of Nazi crimes that explains the belief that it is acceptable to profit by placing African culture in a zoo.

In summary, the “African Village” in the Augsburg Zoo did not conform to the stereotype of the Völkerschauen that was used in the initial debate. We are definitely NOT saying that the Augsburg zoo put on a Völkerschau. We are not saying that the organizers or the visitors whom we interviewed were racist. However, some of the elements that recent scholarship about the Völkerschauen have identified as problematic persist in different guises in today’s marketing of exotic cultural difference. Especially against the background of history, the context of the zoo makes the marketing of exotic cultural difference even worse.

### **C. The Question of Tolerance, Multiculturalism, Humanitarianism, and African Voices in the Zoo**

If the organizers of the event worked to market the event in terms of ideas that racialized Africans and no one got the message, their efforts might be misguided but of little account. They could be understood as well meaning but misguided. However our findings indicate that both adults and children who visited the zoo got the message. The linking of animals, nature, and Africans was a persistent theme. The word “natural” appeared frequently. In various ways a majority of the 83 visitors we spoke to after they had seen the entire display said that the zoo and an African village are a good combination. The exit polls showed that there were also some critical voices among the visitors that echoed questions raised by the critics about the images of Africans generated by placing African crafts and cultural performance in a zoo along with exotic animals. But they were clearly a minority.

The defenders of the event, when the protests began, responded with references to tolerance and support for Africans in Augsburg. They made specific reference to the Togoverein that was participating, as well as the humanitarian activities associated with the zoo. This defense raises two related questions: the meaning of tolerance and the implications of raising money in a zoo to address poverty in Africa.

One can display tolerance and maintain outmoded views of race that divide people into ranked categories based on stereotypes of physical appearance. Tolerance does not necessary mean the equality of cultures or people. Humans can tolerate that lions,

elephants, and zebras have behavior that is different from us and do not reflect our values. So placing African cultural performances and crafts in a zoo in the name of teaching tolerance does not indicate that an event is organized to insure that racialization has been combated. Given the views of both organizers and visitors that Africans and the zoo were a perfect combination, it is hard to say that the event taught non-African visitors to accept Africans as equals.

It is important to say that the members of the two humanitarian groups, who were almost all white, worked long and hard to help people in Africa. The good work they did however does not mean that they may not at the same time contribute to the processes of racialization in their portrayal of Africa. The placing of humanitarian activities in the zoo did not in itself combat racialization. The poverty of Africa in this setting tends to become naturalized also. It seems linked to the very essence of Africa and its people.

There is little room in the picture of Africa disseminated by the humanitarians to acknowledge that many regions of Africa have vast riches in oil, uranium, diamonds, gold, coltran, and other minerals and that profit from this wealth flow into European, American, and now Chinese companies. Broader issues about globalization, about the contrasts between wealth and poverty in Africa's vast cities, and about the history of African civilizations have no place in the images of Africa generated the way in which Africa was being presented in the zoo. The zoo event took place at the same time that the G8 was debating canceling the debt to Africa. News media was publicized that lack of money for health services and public education in Africa was related to the massive amount of wealth sent yearly to financial institutions to service the debt. The zoo visitors, with few exceptions, most of which were Africans or protestors, made no reference to these issues and portrayed Africa as uniformly poor and in need of "our help." The linking of nature, Africans, and poverty does seem to contribute to drawing a line between Europe and Africa that makes it difficult to see the financial connections, at the very time that the press in Europe and some members of the G8 were acknowledging these connections.

Moreover, there is the further issue of how to build solidarity. The defenders also saw the staging of the event as an act of solidarity with Africa and Africans in Germany. They defined solidarity as offering Africans a place to display their goods and perform their culture. The problems that lie behind this rhetoric are the following:

1. African-Germans who had lived for a long time in Germany became Africans and foreigners, only linked to Africa without valid ties to Germany. This equation leaves no place for a discussion of providing opportunities of African-Germans outside of a cultural niche.
2. The voice of African-Germans who critique the event was discounted.
3. The possibility that African exhibitors would prefer a different location than the zoo for their marketing if given a voice or a chance was never addressed. Involving one African business man in a profit making venture for a zoo is not an act of solidarity with the people of Africa.



4. The differential power between Germans and Africans and Germany and Africa was legitimated through a differentiation of “us” and “them.” “We” were in a position to help “them”; and the “best place” to do this is by organizing this fair in the zoo.

Even if “solidarity” was clearly not the most important motivation of the event organizers, it later became the most important argument of the defenders of the event against the critics. But rather than solidarity, the reasoning that stands behind the event “African Village” made use of Africa as an exotic magnet to attract people to a zoo. It is at this point that continuing colonial and racist stereotypes and the history of the Völkerschauen – still not critiqued by most people – intersect with contemporary marketing and produce racialization.

Any assessment of the view of the exhibitors toward the “African Village” in the zoo must be done in relationship to the interests they need to pursue. They earn a living in relationship to the existence of a multicultural niche that markets, celebrates, and values marked differences. Both German born and African born exhibitors benefit from this niche and contribute to the exotic images that make such a niche possible. However, the German exhibitors can put aside their African clothes and dreadlocks and find opportunities in the larger society in ways that those who have dark skins can not.

Therefore it is not surprising that most of the critique of the event by the African exhibitors was stated in terms of their business interests. To discount these interests would be to discount their voice as professional and serious business people. Their discussions of power in relationship to the event were about relative risk of which they shouldered the greatest part.

The question of the vulnerability of Africans as visible immigrants was not addressed by most participants. Only the protestors raised the question of the degrading treatment of refugees and inhabitants of asylum homes. But this issue was not being addressed in the presentation of African culture available in the zoo.

#### **D. Africans in Zoos in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In this marketing of Africa, the organizers were not alone. They were participating in the packaging of cultures and the “branding” of them in terms of distinct and instantly recognizable differences. The present moment is one in which there are global economic trends that can put Africans and other versions of exoticized non-western cultures back into zoos and this is happening in Europe and the United States. We searched websites for information about African culture being displayed in zoos with and we found a trend to link displays of African “culture” with zoos. Examples of exoticizing events relating to African culture in zoos can be found at the following websites:

Whipsnade Wild Animal Park in Luton, near London, England  
([http://www.hospitalityline.co.uk/londonattractions/african\\_nights.htm-W5d69WcAjY](http://www.hospitalityline.co.uk/londonattractions/african_nights.htm-W5d69WcAjY))

Metro Park Zoo in Cleveland (<http://www.clemet zoo.com/education/adventure/camp.asp>)

Perth Zoo in Perth Australia

([http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/ed\\_specialprograms.html#ladum](http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/ed_specialprograms.html#ladum))

Of all the Africans in the zoo presentations we could find through our website research, the Woodlands Park Zoo in Seattle, USA seems to have gone the furthest in this direction, building what appears from arch to be a permanent African village in the zoo ([http://www.zoo.org/zoo\\_info/special/grp\\_sales/av.htm](http://www.zoo.org/zoo_info/special/grp_sales/av.htm)).

It is important to note that our web search did not reveal a generalized trend toward linking animals to the marketing of all culture. We did not find a Russian traditional culture exhibit next to the black bears or German folk culture or opera displayed with animals of the European forests. Nor do we believe that the problem would be solved by leaving Africans in the zoo and adding German culture or even German stereotypes. As we noted when discussing the example of the Bavarian caricature in the Augsburg zoo's playground, different categories of people have historically and today been differentially valued in terms of their abilities to produce civilization. Not even all stereotypes are equal.

We should point out that the discussion of the "African Village" continued after the event was over. The maxVita director decided the zoo was indeed not the appropriate place for an African market and began to look for other locations in Augsburg. In a common press release of the Bundesausländerbeirat and the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Ausländerbeiräte Bayerns (the Federal and the Bavarian Foreigners Councils) denounced the fact that the African village was held despite national and international critique (<http://www.agaby.de/pm/augsburger-zoo.html>). They requested a public discussion about colonial history of Germany and the persistence of colonial racist habits of thinking in interactions with Africa and Africans. Against this background, we note that the City of Augsburg has an opportunity to put the acrimony behind and welcome African-Germans and make the diverse cultures of Africa part of their urban life.

As became clear from our research the decision of the Augsburg zoo to improve their revenues through marketing African artifacts and culture is part of a broader trend rather than the naivety of the event organizers. Is the trend documented here of displaying African culture and people in a zoo setting anything to worry about? Does it help if the African Village is presented in an informed way? As we have seen, for those who focus only on egregious acts of racism, the trend to increase zoo attendance through linking Africans and zoos is of little consequence. Our position is that, given the tendency of racial images to persist, be recycled, and used to justify the mistreatment of populations, we are not so ready to dismiss the Augsburg event as harmless.

We conclude that if respect for others means valuing human equality as well as cultural differences, African crafts, food, and cultural performance should not be displayed in zoos. The fact that Africans seem to have been singled out for such treatment is a cause of concern for those who oppose processes of racialization. It is easy now one hundred years later to see the obvious racialization contained within the Völkerschau. What we

need to learn from history is how difficult but how necessary it is to identify and critique contemporary forms of racialization.

## Appendices

### (4) What do you think about presenting African culture in a zoo?

downtown better, animals distracting , I don't have a racial thing  
Liked drums and African things, different ways of being, village idea good – African culture  
background advantageous, most animals were African  
it is more natural  
Good combination zoo and African village  
it doesn't both me that they say Africans are animals, Germany is my place, my wife is German  
real bands, professional performers, African-American music, Cuban  
good to put African shops in zoo cause poor people need a place to sell goods, children come  
zoo is no place for culture, images of animals in cages shape what is learned, children learn Africans are in zoo  
too commercial  
more art  
(tourist lit is worse)  
presented commerce not culture (wanted culture)  
more African sellers  
drummers good in zoo  
question legitimate only part culture not racism  
atmosphere is nice, many cultures, likes it  
more daily life, cultural presentation, less shops  
expected real village, too commercial  
but only commerce, no presentation of culture  
for children: connection of animals and Africa is well illustrated  
did not like consumption; diverted attention from animals  
good idea  
not necessary only Africa, but fits well: many animals come from Africa  
good connection – animals and culture; but more cultural events (dances) were missing  
attraction, but too stressful for animals, better out of the zoo, but good for the economy of the zoo  
did never think about Völkerschauen in relation to this event  
many people come – good possibility (for?)  
one can get some new inputs, interesting food  
no Völkerschau  
can also be staged somewhere else  
fits well – most animals here come from Africa  
not discriminating  
fits well together, makes zoo more interesting  
good for children – learn about other cultures  
discussion about AV was necessary; Africa days in town would have been better, here: no cultural exchange  
nice surrounding  
every culture can be exhibited; protesters were wrong, behaved paternalistic, the co-organizer was an African  
good surrounding – zoo and culture fit well  
no problem, as long as people are not in cages  
fits well with some animals  
fits well - animals come from Africa  
fits well with African animals  
fits well with African animals  
maybe strange idea, but works well  
one should connect it more with animals  
fits well to the surrounding, like safari

maybe not so good for the animals  
goes well with the animals  
goes well with African animals  
but no culture, only market  
has not to be in the zoo, but it is no problem  
show something, no secret  
stimulates attention – animals, exhibits...  
goes well with the animals  
similar to holidays  
no other good location in Augsburg  
goes well with the animals, makes zoo more attractive  
Something similar has happened two years ago, but smaller; but if culture is represented here is questionable  
Munich was better (Afrika Tage), the atmosphere has been more relaxed  
should happen more often  
good insight in culture, beautiful nature  
goes well with African animals  
commercial event  
too simple, Africa is more complex  
good for children: animals and exhibition  
helps mutual understanding  
no problem, children won't associate the Africans in the zoo with "wild people"  
goes well with animals from Africa

**(5) When you think of Africa, what images come to mind?**

freedom, happiness, color, warmth, things we lack here  
poverty, isolation, different way of being, things made by hand  
(not answered)  
wrong to put event in city and say Africa, natural people, problems  
drumming elephants, African village  
(not answered)  
handicrafts, poor  
a pity because Africa is civilized, its not only nature, people live in towns,  
in Germany they only learn bad sides of Africa, war  
culture is a way of life, science, behavior, food, way of thinking – person is African  
Poverty, desert  
AIDS, many poor people, few rich  
Poverty, no infrastructure, no economy, needs help  
desert, wild animals, nice country  
safari, heal, animals  
Animals  
won't answer that-too political  
music, drumming, rhythm, colors  
African culture, dancing, language  
music, naturalness, medicine men, healing  
Mt. Kilimanjoro  
music, civil war, hunger  
wildness, culture, natural folk, poverty  
Animals, plants  
(family) wife: poverty; husband: warm weather; child: animals  
a cultural land, wooden sculptures, colorful cloths  
many things are different, wilderness, freedom, economic problems

wilderness, nature, poverty, Africa is big  
big country, many animals  
steppe, wild animals, desert, safari, drums, black people  
fight for freedom against apartheid and oppression, animals  
savannah, wild animals  
lions, elephants, animals  
Africans and animals  
cloths, drums, African culture, animals, gods, giant snails  
AIDS, poverty, one has to help, beautiful land and animals  
wild animals  
masks, colors, hot, active people  
Tunisia, drums, civil war  
nature, wilderness, animals  
animals, culture, interesting life-style  
beautiful land, holidays, poverty  
animals, music  
lions, desert, animals  
black people, wild animals, large continent, friendliness  
music, dancing, drumming, poverty, sun, civil war  
desert, steppe, wild animals, poor people  
happy people despite poverty, misunderstood continent, colours, nature  
savannah, animals  
animals, poverty, AIDS, civil war, beautiful nature  
colors, music, rhythm, otherness, dark skinned people, poverty  
heat, elephants, giraffes, safari, poor people  
wild animals, poverty, people are used to difficulties  
special landscape, wideness, calmness, animals, steppe  
animals, drums  
modern cities (e.g. Lagos), but, even if it is stupid and actually not true-grass-skirts, dancing, drumming  
wideness, dust, colors, rhythm, poverty  
animals, Kilimanjaro  
giraffes, masks, poverty, black skin  
safari, steppe  
animals, culture, differences  
nature, animals, heat  
nature, music, dancing, colors, satisfied people even if life is hard  
animals, poverty, art, drums  
cradle of humankind, desert  
national parks, mountains, different mentality  
giraffes, lions, African people, colors  
wide landscape, steppe  
everything is different – the peoples, the cultures; normally one can see this only on TV  
poverty, war, AIDS, everything different  
steppe, poor people, famine, dance, families sticking together that is different from here  
safari, amazing animals, wide landscape, easy going  
problems between black and white (like every country)  
wild animals, beautiful people, beautiful women – Massai – beautiful and tall  
war among tribes, poor people  
not answered  
happy even if they don't have anything,

warmness (of people) – not like in Germany – from holidays there  
beautiful landscape, happy people, civil war, resistance,  
strong religious beliefs, zest for life  
land and country and animals would be interesting to see  
a continent with great potential but also with the greatest problems on earth:  
poverty, food shortage, ecological problems,  
rulers behave like centuries ago, people don't get the wealth  
very male dominated society, a lot of problems: AIDS, women work under difficult conditions,  
spread of American capitalism-African people can't stay away from it  
origin of human kind, parable for nature, wilderness, and origins (of life/nature)  
but in reality development as in  
Europe imposed its civilization and changed relationship to nature  
safari, animals, tribes  
desert, elephant, camel, hunter, people living in bush  
dreamy sunsets, steppe, animals, safari, poverty, different languages  
city, parts are so modern that you can't recognize as Africa, very modern

## **Imprint**

The views expressed in this Report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology or any other organization.