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Museum. Space. History: New Sites of Political Tectonics

A virtual exchange between Belinda Kazeem, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, and Peggy Piesche

Belinda Kazeem / Nicola Lauré al-Samarai / Peggy Piesche

Translated by Tim Sharp

Belinda Kazeem
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I step into the exhibition building. It is very dark. A few glass cases and maps. A bronze. An old white man in safari-style clothes is capturing the bronze's head shape on drawing paper. Memories of colonial travel writings and engravings intended to preserve »African« life for an interested public in Europe. Regimes of visual gazes still in effect.

In front of me a dividing wall. Clay look. Earthy colours. I walk through a corridor and feel like illicitly intruding the Palace of the Oba of Benin. Glass cabinets with Benin bronzes are standing around in this odd landscape. The sense of having discovered

something special is accentuated by the lighting. A few spotlights are pointed at the bronzes whose metal surfaces give off a golden glow like an army of promising treasures. The bronzes themselves appear strangely dead, speechless, without context. I move very close to the glass cabinets, look at the exhibited objects, read the affixed labels.

The next room: another army of glass cabinets, sculptures, bronzes; innumerable labels. After about twenty glass cases, wall texts of generalities and the eternally identical labels, which by the way, only differ in naming the owners, the narrative thread selected by the curator doesn't interest me anymore. What could the »objects« tell me instead? Probably something about colonial appropriations, about illegal sales and illegitimate trade practices, about historical and current meanings for the royal court and the people of Benin. With regard to the curator's motivation or the relevancy of displaying hundreds of bronzes in rows the purpose of this particular exhibition hangs in the air. Education? Conservation? Showing just how extensive the holdings are?

I leave the building with a feeling of emptiness. The strange muteness and rigidness of the objects holds me captive for some time. I ask myself how the exhibition should have been arranged so as not to leave me with this queasy feeling in my stomach. Would it have been possible to change the regimes of visual gazes and to place the objects in another context in order to be able to "hear" them and to make a statement about ownership and appropriation right from the beginning?

Nicola Lauré al-Samarai

I know the weird feeling of discomfort Belinda describes. It apparently creeps over when one is confronted with an irritation that cannot to be articulated in the particular moment. I remember a similar experience many years ago while visiting the Egyptian Museum in Cairo for the first time. After I had fought my way through the noisy crowd to the counter and finally gotten my ticket I, a few moments later, found myself in a confusingly convoluted building with huge exhibition halls and enormous numbers of »pieces« of pharaonic history: outsized statues, ritual objects, death masks, sarcophagi, burial items, daily utensils, jewellery, wigs and so on.

Retrospectively, I was not so much irritated by the unbelievable quantity of exhibits but rather by the presentation itself – something I, at that time, could only translate for myself as 'Western'. Today I would call it a continuation of representational violence that in Egypt — as well as in other countries where a Eurocentric system of meaning insinuates a »highly civilised cultural heritage« — is conveyed and mediated by the West. At the beginning of the 19th century »objects« from pre-colonial times were dragged into the light during an unprecedented colonial storming of pharaonic cult and cultural sites by European archaeologists and self-appointed discoverers with gold-rush manners who desecrated the careful and complex rituals of the ancient Egyptians. The countless results of countless grave robberies are now »at home« in a building erected at approximately that time. It is situated at *Maydan at-Tahrir* or *Liberation Square*.

The ambivalent irony of history is catching up with at least a few of us in the present – exactly *because* of the knowledge of colonial appropriation practices. It makes itself noticeable through the »queasy feeling in the stomach« Belinda describes because as soon

as we, as visitors to a museum, agree to »appreciate« universal treasures in this predetermined ergo »worthy« place by looking at them we suddenly become accomplices and, from my point of view, unwillingly confirm the reifying voyeurism of the traditional domains of ownership and representation. Thus, for me it is not only crucial to scrutinize dominant regimes of visual gazes but to relate them to concomitant individual expectations or intentions of one's own mode of looking. My questions would be: What do we actually expect when we look at de-contextualised »things« that have been made into objects and which do not (cannot) speak »for themselves« since they first should have to be appropriately re-contextualised as elements and expressions of a particular historical subjectivity? And further: Is a re-contextualisation of this nature possible at all, and if so, how?

Peggy Piesche

The first time I felt the collision between European cultural violence and an alternative historical viewpoint was during an ancient history expedition in Turkey as a part of my course of study. Three full weeks of travelling through all the great »European memographies«, as I call them, and then to model them neatly into historical study units in order to convey »history« – a classic of the fundamental irritation you two have already described. Quite unlikely my initial experience took place outside the typical German or European museum. Ephesus, Old Smirna, Pergamon. At home museums tended to bore me and triggered little either intellectual or political response. But suddenly, in the midst of the ruins of ancient Pergamon, I felt a confrontation whose inevitability forced me to become a subject and to conceive myself an active agent. Turkish activists were asking to support Turkish

claims of the Pergamon altar in Berlin and other artefacts by collecting signatures, from tourists, too.

It is almost unnecessary to mention that the head of our expedition, a professor of ancient history, unmistakably declared that »we«, certainly, would not support such a thing. Embarrassment. Silence. Looking the other way. Walking away. A bitter tasting moment of unpredicted complicity just as Nicola has described it. However, already then I felt this was a very *active* moment and the decision of most of the students to comply with the friendly advice of the professor represented an active contribution to the expanded business of European cultural violence. A scientific journey to all the sites of European historical heritage fraught with meaning in a country which is regarded as not belonging to that very heritage and, despite its entirely »scientific nature«, is best travelled using a cheap tourist package produces – a quite bizarre combination in itself.

The reclaiming of self-determined collective memories on one hand and the paternalistic refusal of most of the tourists on the other initially revealed to me — above all emotionally — that something must be wrong with the idea of how historical identity is produced here. I signed the list but could not help noticing that apart from me only my fellow students from Egypt and Greece did the same. Back in Germany museums from then on were no longer boring or barely stimulating places but, rather, became sites of political tectonics. Actually, these halls should be shaken up continuously not leaving anything remaining in its place. But this is another story.

What »the museum« as a concept is really able to accomplish and if it – considering all the inherent burdens of the colonial past which it actually reinforces – can be used in order to illuminate and

adequately deal with colonial appropriation practices I perceived as disturbing questions behind the very recent debate about Nofretete's new »home« as I had done previously in Pergamon. The scenario is basically the same: Egypt has been demanding the return of the bust since 1924, eleven years after the German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt dug it up in Tell al-Amarna and smuggled it past the appraisal officials responsible for the division of the finds. Eleven years in which it could only secretly be exhibited in Germany and, indeed, everything was done in order to conceal the existence of the bust from the Egyptians. That Ludwig Borchardt must have used some tricks to get the bust past the official authorities is cleared by the fact that up till 1924 he did everything in his power to prevent Nofretete from being shown in public. When it was no longer possible to avoid an exhibition in the *Neues Museum* Egypt immediately demanded its return. A long lasting tug-of-war began and it was not until 1935, through an intervention of Adolf Hitler himself, that the matter was ended.

Now, shortly before the 100th anniversary of its excavation a new conflict has broken out as to whether or not the bust can be returned at least as a loan to be exhibited in Egypt. But Berlin does not want the three thousand year old bust to travel. It is not a pop star one can send out on tour; shocks and climatic changes would cause damage. But Nofretete has taken a large quota of journeys already and there are more to come – within Germany and more frequently in Berlin. The last stop for the time being: the bust will be exhibited as one of Berlin's icons at the *Kulturforum* along with European visual art – as a hieroglyph, a code, a symbolic sign for the epitome of ancient Egypt.

The special exhibition Hieroglyphen um Nofretete throws me back to the question of what a museum is actually able to achieve and

what it wants to do. As a cursory glance at the Nofretete-debate clearly shows all the colonial appropriation practices are open to inspection and quasi-intentionally exhibited, too. The continuation of representational violence does not really seem to be a museum problem. The Netherlands, however, is not in possession of all its Rembrandts, and where does the Mona Lisa belong? Has Europe risen above such questions? Has it outgrown the allegedly nationalist historical perspectives? These are, of course, only rhetorical questions but they indicate contradictory practices in exhibiting European and non-European art.

Picking up on Nicola's notions about our respective expectations when we enter the representational space of »the museum« I would want to question the concept of »the museum« itself. I am not sure whether regimes of visual gazes within the manifestations of European cultural violence can be changed at all or if we don't have to think about completely new concepts. The special exhibition Hieroglyphen um Nofretete did not even refer to the so-called Egypt reception anymore. It was more concerned with the readability of pictorial signs albeit their reference to ancient Egypt was not excluded. That sounds good and appears to be far beyond the well-known Egyptomania. But careful, even though colonial representation has been deconstructing itself for a long time it doesn't mean that it has given up. Meanwhile – to quote the sensation-seeking Berliner Zeitung – Nofretete as »the most beautiful woman in Berlin« has already been completely incorporated into this European cultural violence and, as far as I am concerned, can be grasped as a symbol of how capable the concept of »the museum« is in transforming and re-implementing itself.

Nicola Lauré al-Samarai

Our different but similar reports regarding current representational patterns and practices especially of non-European art and culture seem to result in the fact that the concept of »the museum« and the space of »the museum« do not only cause one another but historically overlap in and by producing meaning. That on one hand colonial appropriation represents an integral component of the idea of »the museum« itself and, on the other, is manifested in a real and quasi graspable »object presence« is not a new notion. Hence, the critical and definitely exciting reflections on interpreting these conditions are correspondingly comprehensive. In this context – *Nofretete* serves just as an exemplary metaphor — Germany has a lot of catching up to do, an obstacle additionally enforced by the fundamental lack of awareness of colonial wrongdoing. Productive public discussions or considerations that might indicate a different direction are therefore almost impossible.

To challenge the conventional concept of »the museum« in general can be, as Peggy suggests, the first step in order to think of something that – in the broader sense of a critical transgression – is situated *beyond*. The theoretical position of Mary Louise Pratt who considers museums to be *contact zones* serves as an important starting point for me in order to emphasise the interactive and improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters, to take seriously processes of subject-constituting within major power asymmetries, and to disrupt dominating view-points as well as the reductionist binary of conquest/dispossession. Although — as Peggy rightly stated — »all the colonial appropriation practices are open to inspection, quasi-intentionally exhibited, too« they are more of an annoying sideshow if that, at the end of the day, justifies the means. Critical discourses and alternative practices have not been able to change much if we reconsider the *conscious* representational intention of the Benin exhibition as described by Belinda. It refers

to an apparently undoubted legacy of a white European »discoverer ethos« so as to give a *specific* public the possibility of walking along that trail even if it is »only« within a virtual re/staging.

Thus, People of Color – as subjects – are not only entirely banned from history but also from the present. Historically they are »mute« anyway and, as museum visitors, they are neither considered nor addressed. The self-evident and therefore cynical framework of the Benin exhibition cannot – not by any stretch of imagination – be explained another way else. Here, as in countless other analogous constellations, the violent *contact zones* of the past are joined by those of the present. Contact zone sedimentations emerge; historical/narrative strata, if you like, that are not only rooted in the unquestioned passing on of traditions of colonial racism and cultural Darwinism but, moreover, can only function when idea and space of »the museum« are understood as a spatiotemporal neuter and, thus, are situated *outside* history. If one refuses this intentionally directional gaze with its controlling hegemonic interrelatedness of viewing subjects and viewed objects and departs instead from the historicity of *what* we see and *how* we are requested to see it, then idea and space of »the museum« are thrown back into a field of tension and conflict – an area wherein their historical and present sedimentations are put up for debate and can be analysed.

The question is whether one wants to engage in such a comprehensive »de-sedimenting« process at all. Despite the possibilities offered by a differentiated critique or elaborated varying perspectives I am – like Peggy – not sure if this would cause fundamental change. The conceptual and spatial propagations of violent epistemological configurations are not only extremely condensed they are, above all, inherent to the system. Such a context would primarily necessitate to address the white or

Western gaze and its representations, the past and recent colonial legacies and their versatile assertions and fields of tension, the ever-new and ever more subtle practices of appropriation. In other words: deconstruction. So for me the question arises whether focusing a self/critical, primarily white/Western self/understanding — however undisputed it might be for shifting approaches — makes the actual "objects" less silent; whether one really encounters *their* gaze from behind the glass cabinets and vitrines; whether *their* stories are given a narrative independence.

Frankly speaking: I don't think so. Perhaps — to return once again to our accustomed individual expectations and modes of looking — that is the reason why I became a passionate visitor of "minority" museums where hegemonic narratives, despite their subliminal soundings, cannot claim ostensible space. Places like these represent real *contact zones* for me, because I feel invited to relate with hi/stories, to grapple with different cultural locations and affiliations and to enter sites of survival and resistance. To say it with Peggy's beautiful metaphor: These are the real »sites of political tectonics«, of inspiring representational politics and re/constructional work in the best sense. In short: sites of transformative subject-*being*.

Belinda Kazeem

One of the points you both addressed I consider very important, namely, the question of deconstructing a »white/Western self/understanding«, to use Nicola's words. But does this deconstruction really causes changing directions of viewing, does it permit the objects to speak from behind their glass cabinets? Although I would like to believe in the power of postcolonial theory and its approaches to take effect in hegemonic museums I

also have to admit that I'm sceptical. The desire to deconstruct is lived out on a theoretical level, quasi as a new branch of theory one has to subscribe to whereas in practice i.e. in the context of exhibitions in hegemonic museums the colonial politics of representation unperturbedly continues. I have made this experience in most different supposedly informed contexts: at the university, in panel discussions and so on. Even those who once doggedly refused to deal with critical theory have had to acknowledge that it cannot be ignored anymore but now it is simply incorporated into the dominant canon and accordingly received. It does not, however, find its way into real practice. What remains is critical theory robbed of its critical moment and, at least within these hegemonic spaces, possesses absolutely no activist potential anymore. This, of course, corresponds — and here I'm mainly talking about Austria — with both the continuous refusal to confront colonial history and the more general impugnment of the relevancy of postcolonial theory. Deconstruction thus becomes a theoretical act without any consequences for one's own practices.

Although it would be interesting here to address the issue of what should happen to »institutional burdens« such as anthropological museums, ethnographic collections and their derivative exhibitions or what tasks might be ascribed to these sites I find it more exciting to move out of these spaces and instead focus exhibitions that succeeded in developing their own narrative structures.

Nicola talked of »minoritised« museums or exhibitions that generate *contact zones*. At this point I would like to mention the exhibition project *Remapping Mozart – Hidden Hi/stories* that started during the Mozart Year 2006 and was curated by Araba-Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, Ljubomir Bratić, Lisl Ponger, Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja. Departing from hegemonic notions assigned to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart by confronting the

predominant historical canon the project intended to make »minoritised« positions and voices audible/visible, to bring them together and, finally, to combine them in a multi-voiced conversation. Thus, for all involved participants an opportunity opened up to look at hi/story from various positions, to place these positions in relation to each other, and to initiate a process of re-writing.

Let me exemplify this by taking as an example the Research Group on Black Austrian History and Presence. In our case we were concerned with the beginnings of a historiography from a Black Austrian perspective. Therefore we developed certain questions: How would we tell/write Angelo Soliman's story? How can the protest of his daughter Josefine Soliman who fought against the inhuman display of her father in the *k.u.k. Naturalienkabinett* [*Imperial Cabinet of Natural Curiosities*] be grasped from a Black position given that she was an 18th century Black Austrian woman? Although publications about these two people already exist they usually depict the position of the white majority. For us, however, it was important to research and work up Black history *collectively*. In the course of this process we created the concept for both the song *Let it be known* and the accompanying video. Directed by Dominic Mariochukwu Gilbert (aka Item 7) all research results were merged and flowed into the song. Our efforts centred the collective formulation of the textual/visual and the sharing of hi/stories. Furthermore, in order to consciously disrupt Eurocentric narrative strategies we thought about how to establish connections between us contemporary Black people and the life experiences of Black people in the 18th century. This particular »talking back«, as Claudia Unterweger called it referring to a term of bell hooks, enabled us to take up diverse subject positions and to open up a

space wherein we could/can bring our previously isolated, detached voices together.

Taking into consideration our initial observations which primarily dealt with anthropological exhibitions I would now like to move on to the question whether there might also be possibilities of opening up such a multi-voiced space with rather "object related" contexts that, above all, lay bare the problem of owning and exhibiting the respective objects. In a preparatory conversation both of you mentioned diasporic museums. Perhaps you could go a step further by also referring to exhibition projects which, like *Remapping Mozart,* were/are devoted to counter-hi/stories?

Peggy Piesche

To create a space for one self, to make it accessible, and to move out of the outdated old museum is a metaphor containing real depth. I like very much how Belinda combines the »moving away from« with new narrative strands. Our current conversation convinced me that the concept of »the museum« is completely useless for diasporic historiographies. The old *wunderkammers* of early modernity were not coincidentally called »cabinets of rarities and curiosities«. Along with nature exhibits, art, and craftwork from one's own usually small »kingdom« the main concern was to demonstrate the influence and greatness of the ruler, that is to exhibit it. And this is exactly the moment when »we« enter the picture: as artefacts from »voyages of discovery«. Ultimately, a museum was entitled to show subordinated subjects that the enforcement of a societal order did not only take place in a particular »here«, at home. Even today it indicates, in fact, a considerable political power if such magnificent treasures like the Nofretete that easily can be exhibited in Berlin.

From my point of view this is the crux of the matter since it reveals an antagonistic relationship between concepts of »the museum« and Diaspora. The wunderkammer–collections as the basis for a European understanding of »the museum« not only were intended to convey a world-order but to cement it at home. They, as well as the old art, functioned to mirror a natural and divine order of the world and thus the beginning and end of a divinely determined development. It is obvious that this does not really include us as (looking) subjects or, alternatively, it assigns us a particular place. In this respect I perceive museums to be an active instrument manifesting both the processes of colonisation and the postcolonial re-staging of colonial appropriation.

I think, we share a similar reading considering the binaries of conquest and expropriation. This is why I like Nicola's suggestion to conceive museums as *contact zones* very much. Still it seems important to directly and unequivocally clarify that we are not concerned here with non-coercive or non-hierarchical multi-cultural contact zones. Based on the traditional principle of »the museum« they can only be a variation of it. No, consciously stepping out of »the museum« and creating new spaces does not only demand a novel addressing of ourselves but a rewriting and redefining of terms such as historicity, source, proof, and thereby the basic character of science. So the question of what will remain of the European culture of remembrance when it is progressively emptied of its imagery is very exciting for me. However, Belinda's reflection on how a new space might look like is more important.

To step out and write ourselves out of the hegemonic narratives and viewpoints we have to manifestly redefine these »spaces«. We already extensively talked about new conceptions of content: how to re/configurate diasporic gazes into subjects and to invite ourselves to be viewers; how to uncover the colonial discourse

inscribed in us and to depict it in exhibitions so that it is quasi disenchanted; how to unmask the Western master-discourse as a historical legend. These are various strands and probably also various starting points.

Uncovering the inscribed colonial discourse and making it visible was, at least in my opinion, very successfully undertaken by the mobile exhibition *Homestory Deutschland. Schwarze Biografien in Geschichte und Gegenwart [Homestory Germany. Black Biographies in History and the Present]* commissioned by the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD Bund e.V.) in 2005. There is nothing exciting, sensational or even exotic about biographies invisible, untold and hidden. To change this initial situation visitors are requested to make a physical effort that is to get any information at all they have to actively look behind the photographed faces. It becomes even clearer in the catalogue where the pages have to be cut open otherwise the biographies behind the photos cannot be read. I also like the concept of wandering, being mobile, and the possibility of actively »making« various sites into museums. This concept offers exceptional possibilities for dialogue because – in contrast to the manifest or predetermined space of »the museum« and its status pretending to guarantee historicity – the subaltern »museum« must continuously re/create itself and becomes a site of remembrance only through the actual exhibition itself.

We ought to use these opportunities and combine them with the important issue of subject-positioning in diasporic history. Although there is nothing fundamentally new about mobile displays I think we can learn especially from those exhibitions that do not aspire to become a local museum but instead enter a contentual dialogue with the locations they are presented at, e.g. harbours, railway stations, factories or official offices. Other

concepts take one step further by a priori writing themselves out of the factual, the geographical space. I'm thinking here, for example, of internet-museums that might facilitate possibilities of how to successfully deal with the rather complex task of developing counter-narratives. Having in mind much more than creating a web-page as an exhibition these future diasporic exhibitions could rather be conceived of as Wiki-pages in order to allow viewing subjects to actively work on their historical narratives. This would also correspond to our reality of searching and excavating material. We are still in a process of daily uncovering hi/stories – our hi/stories – overlaid by the mainstream.

My idea might be a little too radical and I am not sure how it could exactly be implemented. While we develop our own narratives a versatile hegemonic discourse will continue to confront us with new facets anyway. Probing alternative strategies, as we are discussing here, will therefore help us to encounter these facets appropriately and prepared. What I like about the idea of Black people creating and designing »museums« themselves is the inherent notion of *agency*. I also see that in the context of a Black archive that virtually carries on writing itself.

Regarding the Western historical master-narrative, in my opinion, the way will be long and tough because we are repeatedly demanded to react. Building up our own virtual spaces means creating novel parallel discourses – and my personal preference will always be located there. Nevertheless, legends of colonial representation will continue to keep us on tenterhooks for a long time to come. Even though we cannot completely avoid being negotiated as objects it should be our priority both to actively form our history in order to disengage it from hegemonic discourses and to perceive it independently from concerns of the traditional

concept of the »museum«. Only then we are capable to develop something really new and specifically our own.

Nicola Lauré al-Samarai

It is a distinctly comforting thought that the flexible, non-determinable and border-transgressing character of subaltern histories can bring forth explosive spaces; that their unpredictable »continental drifts«, collapsing chronologies and multi-voiced sounds literally blow up the predetermined old walls of »the museum«; that they invite us to be just as flexible, non-determinable, and border-transgressing while we set off to discover real and virtual geographies anew – not in order to conquer them or take possession of them but, following the poetics of Houston Baker Jr., to transform them into inhabitable places of nourishing care and support. I would say the biographical project *Homestory Deutschland* can be perceived as an attempt into this direction because it tried to develop an independent representational form of acknowledgement and estimation and it literally »took place«. We engaged in a creative process that demanded a permanent exchange and a conscious interpersonal involvement since we had to relate both to the hi/stories of the biographees and to our own hi/stories and to continuously re-position ourselves. So we learned a lot from and with each other.

For me this interpersonal or, regarding subaltern spaces, »inter-domain« / inter-communal learning illustrates a particularly important point in order to think about alternative discourses, forms of expression and remembering, about concomitant multi-layered and occasionally problematic needs, desires, and expectations. Dominant structures are »tricky« and entangled – the

fact that there are no »solutions« makes creative work exciting and difficult at the same time.

In the light of our discussion I would agree with the two of you to dismiss the traditional concept of »the museum« for diasporic historiographies. I also share Peggy's thoughts on mobility. Nevertheless, I consider »fixed« sites of memory – such as the Jewish Museum in Berlin or the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles – affecting and important. Although their conceptual composition might be disputed (as is generally known the so-called periphery is not free of hierarchies itself) such institutions stand for self-defined real geographies and generate debates far more productive. They do not wrestle with a however described »external« or »outside« but already *premise* the heterogeneity of subaltern discourses and an understanding of marginality as a site of resistance.

Even if, as Peggy rightly remarks, »legends of colonial representation will continue to keep us on tenterhooks for a long time to come« our future lies elsewhere. The idea of a democratisation and a polylogical »making« of history – like in internet-museums – sounds really thrilling. For buried histories, such as the Black German or Black Austrian, these approaches mark important steps to discover new entries and undertake further »excavation work«. These entries are inclusive and surprising, they connect the unexpected and uncover the invisible – their liberating potential lies precisely therein. It is our responsibility to be attentive to these excavations and to leave the spaces we create and shape ourselves open and inhabitable.

Peggy Piesche

Thank you, Nicola, for once again drawing our attention to the manifest spaces and places. I also think of the Jewish Museum as a very fundamental and vital place that tells us a lot about imparting, transmitting and »conserving« marginalised history in the real sense of the word. For me the site itself is much more important than some of the exhibition concepts it houses. Not for no purpose the museum could only be opened with a delay of almost one year and a half: the architectural concept just refused to connect up with the concept of the museum. Personally, I think the building speaks for itself most expressively; its emptiness and clearness aptly illustrate the pathways of the Jewish Diaspora over the centuries and, at the same time, manifest something as inconceivable as the Holocaust architecturally. To my mind, such a concept can be perfectly combined with the mobile moment of diasporic memorial spaces. Yes, I also think that we need fixed or geographically manifest sites of memory such as the relatively new memorial of slavery in Amsterdam.

These sites or spaces should emerge at neuralgic points; their connections could delineate a future cartography of Diaspora – »mapping Diaspora«, so to say, by conjoining various sites of remembrance. Here, of course, I'm being carried away by my own visions. Nonetheless I believe in choosing primarily the path of interactivity in order to develop and appropriate our own hi/stories. We will continue to be occupied with hegemonic concepts of »the museum« both in the sciences and in the world of journalism but our creative approaches have to be directed towards ourselves. Only then we will benefit from the »excavations«.

This is very nicely reflected by the history of the Amsterdam memorial. For many years the Black community in the Netherlands had been working on its own concepts of remembrance enforcing its claims by loudly and audibly

confronting the mainstream. With the actual museum site something was created that, for a long time, was regarded unthinkable in a society so deeply non-confrontational. By now the location has become a very important milestone in the process of historicizing the Black Dutch community's past and present.

In an interactive »museum«, however, more diasporic communities would be allowed to partake. To finish with a final vision: I think the greatest task for our generation lies in connecting Diaspora in and with what it constitutes for us — a Diaspora defined by the collective hi/story inscribed in all of us; a Diaspora which is not a location in the first place, which is not manifested geographically but rather represents a collective identity derived from experience.

Belinda Kazeem

The idea of »mapping Diapora« — the bringing together of many hi/stories in a never-ending process — is wonderful. It reminds me of a sentence from the installation *Josefine Soliman 2006* realized by Claudia Unterweger and me during the Mozart Year. At one point Claudia says that Josefine Soliman's story embodies only one little piece within the larger puzzle of the African Diaspora. I picture the following: countless individual puzzle pieces, some of which are hidden under a thick layer of dust, and us, slowly recovering these individual pieces, bringing them together and using them in a different place to make a »museum of our own«. As already said, a never-ending process.

Coming back to our starting point, such models could also cause conceptual disruptions of »the museum« as a site of exclusivity still marked by »monological« voices of curators/museum directors and the ownership of objects — the originals, mind you. This in turn

would generate another public, more open approaches and accesses. So museums could really transform into *contact zones*, into places/spaces of multi-voiced narratives.