

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2021

Speeches

Sunday, October 24, 2021

Peter Feldmann

Lord Mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main

Grußwort

Freedom of expression is an extremely precious human right. However, when I read that authors have chosen not to come to Frankfurt for fear of encountering radical, right-wing publishers and authors here, I am obliged to call attention to the other rights enshrined in Germany's Basic Law. The very first article, for example, states that human dignity shall be inviolable.

The inviolability of human dignity is the highest priority of our constitution, of our values and of our

Basic Law. It is also a key directive in the tradition of the Church of St. Paul. Frankfurt has no place for xenophobia. It has no place for anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, threats or humiliation. We in Frankfurt have no sympathy for these things. We will simply not tolerate them! Which is also why I am delighted to be able to congratulate our distinguished prize recipient here today.

Interjection by Mirrienne Mahn, Frankfurt City Councillor

Thank you, Peter, for your important words. The point is, however, that as a Black woman, as a city councillor in Frankfurt, I feel it is my duty to very clearly point out a paradox here: We are speaking about discourse and about freedom of expression. Right-wing ideologies that are contemptuous of humanity, however, do not constitute freedom of expression. The paradox is that here, today, in the Church of St. Paul, the cradle of German democracy, we are awarding the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to a Black woman, while at the same time, at this very same book fair, Black women were not welcome. And I use the words 'not welcome' intentionally, because no effort was made to ensure that these women could feel safe. This is not freedom of expression.

If we tolerate a situation in which right-wing extremists professing contemptuous ideologies are given a

platform here in Frankfurt, in my city, in our city, in my home, that is, if we give people who don't want individuals who look like me - indeed, individuals who look like the prize recipient we are honouring today - to be a part of Germany today, then we are playing an active role in creating the next Hanau.* Times must change. Times will change. As long as I am here in Frankfurt, I will do everything I can to prevent right-wing extremists from gaining a platform upon which to spread their inhuman ideologies. The discourse on freedom of expression is not the discourse being pursued in this case. People like me cannot sit here and hear the book fair receive praise for a discourse that, for some, concerns our very existence. Thank you for your attention. Congratulations.

Continuation of welcome greeting by Mayor Peter Feldmann

Ladies and gentlemen, this, too, is Frankfurt and benefits the occasion. It wasn't planned, and yet I thank

you for your courage. This brings us back to the topic at hand.

* On 19 February 2020, a far-right extremist with xenophobic motives murdered 9 people in the town of Hanau near Frankfurt.

»Freeing yourself [is] one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self [is] another.« Uttered by the former slave Sethe in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, this sentence could just as easily have come from Tsitsi Dangarembga's character Tambudzai in her trilogy of novels of the same name. In those books, a young woman named Tambu fights for the right to self-determination against the dominance of whites, and against the patriarchy. She soon comes to realise that the path towards self-determination involves a constant battle against an unmoving set of obstacles. It is a path of never-ending hurdles on the way to oneself. A path that drains a person, wears them down.

In some respects, Ms. Dangarembga, the story of Tambu is also your story.

It is the story of a hurdle runner. Then again, you are by no means running for yourself alone. Indeed, you refuse to tolerate that people are oppressed because of their gender or »race« - or because colonialism continues to shape our present like an echo from the past.

You want things to be different, to be better. In your home country of Zimbabwe, but not only there.

You insist on equal rights. You stand up for freedom of the press and against corruption, even when those in power try their best to intimidate you - as they

did last year - and threaten you with incarceration. Your strength and defiance, which runs through all of your novels, dramas and films, has made you a role model for us all. It is what brought you to this place today. As the saying goes, every house has a story to tell. And this house, the Church of St. Paul, tells the story of a new awakening, of people's struggle for freedom and equality, and of democracy.

This is the place where democracy in Germany got its start in 1848. The drive towards democracy was propelled forward by men and women who refused to accept the status quo. Because they believed that a better life was possible.

Ms. Dangarembga, you once said: »Action comes from hope.« In many ways, this could be the motto of the house we find ourselves in today. Ms. Obama, you're brother is known for the phrase »Yes, we can.« It is a statement of defiance. Indeed, when we are frozen by fear, the result is often that conditions and relationships become rigid and inflexible. And yet we have everything we need in our own hands. We are the ones who can make a difference every day. Let us therefore join together in hope, let us take action together. Above all, and this is a promise, we shall never leave each other alone again!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

Tambudzai is 13 years old when, following the death of her brother, she first gains access to the world of education and boldly walks through a door that has unexpectedly opened up to her. Tambudzai leaves her parents' home - a small hut in a homestead, where the girl's bed is in the kitchen. From that point on, Tambudzai lives with the family of her uncle, who runs a missionary school where she is now a pupil. She shares a room with her cousin Nyasha, whose family has returned from living in England for several years. Nyasha has forgotten how to speak her native language, Shona, and also how to obey a number of sacrosanct rules.

Tambudzai, on the other hand, will do anything to prove herself worthy of the opportunity that has opened up to her. We get to know Tambudzai - or »Tambu« for those of us who've read »Nervous Conditions« - and she becomes a role model, a friend and a beacon of hope. She sets out on her path, she fights, she creates a future for herself - one that we hope she will be able to realise.

This young protagonist in the first book of Tsitsi Dangarembga's Tambudzai trilogy describes a world in which women obey men and children obey their parents. It is a world shaped by colonialism, the structures of which present themselves as being perfectly self-evident. A world in which men assert themselves - by force, if necessary.

Tambudzai observes everything and describes what she sees in an astute and precise manner. She makes it possible for us, the readers, to experience first-hand her insecurity, her hopes, her fears and her growth, oscillating between shame and rebellion, between tradition and new beginnings, between understanding and repressing, between old role models and new opportunities. Cautiously, Tambu develops self-confidence and self-esteem.

Time and again, however, she must put these to the side in order to adapt to the patriarchal system - but also so as not to lose the opportunity to gain an education and ensure a better life for herself.

Soon, we find ourselves wincing along with Tambu, when the rebellious Nyasha calls into question the countless rigid rules and fiercely opposes them. At the same time, however, we sense that Tambu's educational path is coming into increasing conflict with the expectations her family has of her. Ultimately, we fear that her ambition and the discovery of her undeniable strengths may actually become a problem.

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In 2018, thirty years after it was first published, the BBC placed »Nervous Conditions« on its list of 100 books that changed the world. That same year saw the publication of the third volume in the Tambudzai trilogy, »This Mournable Body«, which has now been published in German under the title »Überleben« (tr. Survival).

In this book, everything is suddenly different. A change of perspective has taken place; a hard »you« has replaced the tender closeness we had with the girl in the first book. Tambudzai is older, she now looks at herself from the outside, thereby becoming alienated from her own person, pulling us along with her into this new »you«, no matter how we might resist.

»The tap, cold only in the rooms, is dripping. Still in bed, you roll onto your back and stare at the ceiling. Realizing your arm has gone to sleep, you move it back and forth with your working hand until pain bursts through in a blitz of pins and needles. It is the day of the interview. You should be up«.

Here, on the first page of the novel, we already sense that Tambu hasn't »made it«, in spite of all her education. We sense that, at some point, she ran out of the ability to adapt. She got lost between worlds, between her origin and the big city, between tradition and rebellion. A secure career path – is it possible that such a thing simply doesn't exist for her, despite all her education? At least not in Zimbabwe, which has fallen apart both politically and economically. Tambudzai's self-criticism and self-blame agitate the reader. Her descriptions cut to the core. They hurt. And I suspect that's exactly what they were meant to do. Distancing oneself from them is hard.

»Your breathing remains shallow and difficult. Pain heaves beneath your breath, gripping your throat so that you cannot speak. You know, although you have said little about that evening, that you have already said too much and you must not dare to deliver another sentence or else you will drown in a pit of disgrace«.

The strong-willed Tambu from the first book now finds herself in a situation of sheer hopelessness. Tambudzai is ruthless with herself and uncompassionate towards others; she has lost all sense of herself, the setbacks begin to pile up. And yet, she doesn't give up. She survives. And we, the spellbound readers, remain at her side, full of horror, amazement and compassion. To the very end.

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As chairperson of the Börsenverein, if asked to speak about Tambu's creator, Tsitsi Dangarembga, author of »Nervous Conditions« and »This Mournable Body«, I might say, indeed, I would be obliged to say:

»She is a world-class writer, she has won numerous awards, such as the PEN Pinter Prize, she is a filmmaker and feminist, and she lives, like her protagonist, in Zimbabwe«.

As a member of the Board of Trustees, I might use superlatives to describe her work; I might explore her origins and praise her political commitment or place her empathy at the centre of my tribute. But actually, what I really want to do is say thank you: Thank you, dear Tsitsi Dangarembga, for introducing me to Tambu, for giving me the opportunity to become one with her, for inviting me to understand Tambudzai's sense of hopelessness, but also to witness her every attempt to get back up on her feet again.

You, Tsitsi Dangarembga, have succeeded in bringing us into close contact with a society in such a way that – even though we might not fully understand it – we nevertheless are able to relate it to ourselves, that is, to ourselves and our own shortcomings.

Dear Tsitsi Dangarembga, when you and I were writing back and forth, I found a quote from Mahatma Gandhi in one of your emails: »First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win«. It is my wish that this will come true for Tambu one day. Congratulations to you, dear Tsitsi Dangarembga – THEN YOU WIN – on receiving the 2021 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Auma Obama

»Against all odds «

Laudation

Thank you all very much for joining me here today to celebrate my long-time friend and kindred spirit Tsitsi Dangarembga.

Dear Tsitsi, it is a very special honour for me to stand here and celebrate you for your extraordinary contribution to literature. I am so proud of you. And I am thrilled to be a part of this festive award ceremony.

Throughout your entire career, you have fought against all odds. Even when you were arrested, you continued to fight, using all possible means - writing, filmmaking and activism - to stand up for those who have no voice and for freedom of expression in your country, Zimbabwe. You succeeded in transmitting a differentiated image of the African continent to the rest of the world. You brought this image out to the people. And for that, we Africans thank you.

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The path to your success was not an easy one. I know. Many, many years ago, I walked a part of that journey together with you - we were 29 years old then, and of course we haven't aged a day since. I met you, Tsitsi, at a time in your life when you'd already achieved a number of significant milestones. You were struggling to match the success of your first novel, »Nervous Conditions«, and wondering how you would ever find the inner peace to write another book. Not until I wrote my own book, many years later - nowhere near as successful as yours - did I come to understand what it means to have a publisher breathing down one's neck. It wasn't easy.

You have come a long way since then, thank God, dear Tsitsi, with many successful books, including three novels and several awards. And we are here

today to celebrate this success. If I had tried to tell you, back then, that this success would come one day, you would not have believed me. Or maybe you would have! Indeed, with your ambition, positively speaking, I wouldn't have been surprised if you'd told me, »Yes, who knows what can happen when you give more than 100 percent to a cause?« That was how you were then, truly determined and hard-working.

In other words, even back then, it was entirely appropriate to imagine your eventual success, dear Tsitsi. And look at how things turned out. It must feel wonderful to have come this far. With all of my heart, I am delighted at your success. Celebrate yourself, Tsitsi! We wish you all of this and more. You worked so hard.

And yet, dear Tsitsi, although it is right to celebrate your arrival and you simply must be happy about it, I would like to remind you that arriving is not the most important thing. It is the journey that's important. I know, it's a great feeling. My daughter would say: »Wow, it feels so amazing! It's totally awesome that you're getting this award!« But the journey to this point is just as important, and it deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated as such.

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Allow me to remind you of some of the moments on this journey. When I met you, you had just ventured into a space, Germany, which was completely foreign to you. A foreign country, a foreign culture, a foreign people - foreign everything. And yet you still wanted to be here. You wanted to create a place for yourself, to find the space and time you needed to express yourself artistically. I can relate. I, too, came to Germany, as a way of moving away from my familiar surroundings in search of a space

where I could find my own voice and be completely myself.

Our paths led us both to the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin. We wanted to use moving pictures to tell our stories. We had big dreams. We were fully immersed in our work there, excited and passionate. But it was not easy. How best to be heard? How best to be seen? Those were the questions we asked at the time. How to be truly seen in the midst of so much foreignness? It was very difficult, especially because, in that context, it was we who were the foreigners.

I'm sure you would have preferred to give up on occasion, Tsitsi, to simply give in to the temptation to lead a normal, ordinary life. Why struggle to make yourself be heard when you could get by just by making due? Why create a forum to foster more justice? Life would have been much easier for you, for us. That's how we think sometimes. If we could have done it that way, we would have.

But the ordinary was not the normal for us. You are not ordinary, Tsitsi. You are not an ordinary person. Come to think of it, I'm not an ordinary person either. An »ordinary« life was never an option for you – not for you, Tsitsi, and not for me. Because we are individuals who are driven, compelled by our sense of responsibility to enable positive change. It's just the way we are. As the English say: »My cross I have to carry«.

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Why Germany? Many people ask this question, both of you and of me. We went to Germany because it is indeed true that being in foreign worlds allows one to rediscover the familiar. I am convinced of this. No matter how difficult it is – and we heard speak of this earlier – the fact is that in a foreign country, you have time to take a look at yourself, precisely because others are seeing you differently. You have time to question yourself: Who am I anyway? Precisely because other people are also trying to define you.

This confrontation with oneself is very difficult at home, in the familiar. I would argue that you, dear Tsitsi, far away from the noise and the demands of the familiar, far away from what is permitted and what is prohibited, were able to find your own voice, to see your own path more clearly before your eyes. This is why we chose Germany. Basically, Germany represents a foreign world, the idea of getting away from the familiar in order to be able to see oneself better and more clearly.

And, of course, love also played a part in this journey. Indeed, your beloved husband, Olaf, entered the stage at this time. Hi, Olaf! Long time, no see! And now, dear Tsitsi, you are not only the mother of three wonderful children, all three of whom are here today – Tonderai, Chadamoyo and Masimba, I'm so happy that you're here – but you are also an acclaimed author, filmmaker and activist, one of the most important and prominent voices on the African continent and, hopefully soon, thanks to this award, a leading voice across the globe.

Thank you, Tsitsi, for allowing me to walk alongside you for a part of your life's journey all those years ago. Thank you for inviting me to be with you today, at this special stage in your life. I am so proud of you! We are honouring you here for everything you've done, Tsitsi, and for everything you will no doubt accomplish in the future – as an author, filmmaker and activist. It is your day. It is your prize. These are your accomplishments. You must take it all in now. Soak it up like a sponge, dear friend.

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So allow me, dear Tsitsi, to congratulate you today on receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, on behalf of all of us here, but in particular on behalf of all Africans, both children and adults, because you are a role model for us all.

Allow me to express my deepest respect for you, dear Tsitsi! I believe I was privy to the most difficult time on your journey through life. And I thank God

that you made it through. I would also like to thank Olaf. I know that you are a rock for my dear friend.

Keep up the good work, Tsitsi! Don't stop! We are behind you. And we are so proud of you! And again, thank you, dear friend, for having me here today. I wish you continued success and all the best for the future!

Ladies and gentlemen, don't be surprised that Tsitsi Dangarembga has received this award. I encourage you to go out and read African literature. Look

beyond your own horizon. We are out there. We are strong. We have something to share with you. It is something very enriching. I encourage you to read what is being written on the African continent. Don't let this be an isolated case. Read African books!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

Tsitsi Dangarembga

»For those who are inside the whale: We need a new enlightenment «

Acceptance speech

Dear honoured guests all,
I do begin by thanking you all for being here today. Thank you for opening your hearts to me and my work and making me feel heard. Thank you Auma for this wonderful speech. Thank you Karin, thank you Lord Major.

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Standing before you here today, I feel, as I imagine Jonah must have felt when he was inside the whale. Taken in by a great beast like a bit of plankton floating by, landing within the entrails of a massive mammal, not knowing how he will find his way out of the great churning gut, but knowing very well what the end process of being digested is and therefore, while feeling grateful at no longer being tossed in the raging sea, nevertheless also feeling highly excited.

Indeed, the award of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2021 is a cause for great excitement in my life. I did not ever imagine that one day I would stand in this lovely venue in Frankfurt, a city in a country that I conceive of as having been the strong umbilical chord of western empire, in order to receive the German Book Trade's most distinguished prize. Therefore, I am astonished to stand before you today. At the same time, I am delighted, and I am humbled at this unfolding of events. I am thankful to my publishers, Orlanda Verlag, who first published my work, and then submitted it for consideration; and I thank the jury who recognised positive value in my voice, a voice from that part of the world so often described as other and so often preceded by negative qualifiers. There are seven billion human beings on the planet. I am now one of the few of that great number who understands what a great

privilege it is to find oneself in a place that not even imagination had been capable of transporting one to.

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Zimbabwe, the nation-state I come from, has never known peace. Various institutionalised forms of violence were practised on black bodies by white bodies in Zimbabwe when British settlers arrived to occupy the land. Officials of the British South Africa Charter Company, the private company founded by Cecil Rhodes in 1889, whose members were outriders of the British Empire, used brutal tactics to bring the local people to heel.

Cecil Rhodes' Pioneer column of 500 men marched with an assortment of weapons that included Maxim guns, they marched into the area that is now Harare, capital of Zimbabwe, to annexe the land formally for the British Empire in 1893. Ensuing economic violence saw black bodies being taxed in money for the houses they lived in when the invaders arrived. The population did not utilise a money economy at the time, thus the requirement for money forced the population into labour for the settler community on the terms the settler community offered, in order to obtain the money required to comply with the taxation system. Other forms of economic violence included different rates of payment for the same agricultural products, depending on the skin colour of the producer, with black producers being paid less than white producers. There were also restrictions on the goods black people could trade. Nutritional violence was practised by settler authorities through the sidelining of traditional small grains commercially in favour of less nutritious maize that had been introduced by European settlers. Metaphysical violence included the denigration of pre-colonial belief and other symbolic systems, such as religious, political,

knowledge, legal and language systems. This metaphysical violence was part of a deliberate British strategy to create a metaphysical empire. And here in Germany you see that, too, as more and more English creeps into the language.

Various forms of violence were unleashed on black bodies as the new settler state evolved. These forms of violence included the banning of black political parties, police brutality, judicial harassment, abduction, detention and torture. The violence of the denial of freedom was encoded in laws that determined such things as where black bodies could be at what time, where minds embodied in black bodies could obtain education, where a black body could purchase land or farm, and what kind of alcoholic beverage could be sold to or imbibed by a black body where.

In 1965, the British settler community of the country, now called Rhodesia, declared their own independence from Great Britain. This declaration of independence by the white population was in response to the British policy of decolonisation through negotiating independence with its colonies that evolved in the 1950s. The new policy was an imperial response to unrest in the colonies where there was political agitation for independence through majority rule. As majority rule in a predominantly black state meant rule by black people, the white settler community of Rhodesia acted to prevent it by unilaterally declaring independence from Britain.

Black agitation for majority rule continued in Rhodesia after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the white settlers in 1965. New forms of racialised violence were practised. For example, the settler state, fearing being swamped by a rapidly increasing black population, secretly instituted policies for black population control that included tubal ligation of fertile black women without their consent. At the same time, efforts to retain its white population prompted the settler state to institute repressive regulations designed to prevent its white citizens from emigrating. Zimbabwe has always been a violent and repressive state.

As a result of this history, at independence in 1980 Zimbabwe had a violent outgoing settler state. Being born through a brutal liberation struggle in which atrocities that I cannot go into here were committed on both sides, the incoming nationalist state was just as violent. Its military rhetoric focused on conflict, antagonism and enmity, and this is the philosophy that holds sway amongst Zimbabwean authorities to this day. The antagonists and enemies are any entities, including citizens of Zimbabwe and their organisations, that do not comply with the military rulers' wishes. Complaints of intimidation and torture by the ZanuPf authorities began as early as 1980, the year of independence. A whole genocide was overlooked by the rest of the world a few years later. Since then violence that uses the atrocious tactics of the liberation struggle has flared up whenever power is contested, usually at election time, but also on other occasions.

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The formative violence of the Zimbabwean nation state is not an isolated historical occurrence. The greater part of the world has experienced the multifaceted violence that I have described in the Zimbabwean case at the hands of western empire. This violence is standard for all the imperial enterprise practised by the western quarter of the world on the rest of the globe, a process that began in the fifteenth century. In fact in some cases, such as the USA the process was even more violent with entire nations being wiped out through genocide. We should not be surprised then that violence - physical, psychological, political, economic, metaphysical and genocidal - is too often the order of the day in postcolonial countries. These kinds of violence are structured into the global order that we live in, and have their root in the structures of western empire that began to be formed over half a millennium ago. This is to say that the west, with all its technology and belief systems and practices, is built on these multiple ongoing forms of violence, which it exported to the rest of the world and which are now practiced as eagerly in

postcolonial states as they were by imperial and colonial states.

Obviously, peace cannot thrive under these conditions. Only violence thrives in conditions of violence. It is a well-known fact that violence begets violence and we see this all over the world today, even in the various homes of empire. Imperial violence created conditions that caused many people to leave their homes and migrate to imperial countries. Citizens of the imperial countries resent this and mete out violence onto the bodies of the immigrants in various ways, including through institutional violence that is justified as an administrative necessity, a justification that was also given during the colonial era. At the same time, nationals of imperial nations who have a more developed sense of peace and justice take on their country mates who mete out violence to immigrants and conflict results in the imperial heartland. We had a splendid example of this today, although splendid is probably not the correct word. Anyway, it is clearly a no-win situation. What are we to do, then, to foster peace? Clearly the world structure that ushered in the specific kinds of violence of our era cannot easily be undone. The more than seven billion of us human residents of this planet are today all connected to and embedded in that global system.

Here is an answer, and I personally believe that this answer is simpler than we might think. The violent world order we live in now was brought about by certain hierarchical modes of thinking. The solution is to undo the racialised and other hierarchical modes of thinking based on demographics such as gender, sex, religion, nationality and class, and any other, that were and continue to be the building blocks of empire throughout history, throughout the world.

Our current global dispensation does invest large amounts of money into influencing group behaviour. Methods of influencing group behaviour are taught in courses for disciplines such as marketing and business studies, politics and propaganda studies all over the world. Such courses teach students how to

define a target group by segmenting a population according to a range of demographics. The desires of this population are then manipulated with the aim of this manipulation being not the good of the people concerned or an increase in peace, but in order to maximise something that we refer to as profit. This may be financial, political, social or any other kind of human profit.

I put it to you that this thing we call profit does not in fact exist. In absolute terms, the notion of profit is a fallacy. In the dimension of the human, and the world we inhabit physically, events and matter are localised in time and space. Value that appears in one time and place is value that has been removed from another time and place. A system based on profit, on receiving more than is given, is a system of exploitation. Systems of exploitation result in concentration and deficit. A system that manufactures concentration on the one hand and deficit on the other is a system of imbalance. Such a system is inherently unstable and therefore not sustainable. How then have we come to invest in an unstable, unsustainable system that is bound to lead to our downfall?

A little less than four hundred years ago, a Frenchman wrote a long paragraph on the nature of certainty, that is the nature of knowledge without doubt. One phrase of this long paragraph has come down to us. This is the phrase »I think therefore I am«, now one of the most famous and well-known phrases of western philosophy. In this conceptualisation of the world, »I think« is the only direct, irrefutable evidence a person has of their existence. All other evidence could be false. »I think« was said to indicate »I am« or a person's being, and this position came to be formulated as »I think therefore I am«.

To me, a person who has had the good fortune to access another knowledge system besides the western, experientially rather than intellectually, since childhood, the dangers of such an epistemology are glaring. Firstly, as is well recognised, the famous phrase is only a short version of what was originally expressed. The original expression included the useful

nature of doubt in ascertaining knowledge: I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am. But those very thought processes said to obtain knowledge through doubt refused to doubt and instead opted for the certainty of »I think therefore I am«, the version that has now become common philosophical currency.

What are the effects of such a common philosophical currency? To think is to conduct an inner narrative. This process of inner narrative is composed of process on one hand – how we narrate to ourselves; and content on another hand – what we narrate to ourselves. Equating the process of one’s, or the »I’s«, thinking or inner narrative with being results in multiple errors in our knowledge. Allow me to mention two, that are particularly relevant to my feeling like Jonah inside the whale. Both of these errors refer to difference.

Let us consider the case of a mind that is not one’s own. Let us assume that this other mind that is not one’s own, holds a different content to the contents in one’s own mind; or that it utilises a different system of evoking and arranging contents and thus of delivering meaning; or that it differs from one’s own mind in both content and process. Those who believe that being in the world and knowing in the world is based on »I think«, may very easily come to the conclusion that a mind that uses different contents for representing and different processes of combining contents does not think at all, and therefore does not represent an »I« at all.

Let us now go on to assume that this mind that is not one’s own is embodied. It is easy to see how such an embodied being that is not oneself, that does not think as oneself does, and therefore is said not to think, is very likely to bring into one’s mind the content »They do not think, therefore they are not«. Since the thinker of »I think therefore I am« perceives of themselves as human, those who think differently are perceived of as being not like me, or not human. As we know, this denial of the human value of other human beings has the effect of raising the human value we ascribe to ourselves; and as we also know, this mechanism of differential attribution of

humanity has been responsible for much of the violence that human beings have visited on each other.

I make this point not to discredit the Enlightenment. It is very hard for me, someone who is not personally connected directly to the history of Europe and its narrative, to imagine what life here was like during the Dark Ages and through the Middle Ages, and how deeply the thought revolution that was the Enlightenment was needed. My point is to add my voice to those who say the Enlightenment of yesteryear has run its course so that we, all of us on this planet today are in great need of a new enlightenment.

The knowledges of yesteryear and yester-century do not suffice. They did not save us. In my part of the world, our philosophy of living was encapsulated in the idea »I am because you are« now recognised as the philosophy of ubuntu. This philosophy is still expressed in greetings such as »I am well if you are well too«, but this philosophy did not save us. We must invent new thought, drag it out from where it is nascent in the folds of the universe to effect the paradigm shift in our ways of knowing and valuing and ascribing meaning that is necessary for our survival as we see oceans polluted, ozone depleted, climate changing, temperatures and shorelines rising, diseases ravaging in spite of science, hunger proliferating, and black bodies drowning in oceans on their way to join those who first sailed to join them, becoming this epoch’s most enduring sacrifice to what it calls progress.

There will be no miracle cures for our errors of thought. What we can look to is to change our thought patterns word by word, consciously and consistently over time, and to persevere until results are seen in the way we do things and in the outcomes of our actions. I would like to suggest that one way in which the human community in Germany may contribute to do this is through changing thinking around the N-word. I have heard that there is an ongoing dispute here about the nature of the N-word and whether it is inherently violent, with some arguing that it is not, so that those who choose to use

it are not choosing to use a violent, but only a factual content. At the same time, those who are the object of those who use the N-word to refer to them, and their allies in the country, testify to the N-word's violent nature. In such cases, the choice is ours, whether to valorise the »I« of »I think« or to look beyond this »I« to »We« in our choice of the contents we entertain in our minds. To look beyond the »I« to the »We« could lead to mind-expanding reformulations of the Frenchman's phrase, to, for example, »We think, therefore we are«; or even to »We are, therefore we think«, thereby, with this latter, changing the location of valorisation from the rational »think« to the experiential »are«.

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Indeed, my sense of being inside the whale may not apply only to myself. It is increasingly clear to me that we are all inside the whale of our current paradigm. Unlike Jonah, we will not be vomited out as this paradigm that we exist in is of our creation. We have constructed it through our own choices, according to what we perceive of as knowledge and certainty. We will emerge, if we emerge at all, through our own choices to dismantle these constructions and build sustainable others.

Our choices of thought content and process are ultimately a choice between violence producing and peace producing contents and narratives. This is true whether these contents and narratives are expressed only to ourselves in thought, or whether we go on to

express them to others around us. Both are generative.

The relationship between thought and narrative and violence and peace is what makes the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade so remarkable. The German Book Trade recognises that the symbols, the words that are put down in books are active in the way that they transmit themselves into our minds and influence our thoughts, with the result that these words in books can play a part in shaping our tendencies towards either peace or violence. The German Book Trade has chosen to honour those contents, words and narratives that promote peaceful understanding of the differences we perceive to exist between us. Indeed, that someone such as myself, who in not-so-distant ages past was, on the basis of several demographics, categorised as not thinking at worst; at best, not thinking in any way that is valuable, and therefore not existing in any way that is valuable, is awarded this prize today is testimony to the capacity we have as human beings for transformation. And so I would like to end by wishing us all happy, paradigm-shifting reading of the kind that effects positive transformation for peace, that is championed so excellently by the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

Thank you for your attention this morning.

Kontakt

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