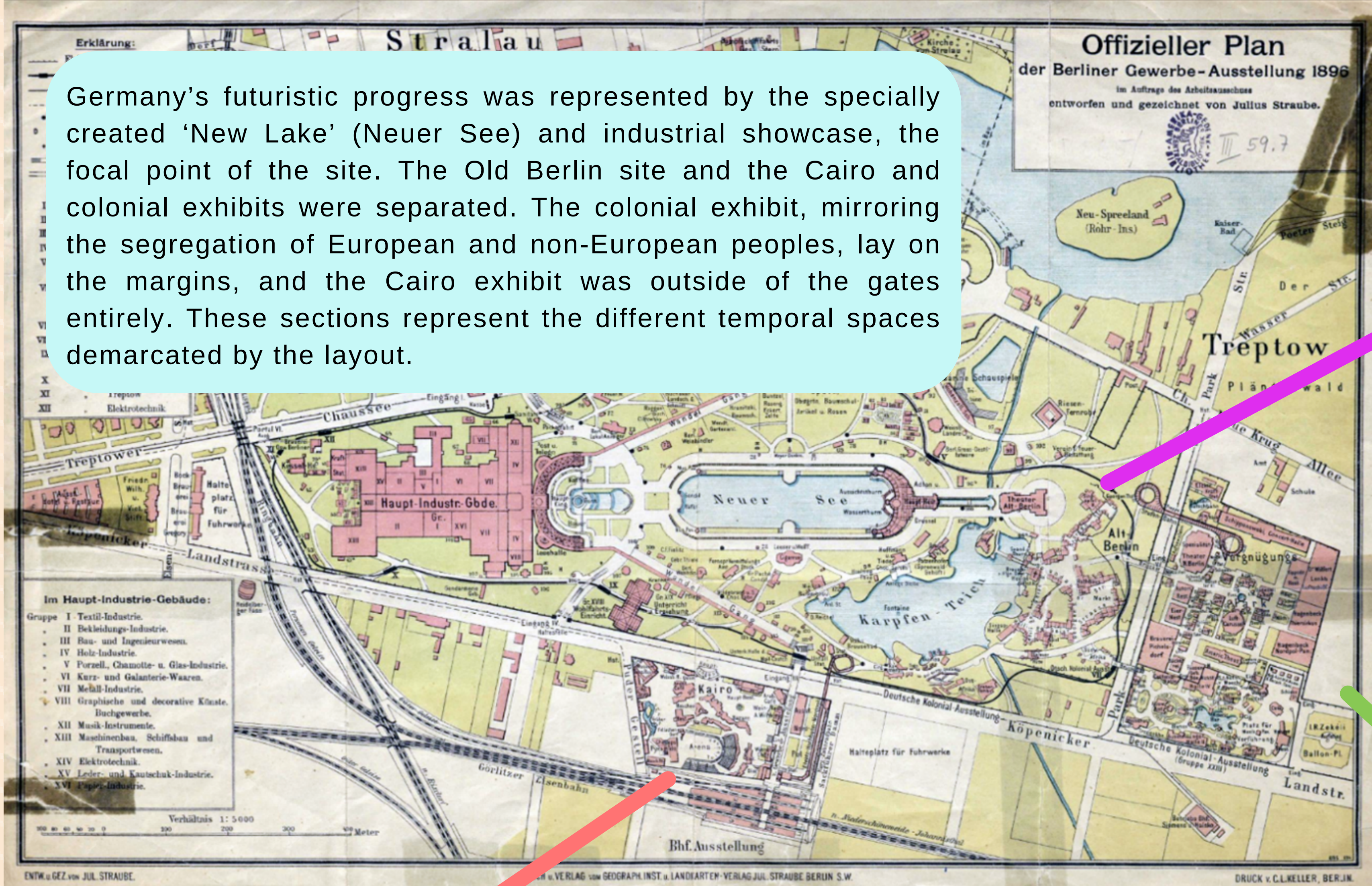


1. GERMANY AND EMPIRE

The German overseas colonial empire (1884-1919) was traditionally considered a marginal phenomenon that 'happened elsewhere' (McClintock 1995: 5), allowing Germany to divorce itself from its responsibility to publicly engage with its past. In contrast, I demonstrate the importance of the colonial project to conceptions of German nationhood and identity through an analysis of the 1896 Berlin world fair/trade exhibition. More than just an exhibition of industrial wares, I propose that it was an opportunity 'to create and cement Berlin's identity as a Weltstadt, a world city' (Zelljadt 2005: 308) through its orchestrated vision of Germany as state and empire intertwined, and simultaneously the 'opposite of a world exposition' (Badenberg 2004: 192), as it was primarily concerned with propagating this cosmopolitan, modern vision of Germanness, contingent on an overseas colonial empire, to German citizens. The fair demonstrated how national belonging was constructed along a linear timeline towards progress, through racial difference from images of the colonial. I propose that the fair encouraged participation in domination and the colonial ideal through demarcating the temporal and spatial difference between Germany and its colonies.



Germany's futuristic progress was represented by the specially created 'New Lake' (Neuer See) and industrial showcase, the focal point of the site. The Old Berlin site and the Cairo and colonial exhibits were separated. The colonial exhibit, mirroring the segregation of European and non-European peoples, lay on the margins, and the Cairo exhibit was outside of the gates entirely. These sections represent the different temporal spaces demarcated by the layout.



2. OLD BERLIN

The Old Berlin site was an aestheticised version of the city from c.1650, a conscious use of the historical to counterpose the industrial buildings, to argue that Germany's technological progress was necessary given Germany's great beginnings. It confirmed that Germany had a deep-seated identity and worthy past, a requirement when forming a national identity.



3. CAIRO EXHIBIT

The Cairo exhibition also created Germanness out of difference by comparing the purity of the Egyptian past and its tainted modernity, which Germany had avoided. The ancient section was a toy picture of the past, indicated by the 'peeling back' of the present day (yet futuristic) Berlin exhibition to reveal the glorified Egyptian past. The postcard represents how Germany's modern success has overwritten the once great Egyptian empire – both had racially pure and noble beginnings, but whereas the imagined exoticism of Egypt's 'ancient' village had led to the modern recreation of a poverty-stricken labourer village (Steinmetz 2017: 63), modernisation gone wrong, Germany could boast its industrial strength.



4. COLONIAL EXHIBIT

The colonial exhibit featured 106 people from colonised lands who built village replicas and engaged in ostensibly authentic activities. This presented the different cultures as primitive in comparison to Germany's enlightened state, justifying colonialism as 'beneficial'. The exhibit produced an authoritative view of people from colonised lands as racially inferior for the everyday German, made all the stronger by the immersive and experiential presentation of people-as-objects, rather than only objects, and the inclusion of settler buildings and administrative technologies. Locating cultures from colonised lands in an artificial past implied that colonised lands will never reach 'progress' without colonialism, Germanness thus contingent on the 'strength' of conquest. This attitude was reinforced by the division of the colonial exhibit into the 'scientific/commercial' and the 'ethnological' sections, which mirrored racial segregation in the colonies. After all, it was not only the 'ethnological' which fascinated the visitor – it was also the fantasy of becoming a settler. Through the spatio-temporal contrast between colonial administration and the 'primitive', domination insinuated itself into the everyday consideration of the visitors. The subject was not only a voyeur, they entered the exhibit to the 'verisimilar' scene of past and ongoing conquest to make further cultural conquest of their own. Participation in the colonial project was a way to achieve the promised technological futurity of the industrial exhibition.



5. TIME, PLACE, SPACE

The postcards are a facet of cultural colonialism: they distribute more than the meaning of the messages inscribed on them; they allowed the visitor to prove themselves as participating in this performance of conquest through their illustrations as meant for display. Like how the 'authentic' replicas are merely transient installations with an artistic function, that of performance, the postcards are also metonyms of the exhibition as performative colonial conquest: marketed as for purchase and circulation, but mere designs. The emphasis on the local landscape and colonial buildings mingling foregrounds the German in the 'foreign'. The illustrated people are also naturalised as part of the landscape-as-property, in this case captured in the postcard to be sold and circulated. This exhibition-like gaze reinforces the German conception of self-identity as owners and that German perception of the world as objective (Macdonald 2003: 3). A juxtaposition emerges between the living presence of these people and the presentation of these people-as-objects as from a primitive state in the past – as further behind in a linear construction of time towards progress. Germanness, inextricably linked with view of racial purity and whiteness, was reified by the presence of people from the colonies, which 'allows whiteness to be done' (Ahmed 2007: 150). Germany was crafted through showing what Germans were not; Germany was defined through its imperial agenda.

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