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## Row over German zoo's Africa show

**German anti-racism campaigners have condemned plans to stage an African cultural festival in a zoo.**

The event is intended to give residents in the town of Augsburg in south Germany, a taste of Africa with craft sellers, drummers, story tellers, music groups and food from around Africa.

But campaigners, including representative of Germany's black community and academics, say setting it in the town's zoo is racist.

"People are upset by the idea of placing [the festival] in a zoo between the baboons and the zebras," said Noah So, who founded Der Braune Mob - an organisation that monitors race issues in the German media.

### 'Exotic atmosphere'

"It is just not the right place to display human beings, let alone their culture," she told the BBC's Network Africa programme.

"Two hundred years ago African people were displayed in zoos. Now we're in 2005 and one could get the impression that nothing's really changed."

According to Augsburg Zoo, the African Village - as the four-day event opening on Thursday 9 June is called - hopes to attract some 20,000 visitors.

Responding to the criticism, Augsburg Zoo Director Barbara Jantschke said she does not see anything wrong with staging the event in a zoo, where many cultural exhibitions are held.

"It's a kind of market where you can see African products," she told the BBC.

"So the products are the centre of attention, not the people."

Aid organisations will be taking part, she added, to allow visitors to get involved in projects in Africa.



The African Village festival hopes to attract 20,000 visitors

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**“ There is an urge to see those who are not white as part of something exotic or romanticised ”**

Noah Sow

### 'Images stick'

Mrs Jantschke also argued that the zoo was the ideal place to convey the necessary "exotic atmosphere" for the festival.

It is an attitude which campaigners like Ms So want to change.

"There is an urge in Germany to see those who are not white as part of something exotic or romanticised."

This treatment insinuates that non-whites are not really part of German society, she says.

Norbert Finzsch, a history professor at the University of Cologne, agrees.



**“ The way Africans are perceived and discussed prove that the colonialist and racist gaze is still very much alive in Germany ”**

Professor Norbert Finzsch

"The way Africans and African Americans in Germany are perceived and discussed, the way they are presented on billboards and in TV ads prove that the colonialist and racist gaze is still very much alive in Germany," he said in an open letter calling for the event not to open.

But not everyone sees the show as contentious.

Nehneh Winckler, a German Ghanaian, who is cooking food at the African Village over the weekend, supports the festival and its setting.

The landscape at the zoo - and even the presence of the animals - make the zoo the perfect background, she told Germany newspaper Die Welt.

For Ms So, showcasing African talent is not the problem, it is tackling the issue of how German people view black people.

"It's a problem... for children who go to the zoo and to find Africans selling bead necklaces, these are images that stick."

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