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A Commemoration of the Berlin Conference

**17<sup>th</sup> February, 26<sup>th</sup> February – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2015**

**DISCURSIVE PROGRAMME**

In the framework of the eponymous exhibition

**By SAVVY Contemporary**

In Cooperation with ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry and Labor  
Kritische Europäisierungsforschung am Institut für Europäische Ethnologie

**Exhibition Concept:** Simon Njami

**Symposium Concept:** Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung with Elena Agudio, Anna Jäger, Saskia Köbschall

The discursive programme **WIR SIND ALLE BERLINER: 1884-2014** commemorates 130 years of the Berlin Conference and proposes a space for deliberation on the repercussions of this crucial conference, offering thereby an occasion to analyse the ideological, economic, political, and humanitarian justifications that underlay colonialism and still frame the asymmetric relations between the West and the non-West today. The accompanying programme to the eponymous exhibition will consist of keynote lectures, roundtable talks, screenings and workshops with students, as well as performances and concerts. Outstanding thinkers and artists will deliberate on the history of the Berlin Conference, as well as reflect on strategies of (non-) remembering.

November 2014 marked the 130th anniversary of the Berlin Conference and the official partitioning of Africa by Western (European, North American and Ottoman) colonial forces – in absence of African representatives. Against this backdrop, the exhibition **WIR SIND ALLE BERLINER: 1884-2014** recalls this determining moment in world history and its severe and ongoing repercussions, as well as it reflects upon Berlin's historical and contemporary bond to Africa.

The exhibition and the accompanying discursive programme offer a critical knowledge sharing platform on the Berlin Conference, on past and current socio-political and economic phenomena in a Europe of flourishing nationalism and racism, as it deals with issues like migration flow or border and identity politics.

The symposium as well as the workshops will address the political, cultural, economical and psychological consequences of this event of systematized colonialism, which still echo in various forms in our contemporary.

## SCHEDULE

### Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015

6pm Keynote lecture: Simon Njami  
7pm Keynote lecture: Ann L. Stoler | Introduction by Regina Römhild  
[ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry]

### Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015

10am Guided Tour | Exhibition [SAVVY Contemporary]  
12am Workshops [KuLe Theater]  
  
7pm Dance Performances: Ahmed Soura | Qudus Onikeku [8/6 EUR]  
8.30pm Essay Concert: Charles Sammons, Kelvin Sholar, Eric Vaughn [8/6 EUR]  
[KuLe Theater]

### Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015:

10.30am Welcome & Introduction  
11am Panel I  
3pm Panel II  
6pm Media Minerals: A spoken-word and sound lecture by Biters (Larry Achiampong & David Blandy) – with notes by Zasha Colah  
7pm Keynote lecture: Manthia Diawara  
[ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry]  
  
10pm Screening: Coz ov Moni [3 EUR]  
11pm Concert: FOKN BOIS [movie & concert [8/6EUR]  
[KuLe Theater]

### Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015

10am Panel III  
2pm Panel IV  
5pm Panel V  
8pm Keynote lecture  
[ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry]

### Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> March

12pm Film Screening I  
2pm Film Screening II  
4pm Film Screening III  
6pm Film Screening IV  
8pm Film Screening V

Screening: 3 EUR | Day ticket: 10 EUR  
[KuLe Theater]

## WORKSHOPS

he discursive programme will open with two workshops on German colonial history and politics of remembrance which are designed for:  
\_ Pupils (13-18 years old) – by Saraya Gomis and Adam Bahar  
\_ Students and others interested – by Jamie Schearer

## PERFORMANCES | READINGS | CONCERTS

Larry Achiampong, David Blandy, FOKN Bois, Dieudonné Niangouna, Qudus Onikeku, Ahmed Soura, Charles Sammons, Kelvin Sholar, Eric Vaughn

## SCREENINGS

Filipa César, Theo Eshetu, Bodil Furu, FOKN Bois, Alessandro Triulzi

## PANELLISTS

Nana Adusei-Poku, Vanessa Agard-Jones, Iman Attia, Kader Attia, Bilgin Ayata, Bili Bidjocka, Friedrich von Bose, Silvy Chakkalakal, Nikita Dhawan, Manthia Diawara, Imara Limon, Sarah Mazouz, Renée Mussai, Kien Nghi Ha, Peggy Piesche, Anupama Rao, Dierk Schmidt, Alessandro Triulzi, Francoise Vergès

## PANELS

### I. *Unsilencing (Colonial) histories*

“If the seduction of North Atlantic universals has to do with their power to silence their own history, then our most immediate task is the unearthing of such silences. Only after bringing such silences to the fore will we know if and when claims to universal relevance and descriptive objectivity vanish into thin air.”<sup>1</sup>

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, The Otherwise Modern – Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot*

**Panellists:** Bili Bidjocka, Bilgin Ayata, Alessandro Triulzi

A forgotten or rather silenced page in German history, like the history of many other Western powers in varying degrees, is the history of colonialism. A fact made clear by the blind spots in school curricula and the amnesia in public memory. With Germanic colonial encounters that pre-date the Berlin Conference of 1884 e.g. Brandenburg in Groß Friedrichsburg (today Ghana), 1683-1717, and spreading their tentacles into the Pacific and Americas, as

well as Germany's involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, one could argue that these entangled histories lay an undeniable foundation to the German nation state. They constitute a crucial part of its history that has been rendered trivial in favour of the occurrences in World War I and II, as well as the Berlin wall/ in the Cold War.

Looking beyond Germany, this panel will reflect on concepts of trivialisation of histories, through the prism of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls “silence of significance’ through a procedure of banalization.”<sup>ii</sup> The panel will discuss examples and strategies of ‘silencing the past’, but also embark on strategies of “unearthing of such silences”<sup>iii</sup> to scrutinise them for their relevance, but also to rehabilitate the histories. Of utmost importance will be the role arts and culture can play in the unsilencing, unearthing or unmasking of histories.

## **II. Contested Geopolitics - Before and After the Scramble**

**Panellists:** Iman Attia, Dierk Schmidt, Kien Nghi Ha, Vanessa Agard-Jones

Relations and geopolitics between the West and the Non-West before and after the Berlin Conference, the political and economical effects of colonialism on the colonies and colonised will take centre stage in this panel. Starting from the production of borders, contested territories, the imposition of concepts of the nation-state, the panellists are invited to exchange positions and knowledge on what Taylor and Overton described saying “geography is a social institution – it is made by human beings in social contexts – and as such its nature will always be contested.”<sup>iv</sup>

But how did the creation of these territories shape the geopolitics of the West and the concomitant development of the global markets? How does this invention of such fictional social institutions still influence the geopolitics of the formerly colonised countries and the plantation territories? This panel sets off on a conceptual journey of territory management and their moving from the colonial trade to the development industry and from the emergence of welfare systems to the fortification and militarization of Europe’s external borders, i.e. the panel will put a spotlight on the histories, politics, and economies of colonial geographies.

## **III. L’Intrus – On Enacting and Enacted Citizenship**

“Once he has arrived, if he remains foreign, and for as long as he does so— rather than simply ‘becoming naturalized’—his coming will not cease; nor will it cease being in some respect an intrusion: that is to say, being with- out right, familiarity, accustomedness, or habit, the stranger’s coming will not cease being a disturbance and perturbation of intimacy.”<sup>v</sup>

*Jean Luc Nancy, L’Intrus*

**Panellists:** Nana Adusei-Poku, Akinbode Akinbiyi, Peggy Piesche, Sarah Mazouz

In a Europe of flourishing nationalism and racism, as it deals with issues like migration flow or border and identity politics, the necessity to understand concepts of citizenship is of increased importance. How elastic is the contemporary understanding of citizenship, especially in the context of various generations and waves of migrants and migration? Looking at the state of refugeeness, in order not to be in a constant state of limbo or a constant state of (be)coming, and especially with fears of being deported at any time, how can one talk about the “ethics of identity” of which Kwame Anthony Appiah speaks<sup>vi</sup>? How can citizenship be performed, claimed, acted? How can we enable people to construct and live out an identity in political systems, which have shaped people in the name of the better selves they might become and in the name of what Isaiah Berlin calls the dangerous ideal of “positive liberty”<sup>vii</sup>?

This panel will get granular on the notion of citizenship by stretching, pluralizing, and re-humanising the concept of citizenship. From a performance point of view the panellists will reflect on possibilities and methods of invoking, enacting citizenship or living (with) an enacted citizenship. Furthermore, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of “The Intruder” (which he uses to describe his transplanted heart as an intruder in his body that shifts the perception of his identity), the panel will analyse the construction and perceptions of the Other within society.

“In me there is the intrus, and I become foreign to myself. If the rejection is very strong, I must receive treatments that will make me resist the human defense system mechanisms that produce it (...) But becoming foreign to myself does not reconcile me with the intrus. Rather, it would seem that a general law of intrusion is exhibited: there has never been only one. As soon as intrusion occurs, it multiplies, making itself known through its continually renewed internal differences.”<sup>viii</sup>

**IV. *L'Intrus – The outward trappings of sovereignty***

“The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.”<sup>ix</sup>

*Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of imperialism, 1965*

**Panellists:** Kader Attia, Nikita Dhawan, Anupama Rao, Alessandro Triulzi, Françoise Vergès

Nkrumah starts his 1965 seminal critique with the claim that “neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage.” He was right about the 'danger' and wrong about the 'final', as imperialism and neo-colonialism have mutated into conjoined twins.

The last decade has seen an increase in political or economical intrusions by Western countries in Africa – often executed under the pretext of democratic liberation through 'revolutions' or economical collaboration. Efforts aimed at toppling inconvenient governments and to secure exclusive access to the continent's resources. Even the 'outward trappings of international sovereignty' have been trampled upon, as it was the case with the French-led “Operation Harmattan” in Libya supported by the international community, in Ivory Coast, Central African Republic or Mali, or the case of Israel in Palestine. A new wave of a scramble to 'get a place in the sun' is on the move. This panel will focus on the poetics of intrusion not only from a socio-economical perspective but also from a cultural one, reflecting on the role of culture in both combating and perpetrating imperialism and neo-colonialism in African nations. As Kenyan novelist and cultural theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stressed in his collection of essays about African language and literature “Decolonising the Mind” (and hitherto was Fanon's idea of rejection of the colonizers' linguistic and cultural forms as a precondition for achieving “true” freedom), the resistance to neo-colonial mentality and to colonial alienation pass also through cultural, artistic and linguistic self determination and independence, through practices of mental decolonisation.

**V. *How to read between the lines or a brief history of things that are not mine – On Colonialism and Ethnologic Collections***

**Panellists:** Renée Mussai, Silvy Chakkalakal, Imara Limon, Friedrich von Bose

It should be common knowledge that most of Western ethnology as a discipline and ethnological museum owe their establishment to the colonial ambitions and structures set up in the colonised worlds. This panel will explore the museums attempt to resolve problems around representation of non-western cultures and the relationship, the consequences and future of colonial collections in ethnological museums in the West.

The maintaining of art and artefacts in archives, collections and museums in the 21st century poses an immense challenge: Recent debates on restitution and provenance research are shedding light on the explosive topic of looted art during the holocaust and Second World War. Negotiations between Germany, Poland, Russia and others about the repatriation of looted art are ongoing. What about objects 'bought', 'borrowed' or plundered during colonial rule? Which are the prevalent recent political and social discourses on restitution? How can the epistemic drainage that results from the 'appropriation' of these objects be mapped and theorised? How can we address counter-narratives of ethnologic objects and how can we resist the display of otherness that ethnological museums perform?

In this context the panel will address cultural large-scale projects like the Humboldt-Forum, asking why and how old structures as well as objects are uncritically adopted and moved outside of their respective contexts, and how “transforming museum practice and active intervention in the framing, the interpretation, and the ownership of cultural heritage is crucial for dealing with the colonial past in the present”<sup>x</sup>. A spotlight will be put on alternative existing and future art and culture models that propose a counter-discourse or counter-structure to existing ethnologic museum curatorial practices.

## BACKGROUND

### German Colonial History: Politics of Memory or Strategies of Oblivion?

2014 was marked by a wave of historical commemorations and anniversaries which surged through German media and the public discourses: 100 years First World War, 75 years Second World War, 70 years D-Day, 25 years fall of the Berlin wall. But the warnings of „Never Again!“ and the value canon that was created out of the historical experiences and which is perceived as universal, seem to be in effect only for a limited, privileged group of people in this restructured world.

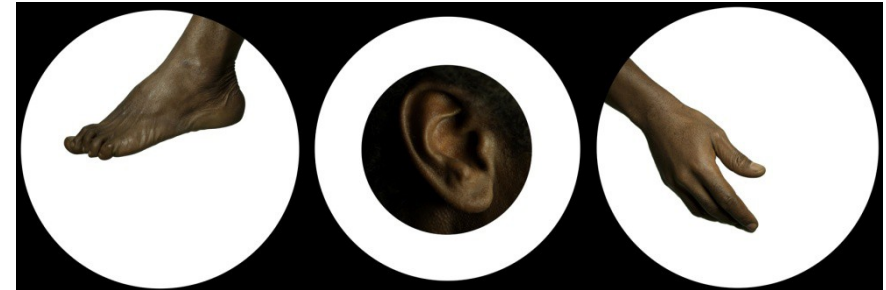
If you opened the newspaper on November 15<sup>th</sup> or turned on the radio hoping to learn something about an event of highest historical and political relevance, you might have been surprised by the complete lack of articles, let alone critical analyses of the Berlin Conference which epitomizes the heyday of the colonial reordering of the world. The lack of regard for Germany's colonial past is not limited to the media; this topic is equally excluded from curricula in schools and universities and at best touched upon peripherally. This colonial amnesia is also astounding in so far as it fails to recognize the importance of global imperialism and colonialism: The correlations between the colonized and the colonizers are manifold and efficacious, yet they are not paid sufficient attention.

Colonial exploitation and rule were directly related to the formation of nation states in Europe and inextricably intertwined with the emergence and development of capitalism and globalization. It is equally interesting to reflect on the development of violence in the modern age and to draw the lines between colonialism and Nazism - both between the respective ideologies and their legitimization with the aid of constructed scientific foundations as well as between the methods of cruelty and violence. **To put it briefly: 1914, 1939, 1989 as well as 2015 were/are inconceivable without 1884.**

The historical topic of colonialism contains a high topicality; it is mirrored in our present. It is reflected in a tinged mirror though that has many blind spots due to the deficient accounting for this essential chapter of German history mainly conducted in closed circles of experts.

The declared goal of this programme is to wipe down the mirror to point out where structures of the past can be found in the present. We are aiming at deliberating on recent academic and theoretical discourses as well as at offering an access to these topics for a wider audience through performances, screenings and workshops.

### Concept by the curator of the exhibition Simon Njami WIR SIND ALLE BERLINER: 1884 – 2014



Bili Bidjocka. *Dis-ambiguiton* (2011). Courtesy Bili Bidjocka/StageBACK\_Shangai

When J.F. Kennedy uttered “Ich bin ein Berliner” in the divided Berlin of 1963 he expressed clearly a political position but even more so, he formulated a humanist statement aspiring to dismantle the borders erected by the Cold War. With the Berlin Conference of 1884 as point of departure we go back over these immanent tensions and transpose them to present times. Kennedy's assertion was intended to widen our humanity to something beyond national existentialism and is thus clearly opposed to the positions taken by the Western nations which gathered around the African continent's map as if before a chessboard.

The European collaboration has never functioned as well as during the organization of the Berlin Conference which took place from November 15<sup>th</sup> 1884 until February 26<sup>th</sup> 1885. Organized by Bismarck and initiated by Portugal whose main purpose was to communicate its territorial complaints to certain European countries, the conference resulted in the division of Africa among the colonising nations who, after the discovery of the Transvaal diamond mines in 1867, had just come to notice that the continent abounded with natural resources of which they needed to get a hold. Besides Germany and Portugal, the other participants were Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, the Ottoman Empire, Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, the Suedo-Norwegian Union and the United States. The purpose of the reunion was essential at a time when quarrels between colonisers had a negative impact on trade and European relations. Fourteen occupying powers thus take part in a debate where the main parties involved, the Africans, are excluded. Beyond the immorality and cynicism that presided at that conference, WIR SIND ALLE BERLINER is interested

in both the exclusion and absence of the African people. Not in a sense of claim (one cannot rewrite history) but in the perspective of a new light being shed on the Conference with contemporary terms.

**What hasn't been said explicitly about this conference is that, while it altered the contours of the African continent, it also changed Europe!**

WIR SIND ALLE BERLINER intends to look at how this conference, despite the absence of the African protagonists, allowed Africa to modify Europe. We will address the signs of those changes in the city of Berlin by inviting artists to reflect on the ebb and flow phenomenon inherent to all colonial systems as well as the migratory movements to and in Europe up to today. Departing from absence, how have these players been able to attain presence and, in some extreme cases, hyper-presence? What is the nature of the negotiation initiated with the “welcoming country”? And how can that same country define and evaluate itself by the yardstick of the past. How does it look at these subjects that, in the end, are just ordinary citizens from overseas? And, after seeing the German pavilion in the last Venice Biennial, how would we define the German identity: In a rigid and historical way, stagnating with Wagner and Goethe, or in a rather fluid and more contemporary sense? The city of Berlin, who hosted the conference, is obviously the most appropriate location for this discussion that goes beyond the borders of the German territory and includes all the countries that took part in the conference. The debate on nationality and citizenship that is occupying an increasingly important place in Europe deserves to be addressed from the standpoint of the Other, “the intruder”.

This is what this project intends to do.

- i Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Otherwise Modern – Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot”, in: Bruce M. Knauft. 2002. *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, Indiana University Press (pp.220-237).
- ii *ibid*
- iii *ibid*
- iv Taylor, P.J. and M. Overton. 1991. “Further Thoughts on Geography and GIS: A Preemptive Strike?” in: *Environment and Planning* 23/8 (pp. 1087-1094).
- v Jean-Luc Nancy. 2000. *L’Intrus*, Paris: Galilée (trans. by Susan Hanson “L’Intrus”, in: *CR: The new centennial review* 2002, Vol. 2/3 (pp. 1-15).
- vi Kwame Anthony Appiah, 2005. *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton, University Press.
- vii Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, 118–72).
- viii *ibid*
- ix Kwame Nkrumah. 1965. *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.
- x Imara Limon, *Owning, Framing, Claiming: An Intervention in the Practice of Ethnological Museums*.