Chapter 1
Black Berlin

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Berlin is and always has been an activist city, in which the people have made their personal and collective viewpoints heard and have asserted numerous demands relating to social, political, cultural, and economic change. Public attention has also been drawn to the atrocities of racial profiling, police brutality, and institutional racism for many decades, commemorating Germany's Black victims of police killings: Kola Bankole (1994), Aamir Ageeb (1999), N'deye Mareame Sarr (2000), Michael Paul Nwabuisi (2001), Laye-Alama Condé (2005), Dominique Koumadio (2006), and Christy Schwundeck (2011) (Kelly 2021).

We should also remember Oury Jalloh, who was burned – probably after his death, as there were no signs of soot in his lungs – in a police cell in East German Dessau in 2005. To this day his case has still not been solved; instead, German authorities, courts, and politicians have been trying to cover up the truth for decades.[1] Since his death, demonstrators have been gathering in front of the police station in Dessau demanding justice every year on the date of his murder, January 7. And although these demonstrations attract several thousand protestors annually, the case has not gained the same attention of the white majority population or media as did the police murder of George Floyd in the USA in 2020.

Millions of Germans had witnessed Floyd's killing that not only went viral, but also was broadcast unfiltered on national TV at primetime. Locked at home during the global pandemic, it was impossible to ignore yet another Black man being murdered by the police. Consequently, another protest fol-

1 Chronology in the Oury Jalloh case from January 7, 2005 to 2020 (https://initiativeouryjalloh.wordpress.com/2020/06/07/chronologie-im-fall-oury-jalloh-von-2005-bis-2020/)

lowed, under the hashtag Black Lives Matter, with Floyd's name being added to the list of victims of police homicides worldwide. In 2017, a working group of external experts had already been sent to Germany by the United Nations (UN) to gain knowledge about the human rights situation in the country. Their subsequent report highlighted racial profiling against People of African Descent (PAD) and stated that its repeated denial by German police and authorities fosters impunity.[2] Based on this report, Berlin became the first state in the country to pass an anti-discrimination law on June 4, 2020, shortly after Floyd's death; a conincidence in this case as the law was the result of combined community efforts over the years.

Hence, 2020 was not the first time BLM protesters had taken to the streets. The first demonstrations under this motto came to pass in Berlin in July 2016, after Philando Castile and Alton Sterling were shot dead by police officers in the USA. One year later, in June 2017, BLM Berlin founded the first BLM month,[3] which ended with a march in July. In 2020, however, these initial BLM demonstrators were joined by individuals from all walks of life as they gathered in front of the US embassy in Berlin on May 30, chanting "Black Lives Matter" at the top of their voices. Some days later, on June 6, 2020, a second protest followed that led more than 15,000 people to Berlin's historical Alexanderplatz.[4] From then onward, a wave of organized protests inundated the country with signs and slogans stating "Germany is not innocent," among other things.

On June 21, 2020 the state antidiscrimination law finally came into force, closing a legal gap and expanding the catalogue of discrimination characteristics to be protected, including social status and chronic illness, and extending the law to structurally related discrimination.[5] But this is not enough! Combating racism also includes knowing your history, as stated

2 "Germany: UN rights panel highlights racial profiling against people of African descent", February 27, 2017 (https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/02/552282-germany-un-rights-panel-highlights-racial-profiling-against-people-african)

3 Information on BLM month 2021: https://www.blacklivesmatterberlin.de/blm-month-2021/

4 "George Floyd killing spurs fresh protests across Europe", June 6, 2020 (https://p.dw.com/p/3dLWS)

5 Berlin state anti-discrimination law: https://www.berlin.de/sen/lads/recht/ladg/

on the homepage of BLM Berlin.[6] Yet, our (hi)stories are structurally hidden or described as alien or inferior to the dominant culture, despite numerous community organizations, including BLM in recent years, poking their fingers in the wounds of German colonialism for decades. But with statues toppeling all over Europe, the media's attention was eventually drawn to questions of ongoing coloniality, memory culture, and restitution, leading politicians to pick up in pace and shift these topics to the top of their agendas.

Despite (or because of) these slow steps of improvement, an anonymous memorial appeared on the legendary Oranienplatz, known as O-Platz, in Berlin-Kreuzberg at the end of September 2020. The square gained political significance after asylum seekers, most of them from African countries, erected a protest camp there from October 2012 to April 2014. The refugees had come from camps all over Germany in an act of civil disobedience to demonstrate against the Dublin III Regulation,[7] insufficient shelters, and the so-called *Residenzpflicht*, which restricted freedom of movement, as well as to fight for the right to work and study in Germany. In the face of the rejection of most refugee applications, the camp was forcefully cleared in 2014, yet the groups remained active, raising awareness of their cause through their website and an information point that was established in the square during the resistance.

Today, the meter-high concrete stela is all that remains of the past struggle, linking it to present day protests. It is surrounded by a stainless steel base plate that reads: "In memory of the victims of racism and police violence." The anonymous monument builders had anticipated the #woistunserdenkmal (#whereisourmonument) initiative; the latter was established by several antiracist groups in the summer to publicly address racism and police violence. Among them were the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh and KOP, the campaign for victims of police brutality; they had planned to meet on the September afternoon after the monument had been discovered.[8]

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6 BLM Berlin Common Consensus: https://www.blacklivesmatterberlin.de/blmb-gemeinsamer-konsens/

7 The Dublin III Regulation refers to EU No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and determines where a refugee should apply for asylum and which country is responsible for the application: http://www.orac.ie/website/orac/oracwebsite.nsf/page/eudublinIIIregulation-main-en

8 "Da ist unser Denkmal - und es muss bleiben", September 8, 2021 (https://gruene-xhain.de/da-ist-unser-denkmal-und-es-muss-bleiben/)

A video on social media that in the meantime has been removed, showed how the anonymous activists filled the hollow steel cast with concrete and screwed the sign to the ground during the early hours of the morning. "We hope that this will initially create irritation and give people a task," one of the activists said on camera. At the beginning of October, they sent an open letter to the district, demanding that the memorial be preserved at the site. An online petition that was launched at the same time supported this idea and gained more than 3,300 signatures.

Figure 1.1: A memorial on Oranienplatz was erected overnight by anonymous sculptors at the end of September 2020. Photograph: Natasha A. Kelly

Ferat Koçak, an activist of color and member of the Left Party, also signed the petition and can imagine keeping the monument in its current location permanently. As Oranienplatz is one of the central squares in Kreuzberg, the many people who linger and walk in the park will see it, he told *taz*, the daily German newspaper (Hartmann 2020). In his opinion, the district will agree to the demands and preserve the monument. A spokeswoman for the district also announced that there is a general will to maintain it. Therefore, the memorial itself should not be replaced. Instead, the open cases of racist killings, especially against people in police custody, such as Oury Jalloh, should be solved and the perpetrators brought to justice.

Reclaiming the African Quarter

Berlin is itself a monument that tells (hi)stories and creates memories, many of which have been written in and into the city, be it in the names given to certain districts, areas, or streets, or in the political efforts made by Black communities from the colonial period to the present day. In the 20th century, Berlin was divided and stripped of its capital status, only to regain power after reunification and the expansion of the East. Today, Berlin is one of the most important capital cities in Europe and in the world. But, above all, it is "the mind of the beast," [9] a former colonial metropolis where in 1884–5 the idea to divide Africa among the German Empire and other European and non-European states was born (Aitkin and Rosenhaft 2015).

A relic from this time in history is the city's African Quarter in the Wedding district. One might assume that it was named because of the number of Africans who have lived there. But this is not the case. The Quarter was built around 1900 on the outskirts of Berlin, linking the surrounding green spaces and forests with the city. It was initially constructed to include Germany's largest "human zoo," in which African people and animals were to be exhibited (Honold 2004). Despite this history, a noticeable number of Africans have been drawn there in more recent times, most of them coming to Germany as students or refugees. On arrival in Berlin, they were sent directly to Wedding by friends or acquaintances, mainly because of the cheap rents in the working-class neighborhood. And if we believe the white German historian Ursula Trüper, Africans should in fact live there, not only because of the Quarter's name, but because she believes that this district should be associated with the city's present rather than with its past.[10]

This idea surely contradicts the original intention of the Quarter, if we take into consideration that Hamburg businessman and animal trader Carl Hagenbeck wanted to create a site that would surpass his earlier successes. In 1874, he organized the first major "human zoo", a so-called "Laplander Exhibition", where he had put the Sámi people from northern Europe on show in what spectators were to believe were their traditional homes (Dreesbach 2012). Hagenbeck planned to exceed this early sensationalism that would

9 Author's note.

10 "Afrika im Wedding", June 20, 2010 (https://issuu.com/afrikawedding/docs/afrika-im-wedding)

become the model for all those that followed, and with the new African Quarter he hoped to overshadow Berlin's first colonial exhibition, which had opened in Treptower Park on May 1, 1896 attracting around 7 million visitors.

Partly organized by Germany's Foreign Office and partly financed privately, the exhibition was intended to rekindle public interest in the German Empire after years of mismanagement and public scandals. It featured exhibits on colonial hygiene and medicine, a common theme at the time, replicas of administrative buildings, and examples of colonial goods such as ivory and cocoa. The spectacle lasted for almost six months and was originally designed to compete with earlier world exhibitions in Paris and London, to promote the German economy, and to demonstrate the growing global importance of the country and its capital. The most popular attraction, however, was the replica African and Melanesian villages, populated with over 100 individuals from overseas (ibd.).

Hagenbeck's ambitions to turn the African Quarter into a "human zoo" were thwarted by the outbreak of World War One, however, as his business contacts pulled out. Yet, the city of Berlin already had a design in place, with its "African Street" (Afrikanische Straße) at the center, an urban monument constructed in 1899 to symbolize the power of the German Empire. Linked to it were other streets: Lüderitzstraße in 1902, Guineastraße in 1903, and Transvaalstraße in 1907. Nachtigalplatz, Windhuker Straße and Swakopmunder Straße followed in 1910. These explicit references were supplemented by names of places and countries that were not directly under German rule but played a key role in the colonial division of the continent, such as "Congo Street" (named after the main arena of Belgian colonialism, as described in Chapter 2) and "Zanzibar Street," both dating from 1912. (The island of Zanzibar was annexed by the German Empire in 1885 but given to Great Britain just five years later in exchange for the island of Heligoland in the North Sea.) Over 50 years, from 1899 to 1958, street names with African and colonial references were added, the most recent being "Ghana Street," named in 1958 shortly after Ghana's independence from Great Britain. Many people are unaware that parts of Ghana that formerly belonged to Togoland were once colonized by Germany before its Empire was forced to give up its colonies to the Allies as a result of the Treaty of Versailles after World War One (Honold 2004).

Untouched by the war, the African Quarter was developed and estates built, such as Friedrich-Ebert-Siedlung, where residents established small

gardens and built sheds, in contrast to other areas in the Wedding of the 1920s and 1930s. Most of these gardens were small and disorganized, but the "Dauerkolonie Togo" (Permanent Colony Togo), founded in 1939, stood out. Incorporating the colonial and imperial ideology ascribed in the Quarter's name, the title of the allotment re-enacted the colonial past and became a symbolic contribution to the "cultivation" of an allegedly "uncultivated" territory. This actively supported the National Socialist Party's propaganda on recolonizing the African continent, which, for the Black community in Berlin, corresponded with the sign displaying the garden's name in big bold letters above its entrance. The title of the garden association was changed to "Kleingartenverein Togo" (Small Garden Association Togo) in the 1980s, but, after numerous disputes and following public and financial support from the mayor's office as well as from other Social Democratic politicians, it eventually changed to "Dauer-Kleingartenverein TOGO" (Permanent Small Garden Association Togo) in 2014. With this renaming, the African Quarter actually moved a step toward becoming more "African" (Faust 2014).

In 2011, the district council decided to make the African Quarter an official site of learning about and remembrance of German colonialism, its perception, and the struggle for independence of African states. With funding from Aktionsräume Plus, a program that aimed to improve socio-spatial and urban development, the project involved residents, schools, young people, and various civil society actors. The objective was to create better opportunities for the residents of this low-income area, with education given priority in order to open up new perspectives, especially for young people. The initiative was also linked to the basic goal of identifying urban problem areas more quickly and more precisely through improved networking, communication, and coordination at the level of the senate and the districts and finding solutions among all those involved on an interdisciplinary basis. By embedding German colonialism and its implications in a modern understanding of democracy, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, this approach extended beyond a shocking reminder of past injustices and instead offered a compelling contribution to the decolonization of Berlin's society and culture.

A board of directors was set up to advise on the selection of projects and to involve activists and experts from Black communities as equal partners. In this context, tours of the African Quarter were organized on various occasions and for different audiences. A digital map of the 22 streets was also developed to provide a descriptive, methodical, and didactic overview of the

area with audio files, graphics, pictures, historical documents, poems, songs, and interviews.[11] One year later, a memorial plaque was placed on the corner of Otawistraße/Müllerstraße, referring to the history of the African Quarter. Instigated by the Street Initiative, a group of African and Afro-German organizations and their allies, the information board includes two texts that reflect the multiple perspectives of the area's history – one written by the Social Democratic Party, the second by the Street Initiative (Diallo and Zeller 2013).

In 2007, the editorial offices of the African magazine *LoNam* had already moved to Wedding, realizing that it was the best place to sell the 10,000 copies of each issue. While not sugar-coating the facts, the magazine wanted to distance itself from negative media coverage. As the editorial team states on *LoNam*'s homepage:

> In doing so, we want to differentiate ourselves from the Afropessimistic media, which mainly show war, famine and misery, as well as from those that only emphasize the positive things about Africa.[12]

The bimonthly magazine was launched in March 2005 and is written in German for both Germans and Africans living in Germany. Since the publication depends on its readers, it was a good choice to move to the African Quarter, editor Hervé Tcheumeleu explained to *taz* (Vollmuth 2008). Being located in the heart of Wedding, the news it reports on occurs right on its doorstep and a lot of readers often drop by the office to offer first-hand information.

Furthermore, the Vera-Heyer-Archiv, a library for Black literature and media run by the non-profit organization Each One Teach One (EOTO), opened its doors in the African Quarter on March 21, 2014, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Vera Heyer was an Afro-German born in 1946 and raised in a children's home near Frankfurt am Main. She began collecting and cataloging the works of Black authors in the 1970s. Her vision to one day open a library to the public was finally realized in 2014, almost 20 years after her untimely death. EOTO has pursued Heyer's dream and has grown over the years to become a reference library with

11 African Quarter, a place of learning and remembrance, Berlin. Digital map with texts and sound recordings: http://www.3plusx.de/leo-site/

12 LoNam das Afrika-Magazin: https://www.lonam.de/about/

more than 7,000 books. Today, it is part of a democracy program funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.[13] The name Each One Teach One was coined by critical resistance movements in times of enslavement and colonialism to highlight the importance of access to formal education and the need to share knowledge within Black families and communities.

As part of the area's resurgence, the Wedding Renaissance swept through the district, with the goal of changing its negative perception – at least during the weekend of September 11–13, 2020, when the festival took place. Based on the Harlem Renaissance in the USA, Black German artists, poets, authors, and musicians took over the neighborhood, reclaiming the space and creating a temporary site for freedom of Black expression. In the same way as the Harlem Renaissance had laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement in the USA 100 years earlier, the event was decentralized throughout the district and aimed to comment on and critique the existing racial structures of German society. One of the organizers, Hassanatou Bah, spoke to *RosaMag*, a Black online lifestyle magazine that has been documenting the multifaceted worlds of Black women in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland since 2019:

> The Wedding Renaissance stands for Black Unity, Black Power, and Black Excellence. It's mostly about Black cohesion. Black Unity means becoming a unit, promoting solidarity among Blacks and expanding the community. Black Power is about our collaboration in Berlin, Germany, and around the world. This is where our Black Excellence draws. Work that reaches beyond the German borders, to Africa, to the Black diasporas in the USA and Americas (Parbey 2020).[14]

Although Wedding has been developing positively for the Black community over the years, there is still a long way to go before the African Quarter is no longer associated with its colonial past. However, with the renaming of important streets in the area, as shown below, the African Quarter is rewriting urban history from a Black perspective and moving a step closer to altering the perception of Black people in Germany and beyond.

13 Website of the non-profit organization EOTO: https://www.eoto-archiv.de/

14 Translated by the author.

Remembering Black German Liberation

Technically, the history of resistance is as old as the history of colonialism itself. After the success of the first Pan-African conference in London in 1900 (see Chapter 3), the first Pan-African Congress took place in Paris in 1919. Germany had just been defeated in World War One, and with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles the country's colonial empire had ended. The world was changing inexorably, becoming increasingly unstable. Aiming to decolonize the African countries and to unify the peoples who had been torn apart by arbitrary colonial borders, Pan-Africanism continued to emerge as a link between many African liberation movements and the African diaspora. Influential in this growing resistance of the late 1910s and early 1920s were Black intellectuals and workers who shared the vision of a unified African state and the end of racial hierarchies and exploitation. W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and George Padmore are considered among the most important pioneers of this era. However, there were numerous Black feminists, who were also influential in the rise of the Pan-African movement: Maria Mandessi Bell from Cameroon, the sisters Paulette and Jeanne Nardal from Martinique, Mabel Dove Danquah from Ghana and Claudia Jones from Trinidad among others.

Between 1892 and 1894, during the heyday of German colonialism, Du Bois spent formative years of his young adult life in Berlin, where he studied at Humboldt University, formerly known as Friedrich-Wilhelm University. Throughout this period, he experienced Germany as a "culture in search of a nation" (Du Bois 1940: 136). With this quote, Du Bois described not only his lived experience as a marginalized Black man in the USA, but also Germany's social structure at the end of the 19th century. Attracted by Otto von Bismarck's idea of a social system, Max Weber's implementation of social legislations, and August Bebel's foundation of the Social Democratic Party, Du Bois returned to the USA after his grant for further studies was rejected. Back home, he did not simply translate German ideas into US thinking; he also merged aspects of German Romanticism with his own concerns for disenfranchised and underprivileged African Americans (Kelly 2016).

In 1958, Humboldt University awarded him an honorary doctorate, and for over 20 years the American Studies Program at the university has been honoring his legacy with two lecture series: the W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures and the Distinguished W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures. Organized by the Senate

Department for Culture and Europe and the Historical Commission of Berlin, a porcelain memorial plaque for the civil rights activist was unveiled at his former Berlin address at Oranienstraße 130 in August 2019 (Conrad 2019). And in January 2022, a plaque was installed on the ground floor of Humboldt University's main building next to the entrance to the Orbis Humboldtianus, a club for international students. The memorial was designed by Haitian-born, Berlin-based artist Jean-Ulrick Désert and consists of three glass panels showing a group photograph of Du Bois and other students, presumably from 1894, and two later portraits of the sociologist. Its color scheme is based on the Pan-African flag and thus refers to the Pan-African movement.[15]

Figure 1.2: Memorial plaque in honor of the scientist, writer, and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, installed in the main building of Humboldt University. Photograph: Natasha A. Kelly

Du Bois is the first African American to be dignified in this way by Humboldt University; he is also the first person to be honored as a former student. Yet, it is important to stress that many young Africans like Maria Mandessi Bell came to Germany during the colonial period to be educated, but the majority were trained as office or domestic workers. Others frequently served as interpreters for African languages at colonial research centers and with the colonial administration offices, and many worked in the entertainment industry. However, no matter where they came from,

15 "Gedenktafel für den Schwarzen Bürgerrechtler und Soziologen W.E.B. Du Bois", January 28, 2022 (https://www.hu-berlin.de/de/pr/nachrichten/januar-2022/nr-22126-1)

Black people were never fully integrated into German society. The political debate about the so-called *Mischehengesetze* (mixed marriage laws) that ignited in the German colonies led to the categories of race and nation intersecting and forming the foundation of German citizenship law. As a result, German nationality could subsequently be gained only through German blood, a fact that leads a large part of the German public to continue to perceive Black and German as an oxymoron to the present day (El-Tayeb 2001).

Figure 1.3: At the entrance to the metro station Hallesches Tor in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, there is a large photograph of Germany's first Black train operator, Martin Dibobe. Photograph: Natasha A. Kelly

One African who came to Germany from Cameroon at the age of 20 was Martin Dibobe. Together with other Africans he was "exhibited" for six months at the colonial show in Treptower Park, mentioned above. Following this, he stayed in the Weimar Republic, as Germany was called during the interwar years, got married – despite administrative difficulties – and started working for the Berlin railway in 1902 (Oguntoye 1997). A photograph of him in his uniform is hanging on the staircase of the Berlin subway station Hallesches Tor in the district of Kreuzberg. However, it is unclear how or why this memorial is actually there.

Presumably, the photograph was not primarily set up to commemorate Black presence in Germany, but to exotisize Dibobe as Berlin's first African train driver who also became a local celebrity. In 1906/07, he was sent to Cameroon on behalf of the Reich government, where he was to consult in the construction of the local railway. But during his stay, he became aware of the

social and economic injustices of the colonial system and returned to Germany to fight for equal rights of Africans, joining the League for Human Rights, founded in 1914, and becoming active in the Social Democratic Party (SPD). [16]

Against the backdrop of the forthcoming end to German colonial rule in Africa and the budding colonial revisionist propaganda of the National Socialists after World War One, Dibobe sent a letter to the Weimar National Assembly and a corresponding petition to the Reich Colonial Office, signed by himself and 17 other Black German men in June 1919. However, although demanding equal rights for Africans and PAD, Martin Dibobe and his followers committed to the former protection treaties of 1884 that had constituted the power of the German Reich over Cameroon and therefore argued for Germany retaining its colonies; an ambiguous decision. Accordingly, the signatories took a vow of loyalty and expressed the hope that the treatment of Black people living in the country would be better than under the imperial government (Gerbing 2010).

Neither the Weimar National Assembly nor the Reich Colonial Ministry responded. Then, on January 10, 1920, the Versailles Treaty came into force, through which Germany lost its colonies to the other colonial powers. Shortly after, Dibobe was laid off at the Berliner railway and planned to return to his home country, however, the now French colony of Cameroon would not let him enter and Dibobe was forced to move to Liberia. There his trail and name fall into oblivion. After Black organizations recapitulated his biography, a commemorative plaque equivalent to the one for Du Bois was put up at his former home at Kuglerstraße 44 in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg on his 140th anniversary, on October 31, 2016 (Djahangrad 2016).

But despite rewriting colonial history from a Black perspective, the city continues to hold numerous remnants of German colonialism that are not too gratifying. From 1883 to 1921 the chocolate factory "Felix & Sarotti" relocated its production facilities to the "Sarotti-Höfe" in Berlin Kreuzberg, Mehringdamm 53-57, which is still named after it today. Criticism of the racist stereotype of the advertising character of the "chocolate-brown Sarotti-M*" (advertising quote) had been growing since the 1960s, so that in 2004 it was redesigned as the "Sarotti magician of the senses". Instead of carrying a serving tray in his hand, he now throws stars into the air while standing on a crescent moon, his skin color golden instead of brown (Koal 2021).

16 "Berlin postkolonial: Erinnerung an Martin Dibobe", November 16, 2021 (https://migrations-geschichten.de/berlin-postkolonial-erinnerung-an-martin-dibobe/)

The discriminatory meaning of the M-word can be traced back to the hostility toward non-Christians in the early 13th century. This connotation was eventually replaced by racist biological arguments in the course of the European Enlightenment. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, for example, spread the view that Black people could be educated only as servants, an idea that supported the degradation of Black people and underlined the word's derogatory meaning. According to analysis by numerous linguists, the word has always had a negative connotation, which is why it is abbreviated to the letter "M" today (Arndt 2011). Arndt suggests:

> [T]he term should be deleted without replacement because it would be paradoxical to look for a substitute for a racist term. In order to function, any substitute needs knowledge of an "avoided" racist concept and inevitably has to reproduce it. As a result, a term that whites use to designate Black people and to portray their supposed superiority is absolutely dispensable (Arndt 2011).[17]

Another remnant of German colonialism is the so-called "Herero stone" in the New Garrison Cemetery in Berlin-Neukölln, a large granite boulder that was moved there in 1973 from a barracks in Kreuzberg, commemorates the German soldiers of the *Schutztruppe* (protection force) who participated in the genocide against the Hereo and Nama in today's Namibia between 1904 and 1908. In 2009, after long protests from citizens' associations, the Neukölln District Office finally set a stone plaque in the ground next to the boulder, which also commemorates the war's victims. To this day it is the only official memorial in Berlin for the crimes of German colonialism. Yet, the Herero living in the city like Israel Kaunatjike would have preferred a different neighborhood for it (Habermalz 2018).

Renaming Streets and Rewriting Urban History

In central Berlin, the above-mentioned Congo Conference was held in the Reich Chancellery on Wilhlemstraße 77 in the late 19th century. The chancellor at the time, Otto von Bismarck, had invited to Berlin delegates from

17 Translated by the author.

the USA and the Ottoman Empire as well as representatives of the European powers – Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, and Sweden-Norway – to negotiate previous and future territories and to establish free trade and trading routes throughout the African continent. The final document, the Congo Act[18], formed the basis for the colonization of Africa, without taking any account of existing social, economic, or political structures.

Figure 1.4: Collage of the old and new Wilhelmstraße used as a backdrop for Natasha A. Kelly's performance "M(a)y Sister #4: between avenui and kreuzberg," staged at HAU Hebbel am Ufer Theater in Berlin in 2018. Photograph: Doro Tuch

Today, an information board stands where the former chancellery was located and reminds tourists and locals alike of this episode of colonial history. It is one of 31 boards set up along the Wilhelmstraße History Mile by the Senate Department for Urban Development between 1996 and 2007 that tell stories of Germany's past. Researched by German historian Laurenz Demps for the Topography of Terror Foundation, the recent boards were part of a street exhibition that took place in 2007. However, a lot of imagination is required when searching for traces of the past, as Berlin's modern buildings provide no information about the edifices in which German politics was made for decades. Andreas Nachama, managing director of the Topography of Terror Foundation, said: "Wilhelmstraße has lost its meaning, but not its memory."[19]

Despite this important milestone in German history, the country's involvement in colonialism did not begin in the 19th century but dates further

18 General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa, 26 February 1885: https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1885GeneralActBerlinConference.pdf

19 "Neues aus der Geschichte der Wilhelmstraße", April 17, 2007 (https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/neues-aus-der-geschichte-der-wilhelmstrasse/835380.html)

back to the unjust actions of officer and explorer Otto Friedrich von der Gröben in the 17th century. In the spring of 1682, Electoral Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg assigned him an expedition to the coast of West Africa, where Otto von der Gröben was sent to establish a permanent armed military base. Later known as Großfriedrichsburg, the fort became the first German colony on the West Coast of Africa in today's Ghana. Selling over 20,000 Africans to the Americas and the Caribbean, and losing many more in the process, the fort became a deadly point of no return characterized by Germany's trafficking of captured Africans. Furthermore, Großfriedrichsburg served to support and protect Friedrich Wilhelm's Brandenburg African Company for almost three decades until the elector sold it to the Dutch West Indies Company in 1717.[20]

On the occasion of the first German colonial exhibition mentioned above, the bank of the River Spree in Berlin's Kreuzberg district was named Gröbenufer after Otto von der Gröben to celebrate Germany's colonial dominance. Criticism of this honor began to arise centuries later after the UN recognized colonialism and enslavement as the main causes of modern racism at the world conference in Durban in 2001. Following the initiative of members of the community, postcolonial organizations, and civil society, including the Initiative of Black People in Germany (ISD) who had come together under the umbrella of the non-profit development policy advocacy Berliner Entwicklungspolitischer Ratschlag, the Green Party put forward the suggestion to rename the street[21] on the grounds that by founding Großfriedrichsburg and leading the Brandenburg African Company, Otto von der Gröben had actively participated in transatlantic enslavement and therefore had committed a crime against humanity. At the end of 2007, the district assembly in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg accepted the proposal and the decision was made to rename the riverbank in 2009.

20 Website of the the Black Central European Studies Network (BCESN), a network of historians spread across four different time zones and located on two different continents: https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1500-1750/founding-a-slave-trading-colony-in-west-africa-1682-1683/

21 "Umbenennung des Gröbenufer in May-Ayim-Ufer Hier: May-Ayim-Ufer aus postkolonialer Aufklärungs- und Erinnerungsperspektive gestalten", May 27, 2009 (https://gruene-xhain.de/umbenennung-des-groebenufer-in-may-ayim-ufer-hier-may-ayim-ufer-aus-postkolonialer-aufklaerungs-und-erinnerungsperspektive-gestalten/)

According to the implementing regulations of the Berlin Roads Act[22], a street can be renamed only after a person with an outstanding personality and an interest in the city as a whole. Additionally, this person must have died more than five years previously and the rules state that the historical context must not be changed and that women should be given greater consideration. This provided a basis for Gröbenufer to be renamed after the Afro-German poet, pedagogue, and Kreuzberg resident May Ayim, who became internationally renowned through her German-language spoken word performances. She can be considered the most prominent representative of the Afro-German movement.

Inspired by African American scholar, poet and civil rights activist, Audre Lorde (after whom the district council (BVV) decided to rename the northern part of Manteuffelstraße in Berlin-Kreuzberg in February 2019), May Ayim was co-author and co-editor of one of the foundational works of the Black German community: *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*.[23] This was the first publication to criticize ongoing colonial injustices and was the first in which the self-determined and self-defined terms "Black German" and "Afro-German" appeared – and, with them, the possibility for a postcolonial discourse in German politics and society presented itself (Kelly 2016). A formal rededication and the installation of the new street signs took place on February 27, with the street officially being renamed May-Ayim-Ufer on March 4, 2010 (Kelly 2015).

Nearly a decade later, the district council finally decided on new street names in the African Quarter; this took effect on April 1, 2019. Debates on changing the street names had dominated the area since the early 20th century. In March 1939, for example, the National Socialists had renamed Londoner Straße as Petersallee to glorify Carl Peters (1856–1918), a colonial commissioner in former German East Africa, where he led a cruel regime over the native population that eventually resulted in his arrest and dismissal. In 1946, the renaming of Togo Street was discussed; a proposal was submitted to the municipal as-

22 "BVV-Beschluss 0384/II Verfahrensweise bei Straßen (Plätzen) und deren Neu- bzw. Umbenennungen vom 20.06.2002", June 29, 2002 (https://www.berlin.de/kunst-und-kultur-mitte/geschichte/erinnerungskultur/strassenbenennungen/)

23 The first book to be published by Black German women was *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* edited by Katharina Oguntoye, May Ayim (fomerly Opitz) and Dagmar Schultz in 1986. The English-language translation was published in 1992 with a foreword by acclaimed African American feminist Audre Lorde.

sembly again in 1987, but did not gain majority support. In 1986, the focus had shifted back to Petersallee, which was not renamed but instead rededicated to Hans Peters (1886–1966), who was active against Nazi rule and cofounded the Berlin State Constitution after World War Two. Yet, the rededication from Carl to Hans Peters was never officially legalized – all that happened was that small signs were attached explaining the eponym. And while Carl Peters had been dismissed from colonial services in 1891–2 for torturing and murdering his African maid Mabruk and sexually assaulting a Chagga girl, Jogodja, Adolf Lüderitz (1834–86), the first German landowner in today's Namibia, swindled land from the Nama chief Joseph Frederiks, who believed he was selling five British miles, each 1.6 kilometers in length, but instead sold 7.5 German miles. Additionally, Gustav Nachtigal (1834–85), a scientist who mainly explored the Islamic culture of North Africa, can be held responsible for bloody military action in Cameroon and the occupation of Togo.[24]

Figure 1.5: May-Ayim-Ufer, located on the River Spree in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. Photograph: Doro Tuch

After decades of effort and with the support of residents, the decision was finally made to reclaim the African Quarter and create a pro-African district in the heart of Berlin, with Petersallee, between Müllerstraße and Nachtigalplatz, renamed Anna-Mungunda-Allee. Anna Mungunda was the first female Herero activist to fight in the Namibian independence movement against the occupation of the coun-

24 Information about the renaming of streets in the African Quarter in Wedding, Berlin-Mitte https://www.berlin.de/kunst-und-kultur-mitte/geschichte/afrikanisches-viertel-609903.php

try by South Africa. Between Nachtigalplatz and Windhuker Straße, Petersallee was renamed Maji-Maji-Allee, commemorating the 1905–7 Maji Maji Uprising in Tanganyika, the most significant African challenge to German colonial rule. Lüderitzstraße is now known as Cornelius-Fredericks-Straße, named after a Nama leader who, together with Hendrik Witbooi, the leader of the Khowesin, actively waged a guerrilla war against the Germans in Namibia. The Nachtigalplatz is now called Manga-Bell-Platz, after Rudolf Duala Manga Bell, the king of the Duala people in Cameroon and the leader of the resistance against the illegal expulsion of the Duala from their traditional settlement areas during the German colonial era (ibd.). And, after an extensive participation process involving civil society, the previous Wissmannstraße in Berlin-Neukölln, which formerly honored the colonial officer Hermann von Wissmann, who was responsible for the suppression of the East African coastal population, was also renamed in the spring of 2021. Instead of a colonial ruler, the street now carries the name of Lucy Lameck, a Tanzanian politician who campaigned for women's rights and the Pan-African ideal.[25] Renaming streets allows the perspective of African people or groups and PAD to be inscribed as subjects – and not objects or victims – into national urban history.

However, the community's project of the heart remains the renaming of M*-straße, which refers to the racist name for Black people mentioned above, something that has been demanded by the Black community for more than two decades. According to the city chronicler Friedrich Nicolai, it was named as early as 1706, at a time when King Friedrich I of Prussia claimed rule over the colonial fortress Großfriedrichsburg (Nicolai 1779). An underground railway station was first opened in 1908 with the name Kaiserhof and was later renamed Thälmannplatz. From 1986 onward it was called Otto-Grotewohl-Straße, and in 1991, after reunification, it was renamed M*-straße to match the street.

For more than 30 years, the community has been fighting to rename both the station and the street. And since 2014, there has been an annual festival at the underground station in Berlin-Mitte organized by associations from the Black community. As the street name is directly linked

25 The new Lucy-Lameck-Straße – renaming and supporting program https://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/die-neue-lucy-lameck-strasse-umbenennung-und-rahmenprogramm-1075274.php

to the history of enslavement, the event takes place close to August 22/23, the former being the day of the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution in 1791 and the latter the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition. At the festival, speeches, poetry, and music are followed by the symbolic renaming of the street. Today the street is partly residential but there are also numerous companies (e.g. a Hilton hotel) and institutions located there, including the embassies of Peru, Chile, and Lichtenstein.

Figure 1.6: Collage of an imagined Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße created as a backdrop for Natasha A. Kelly's performance "M(a)y Sister #4: between avenui and kreuzberg," staged at HAU Hebbel am Ufer Theater in Berlin in 2018. Photograph: Doro Tuch

Those arguing for the street to be renamed, including Bündnis Anton Wilehlm Amo Erbschaft (Anton Wilhelm Amo Inheritance Alliance) have suggested Anton Wilhelm Amo, the first Black professor at a German university (see the Introduction), who fought for the rights of Black people in Europe. Adopting his name would maintain the reference to the history of the enslavement of Black people and their life in the African diaspora. And despite the renaming being opposed by many residents who believe that the "M" word is not racist, the district assembly of Berlin-Mitte approved the suggestion in August 2020, as did the district office in March 2021.[26] At the time of writing, the rededication and renaming ceremony have not yet taken place, as lawsuits filed by residents are pending (Schmoll 2022).

Since 2020, the association Decolonize Berlin has been committed to critically examining the past and present of colonialism and racism in the city. Some 250 people from 30 associations, some of which are Black, individual

26 "Mohrenstrasse: Berlin farce over renaming of ‚racist' station", BBC, July 9, 2020 (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53348129)

activists, and representatives from five districts and six senate administrations have so far taken part in the participatory process in order to formulate concrete proposals. An interim report by the coordination office summarizes the first results.[27] However, let us not forget that we might have moved a meaningful step forward, but there is still a long way to go until Berlin's past ceases to cast a shadow on the future of Black people in Berlin, Germany, and beyond.

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