

Colonial Neighbours – on how to boil rice with a pot full of air/on the wickedness of imagination

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Each day, humanity is walking closer to its end.

People did not live a waking hour without pain caused by the imagination of home and its ever-changing borders. Many wars, some fondly forgotten only to be reenacted in different times yet similar spaces, have been waged under the treacherous imagination of what *Heimat* and its extension should look, smell and sound like.

we think, therefore, we are. . .

we imagine; therefore, others are not. . .

The PostHeimat project, a network meeting in cooperation with *Maxim Gorki Theatre* and the *Theater an der Ruhr*, was initiated to dedicate space to encounters to question notions of migration, representation, identity and finding forms of alliance within theatre and the arts. SAVVY Contemporary was invited to think along these lines and propose a display format that engages with the conference.

The participatory archive project Colonial Neighbours, which hosts a series of material and immaterial traces, focuses on the stories behind the objects, their entanglement from the donor to the object, and our situatedness in the perpetuating power mechanisms of violence. The archive that Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung initiated is hosting objects, stories, packaging material and traces that can be found in the cellars, attics, urban space or our memory.

The donated objects that are often marked by racist content and uncanny shapes are haunted by a past that is not yet fully revealed or understood. The collective engagement with the archive purposefully points to the orchestrated gaps within history, society, education and politics regarding the colonial period of Germany and its repercussions.

When SAVVY Contemporary's archival project Colonial Neighbours was invited to participate in the project, it was important that the collection of objects speaking of and to the colonial history of Germany would not stand alone.

LUCID DREAMING – was conceived as a part of the *FRAGMENT* series, which is composed of interventions in and out of SAVVY Contemporary's long-term collective archive project on German colonial history. In this series, artists, researchers,

activists, and cultural producers are invited to engage with the Colonial Neighbours objects, activating the archive's content and critically engaging with its content.

In the sixth edition of the *FRAGMENT* series, the Berlin-based artist Lizza May David was invited to overshadow some objects with an artwork in which she explores the notion of representation of domestic workers from the Philippines.

In the mixed media work "Looking Inwards" (2008), which was composed of video footage of a domestic worker and archival materials, we experience an intimate portrait of the working and living space of a domestic helper (the artist's aunt) in Hong Kong. Filming within the interior of her employer's household, including the furniture, view from the window and personal belongings, the video visualizes how power relations are interconnected with private space.

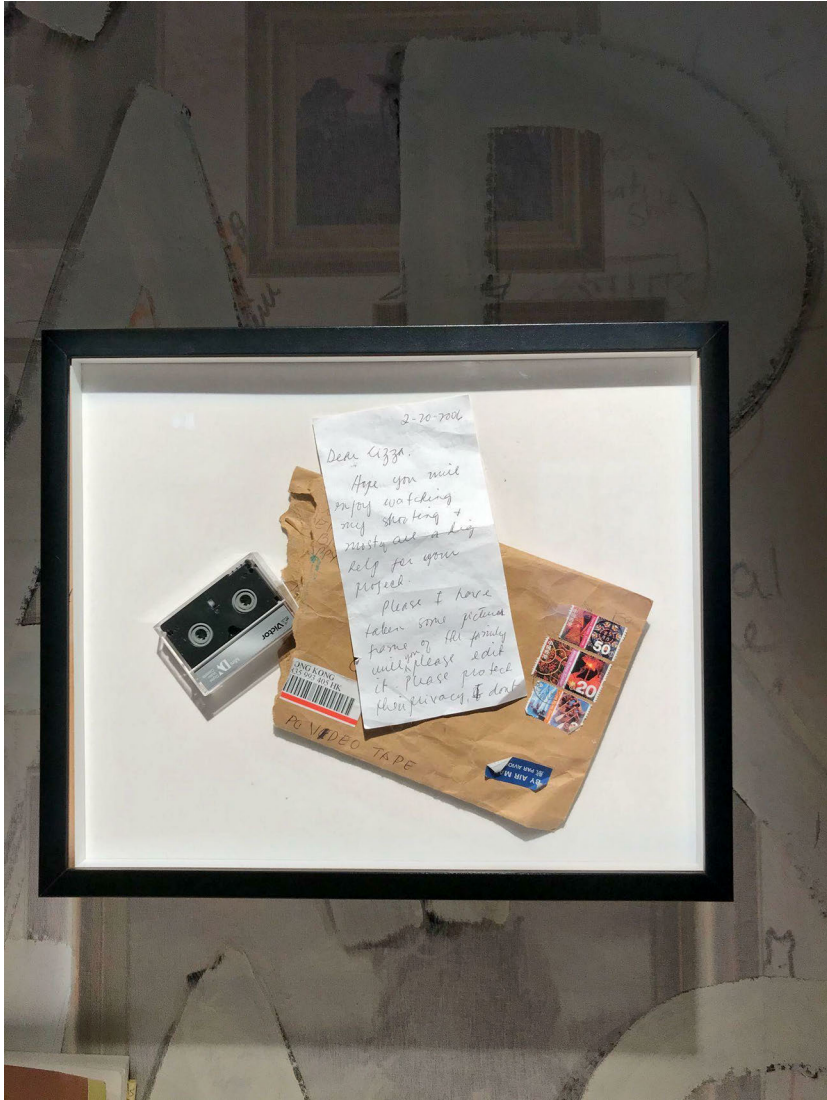
Lizza May David's work display was arranged to converse with objects from the Colonial Neighbours archive directly. One of the objects from the archive, which is a journal called *Kolonie und Heimat* (1907–1920), was published by the *Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* (Women's Association of German Colonial Society), which was one of the most influential organizations of the German empire that campaigned for an expansive colonialist policy. The articles written in German show clearly how race and gender constructions were established on different levels and fields of colonial policies: on the example of labour policies, education and moralities, through the discourse of hygiene, purity and health and within the field of ethnology, photography and advertisement.

The *Frauenbund* promoted the colonial project within the German empire and trained and sent out white German women to the colonies to serve as 'keepers of German manners and morals.

How we imagine and subsequently see, hear and define our opposite is heavily influenced by a long genealogy of hatred. Not only are the remnants of this violent period lingering in our attics or basements, but the very same foul mechanisms that enabled the displacement, the amplification of one's lands through the limitation or dispossession of someone else's that are still in place.

When SAVVY Contemporary's archive project got invited to engage with the Post Heimat ENCOUNTER, it was important to walk back in time, highlighting fragments that support the very same structures that have denied people's right to mobility, land, dignity and life, then as much as now.

The Colonial Neighbours display with these toxic objects and Lizza May David's intimate portrait of an individual claiming space in writing her own story despite the oppressive white narrative that holds one captive was an invitation to reflect on the ongoing colonial entanglements that blur our vision in redefining borders, *Heimat*, belonging and ultimately how we relate to one another.







This is the main door of the house.
 I start here.
 This is the shoe cabinet.
 And on the other side, there is a chair for you to sit on when you put on your shoes.
 This is the dining table,
 together with the living room on the other side.
 [blank screen]
 [blank screen]
 There is a terrace in the living room.
 I will open the door,
 and outside, this is the scenery.
 This is the Hongkong Stadion,
 the Indian Club,
 overlooking the Sea.
 This side is already Causeway Bay.
 This is the corridor going inside.
 From the corridor, on the first door, at the left side, this is the study room.
 This is the collection of my boss:
 Toy soldiers.
 [blank screen]
 He likes collecting toy soldiers.
 [blank screen]
 This is the guest room,
 located at the right side of the corridor
 [blank screen]
 [blank screen]
 And this is the children's room.
 And this is the master's room.
 And this is the master's toilet.
 And this is the kitchen.
 It's full of cabinets, surrounded by cabinets.
 This is the back of the door.
 And this is the washroom.
 Servant's room. Oh, servant's bathroom, I mean.
 We have a back door.
 Beside the washroom, there is the servant's room.
 It's quite small, but we are happy about this because of our privacy.
 They have two servants.
 So, we have a double deck.
 One can sleep on the top, and the other can sleep on the lower part.

Or deck, I mean.

This is the upper deck with the cabinets, which one servant can be used.

Mali ng English ko [My English is wrong]

And this is the lower deck.

I am occupying this.

And since the room is too small,

we have no cabinet to put our clothes.

So, I think of an idea of how to hang my clothes.

I just put it in plastic and put it outside of the wall.

There is also a cassette here.

And we can play CD.

Sometimes, if we have time to listen to it.

We have no TV.

So we just listen to the music.

We usually finish our job at night, around 10 o'clock.

And it's time for us to go to our room.

Sometimes, we are not sleepy yet, and then we listen to music.

And if it's schooldays, we get up around 5.30.

Because the girls are packing lunch.

Because they are whole day in school.

But if they do not pack their lunch, we are getting up at 6 o'clock.

And when it is weekend, we can get up at 7.30.

Looking Inwards

2008, DVD PAL, 4:3, Single-channel video, color, sound; 1 framed letter and mini-DV cassette

This video shows the apartment in Hongkong, where my aunt Nerry Hernandez has lived and worked as a domestic helper for more than 14 years. She independently filmed this footage without me asking her to do it, in order to fill in missing scenes for the documentary "Two Years More," which I was creating about her. In order to respect the privacy of the employer's family she asked me to cut out scenes with family pictures, which could be seen in the video. My artistic intervention in this case meant to change the "censored" family pictures into a blank screen and show it to a wider audience.

The result is "Looking Inwards", an intimate approach about body and space, ethics of image-making and turning gazes. It provides a glimpse into her life, captured with a mini-DV camera that she specifically arranged for this purpose. The footage was made in the same year (2005), when Youtube.com was just starting to be launched.

Looking Inward © David&Hernandez



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