

Colonial Collections in Berlin Universities

An interdisciplinary workshop

27th April 2021, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm CEST

The interdisciplinary workshop “Colonial Collections in Berlin Universities” will bring together members of the research network and guest speakers to engage with colonial contexts linked to collections from all four BUA institutions. The aim is to develop methods to apply ethics of care to these sensitive collections, to make this precious knowledge available to the Global South, and to facilitate dialogue between custodians and interested parties, including activists and artists. During the workshop, the following issues will be addressed: provenance of the collections and postcolonial reappraisal of the history of science; transparency and accessibility for external stakeholders and interested parties; curatorial challenges when it comes to colonial contexts and the need for transnational collaborations and critical exhibitions.

Programme

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| 10:00 am | Welcome and introduction to the workshop & project
by Bénédicte Savoy |
| 10:15 - 11:30 am | Session 1 (English):
"Collective Listening"
For a Plurality of Interpretations of and Access to Colonial Sound Archives (HU)
with Jasmin Mahazi, Mèhèza Kalibani, Irene Hilden
Moderation: Yann LeGall |
| 11:45 am - 1:00 pm | Session 2 (English):
Ancestral Remains in Berlin Universities
Rehumanising and remembering racial anthropology (Charité, FU, HU)
with Manuela Bauche, Thomas Schnalke, Gabby Mzei Orio
Moderation: Yann LeGall |
| 1:15 pm - 2:30 pm | Session 3 (English):
Colonial Extraction and Berlin Mineralogical Collections (TU)
with Johannes Giebel, Christine Okoth, Yann LeGall
Moderation: Malina Lauterbach |
| 2:45 pm - 4:00 pm | Session 4 (German/French):
Kulturvermittlung zwischen Kolonialstil und Dekolonisierung:
das Janheinz-Jahn-Archiv an der HU-Berlin
with Ibou Diop, Susanne Gehrman, Sylvère Mbondobari
Moderation: Ibou Diop |

More about the project & network [“Colonial collections in Berlin Universities”](#)

Financed by:

Berlin University Alliance – Berlin Centre for Global Engagement

Project leaders:

Bénédicte Savoy (TU Berlin)

Manuela Bauche (FU Berlin)

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Coordination:

Malina Lauterbach (TU Berlin)

Associated researchers:

Irene Hilden (HU Berlin)

Ibou Diop (HU Berlin)

Holger Stoecker (HU Berlin, Charité)

Yann LeGall (TU Berlin)

Student assistants:

Jeanne-Ange Wagne

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Description of the workshop sessions

Session 1: 10:15 - 11:30 CEST (11:15 am - 12:30 pm EAT)

"Collective Listening": for a Plurality of Interpretations of and Access to Colonial Sound Archives (HU)

The Lautarchiv at Humboldt University consists of sound objects and other documents generated in the heart of the German metropolis between 1909 and 1944. Created under colonial signs, the archive is a colonial project involving the production, practice, and preservation of specific structures of power and knowledge. To deal with the archived voices that are at once project, product, and testimony of the colonial knowledge regime, "collective listening" can offer a possible approach to the acoustic legacy. In the session, the participants will reflect on potentials and limitations of engaging with sensitive sound recordings. The method of "collective listening" will provide a concrete basis for a wider reflection on the sounds of colonial knowledge production and a critical appraisal of the contexts in which these voices were recorded.

Session 2: 11:45 - 13:00 CEST (12:30 pm - 3:00 pm EAT)

Ancestral Remains in Berlin Universities

Rehumanising and remembering racial anthropology (Charité, FU, HU)

In this session, the history of racial anthropology and its remnants in Berlin university collections will be addressed. If the Charité Human Remains project paved the way for repatriation of ancestral remains from Berlin institutions to claimants in Namibia, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the legacy of racial anthropology has not yet been completely worked through: the Free University is grappling with archaeological finds that date back from the infamous Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics where Jewish, Sinti & Roma and non-European human remains were studied by geneticists eugenicists; the Charité also hosts macabre trophies stolen from the bodies of former colonised people; even the Sound Archive (Humboldt University) houses human remains. Together with historian Manuela Bauche, historian and museum director Thomas Schnalke, and cultural entrepreneur and activist Gabb Mzei, this session will address the memorialisation of the history of science, processes of rehumanisation of ancestors, the need for cooperation with stakeholders in the Global South, as well as greater transparency but also sensitivity towards the dead in the digital age.

Session 3: 13:15 pm - 14:30 pm

Colonial Extraction and Berlin Mineralogical Collections (TU)

The history of the Mineralogical Collections of the Technische Universität dates back to the foundation of the Royal Mining Academy in the late 18th century. Today the collections hold roughly 200.000 mineral specimens from different geographical areas, including Tanzania, Congo or Namibia. As such, they have been a source of precious geoscientific knowledge, yet were obtained thanks to imperial policy and framed along Eurocentric scientific narratives. The entanglements between geological exploration and colonialism still need to be addressed. Issues such as access and transparency for researchers both in Europe as well as in the Global South or the destruction of the collections' archives during World War II also need more scrutiny. In this session, literary scholar Christine Okoth, geologist Johannes Giebel, and researchers Malina Lauterbach and Yann LeGall will define the term extraction and its implications, problematize the gaps and silences in these collections and archives, discuss the history of geology and mining policies that drive critical debates on coloniality, and reflect on how to contextualize and curate natural science.

Session 4: 14:45 - 16:00 CEST (1:45 pm - 3:00 pm GMT)

Kulturvermittlung zwischen Kolonialstil und Dekolonisierung

Das Janheinz-Jahn-Archiv an der HU-Berlin

Seit 2005 befindet sich der Nachlass Janheinz Jahns an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. Er umfasst Briefwechsel, Bücher und Manuskripte sowie Tonträger und Fotografien aus den 1950er, 1960er und 1970er Jahren, die den intellektuellen Austausch zwischen Jahn und afrikanischen und afro-diasporischen Autoren in der Phase der Dekolonisation zeigen. Die Schriften bieten eine wichtige Bezugsquelle für die Auseinandersetzung mit der Rezeption afrikanischer Literaturen im deutschsprachigen Raum und werfen gleichzeitig Fragen nach den Perspektiven auf das Archiv auf. In der Workshop-Session diskutieren die Literaturwissenschaftler*innen Susanne Gehrman, Ibou Diop und Sylvère Mbondobari die Situiertheit der Sammlung, deren wissenschaftshistorische Bedeutung für Deutschland und für Afrika und welche kritischen Lesbarkeiten die schriftbasierten Dialoge eröffnen können.