

G E O G R A P H I E S  
O F  
I M A G I N A T I O N  
  
E X H I B I T I O N  
13.09.-11.11.2018  
I N V O C A T I O N S  
14.09.-15.09.2018

EXHIBITION Salwa Aleryani Heba Amin American Artist Rossella Biscotti Chimurenga  
Saddie Choua Michele Ciacciofera Anna Binta Diallo Dimitri Fagbohoun Mahir Jamal Anna Lindal  
Ibrahim Mahama Tanja Muravskaja Oscar Murillo Daniela Ortiz Sandra Schäfer

INVOCATIONS Ekow Alabi & Band Salwa Aleryani Heba Amin Natalie Bayer Rossella Biscotti  
Michele Ciacciofera Andrea Cusumano Hamid Dabashi Anna Binta Diallo Dimitri Fagbohoun  
Nacira Guénif-Souilamas Helon Habila Hector Thami Manekehla Wayne Modest Musa Okwonga  
Daniela Ortiz Johannes Paul Raether Sandra Schäfer

CURATORS Antonia Alampi Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE

Jasmina al-Qaisi Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock Olani Ewunnet António Mendes Lili Somogyi

PROJECT MANAGEMENT Lema Sikod

COMMUNICATION Anna Jäger

COMMUNICATION ASSISTANCE Johanna Gehring Marleen Boschen

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**S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY  
THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS**

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OTHER  
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AFROPOLITAN  
& OTHER  
LABELS

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INSTITUT

GEOGRAPHIES OF IMAGINATION  
is a project within DIS - OTHERING :  
BEYOND AFROPOLITAN AND  
OTHER LABELS – a collaboration between  
BOZAR–Centre for Fine Arts (Brussels), Kulturen  
in Bewegung (Vienna) and SAVVY Contemporary  
(Berlin) on the necessary deconstruction of “othering”  
practices in European cultural institutions. It consists  
of an exhibition, symposia, a festival, talks and  
performances, a residency program, mapping research,  
and a website, all manifesting in 2018 and 2019 in  
Berlin, Brussels, Vienna and Warsaw. These different  
formats share the bringing together of artists,  
communities, thinkers and people of all walks of life  
to reflect on contemporary processes and technologies  
of “Dis-Othering.”

# B A C K G R O U N D

DIS-OTHERING AS METHOD:  
LEH ZO, A ME KE NDE ZA

I dislike interviews. I'm often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed and easily definable.

Mona Hatoum, Interview with Janine Antoni, BOMB Magazine, 1998<sup>1</sup>

Just in the nick of time when we, by repetition and reiteration, start believing our own concepts that we have postulated and disseminated. Just at that point in time — t — when we think that notion of post-otherness,<sup>2</sup> which we have reflected upon for years in reference to that double moment of awareness and transition, we seem to be experiencing a quake that pushes us to reconsider, but not reject, the paradoxicality of the Post-Other moment,<sup>3</sup> reconsider who and how one bears historical Othering, reconsider the mechanisms of rendering Other, as well as reconsidering who represents whom or who tries to shape whose future in contemporary societies and discourses.

This quake has spurred the necessity to drop off prefixes and concentrate on root words. It seems as if to be able to do these reconsiderations, one needs to, at least temporarily, abrogate "Post-" to be able to situate "Otherness" within our day's context. Especially, taking into account that the "Post-" in Post-Otherness might be dangling on a cliff, threatening to fall either on the side of the "Post-" in "Postcolonial" — which doesn't imply an aftermath but rather intends to announce a continuity of an era shaped by its colonial past — or drop on the side of "Post-racial" — which tends to be a distraction from metamorphosed formats and technologies of racisms. At any rate, this proposal announces the

downscaling of the prefix in order to scrutinise "Otherness" properly.

This quake has been prompted by two random observations:

Firstly, if one, even with a minimum of sensitivity, took a glance at some current political highlights one is likely to hear the reverberations of discourses ranging from building walls to separate nations, "bad hombres" to the Islamisation of the Occident. As Sasha Polakow-Suransky put it in *The Ruthlessly Effective Rebranding of Europe's New Far Right*:

They (the Right) have effectively claimed the progressive causes of the left — from gay rights to women's equality and protecting Jews from antisemitism — as their own, by depicting Muslim immigrants as the primary threat to all three groups. As fear of Islam has spread, with their encouragement, they have presented themselves as the only true defenders of western identity and western liberties — the last bulwark protecting a besieged Judeo-Christian civilisation from the barbarians at the gates.<sup>4</sup>

This becomes interesting as one observes the efforts of the right to co-opt certain historically "Othered" within their political strategies, brewing new alliances and forging common denominators that were regarded historically contradictory, while constructing other "Others" on which long cultivated angst, prejudices and resentments could be projected upon. This process should be understood as a cannibalisation of "Otherness" and a subsequent regurgitation of "Otherness."

For some historically "Othered," the only thing that has changed has been the mechanisms and methodologies through which they are objectified and othered. So, in our socio-political contemporary, one can observe an intensification in the construction and cultivation of "Otherness," morphing old conceptions of the "Other" to cloth new groups of people, while at the same time one can observe the appropriation of the "Other" for purposes profitable to the privileged and powerful.

Secondly, another tendency, especially within the context of the cultural industry, is the resurfacing of what one might call "geographical specification-ing," which is to say the need to put a spotlight on certain geographical regions. This is of course not a new

1 [bombmagazine.org/article/2130/mona-hatoum](http://bombmagazine.org/article/2130/mona-hatoum)

2 Regina Römhild and Bonaventure Ndikung, "The Post-Other as Avant-Garde" in *We Roma: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, eds. Daniel Baker, Maria Hlavajova, Utrecht and Valiz, Amsterdam: BAK — basis voor actuele kunst, 2013.

3 In the article, we discuss the concept and moment Post-Otherness as follows: "In that paradoxical moment, the figure of the 'Post-Other' emerges, a figure still bearing the signs of historical Othering while at the same time representing and experimenting with unknown futures beyond it. In the shadow of the dominant political imagination a cosmopolitanized reality of convivial struggles unfolds, speaking and acting against that imagery. The moment of the 'Post-Other,' however, is still in the state of emergence: it unfolds in the everyday practices of the 'unconscious' kind when, e.g., the anonymity of urban life allows or infinite examples of everyday cosmopolitan interactions. [...] Such practices are still waiting to be united and made visible."

4 [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/01/the-ruthlessly-effective-rebranding-of-europes-new-far-right](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/01/the-ruthlessly-effective-rebranding-of-europes-new-far-right)

phenomenon, especially within Western museum institutions, or other cultural infrastructures in which, based on certain culture-political agendas or strategies, certain geographical regions are put in and out of focus as they like. Some have seen this practice as part of what is termed “soft power,” whereby culture is used as a means to gently exercise political power on certain cultural and social groups. Take for example a museum or library in France that chooses to put a spotlight on Algeria, in the hope that it would thereby appease the Algerian community in an effort to soothe or clean the wounds of its colonial past. Or take for example the British council, Goethe Institute, Institut Français et al opening cultural centres around the world to “promote culture.” Soft power.

This “geographical specification-ing” is in no way bad per se. The long list of, for example, “African shows” or “Arab world shows”<sup>5</sup> around the world did indeed do a great deal in presenting to the world what an African or Arab contemporary could be. That said and that done, one must now take stance to ask: what does it mean to put together an “Africa exhibition” or an “Arab exhibition” today, as we see in the New Museum, MMK Frankfurt, BOZAR Brussels, Fondation LV and many other museums in the West? What does it mean to make geography the subject matter rather than some other conceptual or philosophical discourses of relevance? What about issues of representation if one really wishes to make a geographical exhibition, i.e. how would one represent the 54 African countries, thousands of African languages, and communities within such an exhibition? These issues necessitate re-questioning and reconsidering.

But what prompts this reflection now are the following suspicions:

While the “geographical specification-ing” might be well-intentioned, one can’t avoid thinking of the fact that the occasional presentation of an Africa, Arab, Asia or similar shows is another, and for that matter, a reinforced act of “Othering.” This suspicion is brought about by the fact that institutions tend to content themselves with the fact that they have done an “Africa

show” and therefore do not necessarily need to include other artists of African origin in their regular program. Such “geographical specification-ing” projects then tend to become a compensation for a lack of proper engagement with issues of diversity at the level of program, person and public, and also tend to thrust the “Other” they construct into the “Savage slot,” as Michel-Rolph Trouillot would put it.

Additionally, there is something about the rhetoric in which such “geographical specification-ing” projects are accommodated. With this I mean the rhetoric of “giving a voice to,” “giving space to,” “making visible,” “taking care of,” “making heard” the African, Asian, Arab or whoever in question. These phenomena which could be likened to a paternalisation and infantilisation strategies of course push us to think of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s pertinent question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” But since Spivak, we have learnt that the issue at stake is not if the Subaltern can speak, but rather looking at the twist Seloua Luste Boulbina gave with her question “Can the non-subaltern hear and read?”<sup>6</sup> The crucial question is if these geo-social groups stereotypically put together in such shows, especially in Western museums, do actually wish to be given a voice, space or otherwise? And under whose terms? Don’t they already have their spaces and voices? Again, the issue at stake is the agenda behind such rhetoric, and the fact that this rhetoric is indeed an important part in the process of constructing and cultivating “Otherness” within a bubble, i.e. unnecessarily and unwantedly. Which is to say that the exclusive mechanism in relation to such projects marks a difference between a constructed “norm” and the constructed “anomaly,” which is the one off, space ship-like project that lands and then disappears.

It is equally important to point out the capitalist economic model behind such “geographical specification-ing” projects. The use of slogans, captions, simplifications is the epitome of neoliberal economic practice. This goes hand in hand with the concept of soft power, wherein culture is not only used for political aims, but also suits well as an entry into economic spheres. In the past years, we have heard from philosophers, economists and politicians alike that the future of the world, as we know it will be determined in Africa. Prompt was the reaction from the cultural sector, with projects like “African Futures,” “Africa is the Future” and various sorts of “Afrofuturisms,” as tags and labels well packaged for easy sales. It all becomes a commodity. The commodification of the “Other” and “Otherness.”

Where had they learned to converse and to dance? I couldn’t converse or dance. Everybody

5 For example *Contemporary African Art*, Studio International, London & New York, 1969. Camden Arts Centre, London, 1969, *African Contemporary Art*, The Gallery, Washington D.C. 1977, *Moderne Kunst aus Afrika im Rahmen des West-Berliner Festivals Horizonte Festival der Weltkulturen* (Nr. 1, 1979), *Art pour l’Afrique: Exposition internationale d’art contemporain*. Musée National des Arts Africains et Océaniques, Paris (08/06-25/07/1988), *Art contemporain arabe: collection du Musée du l’Institut du Monde Arabe*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1988, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*. Hayward Gallery, London, 1989, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World*, Barbican Concourse Gallery, London, *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, Center for African Art, New York, *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale*, Museum for African Art, New York, 1993, *Seen/Unseen*, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, 1994, *Rencontres Africaines: Exposition d’Art Actuel*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 1994, *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa*, Flammarion, New York, 1995, *An Inside Story: African Art of Our Time*, The Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan Association of Art Museums, Tokyo, 1995, *New Visions: Recent Works by Six African Artists*, Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts, Eatonville, 1995, *Africana*, Sala 1, Roma & Adriano Parise Editore, Verona, 1996, *Africa for Africa: A Photographic View*, Barbican Centre, London, 1999, *Authentic/Ex-Centric*, *Forum For African Arts*, Ithaca (NY), 2001, *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Prestel, Munich-New York, 2001. Curated by Okwui Enwezor, Villa Stuck, Munich (15/02-22/04/2001); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (18/05-22/07/2001); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (08/09-30/12/2001); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center & The Museum of Modern Art, New York (10/02-05/05/2002), *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art Shifting Landscapes*, inIVA, London, 2003, *Africa Remix*, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (24/07-07/11/2004); Hayward Gallery, London (10/02-17/04/2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (25/05-15/08/2005); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (02-05/2006)... just to mention a few.

6 Seloua Luste Boulbina, *Being Inside and Outside Simultaneously. Exile, Literature, and the Postcolony: On Assia Djebar*, (Eurozine, 02.11.2007, [www.eurozine.com/being-inside-and-outside-simultaneously](http://www.eurozine.com/being-inside-and-outside-simultaneously))

knew something I didn't know. The girls looked so good, the boys so handsome. I would be too terrified to even look at one of those girls, let alone be close to one. To look into her eyes or dance with her would be beyond me. And yet I know that what I saw wasn't as simple and good as it appeared. There was a price to be paid for it all, a general falsity, that could be easily believed, and could be the first step down a dead-end street.

Charles Bukowski, *Ham on Rye*, 1982

But it's worth taking a few steps back to reflect. Otherness as a phenomenon seems to have always existed in many societies all over, and rendering "Other" as a process is said to be inherent in processes of identity formation of individuals and societies. In *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998), it is reiterated that "the existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world."<sup>7</sup> That is to say, for an individual or society to know or define them- or itself, it needs to define another individual or society with regards to what the former individual or society is not or doesn't wish to be. Often a time the "Other" then becomes that projection surface for all sorts of unwanted identitarian characteristics. That is then the thin line that separates the mere wish to "other" in order to find one's own identity, and the othering that is discriminatory and segregational. But if one is the other, then who is another?

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin are fast to point out that it is often an interchangeable position of other and othering counterparts, where power probably determines who objectifies at what time. One is tempted to think that "geographical specification-ing" projects are then vehicles through which such power gradients are defined, and through which binaries of norm and anomaly, or self and other are defined. This of course applies to all sections to which majority and minority identities are defined and cultivated in relation to political, economic and social power and how they come to define race, cultural, gender and class identities, geographies, geopolitics and -economics.

From a feminist discourse and practice vantage point, Cherríe Moraga pointed out in *La Güera* that "what the oppressor often succeeds in doing is simply *externalizing* his fears, projecting them into the bodies of women, Asians, gays, disabled folks, whoever seems most 'other.'"<sup>8</sup> Without wanting to equate the "otherer," i.e. the one enjoying the privilege of making another "other," with the oppressor, Moraga's argument holds

ground with the tendency of the "otherer" externalizing and projecting his/her fears on another in the enactment of othering. Moraga proceeds with an expatiation on the phenomenon:

"But it is not really difference the oppressor fears so much as similarity. He fears he will discover in himself the same aches, the same longings as those of the people he has shitted on. He fears the immobilization threatened by his own incipient guilt. He fears he will have to change his life once he has seen himself in the bodies of the people he has called different. He fears the hatred, anger, and vengeance of those he has hurt."<sup>9</sup>

Taking this into consideration, what could "Dis-Othering" possibly imply?

Maybe firstly, dis-othering starts with the recognition of the acts and processes of othering. With the revelation of the undercurrents that feed, justify, enable and maintain acts and processes of othering. It is in and upon this awareness and consciousness of and towards these acts and processes of othering that one might be able to build resistance and protect oneself both from being othered and from the urge to other. Which is to say, it is in this recognition of the mechanism or technology of othering that a circumventing of the embodiments of both noun and verb, the othered and othering, respectively, can be achieved.

Secondly, dis-othering could imply any effort to resist the internalization of those constructs that are said to make one that "other." The tendency is to see oneself through the prism of the constructor of otherness or the oppressor, which is to say that faced with the violence of continuous belittling or jammed in that space of the savage slot in which one has been thrust, the psyche of the "othered" forces that being to accept an existence within that marginal and liminal space.

Thirdly, in relation to Moraga and complementary to point two, dis-othering must be a self-break, a self-resistance by the "otherer" to externalize his/her fears, aches, and longings to being considered a possible recipient. Therefore, with "Dis-Othering" I wish to propose the phenomenon in which social identity building is not made by projecting on the so-called "Other," but rather a projection towards the self. A self-reflection. A boomerang. That is to say instead of looking for or deflecting one's faults, fantasies, angst on some other, one could embody them and live them. It is about acknowledging and embodying the plethora of variables that make us be.

Fourthly, dis-othering has to do with the realization or the putting in practice of what bell hooks calls "The Oppositional Gaze" (1992), which is to say the possibility of interrogating the gaze of the "otherer," but also the

7 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (Psychology Press, 1998, p. 6).

8 Cherríe Moraga. "La Güera", in *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, (Persephone Press, 1981, p.27)

9 Ibid.

importance of looking back at and against the “otherer,” and looking at one another in that space of the “othered.”

Fifthly, dis-othering must be a deeply non-capitalist, non-exploitative and non-profit oriented act, wherein the principle of “what goes round, comes around” reigns. This is to say that if geopolitical, geo-economic and neoliberal capitalist economic goals of “profit, come what may” are catalysts to acts and processes of othering, then dis-othering must mean a negation and exemption from relations based on such principles.

Sixthly, dis-othering must mean getting out of the cul-de-sac of power relations as the basis of being in the world. Dis-othering is a call for an exploration of the cosmic vastness of the imagination of new futures, identities, ways of being, and ways of living together in the world based on and not despite our differences, but because of the importance and richness of our differences. Dis-othering is a pledge for a re-imagination, as much as a dismantling of cartographies of power, and a re-invention of geographies. Dis-othering is a re-calibration of human and non-human, spacial and social relations independent of the given powers, but based on an interdependency of all – animate and inanimate – that co-habit this world.

Seventhly, dis-othering is the practicing of what Sara Ahmed calls the “feminist killjoy,” which is to say the act of resisting the joy or taking part in the joy of laughing at or mocking or belittling or denigrating or othering someone. A refusal to accept the comfort of societal status quos in relation to misogyny, patriarchy, racism, classism and genderism. Dis-othering will have to mean speaking up, pointing out, calling out inequities, as much as proposing alternative ways of being in and perceiving a world of justice and justness.

# C O N C E P T

## GEOGRAPHIES OF IMAGINATION

*Imagination!* who can sing thy force?  
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?  
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,  
Th' empyreal palace of the thund'ring God,  
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,  
And leave the rolling universe behind:  
From star to star the mental optics rove,  
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.  
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,  
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul.

Phillis Wheatley, *On Imagination*, in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley, published 1 September 1773.

## PART 1

### SOME NOTES ON THE USES OF IMAGINATION

Around the second half of the 18th century, Phillis Wheatley, the first published African-American female poet and a former slave, wrote a poem titled "On Imagination". Here, imagination stands as a possible space for the slave's emancipation, one conceivable through the mind, while the body keeps being trapped in the materiality of existence. Imagination can be understood as a space of resistance, one that allows for the oppressed to construct a being of and in dignity, a space that is less threatening, and a possibility of harbouring an idea of freedom, a space of protection for one's self and one's community.

Imagination drove the arduous journeys of generations of migrants across seas and deserts. It is a cognitive space that inspires taking great risks, that can be worth death. A strong courage lies in following the will of imagination, one that is not blind but determined. One that stands behind achieving radical changes, of existential paradigms considered unacceptable. All that is worth risking everything you have.

### THE ILLUSION OF POWER

Imagination, however, can, did and keeps playing a completely different role. The title chosen for this exhibition is a direct reference to academic and anthro-

pologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's writings on the issue of false representations, of imaginary geographies essential to the West in the creation of its narrative empires and its reorganization of meaning used to legitimize its supremacy. These attempts run dialectically through much of the epistemological literature of the last two hundred years, and stand as the foundation of academic and museological disciplines such as Anthropology.

Narratives in which the white male is the subject, while other histories and identities are defined around the needs, the life-style and the history of the subject. The other in the white imagination is "the savage" that slides between heavenly and hellish extremes-, an imaginary other that the West needed to legitimize its supremacy. A supremacy based on "reason and justice" precisely because the other is utopia or barbarism, one that justifies exploitation (of bodies, of land, of labour, of environment, etc.) and dehumanization, offering to a community constructed on a false sense of whiteness the "illusion of power."<sup>1</sup>

bell hooks in an essay from 1992 titled *Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination*<sup>2</sup> starts her argument by asserting that barely any black anthropologists or ethnographers have ever taken the study of whiteness as their focus, at the opposite end for instance to how many white academics, theoreticians or cultural producers have instead engaged with the study of blackness. However, she goes on, knowledge and observations about whiteness have always existed but passed through means mostly pertaining to oral tradition. Because the white other always needed to be well known in order to survive in a white supremacist society, to survive centuries of white domination. In times of slavery, of legal segregation, whiteness was connected to the mysterious, the strange, and above all the terrible. The white other was and, as she writes, still is, an imaginary figure of thought made of the bricks and steel structures of centuries of racism, of exploitation and of enslavement. It is deeply connected to terror. The white other is a terrorist because s/he is terrorizing. It embodies surveillance. It is looking in order to control.

<sup>1</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 1991)

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks. "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination", 1992, in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 165 - 179)

## DISPOSSESSION

This imagined and imaginary sense of superiority also runs through in the history of the migration – or expropriation, dispossession, theft – of objects and artworks. Objects and artworks were taken from their home countries to never be returned under the auspices of safeguarding and preservation. Such actions are ideologically based on an entirely constructed sense of Western superiority, of entitlement and universalism – precisely geographies built on imagination. Objects and artefacts whose stories are mostly – and not coincidentally – kept hidden<sup>3</sup> and enclosed into predominantly Western institutions. This situation is not only limited to the African continent but is connected to centuries of imperial domination (politically, socially and economically) articulated within and outside of fortress Europe. We can think of the history of colonialism, of these centuries of European expansion, also as a story of appropriation, one in which imposed law and order got combined in order to dispossess. Legal concepts such as “sovereignty” and “property” – in a constant state of transformation among Europeans themselves – were introduced as legal paradigms that would dis-qualify the claims of the now colonised, forcing them to negotiate through ways that were foreign to them, and that they wouldn’t otherwise choose. The presence of already existing legal frameworks within (to be) colonized societies was acknowledged, in different degrees and forms – even if not really taken into consideration – up until the nineteenth century and its emergence of stadial evolutionary theories and the birth of Anthropology as a discipline: only once communities were fictionally constructed as “other”, as imaginary barbaric creatures unable to conceive neither “property” nor “sovereignty”, it was possible to completely deny them even the most basic rights.<sup>4</sup>

## PART 2

### CARTOGRAPHIC POWER

In this project, we are not interested in going back to the origins of geography and cartography as disciplines – we don’t even want to discuss the basic problem of maps such as the Mercator projection – but we do want to take as a starting point the shared belief in their strategic use as instruments of power. In an inevitable act of synthesis, that intentionally just flies over the history of maps and of mapping, we start our journey directly with the lines drawn to divide and define the West from the East through a new global spatial order initiated with the “discovery” of the new world (we could point our fingers to the Spanish-Portuguese Treaty of

Tordesillas and a few others). This is a convenient starting point for our confabulations if we are to agree on the fact that since the end of 15th century and up until the 20th century, Christian and the becoming capitalist Europe in this global order represented the “standard”, the “centre”, the focal norm and the guiding and enlightening civilization, one that understood the “new world” not as an enemy but as a “free space” to conquer. Within this concept of geography, Euro-powers adopted something that has been defined by Carl Schmitt as “global linear thinking”<sup>5</sup>, that is: a relatively superficial understanding of space based on the equation of land and sea surfaces, drawn as soon as the Americas were found by European powers. We could even trace the origins of Europe’s approach in exploiting labour, land, resources predominantly outside of its borders back precisely to these lines, made possible by the fact that legal, moral and political values would change and shift depending on which side of these lines humans would find themselves in (ever thought about the origins of the expression “beyond the line” in international law?). It is with the new spatial order based on states, on divisions in nations, that a new and relevant spatial thinking developed in the Western “Empisphere,” (we are suggesting this new coinage to express the violent mix of geographical spheres with empires) that “began in the 18th century, with the War of Independence and the application of Rousseau’s state of nature to those states freeing themselves from England and Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

“European pre-eminence in cartography and map-making determined what constitutes Africa, regardless of cultural history,”<sup>7</sup> this observation by Ali Mazrui is also reflected in Valentin-Yves Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa*, in which he engages with the conceptualization of the idea of Africa and the continentalization of its identity, through both African and non-African scholarly and literary texts, cartographic imaginations, religious occupation. It highlights how it took precisely European cartography, and all that’s implied in such a discipline, to turn Africa into a continent.<sup>8</sup>

At this point it is important to draw a historical cartographic line from the Berlin Conference through the notion of Eurafrika – a way to integrate African colonies in a federal European project that would constitute a third “power” together with Asia and the Americas – and up to the constitution of the European Union to understand how the relationship between Europe and Africa has been envisioned and constructed to provide Europe with the raw materials that it lacked and needed. Thereby, so the hope, the peace could be kept on the European continent by redistributing its extraction of resources<sup>9</sup>.

3 For a deeper reading please see: Arjun Appadurai. *The Social Life of Things* (New York: New School University, 1996).

4 A central reference in the discussion on this matter is: Carl Schmitt. *Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum* (NY: Telos Press, 2006)

5 [www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/10/59f83dfe4/thousands-cameroonians-seek-refuge-nigeria.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/10/59f83dfe4/thousands-cameroonians-seek-refuge-nigeria.html)

5 Schmitt, pp. 87 -90.

6 Schmitt, p. 100.

7 Ali Mazrui, *The Africans. A Triple Heritage* (BBC publishing, 1986), p.101.

8 Valentin-Yves Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, 1988).

9 For more on the subject of Eurafrika, refer to: Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson. *Eurafrika. The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

In conceiving **G E O G R A P H I E S O F I M A G I - N A T I O N**, we decided to start with a research that examines a timeline on cartographic power, rooted in our current locality here in Berlin, meaning that Berlin, Germany, and the heart of Europe represent a focal point from which and through which to draw these lines. We move non-linearly in an attempt to conceptually group and link ideas as they reoccur in cartographic history. From this body of research and heap of archive material we are faced with the task to present a cartographic reflection that bears witness to the 20th century's reclamations and divisions of cartographic space via anti-colonial independence movements, through the multiplication of international, national and intranational borders and the making of new alliances.

Concurrently, we find ourselves in the 21st century with varied ideations on technologies and practices rooted in cartographic scarification. These technologies —from artificial intelligence to Geographic Information Systems software— are called upon and activated precisely for their histories. We move to and with new technocratic architectures of cartographic powers.

### P A R T 3

#### Y O U W H O A R E N O T O U R S E L V E S <sup>10</sup>

In *The Origin of Others*, Toni Morrison takes the reader through the genealogy of the construction of the other—the psychological, cultural and political work behind the act of othering: of constructing differences that sustain subalternity, slavery and exploitation while divorcing from moral judgement. She describes the need to find an outsider to define oneself and to preserve one's privileges; of the human impulse, since time immemorial, to define those not in our clan or community as the enemy. This enemy is defined by (a perceived) difference - be it gender, race, class, wealth or else - and an impulse that is ultimately "about power and the necessity to control"<sup>11</sup>. As Cherríe Moraga argues in her article "La Güera", many bio-minorities (a recent coinage by Arjun Appadurai, referring to the kind of minorities we speak about here<sup>12</sup>) have been caged in an oppressive imagery that has ultimately also been internalized by the oppressed. But more importantly, as she goes on "it is not really difference the oppressor fears so much as similarity"<sup>13</sup>. They fear the loss of their own privilege, they fear the desires of others for what they themselves fallaciously possess, they fear sameness. "What mimetic desire does the figure of the

oppressed allow the oppressor to resolve by its victimhood?" Arjun Appadurai recently asked?<sup>14</sup> The other, writes Ta-Nehisi Coates in his introduction to Morrison's *The Origin of Others*, exists beyond the border of the great "belonging", something that contributed to producing the sense of anxiety that brought the white and patriarchal supremacist people of the far rights to politically emerge again in recent elections, in the US as much as in several European countries (Italy, Germany, France, Poland, Austria, Hungary, are just a handful of examples).

In "Race in the Modern World - The Problem of the Color Line", Kwame Anthony Appiah identifies different phases in processes of othering, and particularly in the understanding of race. If issues of racism could already be witnessed from ancient Egypt to Greece - or processes of othering based on what he calls peoplehood (differences between people, for instance between Greeks, Egyptians, Sudanese and so on, that already philosophers like Herodotus wrote abundantly about) - then, what we understand as race in the modern world has its beginning in the 19th century with the understanding of race as a biological fact (hence starting with the birth of biology as a discipline). This conception in this particular historical period meets the making of nations and the raising of nationalism, contributing to the construction of the notion of people biologically belonging to precise geographical locations. Hence a body can be attached to geography, a body is constituted by and through the history of the movement and migration of people. A body is politically important because essentially inherited differences come along with specific psychological, moral and intellectual traits. The division of the colonized (and the colonizing) world, the drawing of boundaries and the making of geographies between the colonizing powers determined during the Berlin Conference in 1884 was equally following a logic based on racial bias rooted in a biological understanding of races and their relation to particular places. We can conclude then, as Appiah writes, that: "If nationalism was the view that natural social groups should come together to form states, then the ideal form of nationalism would bring together people of a single race."<sup>15</sup>

### T H E E N D

#### P L A N E T A R Y B E L O N G I N G

We can witness many phases and diverse theories, through the course of the 20th century that engage with explaining racial differences, geopolitical dissensions and other forms of alterity. Culture, systems of knowledge and of thought can be considered tools for defining the other, and processes of othering.

10 This title is mentioned in bell hooks's *Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination*, when speaking of Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*.  
11 Toni Morrison. *The Origin of Others* (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, Harvard University Press, 2017).  
12 Arjun Appadurai. *The Phantom Heimat* (Keynote Lecture given at S A V V Y Contemporary within the Symposium *CARESSING THE PHANTOM LIMB. 'HEIMAT' - PROGRESSION, REGRESSION, STAGNATION?*, 1 June 2018).  
13 Cherríe Moraga. "La Güera", in *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. (Persephone Press, 1981, p.27).  
14 Appadurai, *Ibidem*.

15 Kwame Anthony Appiah. "Race in the Modern World The Problem of the Color Line", in *Foreign Affairs* (94:2, 2015)

We agree with Appiah in thinking that the importance doesn't lie in defining ethnoracial groups but in understanding the social and cultural processes, the governmental and institutional laws and regulations, the neo-liberal agendas that are attached to them. And this is because, to paraphrase what the activist and politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently synthesized: we can't really think of "a single issue with roots in race that doesn't have economic implications" and we cannot "think of a single economic issue that doesn't have racial implications."<sup>16</sup> Othering, and the comfort of othering, is not about difference but power, the subalternity that derives from othering acts is the effect of the exploitation of difference through many forms. Within today's global conditions under capitalism we could even dare to say with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that the only two castes this has produced are the rich and the poor.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, with this exhibition we engage in a con-fabulation that builds connections between the varied and conflicting uses of imagination in constructing otherness, the role of geography as a tool of power and the ways power stands at the core of processes of othering. We ask how processes of othering are connected to forms of belonging that we could also relate to notions of territoriality and possession. G E O G R A P H I E S O F I M A G I N A T I O N is thought as an exhibition, a research, a time-line and above all a space where artists come together to weave, through very different positions, possible formulas towards a core question bell hooks poses and we want to pose over and over again: how can we – now understood as humanity - find a sense of belonging that will encourage and bring us to "embrace all of the conditions of the world" even beyond the human species and towards the earth as a whole? How can we engage in what Angela Davies calls "planetary belongingness"<sup>18</sup>? How can we stop our impulse to "own, govern and administrate the other"<sup>19</sup>? How can we undo the comfort in othering? Understanding the multiple reasons behind processes of othering can indeed help us undo them, at least in an effort to change "the present by putting it in a different relation to the past."<sup>20</sup>

Maybe we need what Lauren Oya Olamina has in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*<sup>21</sup> – a hyper empathy, a new form of empathy that will let us feel all the pain and all the love of the world, and everything

else that exists in between.<sup>22</sup> An empathy that will allow us to love without possession, to belong without identification

In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, there is one named Fedora – a city connected to desire, but also to love, imagination and possession. Within Fedora there is a museum that contains an innumerable number of crystal globes, all representing the different imaginations and desires the inhabitants projected into the city throughout its history. When talking to the emperor, Marco Polo will conclude:

On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big, stone Fedora and the little Fedoras in glass globes. Not because they are all equally real, but because all are only assumptions.<sup>23</sup>

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16 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez quoted in Raina Lipsitz's portrait *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Fights the Power* (The Nation, 22 June, 2018, [www.thenation.com/article/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-fights-power](http://www.thenation.com/article/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-fights-power)).

17 As mentioned in a recent talk, Spivak gave in Berlin: *Colonial Repercussions/Koloniales Erbe* event series, at Akademie der Künste, 24–26 June, 2018.

18 As mentioned in a recent talk, Davis gave in Berlin: *Colonial Repercussions/Koloniales Erbe* event series, at Akademie der Künste, 24–26 June, 2018.

19 Toni Morrison. *The Origin of Others*, p. 39.

20 Jonathan Arac, ed. *Postmodernism and Politics*, 1986, cited in bell hooks. „Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” 1992, in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Duke University Press, 1997, p. 175).

21 Octavia Butler. *The Parable of Sower* (NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993)

22 Angela Davis, *Ibidem*.

T E X T     Antonia Alampi

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23 Italo Calvino. *Invisible Cities* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1974, original 1972).

## M O R E I N F O R M A T I O N

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S A V V Y Contemporary – The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks – a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. S A V V Y Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

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