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From "Frosty Deposits of White Thirst for Knowledge"

Towards Things and wisdom without Frontiers

Colonial heritage and cooperation

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Fundamental Declaration for the processing of the German colonial period in Africa

We are relieved and sincerely congratulate the new government of the Federal Republic of Germany on having codified the issue of "German colonialism" in its coalition agreement. Our peoples, which were colonized by Germany, have waited for 99 years since 1919 for this chapter of common history to be finally worked out. The manifestation of this political will on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany gives hope that we will learn to explore, educate, voices of all concerned, draw conclusions together, and shape a peaceful present and future on an international level.

1. Processing on the German colonial era in Africa

I would like to thank you all the more for inviting me to the personal opening talk on "Colonial Heritage and Cooperation" in Hamburg. I am happy that this topic, which I hold dear, and already explored 1970 with the play I wrote in German and titled "*Ach, Kamerun, unsere alte deutsche Kolonie!* », along my master thesis « *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in Kamerun – Wie Deutschland in Kamerun seine Kolonialmacht aufbauen konnte 1840-1910* » I wrote in German back in 1970 as well at the Université de Lyon, yes, happy that this topic was approved by the German government now. After all, it's been 48 years that I personally waited with patience, sometimes with anger; after all, since 1919, it has been 99 years that our peoples in Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania and Togo have been waiting for a work-up to begin and the sustained destructuring of society and institutions in our countries with their devastating consequences to be acknowledged. The trauma of concerted violent European aggression against African peoples, which was structured, financed and executed by the Berlin conference of 1884-85, is still deeply embedded in the psyche of the modern African, although they do not always understand why their innerly extraverted orientation makes them incapable of moving their country forward with greater strength.

The processing of German colonialism cannot be limited to dealing with museum objects. Although the German colonial experience lasted from 1884 to 1919, that is 35 years only, it was ground laying because the destructuring of society and institutions, the reckless and violent introduction of the European system in politics, economics, education, religion, etc. deprived people of their own homeland and turned them into blind obedient objects if they were not systematically hanged or exterminated. The other European powers that later took over these areas after the First World War only refined and deepened the system.

We honor the foresight of some Germans who in the colonial era perceived and denounced colonialism as a crime, whether members of the German Reichstag, lawyers, or journalists; However, we also honor the work of German historian- colleagues, from Helmuth Stöcker as early as 1960 to Jürgen Zimmerer today, who unlike the boasting colonial historians of the second Reich, the Weimar Republic and the third Reich, have ventured to throw a critical look at the crime committed in Africa on behalf of the German Reich. We as well honor politicians of today's Federal Republic of Germany, lawyers, journalists and other activists because they have not subsided until this topic was put on the table. We also honor the contribution of the German section of AfricAvenir International with its partners with great satisfaction, for tirelessly denouncing yesterday's colonialism and today's racism. Thanks to this great commitment of various people and organizations in Berlin the pit bank named after a slave trader was renamed May Ayim bank, in honor of the anti-colonial poet. The Nachtigal Platz in honor of the colonial acquirer will soon be renamed Rudolf Duala Manga Bell Platz, in memory of the leading resistance fighter before the First World War in Cameroon.

After the independence and the establishment of university facilities with departments of history here and there in the African countries researched has been carried out over the German colonialism, with great difficulties, however, particularly since German was no longer the colonial and educational language, the African academics were trained in English or French and the gothic writing in the archives presented another hurdle. Some African academics of German departments have taken up this topic, but the research field "German colonial period" remains closed as for African historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, art historians, musicologists, etc.

2. On focusing on dealing with museum objects

two questions must be raised and answered:

Question 1: *Did Europe or Germany have a tradition of ethnological museums before the colonial invasion of European powers around 1884?* The answer is clearly NO. These ethnological museums were founded at the time of European expansion in the 19th century to bring and display purchased, stolen, or with armed force high jacked sacred cult and earmarked cultural objects of foreign peoples to Europe. It then developed a sense of alienation of the objects in the European capitalistic system, and to date, has developed a real market for African cult and cultural objects, mainly dominated by descendants of European plunderers.

This culture of contempt for people thrown down by humankind led in Germany and Europe even to mass spectacles in zoological gardens. Even in winter, you could visit these human-like animals from Africa in the zoo and watch.

Question 2: *Did these African peoples have a museum culture for displaying objects just so visitors could look at them?* The answer is clearly NO. Holy cult objects were kept strictly in spiritual homes or royalty, earmarked cultural "objects" were only brought out on special occasions and were then led away. These "objects" were brought out with music, dance, chanting, painting, even body painting, because life is a wholeness in African philosophy. So there is no art "object" but "objects" to breathe life into, or annihilate life, "objects" to carry social life in the community.

Even over 100 years after the violent introduction of the colonial and European system in Africa, today's Africans still find it hard to set up museums or enter museums to view or admire lifeless, non-functional objects. For many, it would be a waste of money, because life is movement, rhythm and vitality which cannot be locked up in a room or a building.

But the discussion with former European colonial powers in the 21st century is such that they expect the Africans to build museums to even discuss how to deal with the robbed and stolen cult objects that have been deported to Europe. Europeans also prefer to discuss with europeanised, often outrooted Africans, who claim museum and exhibition culture for Africa as well. An uncontroverted African knows exactly where these functional items belong in the 21st century.

3. On a possible cultural cooperation

Cultural co-operation with African countries should be reconsidered both at state and private level. I would like to be content with an example in order to offer a possible basis of cooperation on a private level.

The Fondation AfricAvenir International in Douala, with sections in Berlin, Paris and Vienna, has established a 7-year cultural research and education program 2015-2022, offering opportunities for cooperation. What is this about?

As a university teacher and head of the German department at the University of Yaoundé I, I consolidated two research groups in 1981. One dealt with the translation of basic texts to the German colonial period; this project unfortunately could not be resumed for financial reasons. The second dealt with the memory of the German colonial era. This multidisciplinary group of historians, German studies scholars, political scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and linguists traveled throughout Cameroon from 1981 to 1986 to interview ninety to one-hundred-year-old Cameroonian eyewitnesses of the German colonial era. 176 very old but still mentally alert Cameroonians have recorded their observations and experiences in the German colonial era in their respective Cameroonian languages on tape. In 1986, my research group organized an international conference in Yaoundé on relations with Germany since 1884, with the participation of Ambassadors of the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR, and colleagues such as Helmuth Stoecker of Humboldt University, or the Federal Republic of Germany such as Helmuth Bley, Wolfgang Mommsen, L. Harding, Helmuth Christmann and others from the USA like Ralf Austen, from France like Laburthe Tolra, from Senegal like Amadou Sadj, from Togo like Oloukpona AP, The Cameroonian colleagues Kange Ewane, Bah Thierno, Joseph Mbassi, Antoine Madiba, David Simo, Carl Ebobisse, Joseph Gomsu and myself designed this scientific dialogue event in the presence of selected hundreds of eyewitnesses.

In collaboration between the Fondation AfricAvenir International in Douala and the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv, the interviews of the old eyewitnesses were digitized in 2016 and put on single CDs. The larger project labeled *African Collective Memory*, has been implemented in a collaboration between the Fondation AfricAvenir International and the Gerda Henkel Foundation in Düsseldorf since 2015. These interviews are transcribed in Cameroon in the 20 recorded Cameroonian languages, translated into French, English and German and published. There is currently a 9-volume edition, which is available at the Hamburg Museum Book Table, 40 volumes are planned by the end of 2019. Thus, there is a new basis: History of the German colonial era told by native African witnesses. This puts an end to the one-dimensional source availability, as far as Cameroon is concerned, because so far all research had to rely almost exclusively on German sources.

This multidisciplinary research is supported by the specialized library Cheikh Anta Diop at the Fondation AfricAvenir, as it provides many results from African researchers worldwide.

A multi-disciplinary doctoral school "Heritage & Innovations" has been set up since 2016 at the Fondation AfricAvenir International in Douala in collaboration with the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Cameroonian, African and European universities, based on Africa's scientific heritage in various disciplines, and its linkage with the scientific achievements of the 21st century. These young Africans are to be empowered, based on their historical scientific heritage, to acquire leadership skills for the management of their countries in the 21st century. The program is called "Leadership Management in African Affairs". Two days ago, on May 16, 2018, *Deutsche Welle* conducted a detailed interview with the first doctoral candidates who are now putting their completed doctoral theses at disposal.

A large six-storey multifunctional building is planned that will showcase the evolution of human history from the beginning to the 21st century on three floors, bringing people closer to Africa's contribution to science, culture and arts. Slavery and colonial times, including the German era, will play an important role here as well.

Awareness-raising through a culture of remembrance is regularly and variously practiced by the Fondation Africavenir International in Douala, Berlin, Vienna and soon also in Paris. In parallel with the Fondation, the resistance to colonialism is celebrated by many kings, politicians, intellectuals and the people of Bele Bele in Bonabéri-Douala every August 28th. This in honor to my grandfather, Lock Priso Bell or Kum'a Mbape, on whose throne I am sitting, who on August 28, 1884 was the first in Cameroon to write a letter of refusal to the interim German Consul saying: "Pull that flag down, No man buy we". "Put down this (German) flag, no one has bought us". His royal insignia, which were stolen from his palace by force of arms and arson from this consul, are still waiting in the Munich Museum of Ethnology, now renamed *Museum Fünf Kontinente*. A return to our family is inevitable. We hope that we will be able to celebrate reconciliation in my lifetime, for a sustainable coexistence, for a true peace.