**On the Continuity of Colonial Mentality in Film**

We begin our three-part series focusing on the theme of the continuity of colonial mentality with a classic ethnographical film from 1930. We do not want to accuse the directors Gulla Pfeffer and her camera man Friedrich Dalsheim, who shot their movie in a village in Togo, of having a Eurocentric perspective, quite the opposite. MENSCHEN IM BUSCH (People in the Bush) is most likely the first German film about another culture that consistently assumes the perspective of the people being filmed. It is an odd fact, however, that the film is introduced by Duke Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg, who was the governor of the German colony of Togo from 1912 to 1914. How did that happen? Adolf Friedrich became known for his early expeditions to Africa between 1907 and 1911, which earned him an honorary membership in the Berlin Society of Anthropology. After the First World War, he became the vice president of the German Colonial Society and was a member of the board of the German Kolonialfilm GmbH, which was founded in 1917. We will discuss how his introduction with racist undertones ended up in this film.

Mischa Hedinger assembled his film essay AFRICAN MIRROR (2019) from movies by the late Swiss filmmaker René Gardi. We fast forward to the end of the 1950s, to a time when Gardi defined the image of Africa in the West for more than five decades (Filmforum showed his DIE LETZTEN KARAWANEN in 1987). In his countless books, TV programs broadcast on German and Swiss television, and in his movies, Gardi romanticized beautiful, naked savages and the premodern times they supposedly live in. At its premier in Berlin, AFRICAN MIRROR provoked strong reactions and divided audiences. While some people regarded Hedinger’s montage as a criticism of the colonialist tone of such adventure films, others regarded the film – because it completely refrains from all commentary – as just another reproduction of racist mentality. The movie inspires an exciting discussion on how what we see in the mirror shifts, depending who is looking.

CRACKS IN THE MASK (1997) by Frances Calvert is about the journey of two people from the Torres Strait Islands to several European museums in the search of their country’s masks, none of which can be found in their country of origin. They discover 99 objects in the collection of the museum in Glasgow alone. Their cautious inquiry regarding whether at least a few of them could not be returned is quickly revealed as naive. While the provenance of museum artifacts with a colonial background and their restitution is currently a topic of discussion, the fundamental debate about the logic of the objects remaining where they are is not mentioned. The question of our relationship to ritualistic objects and their spiritual meaning, history, and identity is still unanswered.

Panel discussion

**On the Restitution of Museum Objects**

The current discussions about the restitution of artifacts from colonial eras focus only on whether an object has been appropriated in a war situation, due to structural violence, or whether it was acquired legitimately. This legal debate works with Eurocentric categories that ignore both the original context as well as the current situation in the place of origin and do not take the actual objects and their meanings into account. We will explore this topic by considering the legitimate demands of the cultures of origin.

Participants:

**Dr. Anette Rein** is a journalist specializing in ethnology. She writes for the publications *Museum Aktuell* and *Expotime!*. She is also chair of the German Association of Freelance Ethnologists and the former director of the Museum der Weltkulturen in Frankfurt am Main.

**Tina Brüderlin** is the director of the Ethnology Collection at the Museum Natur und Mensch in Freiburg. She has written several publications about the material culture of the Banna, Bashada, and Hamer in Ethiopia and the Tlingit and Haida in North America.

**Bisrat Negassi** is a curator and artist from Hamburg (to be confirmed)