

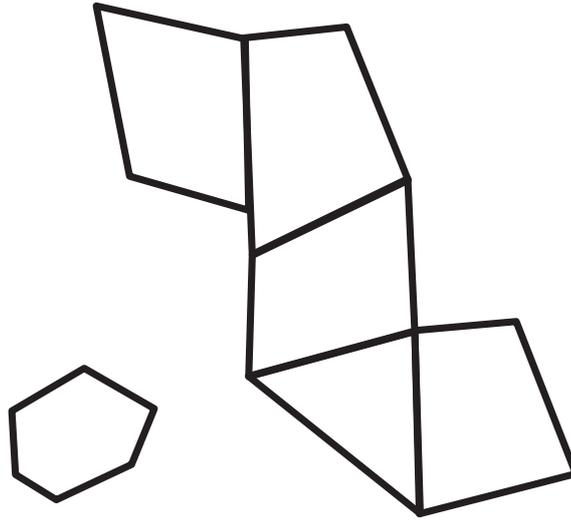
# **DESPITE ALL: Migration to the colonial metropolis Berlin**

Plain English



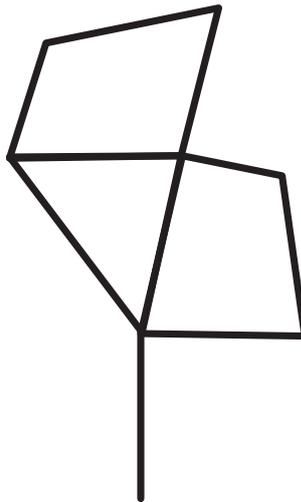
Floor plan .....	S. 5
<b>1.1 – Introduction</b> .....	<b>S. 6</b>
What is migration?	
What is migration in colonialism?	
What is this exhibition about?	
<b>1.2 – What is colonialism?</b> .....	<b>S.10</b>
The German colonial period from 1884 to 1919	
Colonialism before 1884	
Colonialism after 1919	.
<b>2 – How did people come to Berlin?</b> .....	<b>S.12</b>
<b>3 – Policies, borders and rights of migration</b> .....	<b>S.14</b>
Who is allowed to arrive and who is not?	
„Compatriots“: Three families in Berlin	
<b>4 – Relations between Germany and Egypt</b> .....	<b>S.18</b>
<b>5 – Maps</b> .....	<b>S. 20</b>
<b>6 – Migrant organizing and anti-racist resistance</b> .....	<b>S. 21</b>
How did the migrants organize themselves?	
<b>7 – Postcolonial present.</b> .....	<b>S. 23</b>
Is everyone allowed to shape Berlin today?	
Who does it in spite of everything?	
Who made this exhibition?	S. 25

# Floor plan

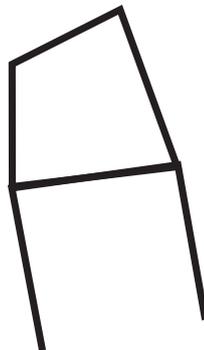


3 – Policies, borders  
and rights of migration  
↗ S. 14

2 – How did people  
come to Berlin?  
↗ S. 12



1.2 – What is colonialism?  
↗ S. 10

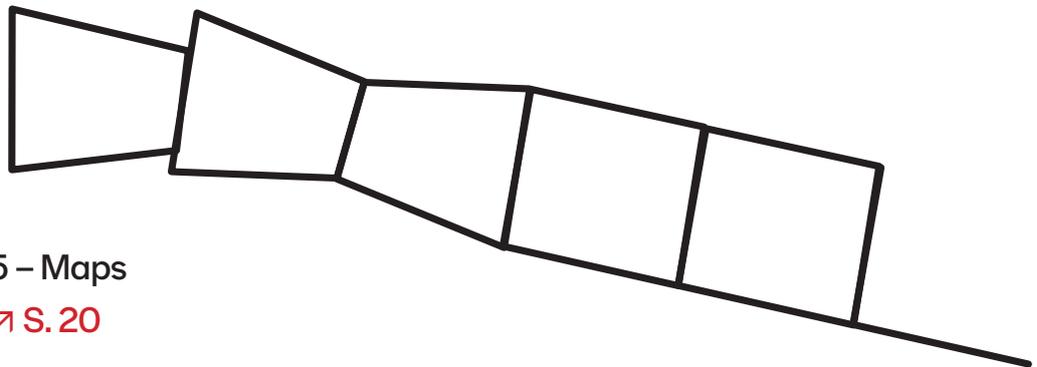


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What is migration?  
↗ S. 6

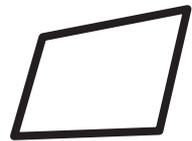


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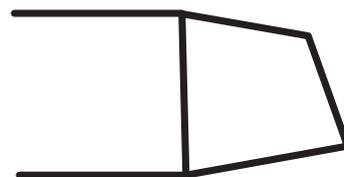
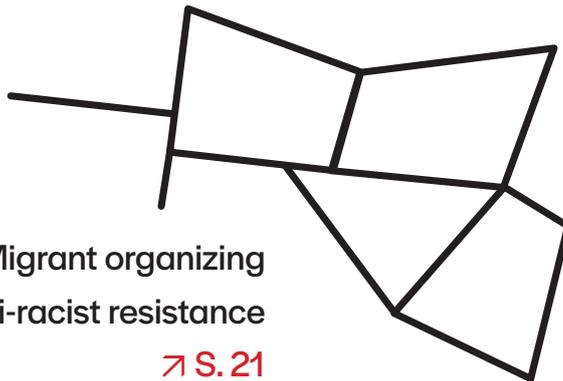
4 – Relations between  
Germany and Egypt  
↗ S. 18



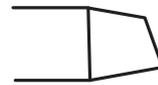
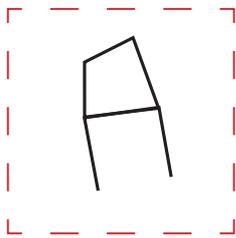
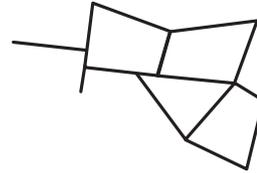
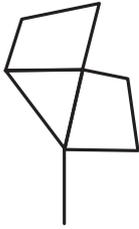
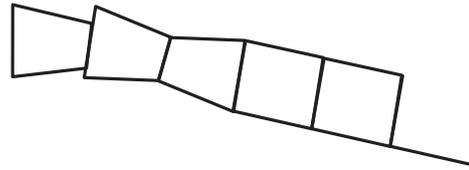
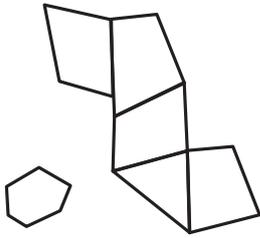
5 – Maps  
↗ S. 20



6 – Migrant organizing  
and anti-racist resistance  
↗ S. 21



8 – Postcolonial present.  
↗ S. 23



## 1.1 – Introduction

### What is migration?

Migration means that people change the center of their lives.

They move to other regions or countries because they want to live better or more safely there. Migration has always existed. It is normal.

And yet it is often seen as a problem. Many find migration a scandal.

Some say migration is a big task.

Migration is an important topic in politics and in society.

There is a lot of talk about:

Some people are referred to as migrants, others are not.

They are treated differently.

People from different countries often get a stamp.

They are seen as different and as strangers.

They don't belong.

They experience different kinds of exclusion.

This exclusion depends on origin, appearance, religion, class and language.

In Germany, people from different countries have different rights and opportunities to determine their own lives.

Since there have been nation states, the origin of the people has become more important.

All of this decides who belongs to the we and who remains a stranger.

## **What is migration in colonialism?**

Hundreds of years ago, people from different countries came to Germany and Berlin.

This exhibition is above all about migration in the period from 1884 to 1919.

This is the time of German colonial rule.

During this time, the then German Empire ruled various countries and regions in Africa, China, the West Pacific and Micronesia.

But it is also about the decades before and after this time.

Because even then and still today, Berlin is a colonial metropolis.

Colonial metropolis means: Berlin is a city with people from countries that were or are being ruled by other powers.

These people shape the development of Berlin.

## **What is this exhibition about?**

In this exhibition we show the daily life and the problems of these people.

We show what opportunities migrants have in life and what rights they have fought for - even if they often had disadvantages due to politics and were excluded because of their origin.

The exhibition shows the many sides of migration and the related problems and tasks.

It is just as diverse as the stories of the people.

Life stories are told that open up new perspectives.

This exhibition also changes the view of the history of Berlin.

The exhibition focuses on the stories of six families:

Boholle family

Egiomue family

Garber family

Soliman family

Taen family

Xie family

There are many photos and documents of these families in the exhibition. However, many other people, groups and stories also appear in between.

The design of the exhibition was specially developed for this theme. The individual stations in the room are connected to each other by long wooden sticks.

The individual pictures and texts are also connected.

All of this is similar to roots.

It shows that our stories are connected, just as the present is connected to the past.

The design also shows: the history of migration and colonialism is diverse and sometimes difficult. It is a story of power and violence.

But also of resistance and struggle against it.

It cannot be told so quickly or in a particular order.

Here history is told from many different perspectives and can also be read from different angles.

That is why there is no fixed order in this exhibition. Visitors can decide for themselves what they want to see.

The texts in the exhibition are also specially designed.

Sometimes there are special signs and lines in the texts.

They are meant to make us think.

## koloniales Wort

Behind the lines there is a colonial word or a violent text.

We want these words or texts to be difficult to read. That way we can think about the meaning when we read it.

Widerstand

This is about resistance and self-determination.

VERBUNDUNGEN

ZLIGEN

The letters have different sizes and they are connected.

So are the stories of people.

## **1.2 What is colonialism?**

### **The German colonial period from 1884 to 1919**

1884 and 1885 was the Berlin „Africa Conference“.

At the conference, the colonial rulers decided on the colonies in Africa.

At that time Germany was an empire and ruled over areas in Africa and the Pacific, that is the ocean between America, Asia and Australia.

There are various island states, some of which were previously ruled by the German Empire.

In addition, the navy of the German Empire also occupied Chinese areas in the Qingdao region.

The occupation of distant regions and countries is called colonialism. It means that countries dominate other countries and regions. These occupied countries became colonies.

### **Colonialism before 1884**

But colonialism existed before 1884.

As early as the early 16th century, merchants from today's Germany traveled to and occupied areas outside of Europe.

In the 17th century, the elector of Brandenburg traded in slaves from today's Ghana. These were people from Africa who were sold as workers to other countries and continents.

In the early 19th century, more and more church representatives came to different countries and wanted to convince the people there of the Christian belief.

In addition, representatives from science, trade and the military take part in expeditions.

They brought objects, plants and goods to Europe.

They also brought animals and people to be studied and displayed dead or alive.

## Colonialism after 1919

German colonialism did not end after World War I, when Germany had to give up its colonies to other countries.

Most political parties wanted the colonies back.

Only the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were against it.

With National Socialism came plans for a huge German colonial empire in Central Africa.

Then the policy of the National Socialists changed and they wanted to rule countries in Eastern Europe.

They wanted to create a so-called "Aryan Habitat".

Only people who were wanted by the National Socialists and who were seen as "pure Germans" were to live there.

For the National Socialists, this was a reason for the war against today's Russia and to conquer Poland.

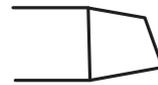
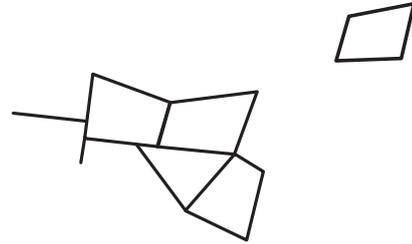
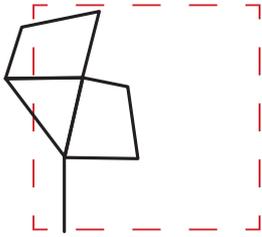
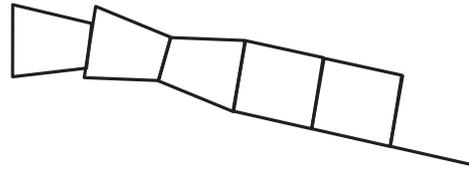
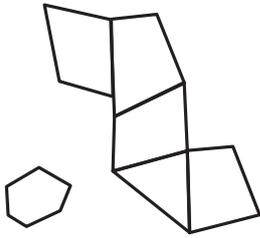
The Second World War led to the expulsion and murder of the local population, many people had to flee.

This German injustice is still noticeable today when traveling in Eastern Europe. But you can also feel it when it comes to politics about migration or in relationships with different countries.

Often the descendants of the victims of expulsion, persecution and murder have not received an apology to this day.

And they were not compensated in money or anything else for the suffering of their families and the crimes of German colonialism.

At this station you will see two videos. In it, descendants of migrants report on their family history and life in Berlin.



## 2 – How did people come to Berlin?

At this station you will get to know people who have come to Berlin for various reasons.

Here you can get to know the Taen family, for example.

They came to Berlin from the Chinese Empire.

Colonial migration came two ways.

People from Europe went to countries they wanted to dominate. Like for example from Germany to Togo.

But people from these countries that were ruled also came to Europe.

For a good 400 years, the movement in this direction involved coercion.

Some were slaves and were forced to make this journey.

Others were prisoners of war and therefore had to go to Berlin.

For Germany, this changed significantly in the second half of the 19th century.

Since then, more and more people have come of their own choice.

They came from countries ruled by other countries.

A few were also from the German colonies.

These people had their own plans for their lives. Many were young men from wealthy families.

They wanted to learn a profession in Germany.

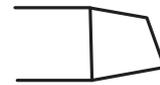
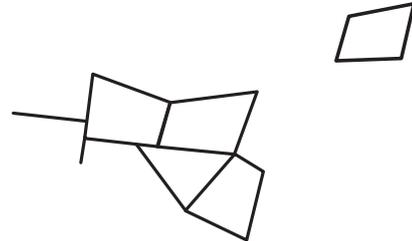
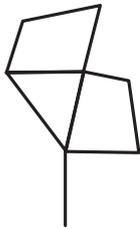
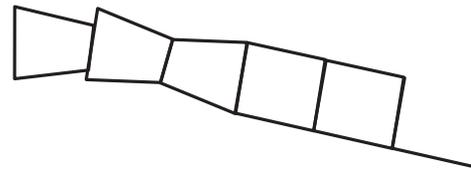
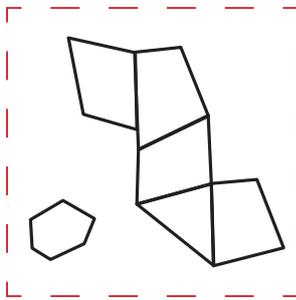
Some taught languages or were guests of the church.

Others had their own companies and businesses.

And some had come to Berlin because they were part of a „Völkerschau“.

This is what exhibitions were called in which people from different countries were shown. Like a human zoo.

The German state didn't want these people to stay, and not all of them wanted to stay either. Nevertheless, some of them founded families, some of which still exist today.



### **3 –Policies, borders and rights of migration**

#### **Who is allowed to arrive and who is not?**

Who is allowed to arrive and who is not?

People from colonies were treated differently in Germany.

They didn't have the same rights as people living in Germany.

People from German colonies mostly came to Germany without ID.

They were members of a German "protected area".

This is how the colonies were called.

The people from the colonies were seen as servants.

Students from China came to Germany with a passport.

Merchants from China mostly had no papers.

Most people from Egypt came to Germany with a passport from the then Ottoman Empire.

This empire included today's Turkey, northern Africa and parts of south-eastern Europe.

People without German citizenship had no right of residence in the German Empire. They could be deported at any time.

That means they were never sure if they were allowed to stay in Germany.

That is why many migrants have always avoided contact with German authorities and the police.

Because they didn't want to be noticed and sent away.

However, they had to go to the office if they wanted to work or get married.

The laws were unclear.

It often depended on the will of the officials whether they approved them working or getting married.

A German passport was important.

Especially in World War I and around the time of the Great Depression of the 1920s.

At that time, a lot of people in the world were unemployed and money was becoming less and less valuable.

A German passport was also very important for migrants during the National Socialist era.

## »Compatriots«: Three families in Berlin

In the summer of 1896, the first German Colonial Exhibition was hosted in the Treptower Park.

At that time, the Treptower Park was not yet part of the Berlin urban area.

There was the "Völkerschau".

That was an exhibition in which over 100 people from German colonies could be seen.

They were displayed like animals in a zoo and not seen as human.

20 of these mostly young men stayed in Germany afterwards.

They came from West Africa.

After this exhibition they worked in Germany or did an apprenticeship.

Among them were Anton M'bonga Egiomue and Josef Bohinge Boholle.

They were both around 17 years old.

They were both from a town called Kribi in Cameroon.

Another is named Joseph Amemenion Garber, whose real surname is Gabba.

He was from the coastal town of Little Popo in Togo, now called Aného.

The three men did an apprenticeship as craftsmen and never returned to West Africa.

They started families in Berlin.

Their families stayed in touch for many years.

They belonged to a small community of Black people in the German Empire.

They called each other compatriots. Even if they come from different regions of Africa and different regions near the Atlantic Ocean.

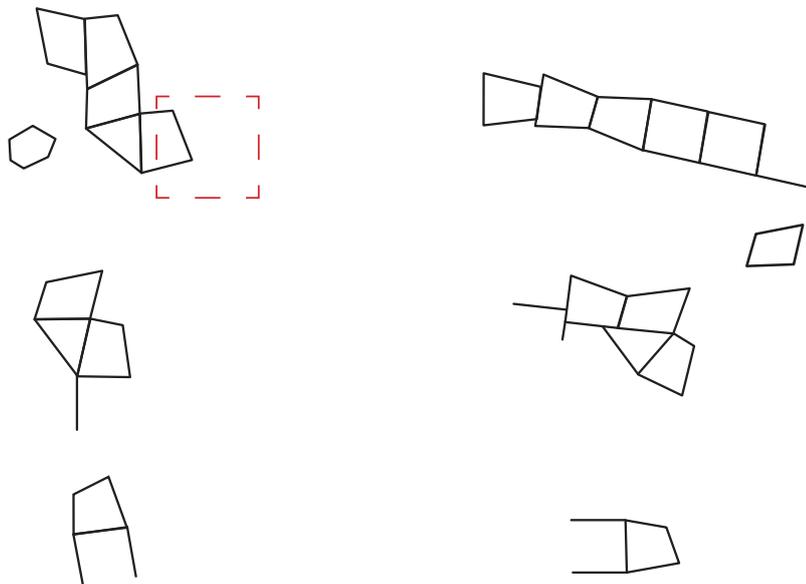
They all had the same experience:

that people are excluded because of the color of their skin.

These experiences brought them together.

They experienced exclusion particularly during the National Socialist era.

At that time their life was threatened.



In the pictures you can see Anton M'bonga Egiomue, Josef Bohinge Boholle and Joseph Amemenion Garber at the First German Colonial Exhibition in Treptow. Felix von Luschan commissioned these pictures.

Many other pictures of people at this "Völkerschau" were also made in his order. Felix von Luschan was a scientist and researched the differences between people of different origins on behalf of museums.

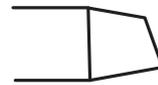
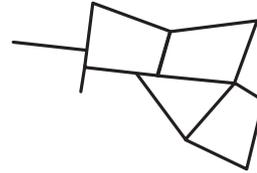
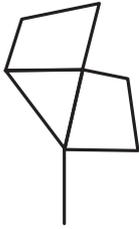
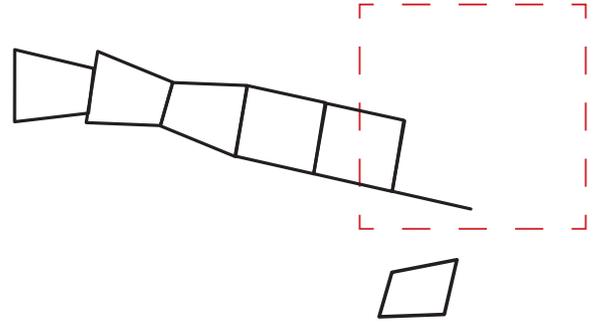
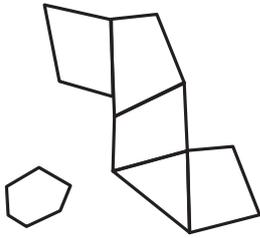
This research was racist.

In his order, the people at the "Völkerschau" should be photographed and measured.

Many didn't want that.

They only did it because they were paid to do it.

In this station you can also see pictures that are from their private family albums.



## 4 – Relations between Germany and Egypt

Egypt has been part of the Ottoman Empire since the late 19th century. Then it came to war with England and since 1882 Great Britain ruled over Egypt. The German Empire viewed Great Britain as an enemy and wanted to weaken it. At the same time, the German Empire wanted to increase its own power. Because of this, they supported people from Egypt who were against the rule by Great Britain and who advocated an Egyptian state.

The German Empire invited these people to Berlin, they could study there and exchange ideas politically.

During World War I, people from Egypt worked for the German Empire and sent news from the region. For example in the news office for the Orient in Berlin.

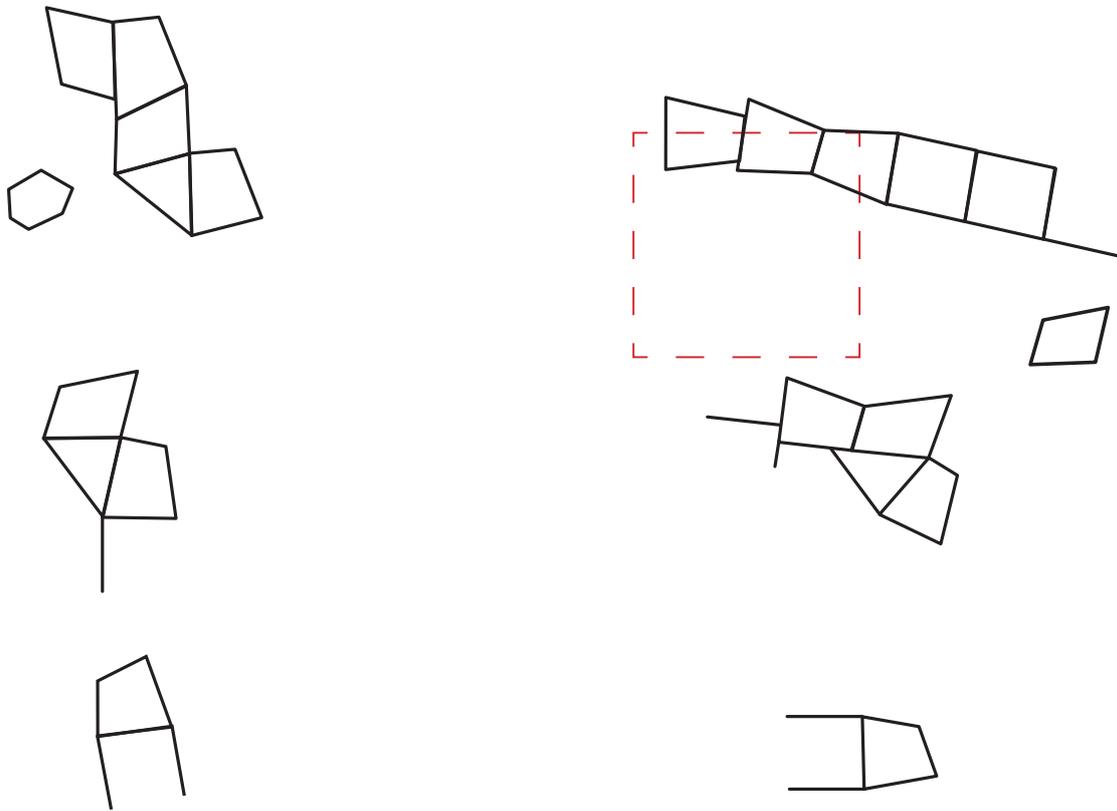
## **Soliman family: Work in the entertainment industry**

At the same time, there were several entertainment groups with artists from different countries, dominated by other countries.

In their performances, they portrayed themselves as „different“ and exotic.

Because that's what the white Europeans wanted to see. Because they liked it. The artists performed with these shows in Germany and Europe.

At this station you will get to know the story of the Egyptian Soliman family. Their family history is closely linked to the entertainment business of the time. Mohamed Soliman had a silent film cinema in Friedrichshain and his daughter Hamida was a singer.



## 5 – Map

People from former colonies have also changed the cityscape of Berlin.

One can still find traces of their life projects in the city.

This includes residential and living spaces as well as workplaces.

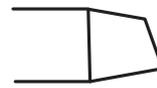
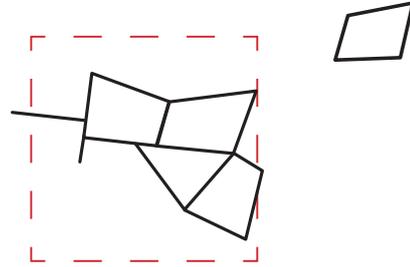
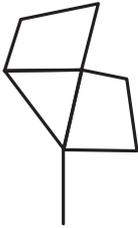
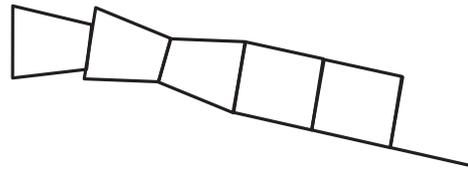
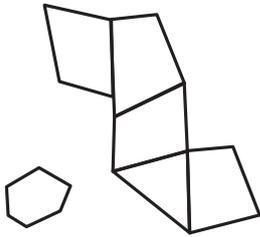
This also includes places where they have resisted exclusion.

This exhibition focuses on the stories of six families: Boholle family, Egiomue family, Garber family, Soliman family, Taen family, Xie family.

On these two maps you can see their living and work places in Berlin.

Here you can also see how and where these people became Berliners and how they got involved in the city's politics.

You can see, for example, that the Boholle family lived in the districts of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Lichtenberg and Neukölln.



## **6 – Migrant organizing and anti-racist resistance**

### **How did the migrants organize themselves?**

This station is about people who fought back.

Such as the Chinese student Cheng.

She was a member of the League Against Colonial Oppression.

You also get to know Martin Dibobe.

He was a train driver on subway line 1.

He joined forces with other Black Berliners.

Together they fought for better working and living conditions.

Just as old as the story of migrants from former colonies is the story of resistance to exclusion.

People were often excluded because of their origin and because of their appearance. They resisted that.

They fought it alone or together.

Their actions were small or larger.

Some supported political actions and movements aimed at political change in the German colonies.

This particularly affected Cameroon.

In addition, many organizations were founded by and for people from different countries in the German Empire.

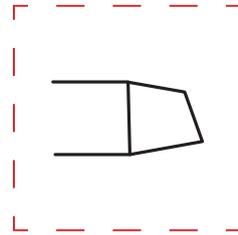
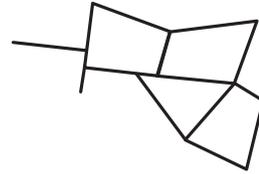
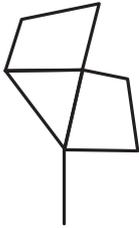
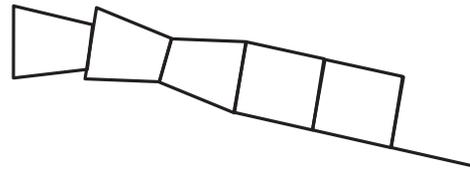
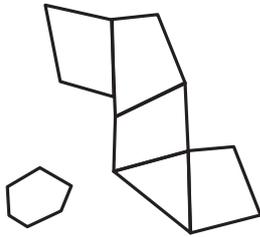
In the time that followed, this turned into political work.

That was during the Weimar Republic.

There was more resistance against the colonial power Germany.

And more and more organizations emerged in Europe and around the world that fought together against colonialism, exclusion and oppression.

These organizations often worked together with communist and socialist parties.



## **7 – Postcolonial present.**

**Is everyone allowed to shape Berlin today?**

**Who does it in spite of everything?**

In Germany, the history of colonialism and migration went unnoticed for a long time. These topics were deliberately suppressed.

That only changed in the 1980s.

The community of migrants has worked for this.

It gave important impulses for their history to be researched and made known.

Refugees from former colonies demanded that the injustices of the colonial era should be talked about.

It should become clear what injustice happened in the past and who is responsible for it.

At the same time, it was and is about preventing domination by other countries.

And they have worked to ensure that all migrants are treated equally and that no one is excluded.

Since the 1990s, it has been about providing information about racism in the German state and giving everyone equal access to their rights.

It is about political rights and it is also about rights and access to knowledge and culture.

Many organizations emerged from the struggles of this period.

Projects were started, there were newspapers and magazines on these topics and networks were founded.

Some of them still exist today.

The migrants fought for their rights, a self-determined memory and political visibility.

This makes it possible to talk about the past differently.

## **Who made this exhibition?**

Many people have worked on this exhibition.

A large team has researched, written texts and searched for pictures.

Many descendants of the families helped.

The exhibition was organized by the FHXB Museum and the project "Decolonial Remembrance Culture in the City".

The design of the exhibition was done by "Visual Intelligence".

A list of all the names can be seen at the first station.

## **Who made this booklet?**

The texts in simple language are translated  
by Marlene Seifert (Schriftgut - Text & Konzeption).

Laura Jousten and Jorinde Splettstößer planned the booklet  
and worked on the texts.

"Visual Intelligence" designed the booklet.

Nicole Halliday helped with the English Translation

