

From the Editor

The content of this special issue of *Nka* partially represents edited and updated papers delivered at the international conference **Rethinking Cosmopolitanism: Africa in Europe | Europe in Africa**, held in Berlin, Germany, at Akademie der Künste, February 2–3, 2013. The conference was organized as a collaboration between Maumaus School of Visual Arts, Lisbon, Portugal; Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; and Akademie der Künste, with generous support from the Goethe-Institut, Lisbon. I had the utmost pleasure coorganizing the conference with my colleagues and dear friends, Joachim Bernauer and Jürgen Bock. To both, and to the above-mentioned institutions, we at *Nka* wish to convey our gratitude and indebtedness for their enthusiasm and extraordinary support of the conference and the publication of its proceedings in this issue.

Rethinking Cosmopolitanism was conceived as a sequel to the 2011 international conference **Modernities in the Making**, held in Dakar, Senegal, which examined Africa's place in modernity and its role in the making of the complex and evolving identities of today's Europe. Decolonization, as the most important event of the mid-twentieth century and after, has complicated these issues by ushering in new geopolitical dislocations. This has led to the rise of a new international order, which, in turn, continues to challenge and expose the insufficiency of classic concepts and definitions of modernity, culture, art, and politics. The Dakar conference provided an opportunity to rethink and challenge the monolithic ways in which the debate on modernity has been cast. In the context of the complex system of exchanges, circulations, and overlapping appropriations ushered by increasing globalization worldwide, this conference considered the impact of this debate on contemporary art in terms of classifications, practices, and exhibitionary regimes, both in Africa and Europe.

The conference in Berlin was in many ways intended to reconfigure concepts of art, culture, and politics through the lens of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, here, is conceived as the need

for members of any community to imagine entities other than their own locales or national boundaries that will be more inclusive on a global scale. It can be perceived as a metaphor for mobility, migrancy, and coexistence with difference, in opposition to parochialism, xenophobia, fixity, and limited notions of sovereignty. The particular focus of this conference was the lasting impact on art and politics of the unfolding relationship between Europe and other parts of the non-Western world. That relationship has been inherently violent due to the nature of European imperialism, and it continues to impede migration flows from Africa and other parts of the world to Europe as well as debates about national European identities and immigration policies that challenge the reality of cosmopolitanism.

The act of rethinking cosmopolitanism takes inspiration from Édouard Glissant's "poetics of relation," the world seen in relation rather than in disconnection, a perspective that affirms and participates in the common ground between seemingly disparate cultures and geographies. In this sense, the concept of *relation* could be used to meditate on new meanings of globalization, chaos, violence, equality, and justice that embrace the pursuit of peace through developing a strong sense of ethics and moral obligation toward other human beings—for example, revisiting notions such as the "right to have rights," as Hannah Arendt articulated in her criticism of human rights from the perspective of "statelessness," a condition that many African migrants continue to embody in Europe. In reconceptualizing cosmopolitanism in this way, even the seemingly adequate conceptual notions of "European," "Western," or "African" art may no longer be helpful. Perhaps these terms need to be dismissed in order to open up a space of debate?

Focusing on the historical and cultural entanglement of Africa and Europe at the intersection of decolonization and modernity, contributors to this special issue of *Nka* consider more adequate definitions of current art practices and their respective ways of envisaging and defining their relationship to distinct but unevenly connected worlds. Expanded with a number of solicited articles that strengthen the theme of cosmopolitanism and make it more encompassing and up-to-date, articles included in this special issue tackle two major interrelated

themes. The first set of articles deals with the theoretical and historical implications of cosmopolitanism in the context of the entanglement of Africa and Europe. These include texts by Susan Buck-Morss and Siegfried Zielinski, which explore the idea of universal history and the relationship of Europe and Africa. Achille Mbembe and Manuela Ribeiro Sanches take the same issues further in critically dislocating Africa and Europe in the context of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and Tejumola Olaniyan proposes what reparations to descendants of slaves might look like from a cosmopolitan perspective. On the other hand, articles by Fatima El-Tayeb and Hans Belting examine the consequences of modernism and the rise of postcolonial studies on museums and the very idea of modernity.

The second set of texts focuses on cultural and artistic practices and the politics of representation in the context of the interconnectedness of Africa and Europe. For example, Sandy Prita Meier's text tackles such themes through the intersection of photography, architecture, and cosmopolitanism in East Africa and the Indian Ocean, while Selene Wendt's article and mine have sought to pursue similar themes in the visual and performing arts and their relationship to contemporary curatorial practices and their political and aesthetic implications.

Finally, an important focus of this collection is the practice of artists who can no longer be classified and located as either inside or outside the "West," or as occupying an "in-between" space. Artists have been at the forefront of highlighting the risky terrain of crossing from Africa to Europe and the West. They have brought attention to the conditions of temporary or permanent residency for sub-Saharan immigrants in Europe, to which minimal coverage has been given by the global media. For the last decade, artists of diverse backgrounds have been working on the topics of migration and dislocation from different points of view in various media, ranging from painting to film to new media-based works, and from the documentary to the conceptual. Some of their work has been transmitted broadly via exhibitions and others through public platforms such as the Internet. This is why we made sure to invite two artists, Berni Searle and Bahia Shehab, to reflect on their practice in relation to the above-mentioned issues. The visual essays by Searle and

Shehab included in this issue reflect their critical engagement with the manifestations of the crisis of the postcolonial nation-state, including corruption, social and political mobilization, increased migration, and the rise of anti-immigrant policies and politics. The solicited essay by Naminata Diabate brings to the fore the practice of black feminism in the performative and photographic practices of diasporic African artists such as Dineo Seshee Bopape and Berni Searle. The work of these artists bears witness to both trauma and affirmation, tilting toward black nakedness as a site of vitality and pleasure that challenges the narrative of pain.

Overall, the collective scope of this issue seeks to establish a platform for knowledge production that can fill the glaring gaps in understanding the cultural and political dynamics of a world in motion. It also considers the consequences of the historical, cultural, and artistic entanglement of Africa and Europe at the intersection of modernity, decolonization, and new migrations.

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