Open Letter to the University Board at the University of Bayreuth

In early January 2021, Dr. Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, a member of the state parliament in Saxony-Anhalt for the populist far-right AfD party, triggered a flow of racist and sexist invectives against Prof. Dr. Maureen Maisha Auma, who holds the professorship for Childhood and Diversity Studies at the Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal. Picking up on Prof. Auma's observation in an interview with the German daily *DerTagesspiegel* about the severe underrepresentation of Black and People of Color (BPoC) scholars at German universities, Dr. Tillschneider has accused her of "reverse racism against white people" and demanded that she should be "put in her place," thus implying that being Black is incompatible with being German and having the right to shape German academic landscapes.

More than other universities in Germany, some of which already publicly affirmed their support of Prof. Auma, the University of Bayreuth (UBT) needs to take a clear and unequivocal stance in this matter. This urgency stems from the fact that Dr. Tillschneider has the status of a *Privatdozent* at the Faculty of Languages and Literatures, which makes him an affiliate of our university with a one-course teaching load per academic year. Also, the UBT is home to the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, a flagship institution on our campus that enjoys a wide international reputation in African Studies and has hosted Prof. Auma on several occasions. As part of its agenda of reconfiguring African Studies, the cluster actively seeks to contribute to changing the researcher demographics in German higher education by increasing the number of BPoC scholars in academic positions. Even though Dr. Tillschneider has targeted Prof. Auma directly and personally, his outrageous assault is equally directed against all BPoC scholars and, by extension, against a research community such as the Africa Multiple Cluster that is firmly committed to creating a transformative space in African Studies and academia more broadly.

We, the signatories of this open letter from professors, lecturers, researchers, students, and staff at the UBT as well as members of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence based at the African Cluster Centres and other universities, acknowledge that keeping silent amounts to being complicit in Dr. Tillschneider's abuse of white privilege. Following 772 academics from Germany who signed an open letter to the president of the *Deutsche Hochschulverband*, and over 300 international signatories of an open letter to the leadership of the University of Bayreuth, we hereby express our solidarity with Prof. Auma. We stand with her, we commend her intellectual rigor, outstanding scholarship and political conscientiousness, and we strongly defend her right to critique structural inequalities and exclusionary practices in higher education contexts in Germany.

Moreover, we strongly believe that our university leadership must not condone this appalling attempt to threaten and intimidate one of the few Black professors in Germany and, by extension, all BPoC scholars and students at the UBT and in the German academic system. While we understand that possible sanctions against Dr. Tillschneider are pending as long as his violation of the UBT anti-discrimination guidelines is under investigation, we do see the necessity for the UBT leadership to take a public stance and renew our university's commitment to the principles of equality and diversity. Members of the University Board, we ask you to take up your responsibility to implement these principles and values, and to uphold them against all attempts at racist and sexist oppressions. Affirming the UBT's credibility is even more important against the backdrop of the promise to create a "climate of tolerance and appreciation," as emphasized in the Structure and Development Plan 2025 and as reflected in the recent adoption of the anti-discrimination guidelines.

Dr. Tillschneider's advocacy of a far-right islamophobe, xenophobe, sexist, racist, exclusionist worldview is the opposite of what we stand for. He is a disgrace to the Faculty of Languages and Literatures, the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, and the UBT as a whole. Therefore, **Dr. Tillschneider's affiliation to our university needs to be terminated,** whether by revoking his status as *Privatdozent* or by urging him to renounce it.

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- 260. Prof. Dr. Kristin Skottki, Junior Professor for Medieval History, University of Bayreuth
- 261. Veronika Rudolf, M.A. student in Intercultural Anglophone Studies, University of Bayreuth
- 262. Lisa-Michelle Helten, B.A. student in Music Theater Studies, University of Bayreuth
- 263. Prof. Ruth Simbao, Rhodes University, South Africa, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 264. Tim Berens, B.A. student in English/History, University of Bayreuth
- 265. Dr. Sulayman K. Sowe, Data Curator, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 266. Frederik Wild, PhD Student, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 267. Gregor Gawor, M.A., Hospitality Officer, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 268. Issa Tamou, PhD student, African Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 269. Dr. T. Michael Mboya, Academic Coordinator, Moi University Eldoret, A member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 270. Eberhard Rothfuß, Prof. Dr., Chair of Social Geography, University of Bayreuth, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 271. Sophie Lembcke, PhD candidate, Research Assistant, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 272. Dr. Saheed Adesumbo Bello, Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Fellow at the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 273. Julius Junginger, M.A. student in International Economics & Governance, student assistant at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies
- 274. Dr. Mosol Kandagor, Kiswahili studies, Moi University Eldoret, Kenya, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 275. Prof. Dr. Michaela Ott, HFBK Hamburg, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 276. Albert Kasanda, PhD, Researcher, Centre of Global Studies (CAS/Prague), member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 277. Dr. Petra C. Steiner, Data Curator, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 278. Samanea Karrfalt, M.A. student in Culture and Society in Africa, student assistant at the Institute of African Studies
- 279. Prof. Dr. Ivo Ritzer, Media Studies, University of Bayreuth, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 280. Ibrahim Bachir Abdoulaye, PhD Candidate, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, University of Bayreuth
- 281. Prof. Dr. Florian Klaeger, English Literature, University of Bayreuth
- 282. Dr. Eesuola Olukayode, Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence

- 283. Dr Lynda Gichanda Spencer, Rhodes University, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 284. Prof. Dr. Alena Rettová, African and Afrophone Philosophies, University of Bayreuth
- 285. Magnus Drebenstedt, M.A. Student, Computer Game Science, University of Bayreuth
- 286. Sandra Zimmermann, M.Sc. Student, Global Change Ecology, University of Bayreuth
- 287. Dr. Maroua El Naggare, Romance and Comparative Literature, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 288. Raphael Guba, B.A. student in Culture and Society in Africa, University of Bayreuth
- 289. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bender, Ethnology, University of Bayreuth, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 290. Dr. Tabea Scharrer, Research Partner at the MPI for Social Anthropology, Fellow at the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 291. Dr. Taibat Lawanson, Urban Planning, University of Lagos, Nigeria, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 292. Dr. Tabea Häberlein, Social Anthropology, University of Bayreuth
- 293. Dr. Ifeoluwa Aboluwade, English Literature, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 294. Prof. Dr. Cyrus Samimi, Climatology, University of Bayreuth, member of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 295. Dr. Christine Scherer, Academic Coordinator, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 296. Celine Malisi, B.A. student in International Economics and Development, University of Bayreuth
- 297. Fatima Ghanem, M.A. student in Etudes Francophones, University of Bayreuth, student assistant in the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
- 298. Albert Legrand KAmga, Anglophone Literatures, University of Bayreuth
- 299. Julia Spitznagel, Schulpädagogik, University of Bayreuth
- 300. Landry-Wilfrid Miampika Moundele, Associate Professor, Universidad de Alcalá, Madrid, Spain, former fellow at the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence