



REMEMBERING AS
RADICAL INCLUSION

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In this short contribution, I sketch three reflexive impulses for conceptualizing learning, remembrance, and commemoration critical of colonialism in hyper-diverse, post-migrant societies. The text is being written at a time of growing socio-political polarization in which geopolitical conflicts over the division of resources, national and global power regimes, and neo-imperialist ambitions are superimposed on struggles for gender rights and fears over the preservation of democratic structures. The key questions for our keynote speech, formulated in the run-up to the symposium *Memory in Motion II*, reflect this search for clarity with respect to struggles over interpretation, the politics of history, and remembrance cultures:

1. What implications arise from a decisively global-historical, decentralized perspective on colonial history, and what meaning does it have for decolonial remembrance praxis as well as (decentralized) sites of learning and remembrance?
2. What specific function could, or should, a (central) site of learning and remembrance for colonialism assume within German commemorative culture?
3. How should this central site of learning and remembrance about colonialism position itself in relation to other sites—nationally or transnationally—and how might it generate intersectional connections, including through its design and material form?
4. In which and whose present would such a site intervene in, whether conceived centrally or decentrally?
5. Who remembers where, and whom or what is remembered? For whom is this site designed, and what does it stand for? What do we need to unlearn, which forms of praxis must we pursue in greater depth, and which methods and theories support this process?¹

1 These key questions were provided to us in advance by Minu Haschemi Yekani, the moderator of our keynote speech at *Memory in Motion II*, titled 'Theorien und Methoden dekolonialer Erinnerungspraktiken: Intersektionale und globalgeschichtliche Ansätze im Kontext eines Lern- und Erinnerungsortes Kolonialismus', Haus der Kulturen der Welt, December 2024.

In this text, I place a special emphasis on the fifth question: I take up Anna Yeboah's introductory thoughts from the Dekoloniale Festival 'The Culture of Remembrance in the City of Berlin'. She opened by formulating an urgent appeal: democratic institutions carry the responsibility for actively shaping sites of remembrance instead of consigning them to obscurity or commercialization. In particular, Yeboah pointed to the Wilhelmstraße remembrance site—the historical location of the Berlin Congo Congress of 1884/85 (and the Imperial Colonial Office)—whose proposed use as a site of decolonial learning and commemoration is threatened by a lack of political support. At the time of the symposium, financing for the site had been withdrawn and there were no concrete plans from the Berlin state government or responsible federal ministry for preserving it as a site to learn about and remember German colonialism. Instead, the site is threatened by commercial development—a bitter setback for the efforts to dig where we stand, to paraphrase the author Sven Lindqvist.²

My contribution is arranged in three sections. In the first, I question the normalizing power of concepts of the conventional archive, remembrance, and commemoration, and call for a radically inclusive perspective that exposes the marginalized geopolitics and body politics found in these concepts while strengthening counter-hegemonic narratives. In the second

section, I reflect on the material foundations of radically inclusive remembrance practices. My focus is on how geopolitical and body-political diversity in learning, remembrance, and commemoration can be strengthened through collectively oriented historical work as well as through archival practices critical of social and power relations. The third and final section explores how radically inclusive conceptions can be sustained over the long term—whether through investment in sustainable structures or the institutionalization of colonial critique.

A. QUESTIONING THE NORMALIZING POWER OF CONVENTIONAL ARCHIVES

Remembrance and commemoration are concepts closely tied to the questions of who controls the management of sources, documentation, and archives, who collects and curates archival material, and which narratives are subsequently legitimized and normalized.³

- 2 See: Sven Lindqvist, 'Grabe, wo Du stehst: Die "Barfußhistoriker" in Schweden', in *Demokratie und Arbeitergeschichte. Jahrbuch 3* (1983): 9–13; see also: Sven Lindqvist, *Grabe, wo du stehst: Handbuch zur Erforschung der eigenen Geschichte* (Bonn: Dietz, 1989).
- 3 Brenda Nyandiko Sanya and Anne Namatsi Lutomia, 'Archives and Collective Memories: Searching for African Women in the Pan-African Imaginary', *Feminist Africa* 20 (2015), 69–76.

Conventional archives—from national libraries to state museums—are selective and structurally exclusive. They frequently privilege dominant historiographies while concealing marginalized perspectives.

Criticism of Elite-Based Historical Cultures and the Coloniality of Archives

As Brenda Nyandiko Sanya and Anne Namatsi Lutomia emphasize in their 2015 article ‘Archives and Collective Memories’, ‘Conventional history-making privileges dominant narratives and silences marginalized others.’⁴ Constructions of history produced by the dominant society tend to reproduce hegemonic narratives, while alternative perspectives and readings of the social world are excluded. Archives are not just stores of knowledge but also instruments of institutional power that stipulate what is considered historically worthy and what not.⁵ The colonial dimension of archives is not only displayed in the choice of what is collected, but also in the manner in which knowledge is organized, made accessible, marginalized, or consciously excluded. Conventional archives grant disproportionate space and visibility to privileged groups—especially those with social, political, or economic power. Women, LGBTQIA+ people, the working class, and groups rendered vulnerable by racism and their contributions to social development are frequently disregarded.⁶ Instead, state-recognized politics of history and archives continue to stabilize hegemonic narratives.

Archives are therefore not just neutral sites of preservation; rather, they are epistemic regimes that normalize individual forms of knowledge often aligned with specific interests while delegitimizing others.⁷ Normative archives—libraries, museums, daily newspapers, and news channels, as well as scientific journals and curricula—function as restricted and restrictive instruments. They generate a distorted and often incomplete picture of society that further cements existing power relations. Control of archives remains in the hands of groups that already enjoy social privilege and that centralize sovereignty over the interpretation of history.⁸

4 Sanya and Lutomia, ‘Archives and Collective Memories’, 70.

5 See: Johanna Heide, ‘Archiv’, in *Gender Glossar*, 2020, gender-glossar.de/a/item/104-archiv.

6 See: Awino Okech, ‘African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality’, in ‘Decolonizing African Studies’, eds. Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks, and Elewani Ramugondo, *Critical African Studies* 12/3 (2020), 313–29; see also: OluTimehin Adegbeye, ‘Who Belongs in a City’, *TED*, August 2017, www.ted.com/talks/olutimehin_adegeye_who_belongs_in_a_city.

7 See: Sanya and Lutomia, ‘Archives and Collective Memories’; and Maisha M. Auma, Katja Kinder, and Peggy Piesche, ‘Kontrapunktische Studien zu Schwarzsein und Schwarzem Europa: Das Schwarze queer-feministische Magazin Afrekete als Wissensarchiv’, *Femina Politica: Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft* 2 (2021), 106–19.

8 Heide, ‘Archiv’.

Radically Inclusive Remembrance Concepts as a Contrapuntal Counter-Strategy

A decolonial praxis of remembrance must be radically inclusive. It must not rely solely on existing archival logics but actively serve the perspectives of marginalized groups.⁹ Subaltern historiographies are not just supplementary; rather, they are decisive for a critical engagement with past and present.¹⁰ A decolonial historical praxis cannot simply wait for institutional reform. Collectively organized history groups, history movements, and local history workshops emerge in opposition to elite-driven constructions of history.¹¹ Such archiving documents social struggles, practices of resistance, and marginalized narratives, for example through digital networking activities. They are not just repositories of documents but living sites for the production of knowledge about resilience.¹²

B. MOVEMENT-BASED ARCHIVES AND THEIR ARCHIVING PRACTICES

The historical traces of themes of interest to citizens are looked for on one's own doorstep: street names, cemeteries, village squares, railway stations. The everyday and the familiar can thus be questioned with respect to migration, post-colonial entanglements, queer life worlds, and ecological developments.¹³

9 Auma, Kinder, and Piesche, 'Kontrapunktische Studien'.

10 See: Alfred G. Frei, 'Geschichte aus den "Graswurzeln"? Geschichtswerkstätten in der historischen Kulturarbeit', *APuZ* 2 (1988), www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/534341/geschichte-aus-den-graswurzeln-geschichtswerkstaetten-in-der-historischen-kulturarbeit/; Corinna Bittner and Lukas Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten: Utopia. Die Zukünfte der Geschichtswissenschaft', *L.I.S.A. Wissenschaftsportal, Gerda Henkel Stiftung*, 24 August 2023, [lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/visiongeschichte_bittner_doil](https://www.lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/visiongeschichte_bittner_doil).

11 Bittner and Doil point to the important contribution of local initiatives who dedicate themselves to the establishment and maintenance of regional archives. They function as a corrective to the praxis of historicization as a 'well-meaning elite project'. See: Bittner and Doil, 'Für eine Geschichte von unten'. See also: Okech, 'African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality'.

12 See: Maisha M. Auma, Katja Kinder, and Peggy Piesche, *Rassismus, Rassismuskritik und Resilienz* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2024); Kemi Fatoba, 'Die Initiative Adefra zeigt Schwarzen Frauen* in Deutschland, was Mut bedeutet', www.vogue.de/lifestyle/artikel/interview-adebra-frauen-die-mut-zeigen.

13 Bittner und Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'.

The history-workshop movement of the 1970s, in accordance with Sven Lindqvist's motto 'Dig where you stand', followed the idea of site-specificity. Accordingly, history is not just documented, it is collectively uncovered and realized.¹⁴ One's own situatedness and one's own embedding in the socio-regional structure becomes the starting point for a search for historical traces. Second-wave feminists took up this situated approach, expanding it to include intersectional, class-critical perspectives.¹⁵ Inspired by feminism, activists understood archival work as more than the mere preservation of historical evidence; they saw it as a political praxis aimed at making marginalized narratives visible. This tradition of knowledge and archive formation was further developed by queer movements as well as by decolonial, intersectional, and anti-racism movements. These groups developed resilient, collective practices that challenged and shifted hegemonic knowledge regimes.¹⁶

These movements' archives are understood as a counter-model or corrective to institutional archives. They not only criticize the absence of multiple perspectives in official archive material and collections, but they also intervene in the archive landscape through their insights into entangled histories.¹⁷ They adopt participative, collective, and experience-based approaches to documentation.¹⁸ By consciously collecting and curating marginalized narratives and making them available, they actively contribute to the democratization of historiography.¹⁹ The archival materials jointly collected, sorted, and evaluated by activists engaged in commemorative practices often pass a lower threshold than official archives. Household account books, photo albums, event flyers, posters, and correspondence and letters from (former) protagonists—from groups impacted by racism on both sides of the Berlin Wall before and after it fell in 1989—are more numerous and enjoy a different status in the private archives of anti-racist initiatives than in official archives.²⁰ This work again makes clear that archiving is

14 Frei, 'Geschichte aus den "Graswurzeln"?'; Bittner und Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'.

15 See: Helga Grubitzsch, 'Frauen machen Geschichte: Aspekte einer feministischen Geschichtsforschung', in *Geschichte entdecken: Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung*, eds. Hannes Heer und Volker Ullrich (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), 150–64.

16 Heer and Ulrich, *Geschichte entdecken*; and Okech, 'African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality'.

17 See: Auma M. Maisha, Eric Otieno Sumba, and Peggy Piesche, "'Reclaiming Our Time" in African Studies: Conversations from the Perspective of the Black Studies Movement in Germany', *Journal of Critical African Studies* 12/3 (2020), 330–53.

18 Fatoba, 'Die Initiative Adefra'.

19 Heide, 'Archiv'.

20 Frei, 'Geschichte aus den "Graswurzeln"?'; De-Zentralbild: Migrant:innen in der DDR, dezentralbild.net/de/; DOMiD – Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland, domid.org/news/vertragsarbeit-in-der-ddr/.

not a neutral act but can either stabilize existing power relationships or call them into question. Particularly in community-based research and practice, archival praxis is not restricted to collecting and categorization but also shapes social debates. Collectively managed archives and history workshops function as spaces of knowledge production in which alternative forms of remembrance are generated. Their initiators—often unpaid activists or locally situated groups—carry out fundamental socially transformative work by experimenting with new forms of archiving and challenging traditional concepts of historiography.²¹

Activist archiving initiatives are important for the deconstruction of hegemonic archives. Informal archives or digitally networked collections often arise from the necessity of safeguarding marginalized memories from disappearance.²² Many of these archives are stored in cellars or private households, or are maintained by independent initiatives.²³ This archival work goes beyond historical reconstruction: it is part of a political strategy of resistance against epistemic violence and hegemonic forms of knowledge production.²⁴ Movement-based archives thus play a decisive role in the diversification and decolonization of archival landscapes. They consciously preserve the histories and memories of groups that are underrepresented, or not represented at all, in academic or state archives.²⁵ At the same time, they often find themselves in precarious situations, both spatially and institutionally.²⁶ Through their choice of themes

21 Auma, Kinder, and Piesche, 'Kontrapunktische Studien'.

22 Bittner und Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'; Fatoba, 'Die Initiative Adefra'.

23 Bittner und Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'.

24 Auma, Kinder, and Piesche, 'Kontrapunktische Studien'; Fatoba, 'Die Initiative Adefra'.

25 Heide, 'Archiv'; Bittner and Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'.

26 Diane Izabiliza, 'Afrekete. Zeitschrift für Afrodeutsche und Schwarze Frauen', in *FFBIZ. Das feministische Archiv*, accessed on 19 February 2025, www.das-feministische-archiv.de/wir-haben-sie-noch-alle/afrekete-zeitung-fuer-afro-deutsche-und-schwarze-frauen; see also: Bittner und Doil, 'Für eine neue Geschichte von unten'.

and participative methods, archives of movements provide an alternative horizon to archive structures shaped by dominance.²⁷ They legitimize forms of knowledge that are marginalized or devalued in traditional archives, including oral testimonies, performances, and alternative media formats.²⁸ This gives rise to independent, often non-state-organized knowledge landscapes that not only document marginalized histories but also actively intervene in social negotiation processes.²⁹

Afrekete as an Archive of a Movement

We see the archive as a location for women to document their lived experiences, and we argue that archiving has great potential to build more inclusive records, histories, and also futures, bringing the ‘margin to the centre’.³⁰

An impressive example of a movement-based archive is the Black queer-feminist magazine *Afrekete*, published in Germany between 1988 and 1990.³¹ *Afrekete* functioned as a shared knowledge archive for Afro-German/Black women and lesbians and, over the course of six issues, documented intersectional, anti-racist, and power-critical perspectives that were generally overlooked or systematically marginalized in dominant archives.³² As Eva von Pirch emphasized

27 See: Peggy Piesche, ‘Inscriptions into the Past, Anticipations of the Future: Audre Lorde and the Black Woman’s Movement in Germany’, in *Audre Lorde’s Transnational Legacies*, eds. Stella Bolaki and Sabine Broeck (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 222–26.

28 Heide, ‘Archiv’.

29 Okech, ‘African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality’.

30 Sanya and Lutomia, ‘Archives and Collective Memories’, 70.

31 Izabiliza, ‘Afrekete’.

32 Auma, Kinder, and Piesche, ‘Kontrapunktische Studien’.

in the second issue, the magazine was an expression of a conscious, collective engagement with the historical marginalization of Black queer-feminist bodies of knowledge.³³ Her phrase ‘surviving in the shadows of history books’ incisively captures this social critique. *Afrekete* was far more than a medium—it was a living archive that preserved knowledge, carried out political education work, and served as a central platform for self-positioning, debate, and networking within the movement. Each issue of *Afrekete* represented transnational Afrodiasporic feminisms, both in its content and visually.³⁴ Produced in Germany, the magazine also had a transnational orientation—an indication of the far-reaching interconnections of Black queer-feminist movements.³⁵ Nevertheless, the structural precarity of movement-based archives—particularly the limited material and temporal resources—eventually led to the magazine’s discontinuation after only two years.³⁶ The short but intensive publication history of *Afrekete* highlights the fragility of non-institutional archives.³⁷ Often relying on the long-term commitment of non-state actors, they operate under vulnerable conditions. At the same time, such archives make a decisive contribution to expanding social archival landscapes by creating alternative cultures of remembrance and making visible who and what should and can be remembered.

C. RADICALLY INCLUSIVE REMEMBRANCE AS AN INSTITUTIONALIZED POLITICS OF RECOGNITION?

Not least, remembrance raises the question of who—based on socially sanctioned resources of recognition, such as street names—is allowed to

33 Eva von Pirch, ‘Schwarzer Feminismus’, *Afrekete* 2 (1988), 34–36. See: ‘Kunst, Politik u.s.w.’, in *Afrekete: Zeitung von afro-deutschen und schwarzen Frauen* 6 (1990). The publishers of *Afrekete* were Adefra Bremen, Elke Jank, and Eva von Pirch c/o Frauenbuchladen Hagazussa e. V. Bremen.

34 See: Katharina Oguntoye, ‘Die Schwarze Deutsche Bewegung und die Frauenbewegung in Deutschland’, *Afrekete* 4 (1989), 3–5, 33–37.

35 Auma, Kinder, and Piesche, ‘Kontrapunktische Studien’.

36 Izabiliza, ‘Afrekete’.

37 Okech, ‘African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality’.

feel a sense of belonging. Which sites of remembrance are visible and accessible in everyday life—and for whom—remains a subject of controversy. The absence of a decolonial site of learning and remembrance on Wilhelmstraße in Berlin highlights the fact that the institutional anchoring of a colonialism-critical politics of remembrance is still lacking in Germany. A post-migrant and post-colonial society must assume responsibility for renegotiating conflicts over resources and identity, as well as processes of recognition within transnational fields of tension. The visions of ‘shared cities und shared memories’, as formulated by OluTimehin Adegbeye in her TED Talk ‘Who Belongs in a City?’, provide impulses for the principled division of social recognition resources and a diversified and decolonized praxis of remembrance.³⁸ It is about shared responsibility and a just distribution of the capacity to feel like an active and valued member of society. Central to this process of negotiation is control over symbolic resources. Adegbeye, as well as Brenda Nyandiko Sanya and Anne Namatsi Lutomia, call for a reorientation in the management and configuration of remembrance, archiving, and commemoration. They demand a praxis consciously shaped by those whose histories have so far been marginalized—*African-led, female-led and subaltern-led imaginaries*.³⁹ In this spirit, the emerging institutionalization of Intersectional Black European Studies—although still precarious—could serve as a foundation for a radical paradigm change.⁴⁰ Remembrance must be understood as a dynamic, conflict-laden process that extends beyond national borders. It requires spaces that facilitate intersectional connections, make geopolitical and body-political diversity visible, and promote pluralized historiographies. Radically inclusive remembrance work therefore demands not only institutional reforms but also the conscious

38 Adegbeye, ‘Who Belongs in a City?’.

39 Sanya and Lutomia, ‘Archives and Collective Memories’, 70.

40 Intersectional Black European Studies (InBEST), intersectionalblackeuropeanstudies.com/. See also: Auma, Sumba, and Piesche, “‘Reclaiming Our Time’ in African Studies’.

unlearning of hegemonic knowledge regimes. Archives must not be seen merely as storage spaces for historical documents; they must also function as active forums for social engagement. They should be spaces in which different social groups can articulate their narratives, share knowledge, and develop alternative cultures of remembrance.

It is only through this processual and participative articulation of archival and remembrance politics that the full social membership of historically excluded groups can be secured and colonial continuities within the politics of history disrupted.

At the same time, an institutionalized politics of recognition must not exhaust itself in symbolic gestures—it must strive for structural change. This includes critical reflection on the distribution of resources, sustainable support for historical initiatives within civil society, and a democratic culture of history that not only includes marginalized perspectives but also recognizes them as constitutive of collective remembrance. A ‘history from below’ requires material and infrastructural resources—financing for spaces, materials, and conservation—in order to secure resilient cultures of remembrance over the long term, and to enable a shared, more just historiography.

Translated from German by Colin Shepherd