



MEMORY IN MOTION

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Indeed, one can say that memory has an ‘existential importance’ for groups and individuals. But while it shapes the present and the future, memory, the meanings of the past(s), and practices of remembering are, in turn, shaped by present contexts, desires, struggles, and aspirations. These are especially significant in contexts of past and continuing violence and inequalities, in the struggle for liberation and the right to self-determination, and in building the narrative of a nation where memory serves as a moral discourse and political tool.

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How, what, and—above all—whom we remember shapes ideas of belonging and non-belonging and has immediate effects on how these ideas are negotiated within politics and society. Memories form and manifest participation in the collective. In conjunction, access to material and immaterial resources is granted, regulated, and distributed. Accordingly, memory—or that which is remembered or not remembered—provides orientation for the imaginations of those who are excluded from this collective, rendered invisible, or consciously marginalized, on both discursive and practical levels. How a society remembers also influences its view of itself as a whole, and of its individual members.

The culture of remembrance in Germany moves within a field of tension between processing the injustices of National Socialism—its central point of reference—and the demands of a changing society. At the same time, National Socialism’s colonial revisionism, the Socialist Unity Party’s anti-colonialism, and the history of the German Democratic Republic, show that plural culture(s) of remembrance require an engagement with different histories of entanglement and contexts of injustice.

Well into the 2000s, remembering Germany’s colonial histories of injustice and violence—and the associated dehumanization—was accorded very little importance in Germany (and in West Germany prior to that). Until then, the political landscape of remembrance was largely shaped by the denial and suppression of this history and its effects at both a local and global level. The term ‘colonial amnesia’ was frequently employed in this context. However, this pathologization of the phenomenon is not entirely

1 Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo, ‘The Past, Present, and Future Entangled: Memory-Work as Decolonial Praxis’, in *The Decolonial Enactments of Community Psychology*, ed. Shose Kessi, Mohammed Seedat, and Shahnaaz Suffla (Cham: Springer International, 2021), pp. 4.

adequate to describe a mechanism whose protagonists acted at times consciously and strategically, at times out of ignorance or indifference.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, transnational perspectives—and the awareness that German history needs to be viewed in a global context—have gained importance in public and political discourses. In parallel, a continual pluralization of society can be observed, which influences the culture and praxis of remembrance. It is against this background that we must view the subsequent efforts of the federal republic for the recognition and reassessment of colonialism, and the associated change in direction of the national politics of remembrance.² The shift described here is reflected not just discursively at the political and scientific level but also concretely in the ways resources are made available. Thus, at the national level, numerous projects, positions, and departments have been founded and developed, and both central and decentralized sites for learning about and remembering colonialism have been planned. In this context, the following was included in the last coalition agreement: ‘German colonial history imparts a special historical responsibility. Consequently, it is an important cultural–political concern of the federal government to critically engage with Germany’s colonial past, to strengthen international cooperation through dialogue with the countries and societies of origin based on partnership, and to return objects from a colonial context.’³

The Federal Foreign Office states: ‘Only those who know and reflect on their past can learn the lessons for the future and shape strong global partnerships. It is not just for this reason that the comprehensive reappraisal of Germany’s colonial past is an important theme for the Federal Government and Federal Foreign Office.’⁴ These developments must be viewed positively. These kinds of processes must be developed and accompanied at different levels to guarantee the necessary

- 2 On this subject, see: Sebastian Conrad, ‘Rückkehr des Verdrängten? Die Erinnerung an den Kolonialismus in Deutschland 1919–2019’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 27 September 2019, www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/297599/rueckkehr-des-verdraengten.
- 3 ‘Aufarbeitung des Kolonialismus’, Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, accessed 17 October 2025, kulturstaatsministerin.de/aufarbeiten-und-erinnern/kolonialismus.
- 4 ‘Aufarbeitung der deutschen Kolonialvergangenheit’, *Auswärtiges Amt*, 7 June 2024, www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aamt/geschichte-des-auswaertigen-amts/2660906-2660906.

mechanisms of participation within the field of decolonization. They must integrate transnational perspectives and voices that are often excluded from discussions and negotiations—a point that has been repeatedly criticized, especially by civil society. This is where *Memory in Motion* comes in: by engaging with the plan to create sites of learning and remembrance for colonialism, the project has implemented formats that connect local and global dimensions and foster dialogue as a part of theoretical and practical reflection.

In January 2023, the first workshop for *Memory in Motion* was held in Hamburg. It was organized by the Historic Museums Foundation Hamburg, the Ministry of Culture and Media Hamburg, and the Advisory Council on the Decolonization of Hamburg in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Civic Education, Decolonize Berlin e. V., Decolonial Memory Culture in the City, and the Berlin City Museum Foundation. Fundamental questions on the development and establishment of sites of learning and remembrance for colonialism in Germany were discussed. Over three days, transnational and interdisciplinary conversations were held on different aspects and forms of post- and decolonial remembrance culture.

Building on these themes, a public event was held in Berlin in December 2024 that drew on the transnational working network on sites of education and memory related to colonialism in Germany. Experts from the fields of science, art, architecture, and urban planning, as well as central stakeholders from institutions and civil society, discussed the forms and content of the German colonialism. The event served as a space for an initial assessment of the two-year collaborative theoretical and working process on the themes of colonialism, coloniality, and decolonial cultures of remembrance. Ideas, visions, and utopian dreams were bundled, processed, and presented. Against the background of current debates on the politics of memory, a space was created in which the forms, content, emotions, and politics of decolonial remembrance could be reflected on and exchanged. As the project's title indicates, remembrance is understood here as a lived praxis—dynamic, multivalent, and constantly changing—encompassing both the remembrance of histories of colonial violence and injustice and histories of movement, as well as theories and practices of resistance. An important strand of the discussion focuses on the (abstract) sites where the work of remembrance takes place—or rather, the sites from which they are drawn and shaped.

Entangled and global historical approaches play a central role in addressing the project's theme. Events in colonial history are analysed in their specificity but also with respect to their interfaces, reciprocal determinations, and relationships. The relational lens is applied both to history itself and to the work and practices of remembrance, as well as to approaches to the conception and shaping of the site—that is, sites of remembrance. This theoretical and practical framework enables one to think beyond hegemonic classifications and divisions and to pay greater attention to intersectional dimensions.

The work of the participating activists, artists, practitioners, scientists, and mediators was guided by the assumption that a corresponding expansion of the political landscape of remembrance makes it possible to tell histories beyond national boundaries and situate them within a global context. As a result, both the interwoven nature of histories across geographical and temporal space and the aforementioned contextuality are made visible, enabling a culture of remembrance that can do justice to a continually changing and increasingly pluralistic society. The focus on these interdependencies and interfaces enables the colonially shaped contours of identity and community to be shifted, redefined, or dissolved, indicating paths for liberating them from rigid and essentializing categorizations and hierarchizations. Thinking through history and the way in which they are analysed, together beyond Eurocentric narratives, also opens up possibilities for imagining cross-community solidarities. The entangled historical approach of *Memory in Motion* thus provides momentum for the development of future narratives in a plural and democratic society. The anthropologist Rosa Castillo has succinctly defined the interactions that coalesce in a place of remembrance as the 'entanglement of memory and imagination, which are both evocative of ideas, emotion, and action. Imagination and memory are closely related.'⁵ Building on these considerations, a further important strand in the discussion addresses the design of concrete, material sites as spaces for activation, encounter, and coming together.

What can such places evoke on a physical, emotional, intellectual, affective, or even spiritual level? What function do these sites have? Where should they be located geographically? Who is imagined as the target group of visitors? How can such sites be designed concretely (also architecturally), and what is their relationship to their immediate environment? What should a topography of remembrance look like when it takes the plurality of society as its starting point and aims to do justice to its demands?

5 Castillo, 'The Past, Present, and Future Entangled'.

This publication appears at a time in which pressure on post- and decolonial perspectives is palpably increasing, both nationally and internationally. Approaches critical of colonialism are not only increasingly coming under attack, they are also being delegitimized and continually questioned. These developments are reflected in the intensification of racist discourses and a general increase in rhetoric hostile to migration. Amnesty International and experts from the United Nations point to the political and social discrediting of critical voices, even to the extent of criminalization, and warn of accompanying repressions.⁶

Globally, the engagement with colonial continuities and the resulting structures of violence and injustice is more necessary than ever. This underscores the urgent task of protecting and developing the discursive spaces of a diverse, decolonial-oriented civil society and scientific community. It is necessary to promote a differentiated culture of remembrance, grounded in solidarity, that unites the local and the global with analytical precision while recognizing their diversity.

Consequently, remembering does not only mean directing one's gaze to the past. It also involves engaging with continuities in colonial and imperialist structures and traditions of thought, as well as the associated dehumanization that continues to shape society, politics, and science, and that are clearly manifest in the current geopolitical situation. Against this backdrop, remembering means creating spaces in which analysis, exchange, learning, critique, and reflection are possible. This volume collects contributions from transdisciplinary experts who were involved in

6 Regarding the recent repression of voices expressing solidarity with Palestine and critiquing Israel's military operations, see: 'UN Experts Urge Germany to Halt Criminalisation and Police Violence Against Palestinian Solidarity Activism', *OHCHR*, 16 October 2025, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-urge-germany-halt-criminalisation-and-police-violence-against; and 'Einschränkung der Versammlungsfreiheit in Deutschland: "Jetzt ist der Moment, um aktiv zu werden"', *Amnesty International*, 13 November 2024, www.amnesty.de/aktuell/deutschland-proteste-palaestina-gaza-israel-einschraenkung-meinungsfreiheit-interview-rechtswissenschaftlerin-nahed-samour.

Memory in Motion. Here, they present their perspectives on building sites for learning about and remembering colonialism in Germany.

The perspectives presented in this publication demonstrate that continual exchange, alongside the active involvement and participation of transnational voices, is essential for establishing sites of learning and remembrance, as well as for fostering a thorough and genuine engagement with colonialism and its aftereffects in all their facets. This was a primary goal of *Memory in Motion*. We would like to extend our warm thanks to all those who contributed to the successful realization of this project and the compiling of this volume.