

GREETING

MERYEM CHOUKRI

At the start of the two-day closed workshop from January 26 to 28, 2023, at Community Space Eeden in Hamburg as part of Memory in Motion, Meryem Choukri welcomed the participants—national and international experts from the fields of science, art, architecture, and urban planning, as well as key players from institutions and civil society.

My name is Meryem Choukri and in the name of the Advisory Board of Decolonization of the city of Hamburg, I am very glad to welcome you all. While I am excited to speak in front of so many distinguished international experts in the field of decolonization and remembrance of colonialism, I am especially happy to greet my colleagues in the process of pushing for responsible remembrance here in Hamburg.

Therefore, I would like to welcome the working group Hamburg Postkolonial, represented here by Hanni Jokinen, Anke Schwarzer, and Madeline Danquah.

I would also like to acknowledge other members of the Board such as Aileen Puhlmann, Kodjo Valentin Glaeser, and Beatrice Angut Oola who are present today. I would have appreciated to see even more of my colleagues here, who have been and are still actively engaged in the processes of decolonization in Hamburg and Germany in general. I am confident we can find ways to include them in future meetings.

We have been debating responsible remembering of the colonial past in this city since before it was cool and trendy to engage with decolonization. This process was initiated decades ago by numerous Black, migrant, and people of colour initiatives, as well as by other civil society groups who have been working on a critical engagement with Germany's colonial history on a national, regional, and local level.

Decolonization is not a top-down process and should also not be an empty phrase. It's about more than installing a critical memorial plaque at the Bismarck statue. Decolonization was always led by the people; no ruling power voluntarily gives up their power. Therefore, any discussion about decolonization and the memory of colonialism must happen in dialogue with the civil society and especially with racialized people who need to be at the centre of these discussions. No place can be 'decolonized', without those who were and are still affected by racism and colonialism today. We need to listen to historically marginalized and oppressed people in order to appropriately remember Germany's past.

We must also not ignore the work that has been done on the grassroots level in specific local contexts. I understand that it might be difficult from an institutional standpoint to engage with various actors, organized in loose networks and groups. But I would like to point out here that this decentrality is a strength and not a weakness. To have any meaningful way

to engage with the colonial past, we have to include as many perspectives as possible. It's important that this dialogue takes place at eye level from the very beginning, because that's also a decisive factor in decolonization. What's more: it's the prerequisite for making this process credible and sustainable.

We all know decolonization is not an easy process. It is also not a marketing campaign. It is messy, uncomfortable work. But we do not engage with the past this intensely for the past's sake or to keep up the good image of Germany as 'Erinnerungsweltmeister'.¹ We tackle these historical injustices to slowly change a lingering colonial mindset. I and many others here do so to change the present and the future, to work towards a society where Black, brown, and other marginalized bodies can feel safe. This is not just about street names, this is absolutely existential.

Before coming to an end, let me reiterate three demands to the *Memory in Motion* network. These also reflect demands that have been expressed by the civil society in Hamburg:

1. I am well aware that this conference does not engage specifically with colonial remembrance in Hamburg. However, we are in Hamburg right now and this event was developed by institutional actors in Hamburg. Let us not forget where we are. Decolonial debates have a global history but are also embedded in local structures. Therefore, I greeted my fellow Hamburg activist first, for we would not meet here without their decade-long work in these fields.
2. In this sense, I urge you to try to include small local organizations and individuals, and especially Black, POC, migrant, and diasporic communities and grassroots organizations in the conversation. What might seem like a great idea at first glance to people that are not rooted in local debates can ignore ongoing discussions that we might not be aware of. Let us think together how we can include these voices in the work of this network during this conference but also in the future.
3. I hope that we can use this space to create a network of solidarity of different civic society actors, groups, artists, and academics working on decolonization and responsible remembering of the colonial past. In my vision, this network of solidarity would ideally not just learn from each other but also actively support each other in our respective local struggles for responsible remembering.

1 *Erinnerungsweltmeister* refers to how Germany has, in the past, been considered to be well versed with national memory work because of its institutionalized memory culture and commemoration of the Holocaust. In recent years, this narrative has fallen under increased scrutiny as Germany is only beginning to recognize its colonial atrocities.

Before passing the mic to Madeline Danquah, let me thank the curational team of *Memory in Motion* for their immense work. I and others saw how much work you put in, how difficult it was for you to move in those white institutional spaces while juggling different expectations and wishes for the conference and network all while resisting tokenism. Thank you to Nana Asafu-Adjei, Ibou Diop, Suy Lan Hopmann, Mèhèza Kalibani, Eric Otieno Sumba, and Iris Rajanayagam.

Thank you so much for your attention!

I am looking forward to engaging in conversations with you all over the next days!