

PLACES OF MEMORY
IN BERLIN

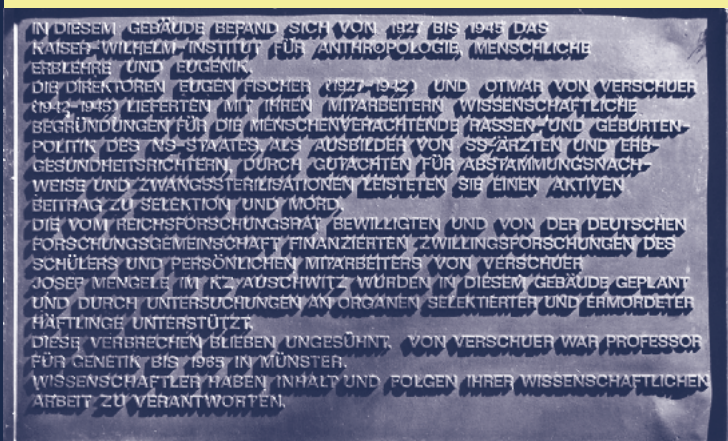
The Ihnestraße Memorial

Manuela Bauche

On 15 October 2024, the Ihnestraße Memorial opened at the Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science at Freie Universität Berlin. The decentralized exhibition critically illuminates the history of the former Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Genetics (KWI-A). The-matizing the connection between science and injustice at the historical site, it also commemorates the institute's victims.

The building at Ihnestraße 22 in the Dahlem district of Berlin, which today houses part of the Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science, was the seat of the KWI-A from 1927–45. Shortly after its founding, the KWI-A became a prominent institute for human genetics and 'race research', already propagating eugenicist ideas during the Weimar Republic. Individual scientists also drew on earlier colonial anthropological research. During National Socialism, researchers supported the Nazi policies of persecuting and exterminating Jews, people with disabilities, and members of other ethnic groups, and participated in these crimes.

The Ihnestraße Memorial was developed by the project 'History of Ihnestraße 22', established in January 2019. The project team consolidated extensive research on the history of the KWI-A and eugenics in Germany and conducted further research to fill gaps in existing knowledge. In consultation with organizations representing relevant victim groups and a scientific advisory board, they developed formats and content for a sensitive visualization of and engagement with the history of the KWI-A and the associated injustices. Since 2024, the Ihnestraße Memorial has been affiliated with the Working Group on University History.



Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered Under National Socialism

Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

In 1992, the German federal government resolved to erect a national memorial commemorating the murder and persecution of European Sinti and Roma under National Socialism. The memorial, designed by the artist Dani Karavan, consists of a fountain with a stone that can be lowered, upon which a fresh flower is placed every day. Informational boards provide details on the exclusion and mass murder of this minority during the Nazi reign of terror. The memorial was presented to the public during a ceremony on 24 October 2012. The artist wrote the following words on the memorial:

A clearing in the Tiergarten, bordered by trees and bushes, close to the Reichstag building. A small, inconspicuous square, secluded from the noise of the metropolis. A place of condolence, a place to feel pain, to remember, and never allow the annihilation of the Sinti and Roma by the Nazi regime to be forgotten. Is such a place even possible? Is the possible perhaps emptiness, nothing? Do I have the strength within me to create a place of nothingness? Where there is nothing. No words, no names, no metal, no stone. Just tears, just water, encircled by the survivors, by those who remember the event, by those who know the horror, and others who do not. They are all reflected here, upside down, in the water of the deep, black pit, while the sky covers them—the water, the tears. Just one single little stone, that sinks and rises, again and again, day after day. And every day a new little flower placed upon it, to remember anew each time, to awaken the memory, steadfastly, for all eternity. The water surrounds the sky, the blue, the grey, the black



sky. The clouds, the light, the darkness. Everything is swallowed up by the swirling water. All that remains of the murdered melody is the sound of a solitary violin, floating in pain.



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Wilhelmstraße 92

Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City

The project space of Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City was located at Wilhelmstraße 92 in Berlin, between the former sites of the Reich Chancellery and the Foreign Office, where the emissaries of the European powers, the United States, and the Ottoman Empire met for the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 at the invitation of the German Reich and the French Republic. Under the chairmanship of Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, they agreed on the rules for the colonial partition and exploitation of the African continent. In 2020, the project Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City had the opportunity to rent a working, seminar, and event space directly at the

site of the Berlin Conference. The reclamation of this historic site was of great importance to the project and marked the starting point for a new, collaborative, and decentralized engagement with German colonialism. The rooms at Wilhelmstraße 92 were used together with the association Decolonize Berlin e.V. Over the course of the project, this space at the site of the former Reich Chancellery established itself as a centre for critical engagement with the colonial past. Through display-window exhibitions such as *Remember. Apologize. Compensate* (2024) and numerous public events, the histories of this symbolically charged site were made visible, supporting demands for recognition of resistance to German and European colonial crimes.

Unfortunately, the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion and the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation were unable to secure the symbolically significant space beyond the duration of the project. The project premises had to be vacated at the turn of 2024/25, following the owner's failure to agree on an extension to the contract. Thus, the socio-political use of the site, which stands, like no other, for Europe's unjust colonial rule in Africa, ended with the model project Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City. Its loss leaves a gaping hole in Berlin's post-colonial remembrance culture.

Wedding–African Quarter

Noël Schepp

Through the renaming of street signs, the neighbourhood in the Wedding district of Berlin is undergoing a process of transformation, from a colonial memorial area to a site of learning and remembrance for colonial resistance and the independence of African nations. The history of the origin of the African Quarter shows that colonialism occupied a prominent position within the public sphere in Germany before it was suppressed in the post-Second World War period. During the forty years of its formation, from 1899 to 1939, the quarter reflected the development and prominence of the German colonial spirit, which formed a constant element in the politically unsettled times.

The initial steps in the creation of the quarter, which was subsequently copied by other cities in Germany (such as Munich, Cologne, and Düsseldorf), took place in 1899. In the largely unbuilt northern perimeter above Seestraße, two streets were named after German colonies of the time, Togo and Cameroon in West Africa. Historians are divided on the precise

initiator of this undertaking. While Ulrich van der Heyden¹ states that it was carried out at the personal request of Kaiser Wilhelm II, other authors, in contrast, point out that the initiative for the naming of the quarter originated from the head of the department for street naming at the time, city councillor Ernst Friedel, who was a supporter of the German colonies². Some people assume that the ‘Animal and People Exhibitor’ Carl Hagenbeck, with his plans to populate the adjoining park—today’s Volkspark Rehberge—with a zoo and so-called ethnographic expositions, was responsible for giving shape to the African Quarter³. However, Hagenbeck presented these plans considerably later, in 1912, and due to the start of the First World War, these plans were never realized.

One after the other, the naming of the streets took place, analogous to the acquisition of the German colonies. However, even after the period of actual colonial rule, the Weimar Republic’s popular colonial-revisionist current led to a renewed intensification of the naming practice. Following the loss of the colonies after the First World War, the theme occupied an even more prominent position within public discourse.

- 1 Ulrich Van der Heyden, “Das Afrikanische Viertel”. In *Kolonialmetropole Berlin*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller. 261–263. Berlin Edition: Berlin 2002, P. 261.
- 2 Christian Kopp and Marius Krohn, “Blues in Schwarz-Weiß: Berlins Black Community im Widerstand gegen kolonialrassistische Straßennamen”. In *Black Berlin: die deutsche Metropole und ihre afrikanische Diaspora in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Oumar Diallo and Joachim Zeller, 219–231. Berlin: Metropol 2013, P. 223.
- 3 Alexander Honold, “Afrikanisches Viertel – Straßennamen als kolonialer Gedächtnisraum”. In *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, 305–321, ed. Birthe Kundrus, Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2003. P. 314.



The only nuance in the colonial logic of the quarter's street names is provided by Ghanastraße, which forms the outer perimeter of the northern section. It was named in 1958 during a visit of the Ghanaian head of state, which had recently become independent. Initiatives for the renaming of especially problematic street names that were named after men who were directly involved in colonial injustices were already launched in the post-Second World War period, and increasingly from the 1980s onwards. Since the turn of the millennium, protests from people of African origin and in the Black community who see the colonial street names as a continual racist provocation have drawn increasing attention. In 2018, after various attempts to find suitable alternatives to the contaminated street names, agreement was reached at the political level to rename the streets after prominent anti-colonial resistance figures.

In 1910, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, the central square in the northern section of the quarter was named in honour of Gustav Nachtigal (1834–1885). He is considered the 'founder' of the colonies of Togo and Cameroon. The square is now named in memory of Emily Engome Dayas (1881–1936) and Rudolf Duala Manga Bell (1873–1914), who, as rulers of Duala in present-day Cameroon, confronted the German colonial authorities. Having been educated in Germany, they possessed knowledge of the language and legal system. This confrontation ultimately led to their execution for 'treason'. The celebratory unveiling of the new street signs in December 2022 was attended by the Cameroonian ambassador as well as the reigning King of Duala, Jean-Yves Eboumbou Douala Bell. Around 1902, the street in the southern half of the quarter running parallel to Müllerstraße was called Lüderitzstraße. Named after Adolf Lüderitz (1834–1886), the son of a tobacco merchant from Bremen, this street, together with Swakopmunder Straße and the Windhukstraße, pays reference to the largest German colony in terms of area: 'German Southwest Africa'⁴. In 2018, the district council of Mitte resolved to change Lüderitzstraße to Cornelius-Fredericks-Straße to recognize the captain of the Nama, who at times led the resistance against the German colonial power in what is today Namibia. In 1904, the Ovaherero ethnic group who are also Indigenous to present-day Namibia, under Samuel Maharero, revolted against the German 'Protection Forces'. This uprising was brutally quashed and ended in the extermination of the majority of the Ovaherero people. In the subsequent guerrilla warfare, which continued for years, Cornelius Fredericks was considered the most dangerous of the colonial regime's adversaries. He died in 1907, one year after the Nama uprising, because of

4 Horst Gründer; *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*. Paderborn/München: Schöningh 1985. P. 163.

the inhumane conditions during his imprisonment in the concentration camp on Lüderitz Bay.

During the unveiling of the street sign in 2022, the Namibian ambassador called for a genuine recognition of the genocide committed against the Nama and Ovaherero people. Considered the first genocide of the twentieth century, it is estimated to have cost the lives of 100,000 people, and ultimately led to the defeat of the resistance against the German colonial power.

According to the 2018 resolution of the Mitte district council, Petersallee was renamed Maji-Maji-Allee and Anna-Mungunda-Allee. Maji-Maji-Allee was to provide a reminder of the mass uprising against German colonial rule in East Africa. In 1905, the people, especially those in the south of the colony, revolted against the Imperial Protection Force for German Africa. This occurred in reaction to the horrendous raising of the poll tax.

The Kiswahili word ‘maji’ means water, which, mixed with maize and millet, was served to the fighters as a medicine. This was thought not only to strengthen the unity of the rebels, but also to make them invulnerable to the bullets of the colonists.

As a result of the uprising, in which the German forces maintained the upper hand—although not without the assistance of African mercenaries, so-called Askari—more than 75,000 people were killed. According to historians, the result of the conflict was as devastating as the uprising of the Nama and Ovaherero in ‘German Southwest Africa’.

The second section of Petersallee was named after Anna ‘Kakurukaze’ Mungunda (1932–1959). She was a member of the Ovaherero, a prominent fighter for the independence of Namibia, and was commemorated with a national grave of honour in Windhoek. She was the first woman to participate in the protests against South African foreign rule. As a result, she was shot by the police and is now considered a national hero in Namibia. The renaming of the streets is the result of the commitment of numerous groups and individuals, such as the association Decolonize Berlin and the Initiative of Black People in Germany. The commemoration of anti-colonial resistance fighters is a further step in the process of decolonization—not just in the urban space of Berlin, but also in Germany’s culture of remembrance.

Translated from German by Colin Shepherd