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Making Germany's Hidden Yet Omnipresent Colonial Past Visible

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ABSTRACT: For thirty years, Berlin was the metropole of the German colonial empire. For most German citizens, however, this statement is relatively unknown. Even though there is an increased interest in decolonial praxis within Berlin-based cultural and educational settings, the persistence of such efforts and their implications within larger society is hard to assess in advance. In response, this text proposes a walking tour through Berlin, highlighting places related to this part of German history. In doing so, it demonstrates the presence of many references to colonialism spread through the city and, more significantly, many initiatives and projects seeking to make this past more visible. By offering an overview of four specific locations within the city, this chapter hopes to critically reflect on the extensive trajectory of the ongoing struggles for historical reparations.

KEYWORDS: German colonialism; Berlin; collective memory; reparations; decolonization

Making Germany's Hidden Yet Omnipresent Colonial Past Visible

ANA CAROLINA SCHVEITZER

Since I moved to the German capital in 2018, I have heard the following statement on a regular basis: Berlin is a multicultural city. There is even a German slang term to refer to Berlin: *Multikulti*. With the recent wave of migration, Berlin has become known for embracing its diverse communities. Yet, this impression is only partially valid. Historically, many groups have been marginalized and their histories silenced. Even today, most of Berlin's museums present a selected view of the country's history, mainly focusing on white German protagonists. In the case of museums with non-European collections, such as the famous Pergamon Museum or the Neues Museum, visitors learn very little about how these objects ended up in this city. Walking through Berlin nowadays, one can learn about the history of the Berlin Wall, the process of reunification, the World Wars, and the tragedy of the Holocaust. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the city's ties to German colonialism.

This text is a walking tour through the city of Berlin. I would like to invite you to look at different parts of the city to unpack the residues of Germany's colonial past, an overlooked theme in German official history.

Let's start.

FIRST STOP — WILHELMSTRASSE 92

If you have ever been to Berlin, you have likely visited this spot. It is just a seven-minute walk from the Brandenburg Gate. On 15 November 1884, it was here that the Congo Conference started in a government building that no longer exists. Otto von Bismarck, the first German chancellor, invited leaders from thirteen nations in Europe and the United States to discuss the colonial policy related to African territories. The conference dispersed, after four months, at the end of February 1885.

The agreements made by imperial powers, including Germany, allowed them to expand their presence in the African continent and further undermine African sovereignty: European nations occupied and divided African territories while establishing new borders that aligned with their colonial projections.¹ Colonial administrations and private companies established a system to extract resources available in the continent while relying on forced labour and extreme conditions of exploitation. The long-term effects of such European colonialist expansion have been felt in the economic, political, and cultural sectors throughout the twentieth century and persist until today.

Indeed, Germany had an active role in this process, for the agreements established during this event — later

1 *Archives of Empire*, ed. by Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, 2 vols (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003–04), II: *The Scramble for Africa* (2004).

called the Berlin Conference — helped to build its overseas empire. From 1884 to 1914, Germany had four colonies in Africa and some protectorates in Asia.² Among its motivations, Germany had a strong interest in expanding its territories and competing with other imperial powers; moreover, it had the support of companies to further develop its colonial project. The usual narratives of German colonialism focus on the economic aspects of the former colonies. In this kind of economic narrative, the colony of German Togo, which nowadays corresponds to the countries of Togo and (a small part of) Ghana, is portrayed as a region solely dedicated to the exportation of palm oil and palm kernels.³ Or, German Cameroon, which today corresponds to the countries of the Republic of Cameroon, (part of) Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo, is reduced to a site of cocoa cultivation and the exploration of rubber. However, the colonial agenda reached far beyond the mere exploitation of natural resources. Studies have shown that this was only possible through extensive violence and the forced exploitation of African labour force.⁴

2 In the Pacific, Germany controlled German New Guinea, part of Samoa, the Bismarck Archipelago, the German Solomon Islands Protectorate, and Kiautschou Bay (located in China). For a brief overview of German colonialism, see Sebastian Conrad, 'Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41 (2013), pp. 543–66 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2013.836352>>.

3 Peter Sebald, *Die deutsche Kolonie Togo 1884–1914: Auswirkungen einer Fremdherrschaft* (Berlin: C. Links, 2013).

4 To give an example, Oestermann's book deeply analyses the exploitation of African workers in the rubber industry in German Cameroon. It demonstrates how the extraction of this colonial commodity by companies was only possible due to an extensive use of the African labour force. See Tristan Oestermann, *Kautschuk und Arbeit in Kamerun unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft 1880–1913* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2023).

Hence, German colonies also became sites of conflict and resistance. More specifically, two colonies experienced brutal wars under the German administration. In the former German East Africa, which comprised the present-day states of Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda, at least 100,000 Africans died between 1905 and 1908 in the Maji-Maji war.⁵ They were first killed by German military violence during the conflict, and then by a devastating famine following the war. The conflict started in the south of Tanzania as a reaction to almost one decade of labour force exploitation/forced labour and abusive head taxes implemented by the German colonial authorities.⁶

Another brutal war took place in German South-West Africa, which today corresponds to the territory of Namibia. This colony became the only settler colony of the German Empire as many Germans moved to these occupied lands. What happened from 1904 to 1908 in this colony is very hard to describe. German authorities led by Gen. Lothar von Trotha — and I believe we must name the responsible — decided not to have war prisoners. Therefore, as a result of his decision, all those who fought against Germans would have to be killed. Herero and Nama — men, women, and children — were thus forced to march through the Omaheke Desert. Later, Germans created concentration camps, where all the survivors were forced to work. Around 80% of the Herero were massacred, and this is now considered the first genocide of the twentieth century. What happened to the Herero and Nama in Namibia

5 James Giblin and Jamie Monson, *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

6 Thaddeus Sunseri, 'The Maji-Maji War, 1905–1907', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. by Thomas Spear (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 1–40 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.154>>.

under German rule remains shocking. Only in 2021, more than one hundred years later, did Germany officially recognize this event as a genocide. There was more than one century of silence.

Anticolonial resistance was present since the early years of colonialism. Kinjikitile Ngwale, a member of the Matumbi people and one of the first leaders of the Maji-Maji war, was killed in the first year of the conflict. Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, Herero and Nama chiefs, became a symbol of anti-colonial struggles in Namibia. Even the Namibian dollar has Witbooi's portrait on the surface. Yet, these names are absent from German official history, such as school textbooks.

As summarized above, the Berlin Conference changed the course of colonialism and the futures of African states, but what we find today at Wilhelmstraße 92 is an inversely proportional representation. For years, the only thing you could find here was a plaque referring to it as a historical marker. The plaque carries a text available in German, English, and French — colonial languages only— in which a short paragraph reminds us of the importance of remembering the violence of a colonial past. Besides this text, one can see three images: a photograph of the former building façade, an 1883 drawing of the conference, and a photo of people in chains, the victims of the genocide promoted by the Germans in Namibia between 1904 and 1908.

Unfortunately, there is little information on the scene about the effects of this conference. The photos of the victims denounce the fact that thirty years of German colonialism left no positive legacy. But since the plaque has not been given much visibility, it is likely that thousands of people have passed by it without ever noticing it.

However, things have changed since I arrived in Berlin in 2018. Most recently, in 2020, different initiatives came

together and created a pilot project called 'Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City'. Located exactly at Wilhelmstraße 92, it represents a 'recovery of this historical place'.⁷ The three initiatives that coordinate this project are *Berlin Postkolonial e. V.*, Each One Teach One (EOTO) *e. V.*, and *Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD-Bund e. V.)*.⁸ The project aims to highlight Berlin's responsibilities as a former colonial metropole and imperial capital. To do so, the organizations have put together scholars, activists, and artists to create new spaces or intervene in historical ones. Moreover, they renarrate the urban history of Berlin as a city where significant migrant diasporic communities from different (post)colonial contexts have resided.

In 2022, the 12th Berlin Biennale focused on addressing the question of how 'colonialism and imperialism continue to operate in the present', and used the space as one of its venues.⁹ During the biennale, the street windows of the location became part of a public installation by Nil Yalter, a Turkish contemporary feminist artist living in Europe, titled *EXILE IS A HARD JOB (1983/2022)* (Figure 1). The same statement, which gave the work its title, was painted on the windows in languages, such as Turkish and Arabic, that are predominantly used by the immigrant population in the city.

As these collaborations demonstrate, Dekoloniale's main goal is to disclose the hidden yet omnipresent German colonial past, promoting conversations and actions

7 'About Us', Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City website: <<https://www.dekoloniale.de/en/about>> [accessed 2 January 2023]

8 In German, 'e. V.' refers to 'eingetragener Verein', which can be translated into English as 'registered association'.

9 'About the 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art', Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art website, 2022 <<https://12.berlinbiennale.de/about/>> [accessed 23 January 2023].



Figure 1. Nil Yalter, *EXILE IS A HARD JOB*, 1983/2022, poster-
ing workshop with Nagham Hammoush and Rüzgâr Buşki. Installation
view: 'Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City', 12th Berlin
Biennale for Contemporary Art, 11 June–18 September 2022. Image
credit: photo by Silke Briel.

about it in the present. Indeed, these collaborations understand colonialism as a system of injustices against which many people from the colonized regions have been fighting, and it is this ongoing struggle that resonates with those fighting against racism in contemporary German society. As Berlin is a former colonial metropole and a present hub of migrants, the cultural institutions within the city have the responsibility of unpacking its colonial past. To this end, the initiatives involved with Dekoloniale try to

address three central themes — memory, visibility, and diversity — by organizing public programmes to reach out to a larger audience. Our first stop, Wilhelmstraße 92, is included in the cinematic and digital city walk that Dekoloniale has organized. ‘Agitprop’ is the name of a current initiative in which Dekoloniale offers a residency programme for artists, designers, and writers. This year, it will concentrate on the districts of Charlottenburg and Wilmersdorf. The outcome is a collaborative exhibition to be held in 2023.

The efforts of this project touch different parts of the city, so let’s follow our itinerary and visit some of these spaces.

SECOND STOP — TREPTOWER PARK AND TREPTOW-KÖPENICK

We are now going out of the ring area to visit our second spot: Treptower Park. People usually visit it to see the Soviet War Memorial, built in 1949, which is not our focus now. Here, more than one hundred years ago, a human zoo was set. However, today the park bears not a single trace of this event. The colonial memory has once again been removed from the view.

In the summer of 1896, almost 7.5 million people went to the city’s Treptower Park to visit the First German Colonial Exhibition.¹⁰ Visitors paid sixty cents to entertain themselves at the expense of almost 106 people (women, men, and children) from the former German colonies who were exploitatively exhibited there. These people were put on display, with a space demarcating where they had to

10 Robbie Aitken, ‘The First German Colonial Exhibition (1896)’, Black Central Europe Studies Network (BCESN) <<https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1850-1914/the-first-german-colonial-exhibition-1896/>> [accessed 2 January 2023].

stand, as if in a zoo. For almost six months, every day, they were featured as part of the event's attractions. Besides the humiliating conditions to which they were exposed, they were offered no appropriate accommodation during their stay in the German capital.

At that time, they used the word *Völkerschau* to describe this event, which could be translated into English as 'ethnic show'. By exposing people and making money in the process, Germany not only objectified the victims but also commodified them. As a large-scale event, the First German Colonial Exhibition was built with the cooperation of many actors and involved politicians, businessmen, clergy, and staff from ethnological and natural science museums. Thus, this historical incidence demonstrates how these institutions reinforce the idea that the colonized people are the 'exotics', the ones to be observed, classified, and studied. As defined by Sandra Koutsoukos, these expositions became 'humiliating spectacles of difference',¹¹ reaffirming racist ideas according to which the people of these regions were both inferior and exotic.

In order to bring back this part of the city's history and to highlight the many people affected by the exhibitions, since 2017 the Museum Treptow-Köpenick has been hosting the exhibition 'Looking Back — *zurückgeschaut*'.¹² The exhibition is dedicated to telling the stories of these 106 people who worked in the First German Colonial Exhibition. In addition to naming these people and tracing some of their life trajectories during and in the aftermath of the 1896 exhibition, visitors can also get a broader picture of thirty

11 Sandra Sofia Machado Koutsoukos, *Zoológicos humanos: gente em exibição na era do imperialismo* (Campinas: Editora da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2020), p. 24.

12 Museum Treptow, Exhibition: '*zurückgeschaut* | Looking back: Die Erste Deutsche Kolonialausstellung von 1896 in Berlin-Treptow' <<https://www.berlin.de/museum-treptow-koepenick/ausstellungen/artikel.649851.php>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

years of German colonialism. The project is the outcome of a cooperation between initiatives such as *Berlin Postkolonial (e. V.)* and *Initiative Schwarze Menschen* (Initiative of Black People in Germany). After a few months of being closed for renovations, the exhibition reopened in October 2021 and became the first permanent exhibition on colonialism, racism, and black resistance in a Berlin museum.

THIRD STOP — AFRICAN QUARTER IN WEDDING

Even though in Treptower Park the vestiges of German colonialism are erased, many survive in the neighbourhood of Wedding. Between 1900 and 1958, the streets and squares around Seestraße and Müllerstraße were renamed. The names chosen refer to former German colonies and individuals who played an important role in German colonial politics. For instance, it is in this part of Berlin that Togostraße (Togo Street) intersects with Sansibarstraße (Zanzibar Street), and Swakopmunder (the name of a town in Namibia) meets Ghanastraße (Ghana Street).

However, it is also here that we find Petersallee (Peters Avenue), named after Carl Peters. As a businessman, he was deeply involved in German colonial politics and held an important position in the German East Africa Company. Petersallee represents the elite that got rich from colonial exploitation. Very similar is the story of Lüderitzstraße, which relates to Adolf Lüderitz, a German merchant who bought an island to the south of Namibia in 1883, marking the beginning of the German occupation in the region. These streets received these names before the First World War, when Germany still had colonies abroad. Today, they symbolize vestiges of the colonial past.

It is not new that many groups have been fighting to change the names of streets, squares, and underground sta-

tions in Berlin. Tanzanian-born Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, who has lived in Berlin for more than three decades, is one of the most active in these movements.¹³ Besides his commitment to reparation and restitution efforts regarding past colonies of Germany, such as Tanzania, Mboro promotes walking tours through the neighbourhood, connecting the colonial past and explaining the names of the streets.

While I am writing this piece, the African Quarter appears again as a topic in the German newspapers.¹⁴ Nachtigalplatz, originally named to celebrate the colonialist Gustav Nachtigal, has been renamed Manga-Bell-Platz to remember the Duala royal couple, Emily and Rudolf Manga Bell, who fought against German colonial rule in Cameroon.¹⁵ In addition, Lüderitzstraße became Cornelius-Fredericks-Straße, the name of an important leader who fought against the German forces during the Herero and Namaqua War (1904–07). It is important to highlight that these decisions for renaming these places took place thanks to efforts by the initiatives briefly described here. Other suggestions include the names of South African singer Miriam Makeba; Queen Nzinga, who controlled the ancient kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba

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- 13 Johannes Odenthal and Judith Weber, Profile of Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, Koloniales Erbe Project Website, 2018 <<https://www.adk.de/de/projekte/2018/koloniales-erbe/symposium-I/teilnehmer/mnyaka-sururu-mboro.htm>> [accessed 27 December 2022].
- 14 Birgit Lotze, 'Afrikanisches Viertel: Deshalb werden Straßen umbenannt', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 29 November 2022 <<https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/mitte/article237030899/Wechsel-im-Afrikanischen-Viertel.html>> [accessed 14 December 2022].
- 15 The Museum am Rothenbaum — Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), in Hamburg, has an excellent exhibition on the life of Rudolf Manga Bell. See: Museum am Rothenbaum — Kulturen und Künste der Welt, 'Hey Hamburg, do you know Duala Manga Bell?'; *exhibition website*: <<https://markk-hamburg.de/ausstellungen/hey-hamburg/>> [accessed 14 December 2022].

(today Angola); and the first African Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai.¹⁶ It is striking that many residents and businesses in these neighbourhoods complain about their address details being changed. These complaints do not diminish the symbolic importance of such changes. Indeed, they underline the urgent need to take more concrete steps towards city-wide decolonization efforts on both official and public terms.

It is time to go to the last stop.

LAST STOP — HUMBOLDT FORUM

So, now we go back to the main street: Unter den Linden. We are standing in front of a new old palace. Yes, you have read it right: 'new old'. The Humboldt Forum is located at the Berliner Palace, which was the royal residence from 1443 to 1918. The bombings of the two World Wars left the structure in disrepair and the administration of the German Democratic Republic decided to demolish it. Later, they erected the Palace of the Republic and called it the 'People's Palace'. From 1976 to 1990, the building hosted significant cultural, political, social, and academic events and became a symbol of East Germany in the heart of Berlin.

In October 1990, the Palace of the Republic was closed to visitors due to its contamination with asbestos. Twelve years after the reunification, in 2002, the German parliament voted not only to demolish the building but also to construct a new cultural complex. This was a very controversial decision since it meant destroying an East German

16 To see the complete list: 'Informationen rund um die Straßenumbenennungen im Afrikanischen Viertel im Wedding, Berlin-Mitte', Bezirksamt Mitte: Fachbereich Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte <<https://www.berlin.de/kunst-und-kultur-mitte/geschichte/afrikanisches-viertel-609903.php>> [accessed 10 January 2023].

monument, erasing a thick layer of city memory. After spending twenty years and almost €680 million, the new building opened its doors to the public.

Now, we are here looking at a majestic palace. There is even a cross placed on the top of its dome. For some, this created controversy for glorifying the German colonial legacy and undermining the religious diversity of the communities that make up Berlin today. Now you might ask me, how does this connect with Germany's colonial past? Why is this the last stop on our tour? The answer is the collection it harbours. The Humboldt Forum is the newest museum on Museum Island and holds the collections of the former Ethnological Museum of Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art.

In recent years, there has been widespread criticism of this new museum.¹⁷ The book *No Humboldt 21!* is an

17 The construction of the Berlin City Palace and the creation of the Humboldt Forum have been the topic of many debates. Regarding the construction, the history of the palace, and the erasing of vestiges of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), see Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, 'The Reconstructed City Palace and Humboldt Forum in Berlin: Restoring Architectural Identity or Distorting the Memory of Historic Spaces?', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25 (2017), pp. 441–54. Scholars have focused on the case of the Humboldt Forum to raise questions about the role of museums and ethnological collections. See Margareta von Oswald, *Working Through Colonial Collections: 'Africa' in Berlin's Humboldt Forum* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022). On the debates on the restitution of African artefacts, provenance research, and the controversy around the colonial legacy of the Humboldt Forum, see Fatima El-Tayeb, 'The Universal Museum: How the New Germany Built its Future on Colonial Amnesia', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 46 (2020), pp. 72–82; Daniel Morat, 'Katalysator wider Willen: Das Humboldt Forum in Berlin und die deutsche Kolonialvergangenheit', *Zeithistorische Forschungen — Studies in Contemporary History*, 16 (2019), pp. 140–53; and George Okello Abungu, 'Die Frage nach Restitution und Rückgabe: Ein Dialog der Interessen', in *(Post)Kolonialismus und Kulturelles Erbe: Internationale Debatten im Humboldt Forum*, ed. by Dortje Fink and Martina Urioste-Buschmann (Munich: Hanser, 2021), pp. 110–31.

outcome of these critiques.¹⁸ Published in 2018, the manuscript brings together interviews, essays, and images resulting from the campaign with the same name, co-sponsored by *AfricAvenir*. This essay collection problematizes the reconstruction of the palace as a survival and celebration of imperialist culture. Authors (scholars and activists) also make demands for restitution and point out the urgency of an equal dialogue that considers the colonial heritage of this new museum. With the slogan 'Tear it down and turn it upside down,' The Coalition of Cultural Workers against the Humboldt Forum (CCWAH) mobilized around these critiques and these demands for restitution in the case of Humboldt Forum. The participation of cultural workers is crucial because they address how the Humboldt Forum owns many items stolen during Germany's colonial era. Moreover, they call their colleagues to take responsibility, as cultural workers, for decolonizing cultural institutions. A fascinating example is the campaign 'I won't participate because...', where they pointed out why collaborating with the Humboldt Forum is far from being a good idea.

Indeed, the opening of the Humboldt Forum has been received by many as a significant obstacle to the process of repatriation of African objects. These protests and debates created public awareness around these issues, which the institution addressed by restructuring the display of the items that were relocated from the ethnographic museum collections. For example, informative texts about colonialism and coloniality now make up the exhibition space, so that visitors can learn a little more about how these collections came to be in the German capital. Moreover, the 'Humboldt Forum Editorial' tries to unpack the issue

18 *No Humboldt 21! — Dekoloniale Einwände gegen das Humboldt Forum*, ed. by Mareike Heller (Berlin: *AfricAvenir International*, 2017).

of how Germany can come to terms with its colonial history. In the volume published in 2021, for example, the statement that connects the nine essays is ‘a world in which coloniality is no longer possible.’¹⁹ Nevertheless, these efforts are very limited and insufficient, especially given that the current cultural landscape displays tendencies for commodifying the decolonial critique itself. It becomes even more contradictory as the Humboldt Forum does not take more concrete steps regarding the efforts for restitution, and as it continues to show Benin bronzes.²⁰

The opening ceremony took place on 22 September 2021. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie made the keynote speech,²¹ in which she emphasized the importance of

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- 19 My translation of: ‘eine Welt, in der Kolonialität nicht mehr möglich ist’. See David Blankenstein, Michael Dieminger, Ibou Diop, Michael Mathis, and Amel Ouaisa, ‘Humboldt Forum Editorial’, *Humboldt Forum Magazine*, 4 (2021) <<https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/magazin/artikel/editorial-eine-welt-in-der-kolonialitaet-nicht-mehr-moeglich-ist/>> [accessed 9 January 2023].
- 20 Benin Bronzes are a group of historical bronze sculptures including decorated cast plaques, commemorative heads, and personal ornaments. Dating back to at least the 16th century, these pieces were originally from the ancient Kingdom of Benin, in present-day Nigeria. In 1897 British forces looted these artefacts, which are still available in museums and private collections throughout Europe. At least 1,100 looted artefacts have been in Germany. The history of the acquisition of these artworks and their intrinsic connection with the colonial past has led to criticism of the exhibition of these objects in European museums. Last year, an agreement between the Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the state of Nigeria decided that one-third of the Benin Bronzes will remain on loan in Berlin for at least ten years. Recently, the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, announced that some of the artworks would be given to the Oba of Benin, Ewuare II, who is considered the original owner and custodian of the heritage and tradition of the former Kingdom of Benin. The Nigerian government has shared plans for the creation of a National Museum of Unity in Abuja.
- 21 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, ‘Keynote Speech on the Occasion of the Opening of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst’, video recording, Humboldt Forum Youtube Channel, 22 September 2021 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMRv5xhMCo4>> [accessed 14 December 2022].

European nations confronting their role in the history of colonial violence. The museum collections are a perfect example for witnessing this violence. The Humboldt Forum alone holds today 20,000 African and Asian artefacts. Adichie drew attention to the importance of the debates on the restitution of these objects and to the fact that concrete action is needed rather than promises. Only actions, such as the return of stolen goods, can promote a reparative process in the long run. In her speech, she also reminded the audience of the value of publicly remembering these violent and violently repressed pasts.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier also gave a speech. He stated that although Germans are historically aware of many of the past events, when it comes to those concerning the German colonial past, there are still 'too many blanks'. His speech did not highlight German responsibility for the violence promoted during the thirty years of colonialism, nor did it highlight how Germany still benefits from its colonial legacies.

It is time to 'change our blindness towards the past'.²² Many activists, institutions, artists, and researchers have stressed the importance of making this colonial past visible. In other words, we need to keep shedding light on the fragments that make up this entangled history. Making Germany's hidden yet omnipresent colonial past visible in official history and everyday life can also help us trace the continuity of ongoing colonial relations in the present. This is of utmost importance for the possibility of restitution, which I believe is a fundamental way of achieving the goal of decolonization.

22 Ibid.

Ana Carolina Schweitzer, 'Making Germany's Hidden Yet Omnipresent Colonial Past Visible', in *Displacing Theory Through the Global South*, ed. by Iracema Dulley and Özgün Eylül İçsen, *Cultural Inquiry*, 29 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2024), pp. 161–76 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-29_11>

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- Memory of Historic Spaces?’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25 (2017), pp. 441–54
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