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Challenging Eurocentrism in Memory and Historiography

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INHALT

Challenging Eurocentrism in Memory and Historiography

Julian zur Lage

History and collective memory are closely interconnected: Historiography as an academic discipline developed out of general memory practices and cultural interaction with the past.[1] Debates on historical events in the media are often fuelled by their relevance to public remembrance, particularly when research contradicts general opinion. While this connection was never truly forgotten, it would receive little attention for the majority of the twentieth century.[2] One particular project turned 'memory' into a major field of contention in European historiography four decades ago: Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Memoire* (1984–1992), on sites of French national memory, created a surge of similar projects for other countries, specific epochs and for overarching themes.[3] A significant number of publications developed out of explicit or implicit opposition to the notion of a predominantly national collective memory and its inherent weaknesses, achieved most prominently by highlighting shared European memories.[4]

The inclusion of global and colonial dimensions in the debate on memory cultures took a few more years to take hold, particularly in Germany – where projects dedicated to this field emerged only in connection with the rise of global history after the turn of the new millennium. Starting in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad as well as Indra Sengupta and Jürgen Zimmerer all published edited volumes on the subject.[5] Nevertheless, Michael Rothberg's ground-break-

1 This chapter is partially based on earlier internal research papers by the author. My thanks to Jürgen Zimmerer, Myriam Gröpl and Kim Sebastian Todzi for their comments and questions.

2 See, for example, the works of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, which only gained real momentum in the second half of the century: Maurice Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch, 1985) [French 1925].

3 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 Vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992); among the projects with a narrower scope see Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp and Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp (eds.), *Erinnerungsorte der Antike* (München: Beck, 2006); Christoph Johannes Markschies and Hubert Wolf (eds.), *Erinnerungsorte des Christentums*, Barbara Schüler (München: Beck, 2010).

4 For example Jacques Morizet and Horst Möller (eds.), *Allemagne – France: Lieux et mémoire d'une histoire commune* (Paris: Michel, 1995); Pim den Boer et al. (eds.), *Europäische Erinnerungsorte*, 3 Vol. (München: Oldenbourg, 2012).

5 Jürgen Zimmerer (ed.), *Verschweigen – erinnern – bewältigen: Vergangenheitspolitik nach 1945 in globaler Perspektive [=Comparativ 14 (2004) 5/6]* (Leipzig: Leipziger Univ.-Verl., 2004); Indra Sengupta (ed.), *Memory, history, and colonialism: Engaging with Pierre Nora in colonial and postcolonial contexts* (London: German Historical Institute, 2009); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.), *Memory in a Global Age*:

ing 2009 study *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* originally received relatively limited attention in Germany.[6] Following the translation of this work into German in 2021, however, debates on Rothberg's work and the connections between collective memories of the Holocaust and colonization spread far beyond just academic circles.[7] A number of other recent publications such as Jürgen Zimmerer's *Erinnerungskämpfe* (*Memory Wars*) or Natan Sznaider's *Fluchtpunkte der Erinnerung* (*Vanishing Points of Memory*) picked up on the issue and connected memory with historiography and politics.[8]

While confirming the continued relevance of memory studies, now with particular focus on the colonial dimension, the sceptical reception of the concept of 'multidirectional memories' demonstrates the necessity to ask: Whose memories are we even talking about? How can we overcome the tendency to focus on the metropolis, even when dealing with the topic of colonialism?[9] *Global Memories of German Colonialism* aims to provide, then, a number of different perspectives from Germany's former colonies which aim to help break the Eurocentric mould.

It may seem paradoxical, in striving to shift perspective on memories, to start once again with the European point of view. However, any attempt to decolonize or globalize memories of colonialism needs to be based on an understanding of the Eurocentric

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Discourses, Practices and Trajectories (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jürgen Zimmerer (ed.), *Kein Platz an der Sonne: Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013); later publications with a similar scope include Dirk Göttsche (ed.), *Memory and Postcolonial Studies: Synergies and New Directions* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019) and recently for France Charles Forsdick, Etienne Achille, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

6 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

7 Among the number of contributions to major outlets: Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Enttabuisiert den Vergleich! Die Geschichtsschreibung globalisieren, das Gedenken pluralisieren: Warum sich die deutsche Erinnerungslandschaft verändern muss.' Originally published in: *Die Zeit* (2021) 14, 31.3.2021 https://www.zeit.de/2021/14/erinnerungskultur-gedenken-pluralisieren-holocaust-vergleich-globalisierung-geschichte/komplettansicht (last accessed 27.7.2024). Much of the academic debate was published by online outlets Geschichte der Gegenwart (https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch, in German, last accessed 27.7.2024), and New Fascism Syllabus (http://newfascismsyllabus.com, in English, last accessed 27.7.2024).

8 Jürgen Zimmerer (ed.), *Erinnerungskämpfe: Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2023); Natan Sznaider, *Fluchtpunkte der Erinnerung: Über die Gegenwart von Holocaust und Kolonialismus* (München: Hanser, 2022).

9 Seminal texts on the issue of Europe as the center in general: Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power [1992]', in David Morley (ed.), *Stuart Hall. Essential Essays, Volume 2. Identity and Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 141–84; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

memorial practices of the last few centuries and the historiography which helped shape them. The following introduction aims to map out this field from the early modern period to the present, drawing on some representative examples of the broader debates.

The connection between historiography and collective memory is in some ways obvious, as neither has ever existed in isolation from the other. However, the aforementioned fact that the return of 'memory' to European academia can be traced back to one major project – the *Lieux de Memoire* – indicates that it is necessary to look beyond the seemingly self-evident. How memory and historiography of colonialism were connected in some ways and disconnected in others is of particular importance to the current state of related debates. A 'colonial amnesia'[10] or 'colonial aphasia'[11] has been diagnosed for both German academia and the broader public for the second half of the twentieth century, when neither paid much attention to the history and the consequences of colonialism. Scholarship on colonialism would, of course, emerge nevertheless, but it was shaped by a disconnect between memory and historiography: European researchers – in History, Geography and Anthropology alike – usually established their claim to objectivity based on the use of written sources and general methodology, while they characterized the memories of the colonized as unreliable or even fictional.[12]

It is of vital importance, therefore, not to perpetuate this hierarchy, requiring the acceptance of memory and historiography as fields on equal footing and ones heavily influencing each other; the former focuses on the public realm, the latter is based in academia. A number of methodological shifts have bridged the gap between historiography and memory over the last few decades, the most important being the establishment of an academic oral history. Nevertheless, despite similar timelines, European and African oral history remain remarkably disconnected.

10 On the relevance of the concept for Germany see Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Introduction: German Colonialism and National Identity', in Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–8, here p. 1; Monika Albrecht, '(Post-) Colonial Amnesia? German Debates on Colonialism and Decolonization in the Post-War Era', in Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds.), *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 187–196.

11 On the concept, originally in the French context, see: Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Disabled Histories and Race in France', in Ann Laura Stoler (ed.), *Duress. Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 122–70, here p. 128. For Germany: Rebekka Habermas, 'Restitutionsdebatten, koloniale Aphasie und die Frage, was Europa ausmacht', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 69/40–42 (2019), pp. 17–22, here p. 18.

12 See Jacques Le Goff, *Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main, New York, Paris: Campus, 1992), p. 131 for similar thoughts on memory in anthropology in relation to history.

Memorials and Memory in Northern Germany: Remembering Colonial Wars

To analyse the history of *German* shared memories of *German* colonialism, it is necessary to identify a field suitable for a case study, where an active, longer-lasting impact on collective memory can be observed. There is not an abundance of cases to choose from here due to 'colonial amnesia'. Most aspects of colonialism have, as noted, received scant attention among the German public, even less so over a longer period of time.

The colonial wars might constitute one of the few exceptions to this, with recurring debates hereon from the Kaiserreich to the present. The 1880s' and 1890s' establishment of the 'Schutzgebiete', the euphemistic term used at the time, was largely conducted by private enterprises and not perceived primarily as a military feat in Germany.[13] Public attention paid to colonialism originally peaked with the anticolonial resistance wars at the turn of the twentieth century. This is particularly true for the suppression of the so-called 'Boxer Rebellion' in China and the Herero and Nama Wars in what is now Namibia, while significantly less interest was paid to the Majimaji Movement in today's Tanzania and the resistance to German colonial rule in West Africa or the Pacific Islands.[14]

The main reason for this imbalance was, to put it bluntly, the number and prominence of White Germans dying in these wars. The German government and public usually treated victims from among the local population with indifference at best, or even welcomed the killing of presumed insurgents and their supporters. This indifference extended to Black soldiers in German service: namely, the '*askaris*' who bore the main burden of fighting in East Africa but who received little recognition in metropolitan imperial Germany.[15] Regarding memorials erected in the colonies themselves, however, their inclusion was more in focus for all colonial powers, as the contribution by Melanie Boieck and Reginald Elias Kirey in this volume demonstrates.

13 On the transfer from private to public control in the case of East Africa, see: Tanja Bührer, 'Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika' (München, Oldenbourg, 2011), pp. 79–86.

14 Joachim Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewußtsein*: *Eine Untersuchung der kolonialdeutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO, 2000), pp. 69f.

15 For several mentions of 'hierarchies' (*Hierarchien*) between fallen White and Black soldiers, see: Stefanie Michels, *Schwarze deutsche Kolonialsoldaten*: *Mehrdeutige Repräsentationsräume und früher Kosmopolitismus in Afrika* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), for example pp. 172, 215. On the role of African soldiers in German East Africa generally, see: Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*: *African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014).

An additional factor for the ethnocentricity of German war memorials and memory was a tradition which had developed since the Napoleonic Wars: Remembrance in the Kaiserreich was often localized, and thus focused on the fallen soldiers of a particular municipality or garrison.[16] As such, memorials generally mentioned only those with a connection to the location in question, usually northern German harbour cities such as Hamburg and Wilhelmshaven in the case of the colonial wars. The former – Germany's biggest urban agglomeration with direct access to the ocean – was home to many soldiers in the naval contingents deployed in the colonial wars, while the latter was one of the main bases of the Imperial Navy.

In both Hamburg and Wilhelmshaven, local authorities cooperated with the imperial government and the Protestant Church to erect memorial plaques in the aftermath of the colonial wars at the turn of the twentieth century. In one of Hamburg's main churches, St. Michaelis (the 'Michel'), a plaque commemorates sons of the city who died 'for Emperor and Empire in China' and 'in Africa'.[17] 'Africa' in this case refers to the colonies in the continent's both south-west and east, with just one soldier in the latter case compared to four soldiers dying in China and ten in Namibia – each mentioned by name, and with some details of service and death being provided. In Wilhelmshaven, meanwhile, a number of memorials covering different colonial wars are to be found, with the most remarkable of them being the one honouring about 30 Germans who died in the Herero and Nama Wars, mentioned with last name and detachment.[18] Both churches also have several memorials for those lost in European wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As evident, the similarities between these two churches' memorial plaques – and quite a few others as well[19] – are significant: beginning with their relatively sparsely documented practices of remembrance from their respective inceptions through the turn of the new millennium, whereupon they were included in general forms of commemoration without special attention being paid to the colonial dimension.[20] The key difference between the

16 On the German memorial tradition in the nineteenth century in general, see: Manfred Hettling, 'Die zwei Körper des toten Soldaten. Gefallenengedenken in Deutschland seit 1800', in Martin Clauss, Ansgar Reiß, and Stefanie Rüther (eds), *Vom Umgang mit den Toten. Sterben im Krieg von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019), pp. 159–162.

17 Author's own translation. For the German text, see photo.

18 See photo.

19 For other examples of colonial war memorials in German churches, see: Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewußtsein* (above, n. 14), p. 69.

20 See the detailed study on the Michel memorial: Karen Stubbemann, *Die Hamburger Große St. Michaeliskirche als postkolonialer Erinnerungsort: Die Gedenktafel für die in den deutschen Kolonialkriegen gestor-*

two memorials has been how each parish has respectively decided to deal with the colonial connections of their churches in the last two decades. In Wilhelmshaven, clergy and parishioners actively campaigned for a key intervention to transform the plaque – and with it, the church – in 2005. Now, the original text is partially covered with photo and text inscribed on translucent glass commemorating the Herero victims of the war. The text might leave the uninformed visitor perplexed, in referencing a supposed Herero quotation:

> When they came to a sand well and there was water, the warriors drank. The women did not drink so that the warriors would have strength to fight. And when they were hungry, the men said to the women: 'The child can die if necessary. I must suck the milk from your breast, because I cannot help it, so that I can fight.'[21]

While clearly highlighting the genocidal thirst and famine German warfare brought upon the Herero, the phrasing raises the question of whether the implied cruelty towards women and children paints the Herero as ultimately responsible for their own demise. The Namibia-shaped cut-out of malnourished prisoners is another possible point of contention, similar to other debates on photos from colonial contexts where the depicted had little leeway to decline participation. The personal dignity of the deceased is at odds with an accurate portrayal of the atrocities in many of these cases, an issue also discussed in reference to the 'colonial gaze' by Vitjitua Ndjiharine and Nashilongweshipwe Sakaria in this volume.[22] However, the adequacy of quote and depiction is not a question for extended deliberation here, and will probably be up for public discussion in the years ahead – as will be the lack of contextualization regarding other plaques featuring in the church. For Wilhelmshaven, one of the cities most influenced by militarism and imperialism in both the Wilhelmine Empire and Nazi Germany, dealing with its past is a matter of ongoing debate.[23]

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benen Hamburger Soldaten ([Unpublished M. A. thesis], Hamburg, 2017), p. 80, for decorations of the plaque in the 1960s.

21 Author's (re-)translation, see photo for the German version.

22 On the approach to 'distort' (Vitjitua Ndjiharine) similar pictures, see also Julia Rensing, 'Ovizire · Somgu: From Where Do We Speak?: Artistic Interventions in the Namibian Colonial Archive (2018–2020)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 48/1 (2022), pp. 81–102, here p. 85. The explicit depiction of victims on the other hand was chosen in the next case, with the photos for St. Michaelis Hamburg by Israel Kaunatjike et al. For this contribution, I consider the small size of the photos-in-the-photos an effective anonymization similar to modern media practices of pixelation.

23 Benno Schirrmeister, 'Wilhelmshavens Last der Vergangenheit: Kolonialer Alptraum', *taz, die tageszeitung – online,* 3.4.2022 https://taz.de/Wilhelmshavens-Last-der-Vergangenheit/!5844372/ (last accessed 27.7.2024).

Fig. 1: Christus- und Garnisonkirche Wilhelmshaven: memorial plaque for German soldiers who died in German South West Africa, partially covered by 2005 memorial for Herero and Nama victims, 2022. Photo: Julian zur Lage.

In Hamburg's Michel, on the other hand, the unsuspecting visitor finds hardly any trace of endeavours to actually *deal* with the colonial past. Its pro-colonial commemorative plaque is to this day still standing in its original state. Not for a lack of trying to change its appearance by civil society, however; the church's clergy and parish have only recently agreed to add a small plate giving some context. Louis-Henri Seukwa, Professor at HAW Hamburg, already demanded intervention in 2002.[24] In 2013, a group headed by German Herero activist Israel Kaunatjike took the opportunity provided by a panel discussion to add framed pictures of German colonial atrocities. While the pictures remained in place for a few years, church clergy eventually removed them in 2016 – according to Kaunatjike, doing so without first consulting the group which had initiated their installation.[25]

24 Louis Henri Seukwa, 'Deutschland muss den Völkermord an Herero und Nama beim Namen nennen.' [Rede vom 18.2.2002, gehalten in der St. Michaelis-Kirche Hamburg], 2018 https://louishenriseukwa.wordpress.com/2018/04/08/deutschland-muss-den-voelkermord-an-herero-und-nama-beim-namen-nennen/ (last accessed 27.7.2024).

25 With thanks to I. Kauntjike for our exchange in September 2019. See also: Anke Schwarzer, 'Eine solche Tafel hat in der Kirche nichts zu suchen.' [Interview mit Israel Kaunatjike, 2020/2021] https://www.re-mapping.eu/de/interviews/israel-kaunatjike (last accessed 27.7.2024).

Fig. 2: St. Michaelis Hamburg: memorial plaque for German soldiers who died in colonial wars with contextualizing images of German atrocities, 2015 (now removed). Photo: Kim Sebastian Todzi.

This key difference between the two churches is particularly remarkable given Hamburg's history of protest against colonial monuments ever since the 1960s, when students toppled the statues of colonial officers Hermann von Wissmann and Hans Dominik in the direct vicinity of the University of Hamburg. In fact, they did so twice in the case of Wissmann, after the statue was reinstated on the orders of the University after its first felling. After the administration bowed to the fact that it could not keep them on their plinths, both statues now only find their way out of storage for exhibitions and installations debating colonialism and memory. Their original purpose to celebrate the 'colonial pioneers' Wissmann and Dominik has effectively been overwritten. According to contemporaries, however, the Michel plaque never turned into a similar point of contention in the 1960s and 1970s.[26] Anti-colonial protest in those decades remained instead a somewhat isolated phenomenon.

26 With thanks to Arwed Milz for our email exchange in August and September 2019. See also: Jürgen Zimmerer et al., '50 Jahre Denkmalsturz. Der Sturz des Wissmann-Denkmals an der Universität Hamburg 1967/68' https://kolonialismus.blogs.uni-hamburg.de/50-jahre-denkmalsturz-der-sturz-des-wissmann-denkmals-an-der-universitaet-hamburg-1967-68/ (last accessed 27.7.2024); Ndzodo Awono, 'Hans Dominik. Kolonialheld oder Verbrecher?', in Jürgen Zimmerer and Kim Sebastian Todzi (eds.), *Hamburg: Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post-)kolonialen Globalisierung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), pp. 463–475; Melanie Boieck and Reginald Elias Kirey, '"Kolonialheroen" in deutscher, tansanischer und britischer

Fig. 3: The 'Askari Reliefs' at former Lettow-Vorbeck Barracks, Hamburg 2021. Photo: Julian zur Lage.

Public debate on Hamburg's colonial legacy only re-emerged after the turn of the new millennium, once again due to a war memorial: With the post-Cold War restructuring of the Bundeswehr, the barracks in the suburb of Jenfeld were to be turned into a civil space. The Nazi-era complex – named after Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, commander of the colonial troops in German East Africa during the First World War – also contained several statues, plaques and ornaments with colonial motives. In contrast to the pre-1919 plaques, the later memorials such as the so-called Askari Relief emphasized Black soldiers' participation in the *Schutztruppe* to argue for presumed support for German rule among the local population by utilizing the '*askari* myth' of voluntary, obedient service.[27] This position was just as much in tune with the nationalist, pro-colonial movement in the interwar period as with fascist ideology; however, the former had largely been incorporated into the Nazi state by the late 1930s.

Erinnerungskultur. Das Beispiel des Wissmann-Denkmals und des „Askari"-Monuments in Hamburg beziehungsweise Dar es Salaam', in Jürgen Zimmerer and Kim Sebastian Todzi (eds.), *Hamburg: Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post-)kolonialen Globalisierung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), pp. 517–530.

27 See Stefanie Michels, 'Der Askari', in Jürgen Zimmerer (ed.), *Kein Platz an der Sonne. Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), pp. 294–308.

When heated discussion of these statues first arose around the turn of the twenty-first century, that Nazi connection certainly boosted public interest – contributing to a debate which has been ongoing for more than two decades by now. The plans developed by local associations in 1999 to use the memorials as centrepieces for a park dedicated to Dar es Salaam and Hamburg being declared twin cities received critique from postcolonial initiatives for its inherent colonial nostalgia and lack of a refined concept. While the connection to Tanzania is at least obvious in the monument to the war in German East Africa, a second memorial is dedicated to all German participants in colonial theatres of war since 1914 – including General Erwin Rommel's North African Corps in the Second World War, a plaque that would only be added in 1965.[28]

Due to the unresolved issues around the so-called Tansania Park, it remains closed to the public – despite several commissions being tasked with developing an appropriate concept, contextualizing the plaques as well as undertaking attempts to rename or repurpose it. These intense debates have contributed to initiatives by activists and ultimately the City of Hamburg itself to commemorate the colonial heritage of Germany's major port city.[29] However, the mere fact that the involvement of civil society activists was necessary to halt plans which had originally received support from the city demonstrates the uncritical attitude towards colonialism which had shaped German public memory in the second half of the twentieth century, only starting to change in the last 25 years or so.

Nevertheless, not only institutions like state or church but even academia had scant interest in critical memories of the colonial era for decades. The first major publication on Hamburg's past as a colonial metropolis, Heiko Möhle's *Bibeln, Branntwein und Bananen* (1999), developed out of a context of activism.[30] This demonstrates how debates on public memory and critical activism can ignite scholarship or even act as a corrective to a one-sided or simply non-existent historiography. The scrutiny of said historiography's trajectory, or in some ways lack thereof, is another aspect needing to be highlighted in regards to global memories of German colonialism.

28 For more detail hereon, see: Jürgen Zimmerer and Julian zur Lage, 'Kolonialkriegerverehrung in (post-) kolonialen Zeiten. Von der „Lettow-Vorbeck-Kaserne" zum „Tansaniapark"', in Jürgen Zimmerer and Kim Sebastian Todzi (eds.), *Hamburg: Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post-)kolonialen Globalisierung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), pp. 531–546.

29 See the homepage of the city of Hamburg for more detail: https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/behoerden/behoerde-fuer-kultur-und-medien/themen/koloniales-erbe/was-ist-koloniales-erbe-110458 (last accessed 27.7.2024).

30 Heiko Möhle (ed.), *Branntwein, Bibeln und Bananen: Der deutsche Kolonialismus in Afrika – eine Spurensuche* (3rd ed., Berlin: Assoziation A, 2011) A number of similar projects for other German cities followed, for example: Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (eds), *Kolonialmetropole Berlin: Eine Spurensuche* (Berlin: Berlin-Ed, 2002).

From Universal History to Global History

With European expansion, scholarship on all parts of the world gained in relevance, with major differences therein based on levels of interaction, cultural trends and other determining factors. For the early modern period, a focus on the African territories suggests itself as pivotal – not only for their importance to imperialism, but also the continent's special role in the writing of history. European historiography treated the interior of Africa as an unknown – and as a singular one with little local variety at that – for centuries despite the geographical proximity to other areas of interest to the colonial powers.[31]

A dedicated European scholarship on Africa would emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Olfert Dapper's *Naukeurige Beschrijving der Afrikaensche Gewesten*.[32] As usual for scholarship of the time, it combined geographical, historical, cultural and political information with knowledge compiled from a variety of sources.[33] By the mid-eighteenth century, a more specialized historiography had developed in the Western European countries, as fuelled by a growing interest in 'histories of mankind' – or, as one of the major projects of the time was entitled, *Universal History*. As an excellent example of the inner contradictions of European scholarship, its unnamed authors first proclaim 'a general uniformity runs through all those regions and people [of Africa]', while nevertheless devoting a total of four sizeable volumes to the continent.[34] This discrepancy demonstrates the desire for a comprehensive history of the world, mirroring the contemporary idea of the encyclopaedia. The project found translators, imitators and adaptors in a number of different languages, such as the attempt from Germany's leading university of the time, in Göttingen, to rewrite the series based on refined academic standards.[35]

31 See: Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cumberland: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 1–6.

32 Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten […]* (Amsterdam: Meurs, 1668).

33 On the role of compilation in Dapper's work, see: Adam Jones, 'Decompiling Dapper: A Preliminary Search for Evidence', *History in Africa*, 17 (1990), pp. 171–209.

34 *The Modern part of the universal history: Compiled from original writers. By the authors of the antient. Which will perfect the work, and render it a complete body of history, from the earliest account of time, to the present,* (London, 1759–1765), Vol. XIV, p. 17. See: Ann Thompson, 'Thinking about the history of Africa in the eighteenth century', in Guido Abbattista (ed.), *Encountering Otherness. Diversities and Transcultural Experiences in Early Modern European Culture* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2011), pp. 253–265, here pp. 254–257.

35 Marcus Conrad, *Geschichte(n) und Geschäfte: Die Publikation der „Allgemeinen Welthistorie" im Verlag Gebauer in Halle (1744–1814)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 5–15 for the english project, pp. 149–170 for the new concept since 1766.

This attempt to change the shape of *Allgemeine Weltgeschichte* – the project's German title – was only the beginning; the encyclopaedic approach now came under scrutiny. Writing a 'history of everything' proved unsurprisingly as impossible as teaching it in school or university would be. Leading proponents suggested imposing criteria for asserting the relevance of respective peoples and their prospective roles in universal history. Those systems of classification, for example according to political or cultural standards, provided a pretext for dismissing as irrelevant all those whose existence and deeds did not directly affect Europe. The interior of Africa, the Americas before colonization and Oceania as a whole were considered 'geographically and historically unknown' to the relevant (i. e. European) contemporaries and could thus simply be ignored.[36] A significant number of authors attempted to justify the omission of highly influential Asian cultures based on the 'principle of contact' as well, meaning only by interaction with Europe would a state or group of people obtain sufficient importance to justify their inclusion.[37] German philosopher of history J. G. Herder even compared China to a 'mummy' in his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, implying the country had enjoyed a long history – however one seeing little development, and hence too stale for having a major impact on the world.[38] Despite the methodological necessity of establishing some relevance criteria, all these concepts were ultimately attempts to embellish the role of Europe in the history of humankind – a topic which Enlightenment thought had established a particular interest in.

Somehow, despite the various approaches to casting aside non-European and particularly African history as unnoteworthy, the aforementioned scholars of European historiography and philosophy of history in the second half of the eighteenth century still maintained more of an interest in the subject than their peers would some decades later.

36 'geographisch und historisch unbekannt" (author's translation) in reference to all those parts of Africa not part of the 'Baghdad [i. e. Abassid] Caliphate', Julius August Remer, *Handbuch der mittlern Geschichte*: *Von der Gründung der jetzigen europäischen Staaten bis auf die Kirchenverbesserung* (4th ed., Braunschweig, 1801), p. 206. While Remer is not one of the most outstanding historians of his time, his position matches his contemporaries in German universities. More on Remer: Julian zur Lage, *Geschichtsschreibung aus der Bibliothek*: *Sesshafte Gelehrte und globale Wissenszirkulation (ca. 1750–1815)* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek 2022).

37 On its use in reference to China, see: Andreas Pigulla, *China in der deutschen Weltgeschichtsschreibung vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), p. 73.

38 Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Riga.: Hartknoch, 1784–1791), Vol. 3, p. 17. See also: Eun-Jeung Lee, *'Anti-Europa'*: *Die Geschichte der Rezeption des Konfuzianismus und der konfuzianischen Gesellschaft seit der frühen Aufklärung: eine ideengeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Entwicklung*, (Halle, 2001), pp. 262f; Sonia Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference*: *Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 112f.

The German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel infamously denied the part of the continent he deemed 'Africa proper' to be a 'historical part of the World', therefore pledging 'not to mention it again'.[39] His statements, first formulated in lectures in the 1820s and reprinted in innumerable editions over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, may sound radical to modern-day ears but were mostly representative of the time.

As German historian Jürgen Osterhammel phrases it: 'At no point before about 1830 and hardly ever again after 1920 is the notion as powerful that the peoples of colour overseas are 'without history' or possessed at most a history not worth studying'.[40] Research into non-European peoples was pushed out of the major disciplines of the humanities into specialized subjects such as ethnology, particular branches of linguistics or early iterations of area studies. This shift coincided with the general differentiation of disciplines in academia, but its effects extended beyond just the scholarly world. Public interest in non-European cultures waned with it, while the alliance of specialized academics and the state for colonial purposes was amplified.[41]

Osterhammel's end date of 1920 certainly has its merits for the high watermark of imperialism and eurocentrism, but for European historiographies of Africa in particular a longer time frame can be argued to exist as well. Exemplifying the prolonged duration of such negative images is British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper's assessment, probably just as infamous as Hegel's: 'Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.'[42]

Originally published – and even televised – in the 1960s, namely at a time when most African states had achieved independence, this statement is certainly on another level

39 Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*: *Translated from the third German Edition by J. Sibree* (London, New York, 1894), pp. 95, 103. See also: Babacar Camara, 'The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa', *Journal of Black Studies*, 36/1 (2005), pp. 82–96, Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, 'Africa in the World: History and Historiography', 2018, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.296, p. 3.

40 Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Neue Welten in der europäischen Geschichtsschreibung (ca. 1500–1800)', in Wolfgang Küttler, *Geschichtsdiskurs, Band 2: Anfänge modernen historischen Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1994), pp. 202–215, here p. 202. Author's translation.

41 See: Brizuela-Garcia, 'Africa in the World: History and Historiography' (above, n. 39), here p. 7 on the organizational idea behind Area Studies. However, the separation of scholarship on the 'Global South' predates the concept of 'Area Studies', visible for example in the institutions dedicated to 'Colonial Studies' such as the Kolonialinstitut in Hamburg. See Jens Ruppenthal, *Kolonialismus als 'Wissenschaft und Technik'*: *Das Hamburgische Kolonialinstitut 1908 bis 1919* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007).

42 Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (2nd ed. (rev.), London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), p. 9.

of racism and wilful ignorance compared to those made over a century before. The fact that Trevor-Roper used this argument explicitly against '[u]ndergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion' in their demanding of Africa's inclusion in academic curricula, only emphasizes the degree to which the assessment is purposefully exclusive and derogatory towards public opinion – that is, memory.[43] Consequently, according to its index, all further mentions of 'Africa' in the book refer only to the Roman provinces.[44]

Refuting Trevor-Roper's assessment, the study of African history gained new momentum with the independence of many of the continent's states. Centres of scholarship such as the Universities of Dar es Salaam and Ibadan arose.[45] While to some degree focused on the newly formed states' national histories, these universities' impact went far beyond their respective regions. Guyanese historian and politician Walter Rodney's years in Dar es Salaam in the 1960s and 1970s are just one example of the interconnected global development of postcolonial thought in general and historiography in particular.[46] The UNESCO project of a *General History of Africa*, first published in 1981 with a large number of contributors from the continent as well as from the former colonial powers, was both a testament to the impressive scholarship which already existed at that point and to the necessity of reiterating the fact that 'Africa has a history'.[47]

The impact of historiography written in the former colonies – as well as dedicated works of postcolonial theory – was, however, particularly limited in (West) German academia, even more so than in other Western European countries and the United States. Studies like the seminal manifesto of Afro-German identity, *Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (*Showing our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*) by May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye and Dagmar Schultz could have paved the way more than a decade earlier. However, it was once again only with the turn of the new century that a boom in global and postcolonial histories occurred.[48]

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43 See ibid., Foreword, p. 7, for its publication history in television and press.

44 Ibid., p. 210.

45 E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, 'Re-Introducing the 'People without History': African Historiographies', in Stephen Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 391–404, here p. 394.

46 Horace Campbell, 'The Impact of Walter Rodney and Progressive Scholars on the Dar es Salaam School', *Social and Economic Studies*, 40/2 (1991), p. 99.

47 Joseph Ki-Zerbo, 'General Introduction', in Joseph Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *General History of Africa I. Methodology and African Prehistory* (Paris: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 1–23, quotation p. 1. For Ki-Zerbo's emphasis on oral tradition, see pp. 7–9.

48 Katharina Oguntoye, May Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz (eds.), *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda-Frauenverl., 1986). Impactful for the transfer of postcolonial

Written Sources, Oral History

These short summaries of European and particularly German memory and historiography on Africa set the stage for what is in some ways the intersection of prevailing themes. Namely, the question of written sources versus oral history – and specifically their respective validity and accessibility. To what degree did European perceptions of writing cultures shape the trope of the *People without History*, as Eric Wolf's eponymous critique phrased it?[49]

A very revealing variation in this trope comes from the travel account of Georg Schweinfurth. In the German version, he describes how he visited 'a people without chiefs, without script, without history'. 'Script', or the more elaborately translated 'script culture', corresponds here to the German original *Schrift*. In contemporary translations of Schweinfurth's work, however, the latter has been taken to mean 'traditions'.[50] This substitution highlights an already remarkable quotation, noteworthy to the degree that German historian Christoph Marx incorporated a part of it in the title of his own study.[51] It stands to reason that translator Ellen E. Frewer considered the people of Central Africa being without script as something too obvious to bother translating, a by no means isolated view.

The question raised by the connection between 'script' and 'history' is one which continued to shape European historiography from the eighteenth through the twentieth century: Are only written sources valid in writing history at the academic level? Even when the answer to that question was not simply 'yes', the perceived unreliability of all other types of sources heavily influenced scholarly works. Additionally, most authors considered the 'lack' of written documents in a given culture a sign of its inferiority. In the late Enlightenment age, this was most prominently debated regarding the Americas.

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thought into German historiography: Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002).

49 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, California: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

50 German: 'Völkern ohne Oberhaupt, ohne Schrift und Geschichte", English 'a people which have been without chiefs, without traditions, without history'. Georg Schweinfurth, *Im Herzen von Afrika: Reisen und Entdeckungen im centralen Aequatorial-Afrika während der Jahre 1868 bis 1871* (Leipzig, London: Brockhaus; Sampson Low Marston, 1874), Vol. 1, p. 156. Georg Schweinfurth, *The Heart of Africa. Three years' travels and adventures in the unexplored regions of Central Africa from 1868 to 1871* 2 vol. (2nd ed., New York, 1874), Vol. 1., p. 145.

51 Christoph Marx, *‚Völker ohne Schrift und Geschichte'. Zur historischen Erfassung des vorkolonialen Schwarzafrika in der deutschen Forschung des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1988).

One example is the Scottish 'stadial' or 'conjectural' history.[52] William Robertson, in his *History of America* and especially his attempted rebuttal of the critique expressed by the Mexican Jesuit Francisco Xavier Clavijero, discredited archaeological testimony and personal experience.[53] Even the imbalance in Robertson's assessment of Meso- and South American cultures on the one hand – being largely sceptical of their achievements – and of India's on the other – seeing greater positivity here than his contemporaries – can be attributed to the easily available translations of Sanskrit texts, as provided by Indian scholars and East India Company members.[54]

Scepticism towards non-written sources had its roots in historical Pyrrhonism. This school of thought, heavily influenced by antique concepts, had reached its peak in the early 1700s.[55] Self-proclaimed 'critical' philosophers of history revived some of the ideas in the late Enlightenment period to use them against sources and other texts they deemed untrustworthy, which included most of those offering positive depictions of non-European cultures. One of the most influential proponents of this Eurocentric Pyrrhonism was Cornelius de Pauw, a seemingly obscure Dutch-German cleric writing in the western German city of Xanten. He built on the earlier critique of travel accounts by philosophers such as Rousseau to argue for the superior vantage point of the sedentary scholar over travellers and eyewitnesses in general. Based on this system, he accordingly tried to argue for his Eurocentric theories on the Americas, China and Egypt:

> It is even a fortunate circumstance, that travellers did not agree in their narratives; otherwise their impostures could not have been so easily detected. So many errors must evidently have arisen from their total incapacity to describe the arts, trades, manner of living, and all such essential objects, by which real philosophers endeavour to acquire a knowledge of nations.[56]

52 Dugald Stewart retrospective attempted to summarize the works of his contemporaries: Dugald Stewart, 'Account of the life and writings of Adam Smith, LL.D', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 3/1 (1794), pp. 55–137, p. 86.

53 Robertson's attempt to discredit Clavijero is particularly striking in William Robertson, *Additions And Corrections To The Former Editions Of Dr. Robertson's History Of America* (London: Cadell, 1788), for example pp. 1–4, 30f.

54 In more detail: zur Lage, *Geschichtsschreibung aus der Bibliothek* (above, n. 36), pp. 180–190.

55 Markus Völkel, *'Pyrrhonismus historicus' und 'fides historica': Die Entwicklung der deutschen historischen Methodologie unter dem Gesichtspunkt der historischen Skepsis* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1987), pp. 200–202.

56 Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical Dissertations on the Egyptians and Chinese. Translated from the French of Mr. de Pauw, Private Reader to Frederic II. King of Prussia, by Capt. J. Thomson. In two volumes* (London, 1795), vol 1., p. 2.

De Pauw's theories received significant backlash. Frederick II of Prussia mocked his 'rigid Pyrrhonism'[57] in his correspondence with Voltaire, while Alexander von Humboldt claimed to be seeking to establish a 'sane criticism' instead of 'absolute scepticism' – remarks clearly directed against de Pauw.[58] Yet, the names of his critics are proof of his relevance in the European republic of letters. While in many ways an extraordinary case, the general notion of scepticism towards all sources not written by educated Europeans would long remain a staple of historiography.

The shift away from Enlightenment thought and towards historism in German academia reformulated Pyrrhonistic arguments against non-written sources, but by no means disavowed them completely. On the contrary, nineteenth-century historism laid the foundations for the enduring exclusion of oral sources from German historiography. While protagonists like Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen contributed to this trend, broader philosophical influences like Wilhelm von Humboldt[59] and in particular scholarly practices were just as important in the hierarchization of source types. Limited access and a lack of language skills, among other factors, discouraged historians from reaching out beyond the established European archival sources.[60] However, the philosophical background had the most significant long-term effect here: similar to with the adaption of postcolonial theory, the broader reception of oral history's core concepts and practical uses only developed slowly in Germany over the course of the second half of the twentieth century.[61] As another parallel, oral accounts also gained importance as 'alternate history' or 'history from below', with a focus on (European) women and working-class people in general.[62] Interest in non-'Western' oral history remained limited, however, as a brief

57 'Frédéric à Voltaire, Potsdam, 20 avril 1776' http://friedrich.uni-trier.de/de/oeuvres/23/426/text/ (last accessed 27.7.2024), author's translation.

58 Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des Cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique*, 2 Vols (Paris: Bourgeois-Maze, 1816), Vol. 1, p. 10, author's translation.

59 Detlef Briesen and Rüdiger Gans, 'Über den Wert von Zeitzeugen in der deutschen Historik. Zur Geschichte einer Ausgrenzung', *Bios*, 6 (1993), pp. 8–10.

60 Stefan Jordan, 'Schriftlose Kulturen in der deutschen Weltgeschichtsschreibung des 19. Jahrhunderts', in Lisa Regazzoni (ed.), *Schriftlose Vergangenheiten. Geschichtsschreibung an ihrer Grenze – von der Frühen Neuzeit bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), pp. 109–128, here p. 118.

61 Briesen and Gans, 'Über den Wert von Zeitzeugen in der deutschen Historik. Zur Geschichte einer Ausgrenzung' (above, n. 59), pp. 15f. See also for Braudel and the Annales School on Africa: Steven Feierman, 'Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives', in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism. Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 40–65, here pp. 42–47.

62 Annette Leo, 'Der besondere Charme der Integration. Einführende Bemerkungen zu diesem Band', in Annette Leo and Franka Maubach (eds.), *Den Unterdrückten eine Stimme geben? Die International Oral History Association zwischen politischer Bewegung und wissenschaftlichem Netzwerk* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013), pp. 7–20, here p. 9.

remark from a retrospective volume on the development of the field from 2013 demonstrates. Annette Leo claims in this regard that 'in Africa, such a development has only just begun'[63] – therewith negating how its methodological importance had in fact been established in a number of African historiographical schools of thought for decades already.

To mention just a few examples relevant to German colonialism: E. S. Atieno Ohiambo highlighted the fundamental relevance of oral history for the Dar es Salaam school of historical thought, explicitly as a response to the trope of Africa being without history. 'Their biggest challenge was methodological: history as understood in the West was based on written documents. The greatest break came with the acceptance and refinement of the methodology of oral traditions as a means for recapturing the African voices from the past.'[64]

Similar methodological reassessments have been established for Namibia[65] and Cameroon, in the latter case for example as headed by A. Kum'a Ndumbe within the project 'Souvenirs de l'époque allemande au Cameroun' running from 1980 to 1986.[66] From Europe, ethnologists and historians such as Jan Vansina also highlighted the importance of oral tradition.[67] The present volume adds to this impressive scholarship, then, with the contributions from Amina Djouldé Christelle and Nancy Rushohora, who both focus on oral memories of instances of armed resistance in Cameroon and Tanzania respectively.

The Paradox of Script and Colonialism

A weakness of European scholarship on Africa similar to the longstanding ignorance towards oral history should also receive more attention, namely what could be called

63 Ibid., p. 12. Author's translation.

64 Atieno Odhiambo, 'Re-Introducing the 'People without History': African Historiographies' (above, n. 45), p. 394.

65 See: Gesine Krüger, 'Das goldene Zeitalter der Viehzüchter. Namibia im 19. Jahrhundert', in Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (eds), *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Links, 2003), pp. 13–25, here pp. 13–16.

66 For some remarks on the project, see Kum'a Ndumbe, 'Introduction', in Kum'a Ndumbe (ed.), *L' Afrique et l'Allemagne de la colonisation à la coopération 1884–1986 (le cas du Cameroun)/Africa and Germany from Colonisation to Cooperation 1884–1986 (The Case of Cameroon)* (Yaoundé: Éd. Africavenir, 1986), pp. XV–XXXIV; Kum'a Ndumbe, 'Discours d'ouverture du directeur du colloque', in Kum'a Ndumbe (ed.), *L' Afrique et l'Allemagne de la colonisation à la coopération 1884–1986 (le cas du Cameroun)/Africa and Germany from Colonisation to Cooperation 1884–1986 (The Case of Cameroon)* (Série Sciences et recherches, Yaoundé: Éd. Africavenir, 1986), XXVII–XLII. See also: https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/stimmen_der_erinnerung?nav_id=6522&language=en (last accessed 27.7.2024).

67 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965 [1961]).

the paradox of script and colonialism: while negating the very existence of local script cultures, European troops looted and removed African manuscripts. That further to, at the same time, restricting access to the documents produced by the colonial bureaucracy.

Early European travellers to Africa's interior, such as Mungo Park and Heinrich Barth, had explicitly and quite sympathetically engaged with the respective regions' script cultures and brought back copies or excerpts of texts.[68] However, the academic impact of this approach was limited, as demonstrated by both explorers' further careers and subsequent reception.[69] Their somewhat positive view is clearly distinct from that of later travellers such as Schweinfurth, whose aforementioned labelling of African peoples as 'without script, without history' coincided with a shift in interest from western to south-central Africa. Timbuktu, and the scholastic centres of West Africa visited by Park and Barth more generally, were often considered exceptions to the rule. Present-day public interest in the threat to Timbuktu's manuscripts mirrors the particular role ascribed to it by nineteenth-century European travellers: they had already designated a special image to the, from their perspective, almost inaccessible city and its scholarship.[70]

Yet in many other cases, European colonizers looted manuscripts from the continent. Just a few examples (beyond the century-old interest in papyri and North African manuscripts[71]): The British campaign against Maqdala in 1868 brought a major collection of Ethiopian manuscripts back to Europe, which have been the subject of restitution claims for decades now.[72] French troops looted Ségou in present-day Mali in 1890, bring-

68 Mungo Park and James Rennell, *Travels in the interior districts of Africa*: *Performed under the direction and patronage of the African Association, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London, 1799), pp. 314f.; Heinrich Barth, *Reisen und Entdeckungen in Nord- und Central-Afrika in den Jahren 1849 bis 1855*: *Tagebuch seiner im Auftrage der Brittischen Regierung unternommenen Reise* (Gotha, 1857/58), Vol. 4, p. 415; see also: Albert Adu Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara, and the western Sudan, 1788–1861* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), pp. 201f.

69 Park had to deal with accusations that his travel account was mostly a product of planter, anti-abolitionist and sedentary scholar on Africa Bryan Edwards; he died on his second trip to Africa in 1806, just a few years after his original return. See: zur Lage, *Geschichtsschreibung aus der Bibliothek* (above, n. 36), pp. 124–127. For Barth's limited success in academia, see: Klaus Schroeder, 'Art. „Barth, Heinrich"' in: Neue Deutsche Biographie 1 (1953), pp. 602f. https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd119076950.html#ndbcontentn (last accessed 27.7.2024).

70 Mauro Nobili, 'Introduction. African History and Islamic Manuscript Cultures', in Andrea Brigaglia and Mauro Nobili (eds.), *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 1–24, here pp. 6f.

71 A project on the colonial origins of the state libraries' papyri has been established in Hamburg: Jürgen Zimmerer and Jakob Wigand, 'Kolonisierte Manuskripte. Zur Erforschung der Papyrus Sammlung der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg', *Provenienz & Forschung*, 2021, pp. 49–52.

72 Martin Bailey, 'British Museum, V&A, British Library and more face restitution claims as Ethiopia moves for Maqdala treasures', *The Art Newspaper – online*, 1.11.2008 https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2008/11/01/british-museum-vanda-british-library-and-more-face-restitution-claims-as-ethiopia-moves-for-maqdala-treasures (last accessed 27.7.2024). On the restitution debate in general, see: Jürgen Zimmerer, Kim Sebastian Todzi

ing back the library of Umar Tal to the metropolis.[73] German colonizers seized Nama leader Hendrik Witbooi's documents on several occasions, some of which were among the first objects returned from European museums to their African country of origin in 1996 – thus pre-dating more recent debates on restitution. Now stored in the National Archives of Namibia, they form part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.[74]

The availability of African manuscripts in European libraries did not lead to significant research interest therein for most of the time period following their acquisition. They were catalogued, and – if at all – researched by specialists, not included in global historiography.[75] Remarkably, the 'rediscovery' of African manuscripts by European scholars took even longer than the inclusion of oral sources, as scholar of Muslim manuscript cultures Mauro Nobili notes.[76] The manuscripts' limited availability to scholars from the Global South leads deeper into the restitution debate, as emphasized by Gloria Emeagwali.[77] Despite the fact that Iceland and South Korea seeing respective manuscripts returned marked two of the most important predecessor cases, they have since played a very limited role in current debates – with art and other non-manuscript objects receiving significantly more attention here.[78] However, the importance of manuscripts transcends the material-culture dimension: following Oswald Masebo in his contribution

and Friederike Odenwald (eds.): *Displacing and Displaying the Objects of Others. The Materiality of Identity and Depots of Global History*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025).

73 Graziano Krätli, 'West African Arabic manuscript heritage at a crossroads. Dust to digital or digital dust?', *Anuari de Filologia. Antiqua et Mediaeualia*, pp. 41–66, here pp. 42f.

74 Ellen Namhila, 'Memory of the World Register Nomination Form: The Hendrik Witbooi Papers', 2005 https://web.archive.org/web/20210715205334/http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/letter_journals_of_hendrik_witbooi.pdf (last accessed 27.7.2024); 'Letter Journals of Hendrik Witbooi. Documentary heritage submitted by Namibia and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2005.' https://web.archive.org/web/20210715210917/http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-5/letter-journals-of-hendrik-witbooi/ (last accessed 27.7.2024).

75 See for cataloguing: William Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1847* (London: Longmans, 1877); Noureddine Ghali, Sidi Mohamed Mahibou, and Louis Brenner, *Inventaire de la Bibliothèque ʿumarienne de Ségou* (Paris: Éd. du Centre nat. de la recherche scient., 1985).

76 Nobili, 'Introduction. African History and Islamic Manuscript Cultures' (above, n. 71), here p. 1 in regards to Muslim script cultures. It should be highlighted that many centers of scholarship developed with large degrees of independence from Arabic or European influences, see: Fallou Ngom, 'West African Manuscripts in Arabic and African Languages and Digital Preservation', 2017, in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History,* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.123; Ridder Samsom, 'Die Swahili-Manuskriptkultur', *Manuscript Cultures*, 4 (2011), pp. 68–77.

77 Gloria Emeagwali, 'Intersections between Africa's Indigenous Knowledge Systems and History', in Gloria Emeagwali and George J. Sefa Dei (eds.), *African Indigenous Knowledge and the Disciplines* (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2014), pp. 1–17, here pp. 6–

78 See, for example, the Sarr-Savoy report and its public reception: while it mentions manuscripts repeatedly, they continued to receive little attention even following its publication; Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy,

to this volume, the inclusion of sources beyond those found in the colonizers' archives is of the utmost importance for the production of entangled histories which disrupt the limited perspectives imposed by the focus exclusively on European documents.

The archives for global memories of colonialism also include, accordingly, the oral tradition, thus venturing into the question of how colonialism influences communities to this day. In this volume, Mercia Kandukira as well as Vitjitua Ndjiharine and Nashilongweshipwe Sakaria address this very subject, in highlighting different approaches to one's engagement with the colonial archive. Generally, the impact of contemporary literature and art on postcolonial academic debates in Europe has been significantly larger than, for example, that of historiographies remaining within a national framework.[79] Opening up to different forms of memory without privileging 'pure' textual research over 'soft' arts may be the most important outcome of what originally represented a quest to include oral history.

Oral History, Memory and Historiography Goes Global

Global memories of (German) colonialism, oral history, memory and historiography are evidently closely interconnected, despite the very limited scholarship to date on this nexus itself.[80] Eurocentric historiography pre-dated formal German colonialism by at least a century and outlived it by almost the same again, if we take the shift towards postcolonial and global approaches emerging after the turn of the new millennium as the beginning of the end. Especially regarding Africa, European authors established the trope of the continent's lack of distinct cultures and history based, among other factors, on the hierarchization of civilizations – as determined by its deemed limited production of written records. Oral tradition as a distinct feature of collective memory would long remain ignored by European and particularly German historiography. At the same time, the colonial conquerors brought a significant number of manuscripts back to the metropolis, creating the paradox that written sources were available to European researchers yet continued to be mostly overlooked.

'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics', 2018 https://web.archive.org/web/20220901051009/http://restitutionreport2018.com/ pp. 33, 50f. 64 (last accessed 27.7.2024).

79 As demonstrated by the disciplinary backgrounds of several important scholars of postcolonial theory such as E. Said or G. C. Spivak.

80 On the limited connections made thus far, see: Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, 'Introduction: Building Partnerships Between Oral History and Memory Studies', in Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds), *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple Univ. Press, 2008), pp. VII–XVII, here p. VII.

It took the establishment of universities in post-independence African states, with History departments highlighting the relevance of oral tradition and memory, to finally bring these elements into academia. For these concepts to truly arrive in Europe, however, impulses from civil society were required and will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future: against Eurocentric practices of memory; for the restitution of looted artefacts and manuscripts; for postcolonial approaches to historiography. Academia cannot ignore these impulses going forward. This volume strives, then, to further incorporate global memories of German colonialism into international scholarship.

However, the relevance of memory and civil society to academia is not a one-way street. As Priya Satia has demonstrated in *Time's Monster: How History Makes History*, historiography helped to shape empires[81] – and today, with most colonial ones having been dissolved by now, imperial historiographies shape not only memory but also the contemporary political sphere. In many European countries, recent debates on transcontinental migration, on the global economy or on coming to terms with the colonial past have been heavily influenced by conflicting understandings of that very history.[82] The importance of challenging Eurocentrism in memory and historiography by including new approaches, additional sources and contributors from beyond the European academic sphere is evident.

81 Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).
82 On the German case, see: Zimmerer (ed.), *Erinnerungskämpfe* (above, n. 8).