REMEMBERING COLONIALISM

A city-wide

remembrance
concept

for the state
of Berlin

FOREWORD BY THE HISTORICAL ADVISORY BOARD ADVISING THE SENATOR FOR CULTURE AND SOCIAL COHESION

In 2019, the Berlin House of Representatives resolved to develop a city-wide remembrance concept under the heading “Berlin takes responsibility for its colonial past”. Its aim was to “intensify public engagement with the history of colonialism linked to Berlin, to ensure the subject is firmly rooted in research and education, to contribute to reconciliation, and to develop appropriate forms of remembrance.”

The Historical Advisory Board advising the Senator for Culture and Social Cohesion warmly welcomes the remembrance concept presented here, which has been developed through close cooperation with civil-society initiatives and actors engaged in culture of remembrance. Despite Berlin’s central role in German colonial history, awareness and remembrance of colonial injustice remain limited. Brandenburg-Prussia was involved in the trade of enslaved people long before formal colonial rule was established. The so-called Berlin Conference in 1884/1885 consolidated the colonial division of Africa. Subsequently, the German Empire seized colonies in Africa, China, and the Pacific region, becoming the world’s third-largest colonial power. Inhabitants of the colonies were displayed at so-called “human zoos” in Berlin and the city’s museums appropriated artefacts and human remains from the colonies. Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University) supported colonial policy through its research activities.

Yet Berlin was also a place of anti-colonial resistance. Political representatives from the colonies travelled to the imperial capital to submit petitions protesting violence and the lack of rights and calling for freedom and self-determination. During the Weimar Republic, numerous associations founded by colonial migrants in Berlin actively campaigned for their rights and against discrimination.

People with family roots in countries once colonised by Germany are now an integral part of Berlin's urban society. For this reason, remembering colonialism represents a vital contribution to a dynamic culture of remembrance for the city. Both the creation of a central remembrance site dedicated to Berlin's colonial past, as agreed upon in the 2023 coalition treaty concluded by the CDU and SPD, and the development of a decentralised landscape of remembrance addressing the colonial history, represent essential demands of this city-wide remembrance concept, along with the establishment of lasting structures to promote and sustain these remembrance activities. The expertise of Berlin's many institutions and memorial sites dedicated to the remembrance of National Socialism and the SED dictatorship can provide significant support here, given that the history of colonialism is closely intertwined with the murderous colonial policies pursued by the Nazi regime in Eastern Europe, and further shaped the GDR's political agenda regarding countries formerly colonised by Germany, especially in Africa.

The city-wide remembrance concept *Remembering Colonialism* presented here addresses all these aspects of Berlin's colonial history with great insight, offering a compelling variety of ideas and proposals to close the gap that the remembrance of Berlin's colonial history still represents. We fully endorse and support these efforts.

The Historical Advisory Board advising the Senator for Culture and Social Cohesion

FOREWORD BY THE ACTORS

The colonialism remembrance concept presented here is the result of a close collaboration between numerous committed individuals and organisations active in civil society, academia, the arts, culture, and practice. Their voices, experiences and perspectives have been brought together to lay the foundation for a critical, plural and equitable engagement with Germany's colonial past.

Upon the initiative of actors mainly stemming from civil society, urban markers and signs to remember colonial history and resistance have been placed across Berlin in recent years. These include Stolpersteine (stumbling blocks) commemorating Black people who were persecuted under National Socialism and whose life stories extend from the German colonial period through to the Weimar Republic, such as those of Zoya Gertrud Aqua Kaufmann and Erika Diek. Further, memorial plaques were installed that honour important Black figures in the city's history, such as the actor and activist Louis Brody or the sociologist and human-rights advocate W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as Mohamed Helmy, who helped Jewish people in Berlin survive under the Nazi regime. Other examples include the memorial plaque honouring José Rizal, the Filipino critic of colonialism; the Decolonial Memorial at Berlin Global Village; the Peace Statue; and various information boards and remembrance steles, for example at May-Ayim-Ufer, in the African Quarter, in front of the former Imperial Colonial Office, at the site of the former Royal Museum of Ethnology, and outside the former "Afrika-Haus", the headquarters of the German Colonial Society.

These markers and signs of remembrance stand as the visible evidence of civil society engagement, demonstrating that the remembrance of colonialism and resistance has long been a shared concern that is actively embraced by various actors within our society.

Colonialism is not merely history – its legacies have been operating up to this day: in social inequality, in structural racism, and in both national and global power dynamics. Thus, the colonialism remembrance concept not only aims at being a substantial contribution to remembrance, but at promoting change as well.

Through our participation, we seek to ensure that the voices of those affected, of the descendants of colonised peoples, and of migrant and diasporic communities are heard and seen. Remembrance is not initiated by institutions. It forms an integral part of individuals and communities and is both the subject and outcome of research and social negotiation. For this reason, it must be shaped together with those directly affected by colonial continuities. Institutions accompany and promote these processes by providing the structural stability needed to collect memories, to reflect, and to share them within society.

We see this concept as a vital step towards an honest engagement with the colonial past, towards an inclusive culture of remembrance, and towards a future founded on justice, respect, solidarity, and responsibility.

2022 Kick off meeting for the remembrance concept at Deutsches Technikmuseum in Berlin.

WHY THIS CONCEPT?

Berlin is, in many ways, closely tied to the history of German colonialism.

As the capital of the German Empire, it also was the capital of the German colonial empire and therefore the seat of political institutions such as the Imperial Colonial Office, where colonial policy was debated and decided.

It was here that the so-called Berlin Conference was held in 1884–85, which consolidated the colonial partition of the African continent.

Berlin was also home to academic institutions, such as the Institute for Infectious Diseases (now Robert Koch Institute) or the Institute for Oriental Languages at Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University), where numerous people supported the colonial project through their research and teaching.

Berlin was already an important cultural centre, staging popular colonial entertainment formats such as the so-called “human zoos”.

Berliners would buy products from German and other European colonies at local grocery shops, for instance in the stores operated by the “Purchasing Cooperative of Colonial Goods Retailers in the Hallesches Tor district of Berlin” (Einkaufsgenossenschaft der Kolonialwarenhändler im Halleschen Torbezirk zu Berlin, abbr.: E.d.K., later: EDEKA).

Finally, Berlin was home to many people who had migrated from the colonies, some of whom actively campaigned against colonial oppression and racist exclusion on the ground.

Despite these far-reaching connections, the imprint of colonialism on Berlin's cityscape and history has largely remained unmarked. Initiated and often driven by civil-society actors[1], crucial steps have been taken over the past two decades to raise public awareness for colonial history in Berlin.

City walking tours have drawn Berliners' attention to sites of colonial policy and popular entertainment. Debates on street names prompted a critical reappraisal of figures responsible for colonial crimes as well as the policymakers that served as namesakes, while highlighting anti-colonial actors and their biographies. Exhibitions resulting from collaborations between civil society and museums in Berlin have explored various aspects of the city's colonial history.

Yet these activities have tended to remain isolated and short-lived. Up to now, a sustainable offer of information on the complex connections and areas of tension between colonialism and Berlin's history have been thoroughly missing.

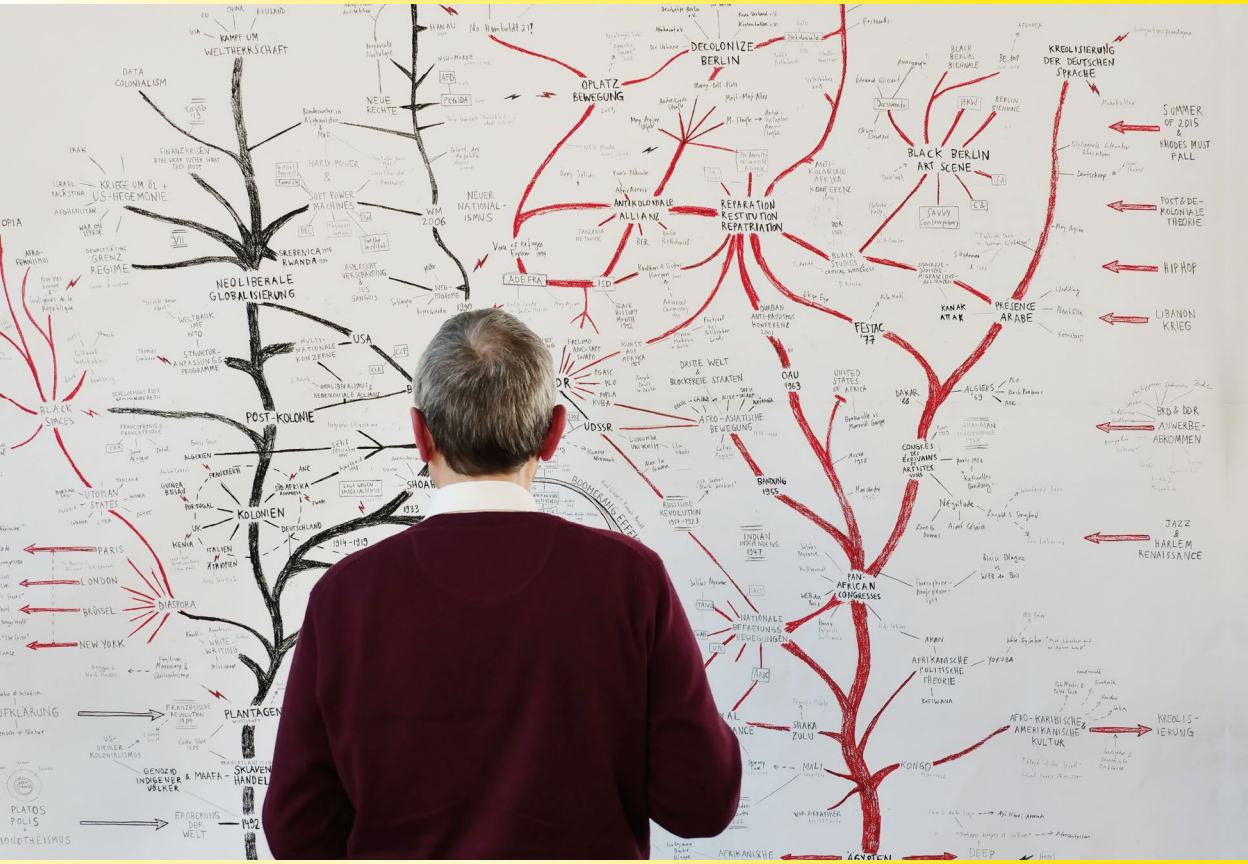
This gap was one of the starting points for the motion "Berlin takes responsibility for its colonial past" (DS 18/1788), which was adopted by the Berlin House of Representatives in 2019.

[1] Whenever the term "civil society" is used here and in the following, it refers to civil actors who have long been working in the field of critically reappraising and remembering colonialism, who oppose racism and discrimination, and who are actively contributing to an open, pluralistic, inclusive, and diverse democratic society. Migrant and diasporic BIPoC-communities have been playing a major role in this civil-society engagement. The abbreviation BIPoC is a self-designating term of solidarity used by people who experience racism and stands for Black / Indigenous / People of Colour.

In passing this motion, the House committed to developing concepts dedicated to the critical reappraisal and remembrance of Berlin's colonial past. Created as a result of this resolution and complementing the critical reappraisal concept developed by Decolonize Berlin e.V., the city-wide remembrance concept *Remembering Colonialism* presented here defines needs, guiding principles and key demands with the aim of:

- developing a central remembrance site dedicated to colonialism in Berlin
- developing and preserving a decentralised landscape of remembrance devoted to Berlin's colonial past and present
- developing permanent structures to promote remembrance of colonialism in Berlin and throughout Germany
- fostering a broader culture of remembrance that critically engages with colonialism in Berlin

This concept alone is not enough, though. To meet the long-standing demands of civil-society actors working on colonialism, it will be necessary to initiate and implement concrete remembrance-policy measures over the coming months and years, both within the remit of the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion and beyond.



2023 Presentation of the progress of the remembrance concept at Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "GERMAN COLONIALISM"?

The concept *Remembering Colonialism* is based on an understanding of colonialism as a phenomenon of three dimensions:

1 **The period of formal German colonial rule on the African continent, in Asia and in the Pacific.** The annexation of non-European territories by the German Empire began in 1884. By 1914, Germany possessed the world’s third-largest colonial empire by area, including territories that form part of what is now Burundi, Gabon, Ghana, Cameroon, Namibia, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, Chad and the Central African Republic, as well as parts of the People’s Republic of China, the northern region of Papua New Guinea, and in the Pacific the island states of the Marshall Islands, the Mariana Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Nauru and Samoa. German colonial rule took very different forms across these territories, leading to consequences that must be analysed in their specific contexts but also understood in relation to one another. Germany was required to cede its colonies to other European colonial powers under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

2 **Proto-colonial** activities pursued by German states and actors prior to 1884: Berlin’s role as the electoral and royal residence is particularly relevant here. The city is associated with Brandenburg-Prussia’s participation in colonial-era commerce and slave trading, notably through the establishment of the colony of “Groß Friedrichsburg”, with several fortified settlements on the coast of what is now Ghana, and through the lease of a market for the sale of enslaved people on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. In this respect, Berlin exemplifies the active and interconnected involvement of numerous German states, duchies, as well as Christian missions in European colonialism. These proto-colonial connections also extended to such places as the Baltic region, South America and Greenland. The integration of these colonial endeavours, which have tended to be viewed as peripheral until now, can contribute to an understanding of German colonialism in all its complexity, and draw attention to its pervasiveness across a multitude of times, spaces and areas of life.

3 It is also important to consider the **continuing impact of policies and patterns of thought and perception of German colonialism,** for example as reflected in the colonial revisionist movements of the Weimar Republic (“colonialism without colonies”) and in the Nazi regime’s realignment of colonial ambitions as part of its Eastern European expansion policy, the so-called Ostraumpolitik, which was propagated and implemented across a wide spectrum of policy and ideology. Attention must also be paid to the gaps within the culture of remembrance in both post-war German states, which – albeit for different reasons – long made it difficult in both the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR, and later in reunified Germany, to undertake a critical reappraisal of German colonialism and engage society in a meaningful discussion on colonial continuities.

For the purposes of the present concept, five aspects of colonialism are fundamental:

1 **Colonialism as a system of injustice**

In the colonies established by the German Empire, the imposed system of rule was founded on institutionalised injustice. Central to this was the deliberate disenfranchisement of local populations, reinforced by a separate colonial legal code and the corresponding judicial structures. The so-called “Protectorate Law” (Schutzgebietsgesetz) of 1886 established two separate legal systems within the German colonies: while white German citizens and white nationals of other colonial powers were subject to German law, local populations were governed by a legislative authority that denied them citizenship, democratic representation and participation, and any form of legal protection. This systematic denial of rights enabled colonial actors to dispossess local communities, destroy their cultures and belief systems, exploit their labour for minimal pay or through forced labour, subject them to mistreatment and medical experiments, and even kill them – without facing significant consequences.

Any practice of engaging with and remembering colonialism must therefore take this systematic aspect of disenfranchisement into account in a nuanced way.

2 Colonialism and violence

The genocide of the Herero and Nama (1904–1908) is recognised as the first genocide of the 20th century. Less well known is the equally genocidal Maji Maji Rebellion (1905–1907), during which several hundred thousand people lost their lives. For decades, civil-society actors such as the nationwide alliance “No Amnesty on Genocide!” have campaigned for official recognition of the genocide of the Herero and Nama by the German government, for an apology to the descendants of the victims, and for negotiations on reparations for the injustices committed. In 2021, the German government only went so far as to recognise the colonial war as “genocide in today’s terms”, thereby continuing to reject the Herero and Nama’s claims for reparations by arguing that the UN Genocide Convention did not yet apply in the early 20th century. A “Joint Declaration” prepared over several years by the governments of Namibia and Germany was drawn up without the participation of independent Herero and Nama associations, and has not yet been ratified by the Namibian Parliament.

Against this background, a more in-depth, sustained and, above all, multi-perspective examination of the history of excessive, systematically exercised colonial violence and its far-reaching consequences is necessary.

The European colonial project – and by extension Germany’s own colonial activities – was always based on the exercise of violence against colonised territories and colonised peoples. In order to demonstrate the complexity and illegitimacy of this system of colonial injustice, two things are necessary: firstly, it is essential to address the mass murder of resistant communities as a central means of establishing and maintaining colonial rule; secondly, it is important to draw attention to “everyday” forms of violence that were inherent in colonial rule.

Such a differentiated view of colonial violence enables revealing both its all-pervasive dimension and the broader, interrelated history of anti-colonial resistance.

3 Colonialism and resistance

Be it in the colonised territories or in Berlin, the history of colonialism is always a history of anti-colonialism and resistance, too. These resistance efforts took many different forms and activist orientations. In the early 20th century, for example, local political representatives from the colonies travelled several times to Berlin to protest against conditions in their home countries by means of petitions to and audiences with the Kaiser. Among those involved in these petition movements was Friedrich Maharero, a member of a leading Herero family, who came to Berlin in 1896 to seek an audience with Wilhelm II and establish diplomatic relations – eight years before the uprisings against German occupation policy and the ensuing genocide of the Herero and Nama committed by German colonial troops.

During the Weimar Republic, the city turned into an important meeting place for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist activists from all around the world. One of the many associations founded by colonial migrants at that time was the German branch of the *Ligue de défense de la race noire*[2], an organisation established in 1929 and originally based in France.

Prominent politically active Berlin residents and visitors during this period included the Cameroonian activist Maria Mandessi Bell; the Egyptian philanthropist, feminist and women's rights advocate Huda Sha'arawi; the Chinese writer and soldier Hu Lanqi; the Indian philosopher and revolutionary Manabendra Nath Roy; the Indian anti-colonial activist Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (Chatto); the Cameroonian engineer and Pan-Africanist Joseph Ekwe Bilé; the labour leader and later Chinese premier Zhou Enlai; and the German communist and founder of the League Against Imperialism, Willi Münzenberg.

[2] The historical name of this organisation has been adapted in keeping with present-day decolonial usage. It is important to recognise that, at that time, Black people and other people of colour mainly had problematic terms for self-identification available to them. Even though such terms were sometimes reclaimed and used in the spirit of resistance, we avoid reproducing them here, using contemporary self-designations instead.

Especially for people who continue to be negatively affected by the legacy of colonialism and who are actively campaigning against racism today, it is important to emphasise that as the former imperial capital, Berlin was not only a starting point for the assertion of colonial rule, but also developed into a major hub and arena of anti-colonial resistance – a role it continues to play to this day.

A practice of remembrance engaging with colonial history must, in a nuanced way, highlight and make tangible this multidimensional aspect, taking into account its simultaneity and often ambivalent traces.

4 Colonialism and racism

Another essential basis for a reflective, decolonising remembrance work is a critical engagement with the history of racism in the 19th and 20th centuries in both its epistemic and scientific dimensions. The (pseudo-)scientific construction and hierarchisation of “races” not only is a central means of legitimising colonial conquest and the devaluation and objectification of people in colonised societies; it is also key to understanding colonial continuities nowadays.

As such, the colonial legacy is not confined to looted cultural objects or racially structured archives of knowledge: it also manifests itself in political and economic dimensions, in colonially shaped modes of thinking and cultural behaviour, and not least at both intergovernmental and interpersonal levels – in societies that were once colonised as well as those that exercised colonial rule. This can be described as the “coloniality of the present”.

The task of future practices of remembrance addressing colonialism must therefore be to decisively examine in detail the dynamic interplay between colonialism and racism, to underline the historical continuities and multidimensional effects that persist across past and present, and to highlight the lived experience and emotional knowledge of communities and societies affected by racism and colonialism.

5 Colonialism and the colonial “metropoles”

Colonialism was not an exclusively “overseas” phenomenon. In recent decades, historical research has uncovered compelling evidence and convincingly shown that colonial projects also had far-reaching effects on the so-called colonial “mother countries” or “metropoles”. In this sense, Germany’s colonial practices influenced its capital Berlin, its urban society and German society in its entirety; too.

Heated debates were held at the Reichstag about the financing of colonial wars, sparking lively coverage by the daily press. Tea, coffee, sugar and many other so-called “colonial goods” became integrated in metropolitan consumer culture. In shows featuring exoticised, if not racialised performers and artists – staged during the first Berlin Colonial Exhibition at Treptower Park in 1896, as well as in the Zoological Garden and in circuses – Berliners were presented with a cultural order that reflected the racist hierarchies inherent in colonial ideology.

Accordingly, the urban landscape of Berlin still bears many traces of colonialism. Decolonising narratives should take these traces as their starting point, pursuing them and tracing their impact on language, art, culture, architecture, education, science and technology, as well as looking at how they affected the ethical and practical dimensions of human life.

HOW THIS CONCEPT CAME INTO BEING

THE MANDATE
THE WORKING STRUCTURE
THE ACTORS
GUIDING QUESTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

2023 Presentation of the progress of the remembrance concept at Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

THE MANDATE

In 2019, the Berlin House of Representatives approved the motion "Berlin takes responsibility for its colonial past" (DS 18/1788), thereby initiating the development of this city-wide remembrance concept. The motion stated the following:

Berlin takes responsibility for its colonial past.

The House of Representatives resolves the following: The Senate is requested to develop a comprehensive city-wide concept dedicated to the critical reappraisal and remembrance of Berlin's colonial past that does justice to the city's historical role and responsibility as the former capital of the German Empire during the era of German and European colonialism and imperialism.

The aim of such a concept shall be, firstly, to intensify public engagement with the history of colonialism as it relates to Berlin, to establish the topic more firmly within research and education, to contribute to reconciliation, and to develop appropriate and dignified forms of remembrance. Secondly, the concept shall consider the traces and lasting effects the colonial past has left both in Berlin and in places formerly colonised by Germany up to the present day.

This includes appropriate recognition and commemoration of all victims of German colonial wars and colonial crimes. Particular importance shall be attached to Berlin's commemoration of the German genocide against the Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1908 in present-day Namibia. To this effect, the Berlin House of Representatives calls on the Federal Government to recognise the genocide against the Herero and Nama.

The concept to be developed shall encompass the city as a whole and be created in close collaboration with Berlin's civil society and across the city's administrative departments. In particular, it should incorporate the expertise and perspectives of representatives and Berlin based communities from countries affected by German colonialism, local initiatives and projects working in the fields of decolonisation and global learning from history, and also the relevant actors in academia and research practices. The same applies to Berlin's districts, especially those that have experience in (post-)colonial remembrance work and those in which numerous traces of colonialism can be found.

Following the adoption of the motion, two mandates were issued: the critical appraisal concept developed by Decolonize Berlin e.V and funded by the Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises, and the Remembrance Concept developed by the "Colonialism Remembrance Concept" Team at Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin and funded by the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion.

The "Colonialism Remembrance Concept" team particularly focused on the following aspects of the overall mandate:

- measures dedicated to visible remembrance in public spaces: starting with sites that bear traces of the German colonial past or where this past is already the subject of remembrance today, and integrating these into a city-wide concept;
- public participation and inclusion of representatives from countries formerly colonised by Germany, (migrant) self-organised community-led organisations from these countries, Berlin-based organisations with a decolonial focus, academic and cultural institutions, and the city's districts;
- proposals for developing a central memorial site dedicated to the recognition, critical reappraisal and remembrance of German colonial crimes, such as the genocide of the Herero and Nama, to be conceived jointly with the federal government as a place of learning and remembrance.

THE WORKING STRUCTURE

Following the House of Representatives' resolution, funding for remembrance and critical reappraisal of German colonialism was included in Berlin's state budget in 2020 for the first time. Since then, various measures have been implemented which have directly and indirectly contributed to the development of this concept:

- Established in 2022 at Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, the "Colonialism Remembrance Concept" team has coordinated the processes leading up to the creation of this remembrance concept focused on remembrance-related initiatives. Since 2024 the team has developed into a permanent unit tasked with preparing the establishment of a central learning and remembrance site for colonialism. The proposal for this site will build on the insights and working structures developed during the creation of *Remembering Colonialism,* both expanding the concept and serving as an integral complement to it.

- The “Coordination Office for the City-Wide Process of Critically Reappraising Berlin’s Colonial Past” was established in May 2020 at the civil-society organisation Decolonize Berlin e.V.: the work done by the Coordination Office is distinct from the development of the remembrance concept in that it focuses on a critical reappraisal concept, defined as a cross-departmental catalogue of measures aimed at advancing decolonisation in Berlin. Here, priority will be attached to the fields of education, business, science and research, culture and international relations. The measures and recommendations developed through the two-year participatory process were incorporated in a Senate submission in 2023, and implementation is under way.

- Funded by the State of Berlin and the German Federal Cultural Foundation, the model project Decolonial Culture of Remembrance in the City (2020–2024) focused on carrying out research into the past and present of (anti-)colonialism in Berlin, in Germany as a whole, and in countries with (historical) colonial ties to Germany, as well as raising visibility of the subject. Including festivals, mappings, exhibitions, performances and conferences, the project was conceived and carried out by an alliance of civil-society organisations, including partners such as the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD Bund e.V.), Each One Teach One (EOTO e.V.), Berlin Postkolonial e.V. and Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin.

- Additional pilot projects were implemented at the state museums Brücke-Museum, Stadtmuseum Berlin and the German Museum of Technology, each of which examined the colonial entanglements in their respective collections.

- In order to support decentralised initiatives dedicated to critically reappraising colonialism beyond major funded institutions, additional resources were provided for the “Project Fund for the Promotion of Projects in the Area of Contemporary History and Culture of Remembrance” administered by the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion. In addition, the District Culture Fund was supplemented with special funding to promote engagement with colonial history in Berlin’s

districts, enabling district-level actors to implement projects on their local colonial history from 2020 onwards.

- In 2022, the “De-Colonisation Competence Centre” was established at Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, with close ties to the project Dekoloniale. This centre develops and tests models of decolonial museum practices. It serves as a contact point particularly for Berlin’s state-funded museums and as a networking platform between Berlin museums and decolonial actors in the area of academia, culture and civil society, both in Berlin and beyond.

THE ACTORS

For more than three decades, associations, initiatives and community groups have been actively involved in addressing colonialism within Berlin's sociopolitical discourse. It was essential to integrate their perspectives and expertise into the development of this concept. The concept *"Remembering Colonialism"* was developed through a complex process of consultation, coordination and participation, overseen by Dr Ibou Coulibaly Diop and the "Colonialism Remembrance Concept" team. The process was supported by:

- the "Coordination Office for the City-Wide Process of Critically Reappraising Berlin's Colonial Past" and Decolonize Berlin e.V.
- the model project *Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City*
- and other civil-society organisations, including ADEFRA e.V. – Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland, Afrika-Rat Berlin Brandenburg e.V., Korea Verband e.V. and korientation e.V.

One key element of the working process was the participation of additional civil-society actors from across Berlin in workshops and working groups. Migrant and diasporic BIPoC organisations, local and international researchers, activists, artists and community experts worked on the content of the concept from February 2022 to December 2023.

Additional input was provided by experts in the fields of research and education, art and culture, including, among others, Professor Maisha-Maureen Auma, Dr Manuela Bauche, Dr Max Czollek, Dr Noa K. Ha, Dr Darja Klingenberg, Talya Lubinsky, Dr Moses März, Léonora Miano, Dr Thomas Oberender, Sharon Dodua Otoo, Maresa Nzinga Pinto, Fogha Mc Cornilius Refem aka Wan wo Layir, Hildegard Titus and Sinthujan Varatharajah.

Finally, the concept was discussed with the Historical Advisory Board advising the Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion and finalised in agreement with the civil-society actors involved.

The present concept is a synthesis of the contributors' wide array of central perspectives, reflections and demands.

GUIDING QUESTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

The work on *Remembering Colonialism* was structured around a series of guiding questions that were explored in workshops and working groups:

- How can we reconcile the fact that colonialism remains largely marginal in German culture of remembrance even as it occupies a central place in the collective memory of many communities? What strategies, interventions and spaces for engagement, documentation and mediation are required?
- Which formats, narratives and spaces can be identified to discuss the complex contemporary effects and legacies of colonialism, that continue to impact day-to-day life and people in Germany, albeit in very differing ways?
- Through which formats, narratives and spaces can colonialism be critically reappraised in relation to other histories of injustice, and how can the reconfigurations of colonial patterns of thought and action in various political systems of Germany, past and present, be identified and critically examined through the prism of coloniality?

The following conditions underpinned the concept developed by civil society:

- Remembrance policy measures engaging with and critically reappraising colonial history must be designed to be sustainable, adopting an interconnected and multi-perspective history. In engaging with the past, a dynamic remembrance work must foster a historical judgement capacity and a pluralistic understanding of history to understand contemporary processes and shape a democratic future.
- It is essential to develop and use sensitive language and vocabulary that appropriately reflects the violence of the colonial past. This is a fundamental precondition for inclusive postcolonial remembrance work. Language and speech can reproduce violence and oppressive habits of thought. To this day, so-called “vehicular languages” (linguae francae), that were mostly imposed, often still hinder the articulation of local perspectives and the development of autonomous discourses in postcolonial contexts. As a result, innumerable archives of knowledge and experiences of formerly colonised societies remain difficult to access and scarcely visible.

- Engagement with colonialism and its history must aim to offer pathways and approaches for diverse audiences: for those directly affected by the ongoing effects of colonialism, for those who are already well-informed, and, not least, those who have not yet engaged with colonialism at all. Contemporary and inclusive formats and methods are needed to question established knowledge, rethink language, foster processes of relationship-building and solidarity, and reflect the diversity of Berlin's urban society.

- A pluralistic and democratic practice of remembrance of Berlin's colonial history must be capable of engaging with colonial archives, institutions of colonial administration, and economic ties. Emphasising these connections reveals how diverse worlds have, over centuries, been entangled in often violent – and therefore profoundly painful – relationships, the legacies of which continue to resonate in the present.

2024 Presentation of the remembrance concept at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin.

THE DEMANDS

THE CENTRAL LEARNING AND REMEMBRANCE SITE

A DECENTRALISED LANDSCAPE OF REMEMBRANCE

ESTABLISHING PERMANENT STRUCTURES

FURTHER DEMANDS

As a result of the participatory process, various proposals were formulated by civil-society actors to promote and ensure a sustainable engagement with colonial history. They include:

- a central learning and remembrance site,
- a decentralised landscape of remembrance across Berlin,
- the establishment of permanent structures
- further demands relating to the remembrance of colonialism

Newly established learning and remembrance sites, along with city markers and memorials, are intended to ensure that knowledge of Germany's colonial past is transmitted within the fields of historical and political education. *Remembrance Needs Sites.*

In addition to transmitting knowledge, the aim of this site will be to foster empathy with the victims of colonial crimes in a way that is similar and complementary to existing memorial sites in Berlin devoted to confronting the legacies of the Nazi dictatorship and the SED regime. To this end, research, documentation and contextualisation of individual and family biographies have proved particularly effective, as has the communication of local (hi)stories. Thinking of these stories in relation to one another – across Germany's federal states, across Europe and transnationally between continents – opens productive perspectives on the history of colonialism, its mechanisms and effects, and on how people have engaged in resistance against it. Such an approach also helps highlight individual and collective agency. *Remembrance Needs People.*

THE CENTRAL LEARNING AND REMEMBRANCE SITE

There is a clear consensus among Berlin-based civil-society associations and actors, emerging from the broad participatory process, on the need for a central learning and remembrance site – or a documentation centre – focused on engaging with German colonialism, its critical reappraisal, documentation, and communication.

These demands have already reached the political level. The Berlin state coalition agreement (2023–2026) states: “The coalition will continue to develop a memorial site dedicated to Berlin’s colonial past.” The current federal government has likewise announced that, in addressing colonialism, “particular attention will be paid to establishing a dignified remembrance site”.

Since the role of colonial perpetrators must be understood not merely in regional terms with reference to Berlin, but as a nationwide crime, cooperation with the federal government is essential in creating such a central site.

A concrete plan does not yet exist. For civil-society actors, this means continuing to advocate for the development and implementation of a learning and remembrance site and insisting on being meaningfully involved in the relevant processes. By definition, a central learning and remembrance site must be participatory and:

- provide institutional support for the work of organisations, associations and NGOs, as well as for established annual commemorative events;
- ensure continuous cooperation with the many actors who have long been working in this field, through consultations and other democratic participation processes.

A central learning and remembrance site must also fulfil a democratic educational mission and:

- serve as a learning centre that makes anti-colonial and racism-sensitive knowledge accessible to all through exhibitions, multimedia formats and programmes of political education, designed for a diverse audience and respond to their needs, including through the use of discrimination-sensitive language;
- provide opportunities for scholarly research through an integrated library and archive;
- function as a community centre;
- mediate between research and education and offer spaces for people of all ages.

A central learning and remembrance site should be developed in the heart of Berlin, at a location of historical significance. Sites currently under consideration include:

- the former location of the German Colonial Museum at Moltke Bridge
- the site of the so-called former Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin-Kreuzberg
- the area around the Karpfenteich in Treptower Park, where the so-called “human zoo” was held in the summer of 1896 as part of the First German Colonial Exhibition.

A central learning and remembrance site must engage in cooperation with:

- educational institutions (kindergartens, schools and universities);
- memorials and remembrance sites dedicated to researching and critically reappraising the history of the Nazi dictatorship and the SED regime;
- museums, archives and libraries at local, national and international levels.

A DECENTRALISED LANDSCAPE OF REMEMBRANCE

The participatory development process for Remembering Colonialism has clearly shown that the goal of a contemporary culture of remembrance cannot be limited to the creation of a single central site dedicated to engaging with colonial history. Rather, alongside the planned central learning and remembrance site, a decentralised network of remembrance must be established. Such a network should integrate existing structures and sites of remembrance with new initiatives and locations. Existing funded structures must be preserved.

The new spaces for a culture of remembrance in Berlin should be developed in close collaboration with communities and civil-society actors who are critical of colonialism and racism, identify as diasporic or (post-)migrant, work in a spirit of solidarity and future orientation, and are directly affected by the legacies of colonialism.

A decentralised landscape of remembrance must make Berlin's coloniality tangible in all its complexity, marking significant sites of colonial history, rendering them visible and accessible within the urban landscape, and conveying both their contemporary relevance and future possibilities.

- Wilhelmstrasse 92 – the venue of the Berlin Conference in 1884–85 – must be developed into a key site within this decentralised landscape of remembrance.
- Other important locations related to Berlin's colonial past that require marking, contextualisation and redesign include the African Quarter in Wedding, the Bismarck Monument at Großer Stern in Tiergarten, the Zoological Garden in the same district, the Botanical Garden and Botanical Museum in Lichterfelde and the former Museum of Ethnology in Dahlem.
- The proposed sites for a central remembrance site should also be considered as part of the decentralised network, once the search has progressed further: the site of the former German Colonial Museum, the location of the former so-called Royal Museum of Ethnology, and the area around the Karpfenteich in Treptower Park.
- At all these sites, the differing dimensions of colonial power and influence must be made visible, for example in relation to urban planning (the African Quarter), colonialism and capitalism (the "human zoo" and the Berlin Trade Exhibition), as well as the production and dissemination of colonial knowledge and associated knowledge systems/sciences (the Zoological Garden, the Botanical Garden and the Museum of Ethnology).

Gaps in the culture of remembrance must be identified and addressed. To date, Berlin has no memorials commemorating the genocide of the Herero and Nama or the genocidal Maji Maji War. This must be remedied within the framework of a culture of remembrance that critically engages with colonialism.

A decentralised landscape of remembrance must also preserve the numerous markers, city signs, monuments, and commemorative plaques in Berlin's public space that are already significant to the city's culture of remembrance, while consistently expanding them.

- Apart from a number of national and centrally situated monuments and memorials, Berlin is distinguished above all by its decentralised network of historical city markers: local history workshops, citizens' initiatives and critical historians have made major contributions to the numerous and diverse forms of remembrance found in Berlin, as have the district memorial plaque commissions, district museums and, time and again, visual artists.
- Mainly through the efforts of civil-society actors, new markers and signs of remembrance for colonial history and resistance have been established across Berlin in recent years.
- These initial steps need to be further refined, accompanied by a process of critical engagement. This also means giving greater attention to markers and signs relating to German colonialism in Asia and the Pacific, among other things.

A decentralised landscape of remembrance must be effective in establishing a critical understanding of German colonial history, as well as seeking to

- place a stronger focus on colonialism within existing forms of remembrance. Particularly promising opportunities exist to acknowledge the complex links between so many sites in Berlin and the biographies of the city's residents.
- encourage the development of new forms of remembrance, whether through temporary or permanent interventions in public space, including the provision of historical information or facilitating artistic engagement.

- ensure that, despite its diverse nature, a culture of remembrance remains coherent and identifiable. For this reason, a city-wide system of markers is called for to link all remembrance sites and symbols relating to colonialism. Equally, the review of already contextualised sites remains an important concern.

A decentralised landscape of remembrance must be process-oriented in its conception and

- be understood as an open-ended remembrance work and as a continuous process of critical engagement, both with itself and with the present. These new, decentralised spaces of remembrance should enable a regionally differentiated and transnationally interconnected remembrance, linking multiple and diverse pasts and presents while considering historical discontinuities, ruptures and contradictions.
- enable a flexible, entangled-historical practice of remembrance that can continue to evolve, fostering research-based engagement, and allowing for both commemoration and emotional connections to remembrance. Such a practice of remembrance should not only address the historical aspects of colonial history but also their enduring presence. In this way, it can enable critical engagement with current social, political, economic and cultural realities, as well as with individual and interpersonal experience.
- create physical sites that are dedicated to the victims of German colonialism and their descendants, providing safe spaces for the mourning and processing of traumatic experiences.

ESTABLISHING PERMANENT STRUCTURES

Plural and inclusive remembrance work on colonialism must be designed to be sustainable in the long term. More than anything, robust and permanent structures are needed to support it, ensure its continuity and maintain its quality. For this purpose,

- the creation of a “Remembering Colonialism Foundation” is envisaged – as an institutional framework for this work in Berlin, to ensure the internationalisation of discourse, and to facilitate and implement exchange projects and networking.
- the expansion of the “Colonialism Remembrance Concept / Remembrance site” unit is necessary.
- the creation of additional budget lines is required to provide institutional support for civil-society initiatives focused on decolonisation, in cooperation with municipal, local, national, and international actors and institutions.
- collaboration must be intensified with actors from the arts, culture and civil society, as well as dialogue with actors from countries with historical colonial ties to Germany.

FURTHER DEMANDS

In the course of the participatory process organised to create this Remembering Colonialism concept, civil-society actors and experts formulated several demands. These provide a basis for developing concrete measures and work packages aimed at ensuring that remembrance of colonialism is plural and inclusively designed.

- **Renaming streets and squares:**
  The renaming of streets and squares that currently commemorate figures who were pioneers or actors of colonialism, slavery, or racist-imperialist ideologies, is an urgent task. The names of these problematic historical figures should be replaced with those of people who were active in anti-colonial resistance and who fought for humanist and democratic values. District authorities in Berlin in charge of changing street names must be more proactive in addressing this issue. Furthermore, it is necessary to contextualise already renamed streets, ensuring a regular update of explanatory information. This would ensure that both the current state of historical research and related developments regarding the use of non-discriminatory language and imagery are appropriately reflected at the respective remembrance sites.

- **Expand academic research on colonial history:** Academic research must engage far more intensely than before in a critical examination of colonial history from an anti-colonial and anti-racist perspective. Society's broader remembrance work should be underpinned by a multi-perspective exploration of colonialism. New academic posts are to be established at Berlin's higher education institutions, with appointments made according to diversity-oriented criteria and the principle of affirmative action in order to ensure genuine equal opportunities for scholars who experience racism and are structurally discriminated. Newly created remembrance sites should serve not only as places of commemoration but also as centres of research, by working in close collaboration with universities. At the Ethnological Museum and other Berlin museums holding colonial collections, provenance research must continue to be expanded, as must investigations into the institutions' histories, their involvement in colonial processes, and the transparency or lack thereof concerning the institutions' own complicity.

- **Expand research on Asia and the Pacific region:** Research on German colonialism in Asia and the Pacific must be further boosted and made more accessible. The focus should be on critical engagement with the colonial history of Qingdao in China, known as "Tsingtau" under German rule from 1898 to 1914, the historical relationship between Tonga and Germany, and the islands in the Pacific that were colonised by Germany under the names of "German New Guinea" and "German Samoa", today Papua New Guinea, the Caroline Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands and Samoa.

- **Strengthening research on racism:** Scholarly engagement with the origins of colonial racism and its enduring impacts must be strengthened. Particular attention should be paid to the development and persistence of dehumanising systems of thought with the aim of analysing and deconstructing the historically deep-rooted structural racism in the contemporary structures of our society.

- **Pluralise and internationalise research on colonialism:**
The history of colonialism is a global phenomenon that cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of Europe or other Western countries involved in the colonial project. To do justice to the complexity of colonial entanglements, it is essential to pursue ongoing scholarly cooperation with researchers from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, as well as with those from related diasporas. In concrete terms, this means boosting existing international research projects, establishing and funding new collaborative research initiatives, and focusing specifically on opening up decolonial discourse to perspectives from African, Asian and Pacific countries with historical colonial ties to Germany.

- **Pluralise and internationalise the remembrance of colonialism:**
In its conceptual, thematic and practical dimensions, contemporary commemoration and remembrance work on colonialism must engage with both the diversity of Berlin's urban society and the experiences and perspectives of those countries and regions affected by Germany's colonial history. This involves being open to African, Asian and Pacific narratives and forms of commemoration. Equally important is the establishment, networking and cooperation of decolonial learning and remembrance centres in Berlin with comparable institutions in African, Asian and Pacific countries. Decolonial learning and remembrance centres can build on the experience of existing networks and institutions dedicated to the critical reappraisal of the Nazi dictatorship and the SED regime, learning from both their successes and shortcomings.

- **Decolonise cultural institutions:**
Institutions shaped and legitimised by colonialism – such as the Zoological Garden, the Ethnological Museum and the Botanical Museum – must critically engage with their colonial origins and involvement, committing resources to making this part of their history visible and accessible. Colonialism is not a "theme" that can be addressed in a single exhibition to then be considered "completed" or "overcome" with. Colonialism critical remembrance work rather is a cross-cutting and structural work that calls for a long-term and process-oriented engagement across

all levels of institutional practice. For this reason, it is imperative for each institution to pursue continuous engagement and reflection on issues like colonialism, coloniality and perspectives of decolonisation in the museum context. Museums in Berlin and throughout Germany should develop a clear position on these issues and communicate it publicly and transparently.

- **Restitution of art and cultural property:**
Expert contributors to this remembrance concept from Africa, the African diaspora and other regions emphasise the need for comprehensive restitution of cultural objects that were stolen or acquired in colonial contexts of injustice by museums and other institutions. This means repatriation, compensation and financial support for restoration, storage and exhibition, as well as the establishment of cooperative and joint projects.

- **Repatriation of human remains:**
Berlin's museums and scientific institutions still hold the remains of more than 9,000 individuals. The prompt and dignified repatriation of these ancestral human remains❸ must be actively advanced both by the institutions concerned and by political authorities. Treating human bodies as "collection objects" is incompatible with universal humanistic values. Societal and political decision-makers are therefore called upon to provide the necessary resources to identify and locate living relatives of named individuals and to facilitate repatriation. Institutions must take proactive

❸ **The term "ancestral human remains" has become established to refer to the bodily remains of deceased persons – relatives, ancestors, forebears – from former German and other European colonies that are still held in "storage" in museums and research institutions in Berlin and Germany. To this day, these individuals have not been laid to rest, they are denied the right to rest in peace, and their descendants do not have the opportunity to mourn or commemorate them appropriately.**

responsibility by transparently communicating their holdings and assuming accountability toward both the originating communities and the direct descendants of the decease.

- **Research to support future rehabilitation of judicial victims:**
  Under German colonial rule, people were wrongfully convicted based on a racist legal system, and must be rehabilitated. The few cases known to date include, for example, the execution of Rudolf Duala Manga Bell in Cameroon and the imprisonment and murder of Cornelius Fredericks in a colonial concentration camp in Namibia. Such cases, however, do not suffice for an all-embracing understanding of the injustices of the colonial judicial system. Further biographical research must therefore be carried out to provide a foundation for the future rehabilitation of judicial victims.

2025 Walking tour in the African Quarter, Berlin-Wedding.

WORKING PRINCIPLES FOR A PLURAL AND INCLUSIVE REMEMBRANCE OF COLONIALISM

Contemporary remembrance of colonialism, oriented toward pluralism and inclusivity, requires clear guiding principles, which are outlined below. These principles were jointly developed by Berlin civil-society actors who have long worked in this field, by descendants of victims of German colonial rule, and by experts from countries with a colonial history involving Germany. They are provisional in nature and represent a preliminary outcome and will be further refined and expanded in ongoing work processes.

- **Decolonise power structures:**
  The power structures established under colonialism – and the postcolonial inequalities that persist today – must be critically examined and their underlying dynamics analysed, focusing especially on intersecting forms of discrimination. Sites dedicated to engaging with colonial history must actively deconstruct existing power imbalances.

- **Decolonise participation processes:**
  In all future efforts to establish a contemporary practice of remembering colonialism, it is essential to ensure targeted, early and comprehensive inclusion of African, Asian, Pacific and diasporic perspectives, and the involvement of the relevant individuals and expert communities. Equally, it is vital that descendants of colonised peoples have a substantive say in all matters that concern them and their ancestors with the aim of establishing and maintaining the dialogue between their perspectives and European narratives.

- **Decolonise forms of commemoration:**
  A vibrant, plural and inclusive culture of remembrance and commemoration requires the multi-perspective reconstruction and integration of memories, narratives and histories. This means providing targeted support for commemorative forms that give space to emotional, artistic and spiritual modes of expression such as dance, music and poetry.

- **Decolonise spatial and architectural understanding:**
  A contemporary, plural and inclusive remembrance of colonialism requires that traditional concepts of spatial design, especially in architecture, should be critically reassessed and reimagined from a decolonial perspective. New approaches should enable spaces to be organised in ways that are sensitive, accessible and sustainable. Collaboration with institutions advancing intersectionally informed spatial redesign should be established. The aim should be to move away from individualistic and isolated approaches, and instead develop collective and communal solutions for a diverse society that take into account and appropriately represent the variety of perspectives, experiences and forms of access that shape the relationship between people, nature and the environment.

- **Decolonise the dominant narrative of urban history:**
  Berlin is a city of multiple voices. The perspectives and experiences of diverse societies, social groups, communities, and generations must be actively included, accordingly. Through this only it becomes possible to narrate and present, as far as possible, an all-encompassing history of Berlin. Experiences of migration, diaspora, and displacement must be considered and embedded within the context of Berlin's colonial and postcolonial past.

- **Networking, dialogue and communication:**
  To be able to work effectively in this field, it is crucial to ensure systematic cooperation among Berlin-based organisations and actors engaged in anti-racist and anti-discriminatory work on colonial history and the remembrance of colonialism. It is also highly important to promote collaboration with research networks and working groups which critically reappraise the history of the Nazi dictatorship and the SED regime,

exchanging ideas about potential forms of cooperation based on approaches that explore how these histories are interlinked. A plural society requires a culture of remembrance that is not divided into distinct spheres but instead works at the intersections and transitions, connecting the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives without diminishing their distinctiveness.

- **Accessibility, design and mediation:**
  German colonialism is a complex historical phenomenon. For this very reason, remembrance sites must be designed in a way to offer both in-depth scholarly information and a wide range of more accessible entry points, reaching diverse – or rather multiple – audiences. The preparation and mediation of content should allow for different modes of learning, enabling people with varied habits of reception and learning preferences to engage with the subject. Educational programmes on the remembrance of colonialism should not only serve the acquisition of knowledge but also act as spaces for discussion and dialogue.

- **Continuity and sustainability in engaging with German colonialism:**
  Remembrance of German colonialism is still marked by many gaps. For this reason, it is all the more important to establish long-term measures for a plural and inclusive remembrance of colonialism to ensure continuity in the culture of remembrance. Only through this can the memory of colonialism be embedded in the collective societal consciousness and contribute to an ongoing process of social reflection. Access to and the collection of objects and archival materials reflecting the diverse realities of life in Berlin play a key role in this endeavour.

FINAL REFLECTION

When, in the context of remembrance policy, we are calling for the necessary engagement with our colonial history and its impact on social coexistence, we often use the term “decolonisation”. Despite its outward resonance and impact, this process is primarily directed inwards. It concerns us, who we are here and now, but also who we wish to become tomorrow, in all our diversity.

The process of decolonisation touches every sphere of life; it demands patience and the willingness for change. It is up to us Berliners to create a collective culture of remembrance that does justice to our diversity, our life experiences and our stories, while acknowledging our differences and contradictions. As the society we are today, this process enables us to develop critical perspectives of our pasts and presents, as part of Berlin and Germany, and of the wider world.

We can no longer defer responsibility for our colonial legacy – especially given our varied positions – to future generations. Instead, we must ask ourselves what kind of worlds these generations should or may have to live in. This question requires clear choices and calls for concrete action. Here and now.

2024 Presentation of the remembrance concept at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin.

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