Paths, Palimpsests and Voids of Dé kolon εl í za shɔn

Memorials and Memorial Cultures
Based on Examples/Voids in Sierra Leone_ and Germany_

A Path, Detours and [Proposal] - Essay in Notes and Images

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Abstract

This essay attempts to discuss the decolonial memorialscape in Germany and Sierra Leone, bringing into focus the few existing examples. Coming from the art field, my wish is to bring art-practice into the communication for development field. This means allowing associations, emotions and subjective observations to be part of the research on memorial-cultures, understanding images and layout as integral parts of a political-aesthetic thesis. The examples from Germany and Sierra Leone are not only understood in their national frameworks, but rather in their un/common coloniality. The essay explores at first the material world of colonial-critical memorials, an undertaking that I deemed to be achievable in view of the limited number of memorials both countries have. The research field is still very complex and therefore the essay itself is a condensed and fragmented first step along peripheral paths. Listening to voices from Freetown as well as observing activities around a memorial in the German city of Bremen helped me gain an enlarged understanding of memorials. Communication aspects and performative approaches surrounding a sculptural form are able to give memorials living and discursive dimensions.

The hypothesis that memorials could be helpful for the decolonialization of colonizing – as well as colonized - societies could not be fully answered as the examples described all have their weaknesses. If immaterial, sometimes ephemeral forms like writings, theatre, activism and spiritual ceremonies are included in the memorialscape, the answer is clearly positive, even though the majority in Germany would not be reached by these actions. In contrast to Germany, in Sierra Leone I found a *milieux de mémoire* (Pierre Nora) which might not be that active in the definition of Aleida Assmann, but which, with the empowering impacts of the West African concept of Sankofa, is able to create creole realms of memory.

Besides the image of the path along the fragmented, multilingual Dékolonizàshôn process, different bodies of water became powerful imaginations for decolonial memorials, connecting different times and places. The element of water itself is a palimpsest and at the same time an unchanging Mahnmal. A Mahnmal which is absent from the collective memory (Maurice Halbwachs) in Germany and can therefore be perceived as a void – unlike in the collective memory-culture of The Black Atlantic (Paul Gilroy).

With reference to the examples described and analyzed, proposals are included and put forward for discussion.
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San Ko Fa – go back and get it-
Akan proverb

Maandee Ye Elomboe ²
Nzema proverb

Singg Dɔn, Wɔd Lɛf - The song is done, the words remain-
Krio proverb

.... Elle est une pensée éclatée – ce qui fait sa force, mais aussi sa faiblesse.
.... It's a fragmented way of thinking, which is both a strength and a weakness.

Achille Mbembe on postcolonial thinking

...not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by its passerby but to demand; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violations; not to accept gracioulsy the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.

James Young on Holocaust Memorials

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1 In the context of an English text it is difficult to explain my use of a German specificity reacting to the male dominated German writing which used to name only the male form, if both genders are involved. The so called 'Gender Gap' reacts to this habit, not in adding only the female form, but a gap for other possibilities as well, as transgender. I use this gap in each case where I believe that there is something more to be considered as the word evokes, but to explain it would go too far. Here it should give a hint to the fact that 'Germany' as well as 'Sierra Leone' are in my view not sufficient to describe the complex framework in which I want to understand and discuss the memorialscape – as national, but also other frameworks.

2 Nzema proverb from South-West-Ghana -translated 'things of the land' or the culture and traditions of the land. [.....] meaning the traditions of the land are heavy - it suggests that no one person can single-handedly carry the traditions of a land. Douglas Frimpong Nnruoh, The scientific Basis of Some Ellembelle Nzema Indiginous Knowledge Forms in Kuupole, Botchway 2010:101. I am citing that as guiding proverb to acknowledge that we cannot understand everything; especially in another culture. That is also the reason why I decided not to translate directly. The other point is that a single person cannot handle it alone, which in my case refers to all the people around me, the literature I consulted, but also the limitations of such a "single-handed" work.
Before the Track – Titles, Subtitles and Citations

This thesis describes a path, a path where the examples delineated are constantly overwritten. Memorial culture in terms of the colonial past and present could be considered nearly a total void in Germany if immaterial, ephemeral forms of memorials are not included. My hypothesis is that Sierra Leone, as creole culture in West Africa that combines Western and African ideas of remembrance, could be an example of the decolonization of memorialscapes, even though the country also has a lot of palimpsests and voids hiding the underlying coloniality. Decolonization - Dé kolon ɛl í za shən - is a fragmented multilingual process, in which more and more voices, languages and creolizations should be heard. ³

By combining 'scientific' and 'other' texts and understanding pictures and layout as a form of research, I am trying to find ways on how to work, communicate and act on the complex legacies of colonialism. I have chosen the picture of a small or peripheral path which I have tried to follow and find, creating for the reader (and myself) some stumbling stones, allowing language to follow the complexities on the stony path of decolonization, is one of my methodologies. It is an inquiry driven by the wish to merge scientific writing and visual-art-practice from two separated forms into one. It is clear that such an aim must be understood as practice, a work-in-process – a path.

By also taking detours into consideration, I am hoping to make some connections which might not be there at first glance, which however could also lead the wrong way. This would mean going back and searching for the lost way, as an Akan proverb suggests – san ko fa - go back and get it [back]! Sankofa is today one of the most common symbols concerning African culture, history and politics of remembrance. It has various forms – one is a bird that turns its neck backward to look for its lost egg while flying forward.

The concept of Sankofa is a way to re-connect with the past in order to create the future. In Sierra Leone that concerns the lost and destroyed West African knowledge; in Germany it is about the remembrance and the acknowledgement of colonialism and its racist traditions in Europe. Apology and reparations would be the logical consequences of this realization. Coming from the visual-art-practice, I will not only involve many images, but also proposals – in [gray courier letters] – for interventions, memorials and the communication tactics around them.

³ The word is a "disconnected creolization", adding French, German/Spanish and Krio pronunciations/associations to the English term.
The chapters could be understood as notes on a journey - a process - which I understand as a goal described by decolonialization. Among my main questions are: Could memorials be helpful in this ongoing process of decolonization? Do we have to enlarge our understanding of memorials? No final solution to the memorial-question, as stated by James Young,\(^4\) meaning the discourse around the holocaust memorials should not end. They contribute to a living memorial-culture, as one of the paths which I will elaborate further. Especially when starting from a German context, it is clear that the holocaust memorialscape has a huge impact, from the Stolpersteine – Stumbling Stones – to several not materialized ideas for the Holocaust Memorial, immaterial or ephemeral forms and the international Holocaust memorial cultures. Whereas in the Holocaust memorial-culture the Void (Daniel Libeskind) is an active powerful symbol of the infinite loss, in the memorial culture of enslavement and colonialism it is a passive void created by the lack of memorials. However, this void is anything but passive, if we consider the constant denial and ignorance of coloniality today.

Overshadowed by the feeling of having a very limited perspective as part of the (world-wide) white minority, I hope to gain broader perspectives by studying the memorial-cultures in Sierra Leone and engage in anti-colonial, postcolonial and especially decolonial literature from the Global South, respectively by People of Color.\(^5\) It is an attempt to play with different forms of thinking, to challenge the Western system of knowledge, trying to combine personal observation, literature-review, (critical-)diary and analysis, as well as artistic research and proposals - although there is a risk that this might lead off the track.

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4 James Young, one of the most known scholars on memorial-cultures of the Holocaust in his lecture in 2000: *Germany’s Holocaust Memorial* at the University of California on Television (UCTV) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmxyYXtf_vw - 01. 03 2014

5 The term *white* is not used in a biological sense, it does not refer to skin colour, but to a system in which people who identify (willingly or unwillingly) themselves as white have privileges and fostering wherefore a racist system, based on historically-grown, sociological and cultural privileges. As the term is widely not self-chosen by the majority of white people it is in contrast to the term *Black* in italic and lowercase.

There is no clear distinction between anti-colonial, postcolonial and decolonial texts – I only can describe how I understand and use it in this essay. Anti-colonial: mainly from the major colonial times; a perspective of being against colonialism, but not necessarily reflecting ones own involvement, if it is from a white perspective – it could be considered an activist term. Postcolonial studies came up after the biggest part of occupied territories were (nationally) liberated. Initiated by scholars of the Global South. But there are postcolonial thinkers avant la lettre, like W.E.B. Dubois and Frantz Fanon. Postcolonial theory has found its place in the academy without the power to decolonize it – appropriated by white people, it faces criticism. Decolonial thinking/aesthetics try to focus on epistemic cultures of the Global South (and will be explained more in detail later).

The term *People of Color* derives of the self-designation practice racially oppressed people (Kien Nghi Ha, 2009, translated from the German by the author). It is unlike a common understanding not only a self-defined unifying term for all non-whites, as somebody can be understood in one constellation as white, in another, of Color.
Departure

Departing from a post-colonial, post-fascist society where the former aspect is mainly forgotten, euphemized and overwritten, I want to follow peripheral paths of decolonization, which often end too early, too abruptly. Bigger roads tend to ignore not only a range of theories but also daily racism, which has to be understood as rooted in the colonial legacies.6

Coming from a country whose remembrance and memorial culture is regarded as one of the world’s most sophisticated and self-critical, and therefore suitable for large-scale export, one has to challenge this notion of overestimation with the conviction that communication for development has to start at one’s own doorstep.7

While Germany overall has a rich memorialscape in its public spaces, when it comes to colonial-critical memorials, there is a void, which at the first gaze could even be considered total emptiness – depending on how broad the understanding of a memorial is. In this case, I want to widen this understanding.

One way of enlarging the understanding of memorial culture is to research in other societies with fundamentally different experiences, especially in terms of colonialism. Therefore, being involved already in the memorial-discussions in Sierra Leone, I imagine one possible path in the memory-landscape (Paul Basu) is a trail that leads past a range of examples, but also voids and palimpsests, in Freetown and beyond. My conviction is that in order to decolonize our thinking we should not believe we could do that only with theory and practice from the European knowledge system. Therefore I will try to follow more “peripheral” paths, made accessible by decolonial8 thinkers of the Global South_ and try to understand the diverse cultures of commemoration and

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6 I write it in plural to include also the enslavement and the apartheid systems.
7 See the German engagement in Peru, Tunisia, Cambodia and others.
8 The term ‘decolonial’ comes from the Americas. It stresses the need to change perspective, not only by criticizing coloniality by means of epistemic cultures of the global North, but with an Epistemic Decolonial Turn (Ramón Grosfoguel, 2007) meaning a thinking from the global South. See also Anibal Quijano, Alena Lockward, Walter Mingolo or Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who writes in 2011: This more substantial decolonial turn was announced by W.E.B. Du Bois in the early twentieth century and made explicit in a line of figures that goes from Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon in the mid-twentieth century, to Sylvia Wynter, Enrique Dussel, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lewis Gordon, Chela Sandoval, and Linda Tuhiwai. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez called it Decolonizing Epistemology – Ontologizing Knowledge (2010). Today, where the term ‘decolonial’ is also inscribed in certain Anglophone academia and in intellectual activist scenes in the Netherlands, Austria and in Germany, we can define it as working with aesthetics in language and art which are not anymore only against coloniality, as anti-colonial struggles were, nor postcolonial, which is already mainstreamed in the European knowledge systems, but an embracing holistic system of thinking on the way.
memorialization in Sierra Leone. On the one perspective, there seem to be huge differences, on the other – due to colonization as well as overwritten histories – there are similarities too, which I will discuss and analyse in this essay. I will take two memorial sites that have already been constructed as points of departure:

The first, Germany’s sole Anti-Colonial monument *Der Elefant* is situated in the city-state of Bremen. It was built by colonial revisionists of the national-socialist party in 1931 and renamed in 1989. In 2009 it was complemented by a small memorial – the only one in Germany commemorating the genocide in Namibia committed by the German colonial power in 1904 -1908.

The second memorial site I will look at is the *Peace and Cultural Monument Sierra Leone*, recently built by the military as *War Memorial* and renamed before it opened to the public in 2012. Even though it is a vibrant history-park in the middle of the capital Freetown that showcases a large number of historic role-models – while hiding and excluding others – it is hardly known.

**Motive(s) and Position on the Way**

Coming from the art-field, my first aim is to challenge colonial images and language. As a *white* German woman, I consider Communication for Development to be practised first at my own doorstep, doing 'Homework not fieldwork' as Kamala Visweswaran called it. That means for me to be engaged with critical whiteness, which I understand as the precondition for decolonizing the mentalities of *white* people in *white* dominated societies – which of course is a huge difference to decolonizing colonized societies – of Color – where the focus is on healing, taking the traumata caused by enslavement and colonialism seriously and making voices heard.

Speaking about memories and memorials, my aim is to engage myself in finding a path that leads in two directions: one to the past of the colonial times and the other to a more conscious future, by means of research, reflections and political art – and maybe memorials. My wish is to set one tiny stone that helps pave the way for decolonialization.

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10 Critical Whiteness Studies focus on the privileges of *white* people and their racializing practice, trying to deconstruct them, without denying their impact or being "color blind" but with active acknowledgement (in practice it is still in a very early stage).
Research Questions, Trying to Consider Plural Perspectives on the Way

In my essay about the colonial legacies in Germany and Sierra Leone, I want to raise the question if memorials could be helpful in the decolonization process. I want to discuss ways of commemoration which bring the un/common histories back to the foreground, keeping it alive in order to be able to reflect and relate its legacies to our societies of today. My hope is, by looking at two societies with fundamentally different histories, to gain multiple perspectives on how to remember in diverse contexts. Besides Germany, which is not a deliberate choice because of the before explained impacts, Sierra Leone's memorial culture holds the promise with its 'Western' and 'West-African' influences, its postcolonial pastiche, as Paul Basu (2013) called the newly erected Peace and Cultural Monument in Freetown, to open up ways of commemoration from multiple perspectives - a precondition for healing and reconciliation?

Historiography: Which Sites of Memory? Who's Milieux de Mémoire?

When dealing with historical legacies, memorial and memory-cultures in a European context, several scholars such as Maurice Halbwach's mémoire collective, Jan and Aleida Assman's Erinnerungskultur, or Pierre Nora's lieux de mémoire have to be considered. [...] the study of collective representations was transformed by Nora to the study of collective representations of the past, of memory.11 Pierre Nora's notion, that There are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de memoire, real environments of memory12 is convincing and might be especially important in a European context. However already the translation into English or German causes problems and, after reading it in different translations and interpretations, it became clear to me that this captivating term can be interpreted in quite different ways and might therefore not be precise. This also makes its use flexible, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai describes in Remembered Realms (2001:906), where she describes that the interpretation of the term was already developed in the years Nora's historiography13 was written - between 1981-1992.

11 Alon Confino, Memory and the History of Mentalities, in Astrid Erlls, Ansgar Nünning, 2010: 78
12 Pierre Nora, Between Memory and History in Representations, no.26, 1989: 7
13 See also: Pim dem Boer: Translating lieux de mémoire, in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, 2010:22f, or Robert Aldrige, Decolonization, the French Empire and sites of memory, 2005:2; or Hue-Tam Ho Tai (2001) Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory. The American Historical Review.
On an abstract level, Pierre Nora’s *lieu*-theory might be fruitful for this discussion, interpreting it in contrast to *millieux de memoire*, which I especially see in the amnesia of European colonial histories as Robert Aldrich writes:

*The darker sides of the colonial experience – slavery, the use of indentured labour, torture, the deaths of tens of thousands of French soldiers in colonial battles* – were banished from memory. For a generation after 1962, except for groups such as pieds-noirs and migrants (and colonial historians!), the French suffered from colonial amnesia.\(^\text{14}\)

I cite this short paragraph even though it is highly problematic: 'the darker side of the colonial experience' implies that there is a 'lighter' one, which is, from a British or a white settler perspective, especially questionable. It could also refer to the 'experiences' of the colonizers, which would explain why this euphemism is used, sounding in that context more like an 'adventure' and not 'suffering'. Then: 'slavery' which I would call 'enslavement', 'indentured labour' an euphemism, as it was forced labour *the deaths of tens of thousands of French soldiers in colonial battles* ignores the millions of colonized people who resisted or not in these battles, and where killed in far larger numbers than the invaders. And 'pieds-noirs' – a racist term for white French people, who colonized and settled in the Maghreb, especially in Algeria. Finally 'migrants' might be at least imprecise, as a lot of people considered migrants - therefore not French - are French and not migrated, but born in France.

With this short example, one can already see, how much colonial violence can lie already in a colonial critical paragraph. Being against colonialism or racism, does not prevent you from talking, writing or acting racist, but it is a privilege - and at the same time a loss - as a white person not to be aware of it. *Unlearning one's privileges as one's loss*, the famous aphorism by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, speaks also about the being cut off from other realms of knowledge by this privilege.

Pierre Nora opens up 'realms of memory' - one English translation, which for me is the most open one and could point in a performative direction, away from a certain place - a non-material memorial. Another English translation which could be read more geographically is *sites of memory*, like the Namibian desert of Omaheke where the first German-caused genocide happened (which the Germans called Deutsch Südwestafrika and euphemistically “Strafexpedition” or “Kolonialkrieg”) – “punishment expedition” or “colonial war”).\(^\text{15}\) Other sites of

\(^\text{14}\)Robert Aldrige, 2005:2 ibid.

\(^\text{15}\)A commemoration, dated back to October 2\(^\text{nd}\) 1904, where Lothar von Trotha gave the extermination order against the Herero, which we committed yesterday on a graveyard nearby where the “Afrika Stein” (Africa Stone) for the German soldiers was juxtaposed with a plaque. - only 5 people lighted candles, put down roses and practised a minute of silence. But one has also to say that this stone is highly controversial: 1. due to its premier colonial connotation where revisionist groups are still commemorating their soldiers and 2. due to the plaque's inscription that was not accepted by the community and the activists, because it does not even mention the genocide.
memory are the remains of the concentration camps on 'Haifisch Insel' – Shark Island - near Lüderitz. These are sites of memory in the Namibian context, but not in Germany. Inside Germany are many colonial sites, like memorials – often animals with the names of the regarded-as-lost "colonies" and street-names honouring colonial perpetrators or these "colonies." It is difficult though to refer to them as sites of memory in Nora's sense, as they are hardly known or perceived. In contrast the unconscious realms of memory are very strong in the daily life in Germany even though neither acknowledged, what decolonial thinkers call coloniality; the structural colonial memories, the colonial archive which is omnipresent but for a majority of white people not visible, which position People of Color to the "Other."

Aleida Assman called the archive the passively stored memory that preserves the past, but only for one part of the German society it is seemingly past. Though, the Subaltern Can Speak and produce counter realms of memory, like Grada Kilomba's book Plantation Memories – Episodes of Everyday Racsim (2008) or the song Mental Slavery by the Sierra Leonean Refugee All Stars (deriving from Marcus Garvey...). These examples I would call immaterial monuments, memorials or realms of memory - shared by a community, but not by all people of a country like Germany. Here it becomes obvious that we cannot speak anymore from a national collective memory, as Maurice Halbwachs, suggested already nearly 100 years ago. In this respect becomes lieux de memoire ambivalent. On one side Nora’s realms of memory opens up the memorial to an immaterial space, on the other it is restricted to a national framework which even does not exist anymore as such. If we think about the Black communities worldwide the term collective memory becomes very strong as it is also connecting to collective trauma.

In his seven-volume book on French HistorY Les Lieux de mémoire (1997) Pierre Nora takes a rather conservative, or better white French course and thus ignores diaspora, migrant, postcolonial cultures which are part of French historicIES. French colonial history in general is underrepresented by having no chapter on French oversee occupations, nor on enslavement, nor on Haiti and therefore nothing on the resistance struggles and independence. The only 15 pages on colonialism (and anti-colonialism in France, sic!) are contained in volume 3 chapter 25: L’Exposition coloniale de 1931 of his 5000 pages historiography.

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16 After Adolf Lüderitz, a businessman from Bremen who “bought” a big part of today's Namibia with a trick: “the mile-swindle” -and euphemism for cheating the local authorities. At least the district of “Lüderitzbucht” has been renamed !namiǂNûs since August 2013.
17 Aleida Assmann, Canon and Archive, in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, 2010:98f
18 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1988, Can the Subaltern Speak?
19 The term ‘Black’, with capital letters refers to its social and political construction, not ignoring racism and its construction of race and is not to be understood as biological term. The capital refers to the self-determination of the word, instead of ‘white’, which is written italic to differentiate it, but it is not a self-chosen expression.
Among the new nations, independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation. Similarly, a process of interior decolonization has effected ethnic minorities, families and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital. Pierre Nora (1989:7)21

Here I felt to be in a colonial scene (Grada Kilomba) - last prominently staged by Nicolas Sarkozy in the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal in 2007. The ignorant thinking, that the African Continent has no history – as Hegel and many other European intellectuals already imagined since hundreds of years. I was speechless – searching for citations against this reading – and before citing Achille Mmembre replying to Nicolas Sarkozy, “I” reply to Pierre Nora, a white French, born in Algeria, with a just-found Tunisian Article about the 50th commemoration of the burning of the Algiers University Library and the following memorialization tactics.

*It was a fire desired by the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS), the armed organisation of the French who did not want to see Algeria gain independence and which through this act full of significance tried to sweep away the historical and cultural memory of the population.*22

Only three years after independence of Algeria different Arab countries printed a commemoration stamp depicting the barbarous act of burning books and the flame of wisdom in the genie-lamp – symbol of the success of independence? - the holy power of knowledge? Or can the powerful spirit once out of the lamp not be controlled any more?

The first 2 are from one Algerian letter, the 3. from Kuwait, 4 and 5 are from an Egyptian letter and the 6. is from Libya, all 1965 - retrieved from a library-history website by Larry T. Nix. -

I read the stamps as a decentralized memorial of solidarity for the long colonial suffering and resistance of the newly independent brother-state Algeria.

21Pierre Nora: Between Memory and History: Les lieux de Mémoires, 1989:7 in Representations, University of California Press, - In the colonial context Pierre Nora, is considered ‘white’, as he is Jewish, he could be considered in a fascist context of Color
22ANSAmend, 07. 8. 2012, Algeria: 50 years ago the French set fire to library – Algiers.
The Sarkozy-speech is an example of how Europeans are often ignorant about the rich history of the Continent\textsuperscript{23}, where Cheikh Anta Diop is one of its most known historians who decolonized the theory about European “African history” and how language can be violent, destructive and racist, as Achille Mbembe answered to Sarkozy:

\[
\text{[...]}\text{the act of violation often begins with language- a language which, on the pretext of simply expressing the speaker's deepest convictions, excuses all, refuses to expose its reasons and declares itself immune whilst at the same time forcing the weakest to bear the full force of its violence.}\text{24}
\]

To ignore these histories - which are not only the ones of [...] migrants (and colonial historians!) but of all Europeans, Africans, Asians and First Nations in the Americas and the Pacific - has to do with structural racism. And if we want to decolonize our knowledge, we have to perceive different perspectives and maybe other forms of history(writing) – other forms of knowledge of the past and how to perceive the present and create the future.

\textsuperscript{23}By calling Africa, the Continent, people stress the fact that it is huge with 54 nations - it is also an Pan African notion.

\textsuperscript{24} Achille Mbembe, 2007, \textit{Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa in Africultures}. 
Detour: The Unknown of the River Seine - the Unknown Seine Memorial -

Meanwhile in Paris, in 1961, the same year of the arson attack on the University Library in Algiers, the police drowned Algerians in the River Seine. *La Seine* – the River Seine which runs through Paris – is a symbol in the middle of the French Republic which can be read as *lieu de mémoire* in many different ways as it carries manifold histories and memories – the element of water is itself a palimpsest overwriting diverse histories.... For the Algerian communities, it is an open wound, traversing not only the capital but society itself, as more than 200 Algerians were killed and drowned here on October 17th 1961.

The French majority see the River Seine as bearer of the ashes of Jeanne d'Arc - the Virgin of Orléans – her myth is a *site of memory* according to Pierre Nora’s historiography. Even *l’Inconnue de la Seine* - the Unknown Girl of the River Seine - is much more known than the Massacre of Paris, where so many Algerians and other Maghrebians demonstrating peacefully against the racist curfew imposed on North-Africans and for the independence of their country where killed and drowned by the French authorities exercising their shrinking colonial power.
Epistemic Roadblocks on the Way to Another Ontology - or Cosmology?

Decolonizing the *epistemic violence* as scholars like Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak formulated long ago means after Dipesh Chacrabarty to *provincialize European* knowledge systems which are still linked to coloniality and therefore regarded as universal reproducing hegemonic and racist structures in academia.

De-Valera N. Y. M Botchway, a scholar from Ghana, wrote *in Polishing the Pearls of Ancient Wisdom* (2010:19)

*Institutions must abandon the colonial idea of “Ivory Towerism” and harness [Indigenous Knowledge Systems] IKS to become society-oriented grassroot-embracing African institutes of higher learning.*

He explains that not only the system itself should be less elite based, but that the colonists understood their system as the only one. Botchway argues after Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the leading historians from the Continent, that the European knowledge systems derived very much from the Khmet culture, from ancient Egypt, therefore have African origins. In as much as in Europe this knowledge system is regarded as universal, it is described as from European origin – always in contrast to the "dark continent" (ibid.: 29ff).

Botchway argues that the colonial-based educational system separated the people totally from their own systems of knowledge, their cosmologies and spirituality - there is until today nearly no connection possible between the knowledge of the ancestors and the university (ibid.: 47-53).

As Joshua Kwesi Aikins, a Black German scholar and activist, in his speech on the occasion of the first renaming of a street - named after a perpetrator of the German/Brandenburg enslavement-system, von der Gröben, to an Afro-German activist and poet, May Ayim - in Berlin 2011 said:

*Today’s dedication of the memorial plaque here on May Ayim Ufer is a small step on a long road, so I would like to preface my remarks with a saying of my Ghanaian ancestors: The Adinkra proverb San-ko-fa invites you: "Go back and get it [back]". This refers to the need to look into the past to deal with history in order to understand the present and to be able to create the future.*

In several texts and books (like *Polishing the Pearls of Ancient Wisdom* or ‘*Gazing Back’ to Indigenous Knowledge and Skills*, Sankofa is described as a *journey* (Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour, 2012) where you sometimes have to go back to catch something forgotten, to reflect - an image that fits my own understanding of research, self-reflection and vision of a system of thinking which doesn't

understand itself as universal and carved in stone. African intellectuals have expressed the need to step beyond the roadmap of European knowledge systems and reconnect to their own without rejecting the parts which can be integrated on that way.

Amadou Hampaté Bâ said: **Humans Can Reach a Common Goal Without Taking the Same Roads**\(^{26}\)

In the cases of Sierra Leone and Germany, this might be very true and I am trying to follow different paths of de-colonial writings by scholars from the Global South who have a lot to offer in terms of changing perspectives and direction.

> The fact of not having the writing, does not deprive Africa to have a past and knowledge. As my master Tierno Bokar said: "Writing is one thing and knowing is another. Writing is a photograph of knowledge, but it is not the knowledge itself...." \(^{27}\)

Besides the oral traditions there are a lot of visual ones in the cities in Sierra Leone as mural paintings, depicting historical figures like Sengbe Pieh - the conquerer of the Amistad, - religious and political leaders, stars, daily-life-needs and tags from social youth groups featuring Black agency. I would guess that there are less *lieux de mémoire*, less memorials or official memorial-culture, but maybe a *milieu de mémoire*, which might not be sophisticated, but vivid in its imaginary and ephemeral, unofficial forms. The legacy of the violent histories in Sierra Leone might still be under-theorized - at least within the country - but this does not mean that there is not a lot of research done abroad. In fact there is a need for more voices from within to take the centre stage on the discourse on remembrance in order to get the interpretive sovereignty back. **Sankofa!**

\(^{26}\) Citation from the Collège Amadou Hampaté Bâ-Web-Site.  
\(^{27}\) Amadou Hampâté Bâ, 1972. Translated from the French by the author.
Sitting at the Sideway in the Middle of Berlin:
Lumumba - an Anti-Colonial Memorial or Just an Expressive Sculpture?

For the sake of actuality, I will narrate an example of active or passive de-memorial-culture that showed up on my way just yesterday in Berlin (08. 10. 2013) – the ghost of Patrice Lumumba who is unable to rest? In the evening, while attending a meeting dealing with colonial-looted art and human remains, I was told a Lumumba statue had just been erected (apparently, Lumumba's son and several ambassadors were present, but view of the communities_ had even been informed). The same night, I searched this new monument, but it was difficult to find: it is very small and the inscription reveals that it was not primarily erected to honour Patrice Lumumba, the first Congolese President, but the German woman artist who had created this sculpture soon after his death in 1961 depicting him on the transfer to Thysville, in the hands of his murderers. It shows him tied and powerless – a victim, not a president, not a resistance fighter nor an important charismatic liberation figure for the whole Continent. In view of the fact that many occupied countries where still not independent at this time and especially socialist countries were against imperialism, this depiction (by an art professor of the GDR, Genni Wiegmann-Mucchi) is a gesture of disapproval, even of empathy, but not at an I-level – the gaze is still a colonial one. But what does that mean for us now, 52 years later? One could argue that this is a case of passive remembering as Aleida Aßmann called it, when sculptures are stored in an archive. But in this case, it was an active act to take the sculpture out of the storehouse and show it to the public which would make it an active remembering. The passivity in it, is in my view, the historical-, or better the memorial-blindness, which could be called passive forgetting in the sense of Aleida Assmann's scheme of cultural memory, with its active and passive remembrance and passive and active forgetting parts (Aleida Assmann 2010:99). While I would agree on the abstract level of her scheme, I have problems finding this case reflected in it, or better, how I would interpret it. I would challenge the idea that this is only a passive action. For me it is an example of deliberate active forgetting, without negating or destroying anything, which would be preconditions to fit in Assmann's scheme of active forgetting. It is hiding the criticism of coloniality while showing it at the same time. It is anti-colonial, while displaying it in a colonial gesture. It wants to remember Lumumba, but at the same time, it overwrites his name with that of the artist and the art itself. It places it in a sculptural environment of l'art-pour-l'art, topped with a (white!) gendered surplus. The two men who attended the inauguration told me that the people standing around the sculpture where looking down at this representation of Lumumba. The text uses a huge difference in scale without any logical reason, stating the artist's name double the size of „Lumumba“ which might sound to the uninformed passer-by as an artist's invention.

This sculpture (which seemed to me to emerge out of a void – like a drop-sculpture) is a complex example of how a memorial can be de-memorializing by lack of communication (information-, press- and text-politics), size, form and site. Not every art-practice is helpful in the memorial field, as some follow totally extraneous perspectives. The (apolitical) artistic view can be very much in favour of an unconventional memorial which does not show so much a heroic gesture as the
vulnerability of a human being, while underestimating that a memorial always represents the depicted as well as the spirit of the people who present it to the public.

The photos I took that night in October 2013. The unfocussed is made by a passer-by to understand the relation -the sculpture itself is 81cm, with pedestal 130 cm tall.

My proposition for the text on an higher pedestal:

**Patrice Émery Lumumba 1925 - 1961**
First President of the Independent Republic of Congo
Fighter Against Ongoing Colonially
Murdered to Protect Western Interest and Power

Sculpture from 1961 by Genni Wiegmann-Mucci:
"Lumumba - Transfer to Thysville"

Neither brutality, nor cruelty, nor torture will ever bring me to ask for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head unbowed, my faith unshakeable and with profound trust in the destiny of my country, rather than live under subjection and disregarding sacred principles.

From Patrice Lumumba's last letter
to his wife Pauline Opango Lumumba]
Another Peripheral Path, Another Representation: 
Lumumba in the Lumumba-Street in Leipzig

A counter-example is the very same-but-different Lumumba-statue in the East German City of Leipzig, a memorial with a rich history itself. In 1961, months after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the GDR named a street after Lumumba and erected there - just in front of a University Building - a Lumumba-Bust, quite realistic with glasses. After the reunification, in 1997, this memorial was desecrated and stolen. On the 50th anniversary of Lumumba's violent death, in 2011, the very same organisation which was involved in the building of the Berlin Lumumba sculpture, DAFRIG, arranged a colloquium with the Senegalese Professor Maguèye Kassé from the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar and inaugurated a new Lumumba memorial enlarging the bust of the sculpture from Berlin and set it on a new tall socket to bring it to an I-level. In as much as that could be called a conventional memorial, it seems to me far more politically thoughtful and far more appropriate as its Berliner counterpart.

Going Back to Berlin – the Colonial Capital – Congo/Africa/Berlin-Conference...

Interestingly DAFRIG named the campaign to generate money for the Lumumba statue of 2013 a “help-project for Berlin”. Congolese Internet News were very positive, having heard about the Lumumba statue inauguration, criticizing the Belgian policies, where no Lumumba statue has been erected - [but many (as I researched in a former work) of King Leopold II. who brutally exploited the Congo].
In the African Quarter in Berlin – so-called due to its colonial street-names – a party which campaigned against the re-naming of streets honouring colonial perpetrators tried to scare people by asking ‘Do you want to live in a Lumumba-Street?’ (with success).

On the other hand, in 2013 the district’s government in Berlin decided, that there will be a Lern- und Erinnerungsort – a site of learning and remembrance – a lieu de mémoire - planned by the Black community which bears the symbol of Sankofa - to create a new milieu de mémoire in the future?

What might look like a detour, having said to start with an other memorial, became out of actuality another example of the memoryscape in the colonial-metropolis of Berlin where the partition and exploitation of whole continent was decided. Actually it was out of despair – of having no deliberate material memorial in Berlin – that I had decided to start with the anti-colonial path in Bremen, following the idea of starting with traditional, sculptural memorial-culture. Historically it should be situated in Berlin, where the so called Congo Conference – also called Africa or Berlin Conference – took place from 1884 to 1885. In this conference where no African was present, the European powers met to divide the African continent into pieces they distributed among themselves – a bitter-sweet cake we are still eating of – consciously or not.

In Berlin, where that fatal conference took place, there is only a small commemoration plaque installed by a private initiative. This plaque is hardly known and was recently even 'overshadowed' - or better out-shined - by a 11m high statue of Georg Elser, a Hitler-assassin. However this location is the annual starting point for an demonstration against forgetting and overwriting.

Later I will come back to some examples of the more immaterial colonial-critical memorial culture in Berlin like the Anti-Colonial Africa Conference in 2004, the Reading of the Protokolle und Generalakte der Berliner Afrika-Konferenz 1884 – 1885 in 2005, Déberlinesation-Art-Projects by Mansour Ciss Kanakassy, the Remember Resistance Programs about the Ghost of Lumumba haunting Europe in 2008, the film JuJu Factory by Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda or the path-finding book by Grada Kilomba, Plantation Memories - Episodes of Everyday Racism, or the more actual Music-Project 1884 by Philippa Ébené and Musicians of African descent.

Fortunately the immaterial decolonial memory- scape is too diverse and huge to be fully considered here– but it is still invisible to the majority of the German society and therefor has to get stronger, more powerful – and more visible and loud.

One day history will have the final say, but not the one taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations. [...] Africa will write its own history, and it will be from north and to south of the Sahara, a history of glory and dignity.

From Patrice Lumumba’s last letter to his wife Pauline Opango Lumumba
I got the first glimpse of the Elephant Statue already through the railway tunnel, at the Bremen main station. Coming through the tunnel I thought: *it is huge!* As I approached it, it became smaller and smaller – a contradiction? A reason could be the huge trees in the park surrounding it at its rear. Only when I stood directly before it, or more concisely below it, did it become monumental again – in relation to the human body. It became obvious to me that a photo can only give you an idea, you can analyse the written parts, the symbolism -the content, but not the real impression it makes when perceived directly.

Taking photos of monuments, especially if they have an imposing and violent character I ask myself how I can photograph it with less reaffirmation.

Surrounding the Elephant and looking up I stumbled all the time into molehills – I had the feeling that the whole ground is unstable, *it undermines the colonial monument more than the text-politics*, I thought. The atmosphere was dull – the typical backside of the station (which depicts in a monumental mosaic the colonial trade). Sitting on a bench in front of the massive animal-statue, watching the scene, I notice a newspaper “Gauk [the German President] in Ouradour-sur-Glane”\(^{29}\) - the contrast could not be bigger to this scenery which is in private.

\(^{28}\) (city honouring title “City of the Colonies” in the National Socialist Era).

\(^{29}\) A French village totally destroyed in 1944 by the Germans and the people.
hand. In the case of the genocide committed in Namibia, no acknowledgement of the genocide, no apology nor reparation, never a major state representative present, when some of the human remains were given back to the Namibian people – a scandal. - The newspaper quoted Joachim Gauck: *But from the sincere discussion of this bitter history in Germany, people have gained the power to make my country a good country.* A good country for whom? The descendants of Herero and Nama living in Germany? The refugees, who do not get asylum or residence in Germany? The Sierra Leoneans, the Roma and the Namibians who are deported everyday? Or the Black Germans who are always asked where they are coming from?

400 Kilometres from Berlin there is this lost monument, built after the design of the colonial animal-sculpturer Fritz Behn. As *Reichskolonialehrendenkmal* - Reichs-colonial-honorable-monument – built in 1931, in 1932 inaugurated, it was for the colonial movement their central memorial in Germany.

The monument is built by the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* – German Colonial Society³⁰ - out of red clinker, hollow and with a crypt for the commemoration of the fallen German soldiers underneath. It is in total 10 meters high – the large rectangle first socket is 1,50m high, the smaller dodecagonal second is 1m on which the elephant stands with 7,5m - the ground socket is as large as the whole monument is high -10 meters - at the front.

After completing the works in 1931 it took another year to open the monument because the NSDAP³¹ feared protests³². At the inauguration, where Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, amongst others, spoke to “the public,” only certain people where allowed to take part ³³

*Der Elefant*, as the depoliticized monument is known (or unknown) today, has a rich history but cannot be easily seen as a *lieu de mémoire* in the sense of Pierre Nora, as it is not nationally known. On the other hand the attempt is there to

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³⁰ The Vice-President of this society was from 1931-1933 Konrad Adenauer (the first West German chancellor) – a fact which explains one of the continuities in West Germany, but is hardly known.

³¹ The Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – Nationalsocialist workers party – the party of Adolf Hitler which was in support of colonial propaganda hoping to get back “their colonies” which they lost in the WW1 and which became British, French, and Belgian.

³² (mainly from people who wanted to commemorate the German soldiers and did not want a propaganda monument to take “their” colonies back..).

³³ Lettow Vorbeck was one of the most known and celebrated( from the Nazis to the Federal Republic!) colonial generals, who “fought” in nearly all German colonial wars from Asia to Afrika - he is one of the biggest colonial perpetrators, but still some streets honour his name, as well as military barracks (not in initial use anymore).
make it an Erinnerungsort, as there is no surrounding of memory anymore. Following the communication strategies around it reveals on one hand the mindsets and development behind the written supplements on which I will focus, but also its weaknesses.

On the front of the first pedestal was written Unseren Kolonien – To Our Colonies. – At the sides of the socket were names of countries applied Germany regarded still as its property: Togo, Kamerun, Deutsch-Ostafrika, Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Deutsch-Neuguinea und Deutsch-Samoa. At the back were the portraits of Franz Adolf Lüderitz and general Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. All the applications on the socket where destroyed in 1945 by the US-Army on demand. Two original writings remain nevertheless inside the crypt: On a large altar in stone, where a book with the fallen colonial soldiers were lying until 1945, is written in stone VNSERN·TOTEN -To Our Dead - and a bronze panel in the entrance from 1932 stating, that it was financed by the Bremen Colonial Society.

Looking precisely onto the (supplementary) writings of the different times seems to me quite important to understand the zeitgeist, the political impacts and who is present or not present, respectively who initiates it – and who not. Chronologically the next panel was set up 1988 by the Syndicate Youth (IGM Jugend), For human rights against Apartheid. In 1989 the Colonial Memorial was

34 In the just published book Kein Platz an der Sonne. Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte, edided by Jürgen Zimmerer the Anti-Kolonial-Denk-Mal has no chapter for this site. It is discussed by Winfried Speitkamp in his chapter Kolonialdenkmäler among others, page 413ff. In contrast the Windhoeker Reiter, an equestrian monument in Namibia which has until today an unbroken colonial connotation has a chapter, as well as the already mentioned May Ayim Ufer, the street-name, which was changed and has become a torchlight of the decolonization of the public space in Germany. It is interesting to note, that the Anti-Kolonial-Denk-Mal is somehow in-between these two sites of commemoration of the colonial legacies and therefor not in the focus of either side.

35 DAS
DEUTSCHE KOLONIALEHRENMAL
IN BREMEN
WURDE VON DER
DEUTSCHEN KOLONIALGESELLSCHAFT
ABTEILUNG BREMEN
AUS BREMER SPENDEN NACH DEM ENTWURFE
VON PROFESSOR FRITZ BEHN-MÜNCHEN
IM JAHRE 1931 ERRICHTET
UND AM 6. JULI 1932 FEIERLICH EINGEWEIHT.

25
rededicated into an Anti-Kolonial-DenkMal\textsuperscript{36} - without making it sustainable and readable for the public. The next commemoration plaque was installed in 1990, stating besides the history of the monument that \textit{[....] Africa's problems are still closely connected to colonialism, racism and exploitation and African people resisted successfully under great sacrifices in the liberation struggles. \textit{[....] Africa has found new friends in Bremen. This monument is a symbol of the responsibility which grows out of history. While this inscription reflects the engagement and obligation of the descendants of the colonizers, it does not explicitly state the German responsibility. In a naive or deliberate sentence it unveils also hegemonic ignorance: that some citizens from a small German city are “friends” of a whole continent with 54 (in that time 52) nations. - This monument is a symbol of the responsibility which grows out of history - an ongoing responsibility, where one has to critically read what is there, but also ask oneself what one, or better we, can do out of these legacies - historically as well as on the level of remembrance culture and politics, which are of course interwoven. especially in the memorial-field.}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{memorial.jpg}
\caption{Zum Gedenken an die Opfer der deutschen Kolonialherrschaft in Namibia 1884-1914}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{memorial2.jpg}
\caption{In memory of the victims of the colonial rule in Namibia 1884-1914. That is now the first time the specific colonial engagement in Namibia is named in the negative sense - but the plate is also getting smaller. Finally in 2009 together with the building of a new memorial – the first in Germany - the label admits the first and only time in Germany the genocide - in German and English. To the memory of the victims of the Genocide of 1904-1908 in Namibia and the Battle of Ohmakari. To name the battle in German Schlacht am Waterberg and in English the Herero-Name, speaks already from a growing sensibility and depicts very well the un/common historical landscapes described by Larissa Förster (2010).\textsuperscript{37}}
\end{figure}

In 1996 there was another plaque installed with the names of two representatives, which can be seen more on an I-level- but even though the plaque titles Henning Scherf as president of the city state of Bremen, his position is actually one of a major, but Sam Nujoma was the first president of the independent state of Namibia. \textit{In memory of the victims of the colonial rule in Namibia 1884-1914. That is now the first time the specific colonial engagement in Namibia is named in the negative sense - but the plate is also getting smaller. Finally in 2009 together with the building of a new memorial – the first in Germany - the label admits the first and only time in Germany the genocide - in German and English. To the memory of the victims of the Genocide of 1904-1908 in Namibia and the Battle of Ohmakari. To name the battle in German Schlacht am Waterberg and in English the Herero-Name, speaks already from a growing sensibility and depicts very well the un/common historical landscapes described by Larissa Förster (2010).}\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[36] A word play with \textit{Denkmal}, meaning 'memorial' to \textit{DenkMal}, an imperative, meaning 'Think about it'
\item[37] Larissa Förster: \textit{Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften. Wie Deutsche und Herero in Namibia des Kriegs von 1904 gedenken}, Campus, Frankfurt/Main 2010
\end{footnotes}
The Memorial to the Namibian victims of German Genocide in its relation to the Nazi-built Anti-Colonial DenkMal, der Elephant - downsized on all levels, from it's presence to the communication.

Regarding the Picture of the memorial one can already imagine the scale of the label which besides the Waterberg-Naming does not state the German involvement and not at all the responsibility - but it is more than we have in the whole of the (united) Germany on the level of traditional memorials. On the immaterial side or in the re-naming culture/politics the discussions are much further.

Based on the development of the texts, one perceives the importance of communication of the hidden histories behind memorials and politics, but it also becomes clear that they cannot compete against a monumental form like the elephant, as it is the case now.
One can realize that from the building of this monument in the 1930s, where the colonial project was one of the whole state of Germany, the memorialization became more and more privatized. In the 80s and 90s the city-state of Bremen took charge, 2000 until 2010 the Genocide Memorial was initiated by a University Department, the Zentrum für Afrika-Studien, until today, where the Monument, Der Elephant, is leased symbolically from the city by a private association, DerElefant! e.V., which can decide and initiates everything that is going on around and underneath the monument.38

The crypt is in my view an obligation and a chance to keep the memorial political in a critical dialogue; my impression from what I researched on the huge website and facebook of DerElefant! e.V. is that the activities are not only dedicated to the commemoration or dealing with coloniality, which in my eyes is imperative. The view exhibitions and events like the one on September 9 2013, the Day of the Open Monument, where I participated (as researcher) are not supported enough by a more critical public which has problems with the non-critical-whiteness state of mind of some of the members and with some of the events which also from my point of view are often euphemizing the nazi-monument with a-political elephant texts, pictures, - even cakes and Nippes. Actually at the moment it is run by a single woman, Gudrun Eikelberg, who was grateful to get some input from outside and to have some interaction (with me) - a point what I consider also a great disadvantage and deficit: researching and writing alone, and not discussing enough with critical friends and colleagues.

First Imagined Steps to a Future Gedenkort – memorial-space -

The five year old memorial

[-Commemorating the Genocide Germans committed against the Herero, Nama, Damara and San in Namibia- as I would name it,]

is not able to compete against the massive monument

[in a Gedenkort - memorial space - which could be created in the future,]

if it would be left as it is now.

38 DerElefant! e.V. was founded in Mai 2008 as charitable association for diversity, tolerance and creativity – an obligation which in my eyes is not fulfilled, but this buzzwords sound in my ears already as 'good intended, but could make the opposite impact'.

28
My first steps on how to deal with the monumentality of the monument started by showing the dimensions, then trying to get closer – or higher. – Then I reflected together with an artist college, Anja Helbing, on what kind of contra-monumental interventions could be made. We thought about bringing the ground of the park higher in order to destroy the monumentality – that was already before I went there in person. Having experienced, that besides the huge trees it is not only the height which makes the monumentality, but the hardly known – or difficult to experience in situ – monstrosity behind it. Besides, it could also foster the belittlement as a-political animal sculpture. Having been there, I thought about a hill out of sand in some distance surrounded by rusted barb wire, to get the connection to Namibia and the German concentration camps there – a fata-morgana in the sense of a reflection of the genocide which has taken place in Namibia 100 years ago. The size and the material were understood as critique to the small Genocide Memorial which from the perspective of the Elefant (as well as mine) is like its Pet Bowl – from size and form (like dog food). So in any case it cannot be considered adequate. The other critique I have, that the stones for the Genocide Memorial were taken from the Omaheke Desert in Namibia – again!? – Germans are taking mineral recourses out of the country? – what kind of symbolism is that? So the sand of the desert dune should come form the German seaside and the negative form should form the other part of the memorial where the ships left for the colonized lands.

Another idea which is more focused on the direct communication aspect of this site would be to make all the different plaques as photographs on huge billboards with a new one, formulated by experts of the Black Community in Germany.]
The sketch of the Colonial Memorial takes us back to a Void in Berlin...

Coming back from future ideas on interventions to the very beginning of the colonial memorial – the sketch, which Fritz Behn made already in 1913 – for Berlin. He won a competition for a central _Kolonialdenkmal_ – Colonial Memorial - in Berlin on the _Balten-Platz_, today’s _Bersarin Platz_.

Sketch by Fritz Behn for the competition for a Colonial Memorial in Berlin Published in the newspaper _Daheim_, 20. 06. 1014, retrieved from Joachim Zeller (2000:86).

And the square today – one of the places I would call voids – not because I consider plants – wild or planted by humans – a void, but a void in the historical, political sense of de-memorialising a square, where one of the central colonial monuments where supposed to be built and nobody besides the so called _colonial historians_ know about it.

[A possibility would be to name the square after people who fought against colonialism and build a memorial in the traditional sense – or an immaterial, temporary one to be discussed.]
Speaking about memory, especially of times which are seemingly long past – even in Sierra Leone there are only few people alive who were adults in what I would call the second colonial times. Coloniality is far more remembered by the people who are still being harmed by it, instead of by those who profit from it, as the latter wish to believe that their wealth is not connected to exploitation of the former. For example in her newest book *The New Discomfort in the Remembrance Culture*, Aleida Assman, is more concerned about the migrants being integrated in the German Holocaust remembrance and describes the "same" problem within state with colonial past - not mentioned in the German context - like *Australia* and *Canada* (2013:123-141). 39

In this context, I want to stress how easy it is to fly from Berlin to Freetown, while the other way round is stony, dangerous and even mortal, divided by the desert and the sea, but foremost by the politics of the 'Fortress Europe.'

The Mediterranean Sea has become a growing mass-grave with its roots in colonial politics and unwanted humanity, as Tejan Lamboi called it in a recent lecture. 40 It is a politics which could also be called murder [rephrasing Jean Ziegler]. The Mediterranean Sea could be seen as a memorial, a cemetery – seemingly an invisible one, a constant reminder of how the past and present are interwoven. The Watergate of Europe’s Hypocrisy – known by everybody, called by nearly everybody a mass-grave - without this having any effect.

It is an example of how a seemingly natural landscape becomes a political landmark - a memorial - a reminder of the colonial ties-and-separation.

39 Translated from the German by the author.
40 Tejan Lamboi: *Organized against EU Unwanted Humanity Politics and Stigma*, 04. 12. 2013, Oldenburg University, Germany
Coming Closer to Sierra Leone Through Voices from Freetown

Another rapprochement to memories and memory-cultures, mediated by Sierra Leoneans through listening and watching interviews undertaken by Tejan Lamboi.

Listening to videos and doing the transcripts and translations from Krio, taking stills and combining them with the extracted words, took me deeper and deeper into mediated personal memories. Together with my past experiences in the country (2006 and 2009) and what I have been researching ever-since, I felt like I was diving into the violent pasts of this little, rich West African country – or better into the seemingly light-footed ways of dealing with it. I had the impression that the memorial-cultures are quite divided into the Sierra Leonean oral-aural and visual cultures on the one hand, and the written international ones on the other.

It is obvious that each subject or situation needs a different methodology. As the experiences from Sierra Leone are largely mediated, the biggest part is listening, reading, looking at the image and film-material, taking stills and details, thinking about the statements and their textural connections, taking notes. A process of thinking in images, gestures and voices – the first steps on the partly-paved way to the Sierra Leonean memoryscape.

Taking a more empirical step out of the former chapter, Paul Brima Bangura’s shirt connects us to the daily political side: NEAS-SL Network of Ex Asylum Seekers-Sierra Leone, a self-empowerment organization of people who were deported from Germany – forced de-migration which connects history and present, as in the symbolic image of the Mediterranean Sea presented before.

41 The informal interviews where commissioned in August 2013 to the social researcher, journalist, colleague and partner Tejan Lamboi from Sierra Leone, living in Berlin with a guide of questions as:
- What are you remembering from colonialism - and enslavement?
- What and how would you like to remember or would be the best to remember in Sierra Leone?

42 Paul Brima Bangura, is a coordinator of the human rights organisation Conscious International, also in the Gambia and Liberia and works for NEAS-SL.
Like Paul Bangura, I used to regard critically the celebration of independence - especially the 50th two years ago - thinking it should have been a moment to remember and critically analyse what the colonial impacts are today. Now, however, I am also more and more convinced that a celebration should just be a celebration. It is important to remember The Independence, as a huge incision, as liberation and time of hope which might even have a healing side, even if this has been unfulfilled to date. To analyse and think about the consequences of colonial violence is something which can be done on a daily basis or at least on other occasions.

Abubakarr Joe Sesay, as the previous speaker, stresses the colonial epistemology, but also the resistance against it in the person of Bai Bureh, who fought against the British hut tax in the White Man's War. Although the British used his own tactics to overthrow him, he remains a personification of the anti-colonial memory-culture where heroes of resistance are celebrated and recalled in a *milieux de mémoire*, as his image is omnipresent, in street-names, on the 1000 Leone note, as non-de-guerre, as well as in street-art and in narratives of his magical powers.

“[Bai Bureh is seen as] an ‘ancestor’ not a figure of the past, but one who has gone on ahead and in whose footsteps others will follow – an active presence in contemporary events.”

Although Bai Bureh is alive, the only known picture was drawn by a British soldier showing his surrender in an undignified way. The second depiction was by an American Peace Corps Volunteer who in the 1970s commissioned a statue with the wrong clothing style and it was only in 2012, 105 years after his death, that a photograph of Bai Bureh appeared on e-bay and was bought by the very same Peace Corps Volunteer who wanted to give a face to a Sierra Leonean hero, inventing it for the National Museum. This "new" photograph was discussed in a booklet commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs in 2013,
stressing the idea of how the genuine hero against colonialism was shaped by colonial - and postcolonial ideas. - At least that is my interpretation. Actually, it was mainly written by the three white men who seemingly rescued Bai Bureh's image for his country - as a site of memory.\footnote{For readability I enlarged two subtitles of the images.}
Getting Lost in the Labyrinth of the Sierra Leonean Peace and Cultural Monument - a Baroque Park of Images, Colours and Texts

The convoluted memorial-garden is situated in the middle of the capital between the National Museum, the State House and Freetown's symbol and oldest memorial, the Cotton Tree. It depicts many Sierra Leonean heroes – named and unnamed - in painted cement sculptures and bas-reliefs. There is an artificial Sierra with (in the natural fauna non-existing) Leones. An elephant-fountain (without water), a variety of painted cement forms and contents, together with staircases, tiles, texts and plants. There is a chapel commemorating the fallen soldiers of the last war and a restaurant. It is a colourful mixture of different aesthetics and meanings of the Sierra Leonean historyscape.

1. Entrance, 2. Chapel, Wall of heroes with and memorial guide Peter M. Bassie, 3. Restaurant, Dove and "traditional" women servants of water, representing Sierra Leone and Africa (around their necks) and NEAS-SL member Abdulai Daramy.

The "unknown hero", rescuing women, children and comrades, but also leaving dead bodies behind – as well as the "Isaiah Man" blacksmithing swords into ploughshares. A pastiche of US-American and Socialist-Realist and West African styles, locally painted in Camouflage, British Poppy-Day-symbolism on Sierra Leone flag in nation shape, topped with pineapples and worshipped by women in national colours, overlooked by the Portuguese invented lions. Left: from the dove's-eye view, right: from a worm's-eye-like humans perspective.
Mohamed Alie Bangura gave his interview in the Peace and Cultural Monument. Surrounded by all the heroes of Sierra Leone’s national narrative(s), he nevertheless focused on the two most dissident and popular ones, both mediated in films from Hollywood and Freetown, depicted on banknotes, in the museum, on murals and now in the memorial: Sengbeh Pieh and again Bai Bureh.  

Details from two of the twelve murals: Sengbeh Pieh and Bai Bureh

46Sengbeh Pieh is the main character in the historian film by Steven Spielberg, *Amistad*, who led historically the rebellion which among others led to the abolition of enslavement as “legal” system of trade and “property” by the colonial powers.
The different and sometimes contradictory images statements and styles convey of a constant overwriting – a complex history park where the recent _war\textsuperscript{47} is the most powerful palimpsest. Although the majority of the named heroes are Sierra Leoneans from colonial times, the coloniality - also of today - is not at all directly mentioned, unlike in the interviews.

Paul Basu called it a postcolonial pastiche -recasting the national narrative, \textsuperscript{48} and I would add: from a strong military perspective which does not forget the cultural and civil side.\textsuperscript{49} Like Paul Basu I use 'pastiche' in a positive sense, being impressed by the rich creolization capabilities of this Krio-founded nation where local, British and international forms interact – seemingly light-footed, blurring the boundaries of politics and history at time.

In as much as Sierra Leone is a multi-religious country (one of the most tolerant ones, especially in terms of Christian and Muslim cults), the monument only has a Christian connotation: from the prayers to the swords-into-ploughshares symbolism. The military perspective re-writes and euphemizes the violent histories as ongoing battles for a peaceful future where the Sierra Leonean soldiers apparently fought for their country whether it is in WWI or II (for the British and against their colonized brothers in Cameroon, Burma, Congo or India, against fascism\textsuperscript{50} or for the ECOMOG, the West African defence force).

![Battle of Honours](image1)

The chapel is entirely dedicated to the fallen soldiers in a mimicry style of traditional Western War Memorial culture, where granite is replaced by plastic, fresh flowers by artificial ones and the grave of the unknown soldier is open and

\textsuperscript{47} The so called "Civil War" which in my view is a misleading term, as it was fuelled and actively fought internationally.

\textsuperscript{48} Paul Basu, 2013, Recasting the National Narrative - Postcolonial Pastiche and the New Sierra Leone Peace and Cultural Monument.

\textsuperscript{49} Actually it was a private initiative of a military which was ideally supported by the Ministry of Defence and privately financed.

\textsuperscript{50} In this framework I could not find written sources about Sierra Leonean soldiers who thought directly against/in the fascist Germany, but it is clear, that Freetown's harbour was the main one in West Africa for the British Army in WWII (and Sierra Leoneans paid for 2 Spitfire planes in huge collections as many other African countries did too). Umaru Jarr told me, that his late father was talking about Sierra Leoneans fighting in Germany.
empty. However, it seemingly does not create an empty signifier, as Paul Basu noted, but is filled with emotions and tears of people reading the endless list of names of the fallen soldiers (Basu, 2013:15).

The figures are re-sampled from different sources, namely from drawings and photos of the colonial archive which at the same time fabricated an imaginary national narrative, the Sierra Leonean Heroes Book. In the memorial these personalities are "indigenized" and depicted with a greater agency – a self-empowering tactic or overwriting of the colonial connotations - or maybe both? Their depiction in an active position, as against the colonial sources of the images, is most captivating in the pictures of Senghe Pie and Bai Bureh. Senghe Pie is shown in his role as the mutineer on the Amistad and Bai Bureh as resistance fighter against the colonial soldiers. As regards what Paul Basu called "indiginized," I am searching for another word which might be less colonial-biased and problematic. I see his point only in a superficial aspect, the so-called country clothing or traditional dressing styles (which could have a connotation, not readable for an outsider), but not in a wider sense of spirituality, as big parts of the memorial-park are overwritten by the Christian cosmology.

The particular qualities that these heroes represent, however, reflect the wider ambiguity of the sculpture park, caught in its schizophrenic identity as both war memorial and peace monument. (Paul Basu, 2013:18).

Foamansu Matturi, Pa Demba, Gumbu Smart. Madame Yoko and horn-blower

It would go too far to show and describe all the figures shown – it would also mean to rewrite a text already written by an expert and eyewitness of the memorial garden and the whole Sierra Leonean memorial landscape, Paul Basu. His essay Recasting the National Narrative: Postcolonial Pastiche and the New Sierra Leone Peace and Cultural Monument is a rich description and analysis of this monument and was together with the interview, the photos, the text labels and a short video of a guided tour, my main source. In his 15-page long text, where he gives

51 Resampled by Joseph Opala et.al. In 1988 - one of the former Peace Corps volunteers who actively participated in the Sierra Leonean history-scape. 52 (ibid.:20).
detailed information of the figures and their photographic, painted or other sources, he focuses mainly on the historical-political aspects, which I also consider the most important ones.  

As my description is more fragmented, jumping here and there while getting lost in the mediated memorial-garden, I allow myself to take a look at the more leisurely parts of what one could also call an edutainment memorial.

The Elephant fountain, some dolphins, the rich vegetation together with the restaurant, from where you have a view of almost the entire garden are important elements for people to spend some time there and enjoy not only the manifold heroes and (one!) heroine as role-models, but also the whole environment, to rest, eat and - maybe - reflect on what lies behind these figures. The restaurant is meant to finance the garden, even though I heard that it is yet to pay-off. There is still an entrance fee to pay which is beyond the daily earnings of the majority of Sierra Leoneans. This is one reason why this important memorial is not so much known and even less visited.

Below the restaurant which is in the first floor is a space, the use of which I have not yet discovered...

[... This room could be a space for adding a living memorial aspect to the (post)colonial "archive" sculptures. For example in theatrical, ceremonial or other activities - commenting and reflecting how this historical, cultural site could be expended into the present. This is something which could also take place outside in the dry season in the large middle part of the garden with its staircases which could function as stages.]

53Paul Basu, 2013, Recasting the National Narrative: Postcolonial Pastiche and the New Sierra Leone Peace and Cultural Monument

54 In this essay my focus is less on feminist ideas as especially the (Western) gender-focus is often likely to overwrite the colonial connotations; even though they are totally interwoven. Speaking about role-models this memorial has not so many or hardly pleasant roles to offer for women – not a big surprise in view of the fact that it was initiated by male military members and built by men artists. The heroine Madame Yoko was a Queen, a Paramount Chief and a very powerful member of the Sande Society, but it would go too far to discuss her in detail and nothing else could be adequate - even to quote the inscription could lead to a misconception - under Western (feminist) eyes. The other women figures are servants, victims, workers and worshipers.
Even the Independence is overwritten by 'Reconciliation' - what a reconciliation with the whole history could mean might be symbolized by the last picture of the storyboard-murals (r.).

Due to the complexity of the memorial garden it was not mere rhetoric to mention 'getting lost'. I would need further weeks just to describe it and I am sure that I still would not be able to give a comprehensive picture. I had the impression that it is monumental in its complexity and each detail could be described in an essay itself. However, it is not monumental in the sense of the Bremen Elephant Monument, where one colossus bears a lot of hidden monstrosity. Here every figure is somehow different; in its size, technique and the storytelling behind it. If the military and Christian aspects were not so dominant, it would really deserve to be named a diverse, edutaining memorial, interweaving a big part of the Sierra Leonean history: from enslavement, establishment of the "modern" colonial country by former enslaved Africans (and Britons), to the fight for independence, the founding of the Republic of Sierra Leone, the "civil" war and the ongoing reconciliation process. Interestingly the last picture of the comic-strip-like wall of fame is 'FREE At last' – which in its position at the end I would interpret as encompassing the whole colonial histories of the country described by the mural in a nutshell – showing the ongoing struggle for freedom and independence.
Sierra Leone's oldest visible and living memorial must be The Cotton Tree in the middle of Freetown. The oldest written source of its existence dates back to 1787. In 1792 the freed-from-enslavement Africans, coming back from the Americas and Britain, prayed under its shadow and founded the "independent" city of Freetown. It symbolizes the liberation from enslavement and creation of a free state, even though the country was colonized by the British (abolitionists..!).
As it has been overlooking the capital for at least 230 years – some say 500 – it is the only "eye" - or maybe better 'root' - witness of Sierra Leone's history. In its imaginary structure it reaches until every corner and can encompass - symbolically, maybe spiritually - the large diaspora as well, as it is used for many websites, news and organisations as image or name-giver.

In my research, trees in Sierra Leone became more and more important, as they do not only produce livelihood, but also protect against death and enslavement. In fact they were formerly used as fortifications around villages – that make them also symbols of resistance. Providing shade in the dry season and protecting against rains in the rainy season make them also spaces of encounter and discourse. In addition to their spiritual importance, they embody living memorials.

Thus for those who can read the forest landscape, some natural features are as tragic as any scene of violent destruction. [...] cluster of kola and fruit trees [...] quickly become the only visible traces. By contrast, the presence of gigantic "cotton trees" (Ceiba pentandra) [...] points to ritual spaces belonging to esoteric associations or to older settlements. [...] In rural Sierra Leone, growing vegetations is often the only recognizable trace or human intervention in the landscape. It is both a memorial to the past and a sign that the past is yielding to new forms of life.

(Mariane Ferme, 2001:25)

Some of my findings about the ephemeral, or better immaterial, memorial-cultures in Sierra Leone date back to my research in 2011, which led to the impression that parts of the active memory-culture have been overwritten by the traumata of the 11-year-long war, only 11 years ago. This went so far that a memorial was planned, proposed by ex combatants around the Cotton Tree, as stated in the recommendation sheet for memorials in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report.55

It also states that people would prefer memorials not to show atrocities, a fact which can be connected to a colonial memorial culture that shows resistance fighters, and not suppressors, in the foreground. Consequently, the effects of the violent suppression tend not to be reflected today.

In general one can note that many Sierra Leoneans have existential concerns other than memorials, a situation similar to many other countries; especially poorer ones. Some prefer memorial hospitals and schools; others traditional Western styled commemoration with names; some others want to protect the sites of atrocities like the so called Slaughterhouse in the Kailahun district, a guillotine from colonial times somewhere in the eastern provinces (which is hardly known) or the ruins of the fortresses of enslavement on Sherbro Island. The King Jimmy Wharf, in the middle of Freetown, where enslaved people where brought down to

the ships is an unprotected "living memorial." For instance, students of digital storytelling did interviews in the King Jimmy Market area and made a short film about their findings, showing many local residents aware of the violent past of their quarter who would like to protect the historical remains:

King Jimmy Wharf with its traces from colonial and enslavement times is a lively market.\textsuperscript{56} It was in the news when in August 2013 the popular King Jimmy Bridge collapsed. People would like to preserve it as memorial site. Who King Jimmy was is less known. He fought against the first land-grabbing by British and freed Africans to establish the "Province of Freedom." King Jimmy burnt down this first "Black-Poor"-British settlement

In Sierra Leone there are also strong traditional ceremonies, like the cleansing of sacred bushes, animal sacrifice, re-burial with bones and symbolic corps of Banana stem, the planting of peace trees, eating and drinking, fasting times and prayers from different religions to commemorate the lost ones, ancestors and traumatic past times.\textsuperscript{57} Ceremonies and other events around the trees have, in my

\textsuperscript{56}Produced by students of iEARN Sierra Leone, 2006, 5,55min.

\textsuperscript{57}See also my research in the Pilot Project, Exploring the Memoryscape in Sierra
imagination, the power to go to the deeper roots of the last conflict. As spirituality is not focused on one traumatic past, it is able to make a more profound connection to the ancestors living and suffering under colonial occupation - or even further to the enslaved relatives, some of whom came back to create a new and 'at least FREE' country.

While memorialising should honour traditional and cultural methods, the magnitude of atrocities and human rights violations committed during Sierra Leone’s decade-long civil war makes this conflict a unique event that requires unique treatment. (TRC-Report-Appendix 4:6).

In as much as every war and conflict is different, naming it a unique event with a magnitude of atrocities overwrites the colonial era and suggests that traditional cultural memorial-methods would not be adequate. That does not mean that diverse memorial-concepts should not enlarge the national horizon. Rather, it reflects a hegemonic view which discusses a post-colonial conflict in terms of "civil" war and not as a multinational war for power and scramble for resources in the Mano River Region (Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone), overwriting the colonial roots of the conflict. Even Mariane Ferme and Rosalind Shaw, who both wrote about the deep roots of the war, tracing everyday memorial culture back to enslavement and colonialism, write at some stage about the recent conflict being the most violent one. How is that possible? How can white women from North America and Britain perceive the last war as more violent than colonialism and enslavement?

I stood still, straining for the sound of their voices, but the layers of years in between us were too many. [and the Space Between Us was too large... ]

Aminatta Forna, Ancestor Stones (2006:10)

[Marie-Hélène Gutberlet (2013)]

Aminatta Forna with her double consciousness being British and Sierra Leonean, contributes not only to the literaturescape, but to a personal and thus emotional history-writing. In Ancestor Stones she covers a period from 1920s until the end of the 1990s, in overlapping stories from colonial, independence and last war-times, through the voices of her four aunts who represent four generations.

Nevertheless, Mariane Ferme and Rosalind Shaw together with Paul Basu are among the most relevant scholars on the Sierra Leonean memaryscape - in Western eyes.

Mariane Ferme suggests that the Underneath of Things in Sierra Leone is not always visible to foreign eyes or non-initiated persons. She notes that in the everyday life there are constant relations to colonialism and enslavement. Already the Mende word for 'underneath' means at the same time the soil, the roots, the invisible world and the underground resistance fighter (:30). From a powerful...
white ghost, you can only protect yourself by replying with wrong answers (:31).58

Paths are de-constructed, not maintained or abandoned to cut off the access to intruders. Paramount Chiefs – the traditional leaders – deliberately made detours in order not to arrive on time in there dealing with colonialists – all these are stories still being told (only in the rural areas?) and sometimes practised in other constellations (ibid.:64ff).

In Memories of the Slave Trade - Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone (2002), Rosalind Shaw writes about the Atlanticizing of the spiritual memory scape, how deep the memories of enslavement and colonialism are embedded in the present remembrance culture, in narratives as well as rituals.59

She describes the road as an endangered space, that has been personalized - Pa Road - citing Pa Kaba Bana (ibid.:64). Similar to Marianne Ferme’s Underneath of Things, the histories of the enslavement and colonial are described as condensed in the earth.

It could be another sign of whiteness that for me being on the road has a foremost positive connotation whereas in Sierra Leone it seems to be the opposite. Unconsciously I felt that peripheral paths have to be taken in order to understand and acknowledge other realities. It is a strong weakness of my research that I was not able to get hold of more Sierra Leonean literature on these topics.

[...] Ben Okri’s “famished road,” the all-consuming road that began as a river, now extends across the Atlantic. More than a route connecting Africa to America, it has become a chronotope that links "here" and "there" at different points in time, a gathering-place of extractive mobility that folds together the Antlantic slave trade, colonialism’s corvée labor and the mining of African minerals into a palimpsest of many pasts.

Rosalind Shaw (ibid.:263)

58A tactic which reminded me of 'Wrap someone in hay' told by Amadou Hampâté Bâ, meaning telling the white (sic) ethnologist all kind of stories about what they want to hear about their customs, cosmologies and religious practises in order to them believe that they know all, but what they wrote down where just lies.

59Rosalind Shaw, 2002:33-69
The fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange and transformation that we try and specify through manifestly inadequate theoretical terms like creolisation and syncretism indicate how both ethnicities and political cultures have been made anew in ways that are significant not simply for the peoples of the Caribbean but for Europe, for Africa, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, and of course, for Black America.

Paul Gilroy (1993:15)

Trying to dive deeper in the memorialscape of Sierra Leone, which is so much connected to the Black Atlantic as Paul Gilroy writes, I felt more and more the wish to silence myself and let other people speak. In addition to the critical whiteness this connotes, I would consider that my strongest ability is in my art-practices, not necessarily creating something new, but sampling, associating, bringing together different media and meanings.

Water connects world with otherworld, life with afterlife. Among Africans dispersed across vast oceans, these waters are emblematic of the ultimate journey back home to Africa and all those distant yet living ancestors.

Johnnetta Cole about Mamie Wata

The Black Atlantic has become far more than the book by Paul Gilroy who recalled his ancestors like W.E.B. DeBois or Frantz Fanon, it became a symbol for the Middle Passage - a Mass Grave Memorial - but also for creole cultures and their Double Consciousness. I read the concept of Double Consciousness, developed by these authors, in its various meanings, from the psychological wounds inflicted by always seeing oneself as Black subject from a white racist view, as well as the strength to have multiple perspectives, multiple reference points, multiple memories, multiple memorial-cultures - sharing doubleness and cultural trauma (Nkechinyere Mbakwe 2011:31)

The Black Atlantic is not only embracing physically the African continent, the Americas and Europe, but spiritually from religion, memories to music....
Promoting the inauguration of colour-tv, Nina Simone sang with many other international stars in Berlin 1967 – The song symbolizes strongly the unspeakable trauma and the agency of the Black Atlantic – it was adapted and transformed in the musical Hair, sang by a white actor, excluding the first part which describes the loss. This version is the one I still remember from my teenager times. The Sierra-Leonean-German musician Patrice brought the song by Nina Simone into the present, showing his face in the video through a sculpture of loudspeakers sampled by naked white people in the forest, the factory and on the Atlantic, the German North Sea Side with its tides: the ebb and flow ...where the Brandenburg ships left for the Guinea Cost to deport enslaved people to the Americas.

Especially through the Sierra Leonean memory-culture it became apparent to me that memorials have to be extended to a living, immaterial form like a song or whole music traditions; like a prayer or creolized spiritualities; like a poem or diverse literature-forms; a performance or theatre-traditions. These altogether form a diverse memorialscape which is not necessarily visible or heard.

While writing it seemed to me that more and more of such immaterial memorial projects are being initiated in Germany. Let me start with the latest examples of the growing - but still from a majority perspective peripheral - decolonial memorialization process, which in my understanding jointly form a diverse memorialscape. All this does not stop us to fight for a material - always visible form too.
There are two proposals which are still immaterial: The 3D-materialization *Shrine for the Forgotten Souls* by Satch Hoyd published as a postcard and the booklet 'Zerstörte Vielfalt' - Diversity Destroyed – issued as part of the national remembrance year 2013 commemorating the loss of a diverse society and many personalities after 1933.

The material form of the memorial would be from bottles, referring to the Congolese > North Carolina tradition of bottle trees, filled with water and personal names of lost ancestors killed by the Germans from Namibia, to be played on by the passers-by with rubber sticks, as Satch Hoyd explained in 'The Space Between Us‘ publication (2013:140).

The memorial proposal creates a link to multiple branches of today's decolonial memorial-cultures and protests.

As it was shown within the context of the holocaust remembrance, it had a wider outreach, even though it is an isolated example of the perception of Black people as victims of the Nazi-Regime.

In 2013 from the 40,000 *Stolpersteine*– Stumbling Stones- in about 1000 cities in 15 countries, the most decentralized living memorial, commemorating victims of the holocaust, only one is for a Black person: Bayume Mohamed Husen, in Berlin.

The second link created by the bottles would be to the Black Atlantic, which is also symbolic in the space in which it has been virtually placed: the backyard of the Humboldt University, where W.E.B. DeBois studied and developed his concept of *Double Consciousness*.

A third link leads to the huge, but not widely heard, protests against the erection of the Humboldt-Forum just across the road from the university. Here Berlin's former castle is being rebuilt, into which the colonial-connoted African and Asian collections will move, taking them from the Ethnological Museum at the city's periphery into a decolonial void - or colonial reaffirmation - in the centre of the city.
The second still immaterial memorial is a sketch of mine for a physical decolonial pathfinder to be installed in the city centre pointing in all directions where decolonial memorial practices take-or-took place.

It is a proposal for an open form of memorial, where as many as possible steps for the decolonization of the public space and beyond are credited and honoured and could be added with time.

It is a side-product of an attempt to build another working group for a decolonial memorial in Berlin and beyond. In 2012 I started a blog to find people who would discuss, on an interdisciplinary and international level, how a decolonial memorial in Germany could be designed and built. It is, however, a project that is hardly feasible without financial support.

The 'Decolonial Pathfinder' is also thinkable in a more immaterial form as web-project, collecting all the initiatives, publications and proposals for a living memorialization of the de/colonial space we are living in as proposed in the blog.

A first step taken in the right direction is the establishment of a Black advisory board to plan 'The Learn and Memorial Site' in the so-called African Quarter in Berlin, where colonial connoted street-names and squares will soon be renamed to honour personalities of resistance and explain the coloniality behind the quarter. I added their symbol and name on the top of the pathfinder, but the proposal is not yet published.

Among the many projects the idea of a decolonial pathfinder memorial is paying tribute to, I will shortly elaborate on two true immaterial memorials which are path-breaking. Grada Kilomba's book from 2008 Plantation Memories-Episodes of Everyday Racism, like Aminatta Forna, let women speak - here about their
experiences with daily racism which places the Black subject in a colonial scene. - In a kunstgriff – artifice- the women narrate their (hi)stories and the author, the scholar and psychologist analyses the scenes in their historical, psychological and political framework. It was recently performed in the first theatre in Berlin directed by People of Color, the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse. In her text which, combines science and literature, she follows the path pursuit by Frantz Fanon in the colonial times: to speak out and analyse the psychological wounds and traumata imposed by the racist enslavement and colonial systems on people, communities and cultures.

The 1884 Music Project, led by Philippa Ebené also points in an empowering direction, not allowing – again - the white dominated educational systems to teach Black subjects their history, as is done by the postcolonial studies that are currently on the rise. She organized workshops in 2010 for musicians with African background about the colonial histories and legacies, which are neither told in the African countries nor in Europe. Listening to lectures and watching films presented by experts of Color, the diverse 17 musicians produced 13 songs in as many languages on CD as well as on stage, recalling their ancestors, heroes and heroines of resistance, leadership and wisdom against a system of forgetting and ignorance.

Weakness at the End... and Hope Before the Next Step

'Transitional Justice,' 'Reparations,' 'Reconciliation' are all buzzwords that we hear from the so-called international community. Within this system of thinking, African states have minor voices – or none at all – but are the first expected to fulfil the measures devised by the international community to counteract the effects of what are called "ethnic conflicts" and "civil wars."

As we are talking here about voids and palimpsests of colonial atrocities, such as enslavement, exploitation and genocide, it should be noted that the stage of transitional justice has not been reached in Germany itself, even more than 100 years after the colonial crimes against humanity happened – something, it is
claimed, countries like Sierra Leone should do directly after the war. This is not just a violation of the right to memorialization as proclaimed by the UN, it is active forgetting, denying and profiting of the wealth and power gained by the destruction of cultures, mass-murder and suppression.

Discussing diverse examples of the memorialscape in Sierra Leone and Germany, I was always drawn back to the underlying system which violently disables a critical approach: the coloniality – especially in Germany. Although the underlying system of coloniality affects both countries powerfully, one could argue that the strategies used must be totally different, as it is necessary to empower Sierra Leoneans and dis-empower white Germans. Even here the preconditions could be the same: to learn and understand the un/common histories as a first step. What in Sierra Leone could mean to value one's own culture and re-call the ancestors and role-models who fought against the colonial system, would in Germany mean to critically question so-called 'cultural values' and oust perpetrators from their pedestals and street-signs.

One thing which became very clear to me through the material examples taken from Germany, especially the Anti-Colonial Elephant and Genocide-Memorial ensemble in Bremen, is that communication strategies are very important and need to be developed, in writing as well as in the form of activities around the memorials. In the Sierra Leonean example of the memorial park, the communication aspect is on the one hand stronger, as the written aspect is already integrated into the memorial itself, and a big part of the images are known and easy to understand – albeit superficially. Reading between the lines, the communication becomes blurry, contradictory and with colonial connotation. This could be due to the fact that the peace/war memorial overwrites in parts the colonial history, it being a memorial which wants to embrace and unify the country, without sufficient awareness of the one-sidedness of the Christian/military perspective. Therefore the part of Freetown's memorial park that is closest to the monumentality of the elephant monument in Bremen is the sculpture of the soldier and his entourage. The monumentality is underlined by the pedestal which places the visitor into the position of a worm's perspective. In contrast, the alley of heroes and heroines in the memorial park meet the people at eye-level, showing figures that are both larger and smaller than life.

Size matters far more than I would have thought before – for the actual sculpture/monument as well as the writings, or the communication around it. But size must also be differentiated. It is not the mere physical size which makes a memorial too big or too small. It is a combination of shape, discursive formulation, place and communication, which ranges from advertising to performative forms, as well as the political impacts of the discussions around it. This space – material and immaterial – surrounding a memorial cannot be vast enough, and is also a sign of the significance of the architectonic or sculptural form. It is the question of creating critical! *milieux de mémoire* around a *lieu*, as I would imagine it. At least in the European context, the definition of the *lieu* in the sense of Pierre Nora is helpful, as subsidy for lost *millieux de mémoire*, although it should be pushed
beyond the boundaries of a nation, which tend to keep minorities out. At the same
time, local forms of memorial culture and communities decentralize and diversify
the national lieu de mémoire. In West Africa the concept of Sankofa enlarges the
terms of lieu and milieux de mémoire. It is not only about remembering but about
bringing back, as Sankofa suggests, the parts of history, culture, and therefore
identity which were systematically taken away, suppressed and forgotten.
To create new lieu de mémoire in Sierra Leone could also make sense if Sankofa
is practised. That could help create a milieux de mémoire, or better, realms of
memories and a healing process could start. These creolized forms of
commemoration where Sankofa is combined with European terms like lieu de
mémoire could be a way of creating living memorials with the power to empower
the diverse population, who are encouraged to remember and accept their own
identity, whether they are descendants from colonizers or colonized.
Of course the process has to start with discussions – in both countries – on how a
remembrance culture, or more specifically a memorial-culture which takes into
account the diverse realities in two countries with histories of being colonized and
having colonized could be established.
In the examples described of colonial or decolonial connoted memorials as real
places in the cities – be it in Bremen, Berlin, or Freetown – it is hard to find an
answer to the question of whether memorials are able to play a part in the
process of decolonialization. All these examples have their weaknesses and are not
known enough. A critical approach that could counteract the "final solutions" that
are often proffered by materialized memorials is needed.
In the material world of Sierra Leone and Germany, I could not find examples which
would fulfil these ideal promises. Without the mostly immaterial examples from the
'path-finder', especially the work by Grada Kilomba and Philippa Ebené, I
would not have been able to know where to start describing this path of
decolonization, where one always has to step back or is kicked back by the
realities of coloniality.

Since the Sierra Leonean memoryscape contains a lot of secrets, it also holds the
hope that these hidden narratives could be told to future generations, who could
act upon them to build or maintain memorials belonging fully to themselves – and
not only invoke a national (colonial) identity.

[In 2014, the memorial_working_group will start planting or
finding trees to create sites of memories in rural Sierra
Leone, which might already be milieux de mémoire. Depending
on the wishes communities express and want to take charge of, realsms of memories like ceremonies, story-telling or other
performative forms could be created which could be hopefully
reconnecting the people not only with their lost ones in the
war, but their ancestors.

It is not possible to foretell whether the living memorials
in Freetown and beyond, as we called our memorial proposal
for the competition we won in 2012, will be embraced by the people, thus making them memorials of local ownership. What gives us confidence on this path are the discussions and ideas put together in the diverse memorial_working_group with expertise from Sierra Leone and Germany and the wishes and demands formulated by the interviewees. The concept is also so open that the presence and care of the Sierra Leonean people will make it a place of remembrance – ephemeral or longer lasting will be defined by themselves.

Drawing by the memorial_working_group for posters which will be distributed around the areas commemoration ceremonies will take place.

By binding bands onto the branches of the trees, we are hoping to induce the Sankofa bird to return to the tree-crowns to sing about the realms of hidden or forgotten histories – that they may become memories again...]

The fact that it seems to be easier to get support for the memorialscapes in Sierra Leone than in Germany is due to the communication for development structures embedded in coloniality. There are funds in Germany to support 'Transitional Justice' and 'Reconciliation' in Sierra Leone, but there is no acceptance of responsibility for 'Reparations' to countries colonized by Germany, and to place another form of reparations – memorials – commemorating the losses caused by German crimes, into the middle of the society.

De/colonial memorials and memorial culture are part of a huge field where many disciplines are involved, like postcolonial, cultural, or critical whiteness studies, communication, memory and memorial studies, history, ethnology, psychology, (visual)anthropology, religion, art and politics. To discuss two different memorial-cultures is immense as well; however, in Germany the field is not that large, due to the fact that colonialism in Germany is hardly remembered in memorial sites. This made me initially believe that it would be possible to discuss the field in depth, yet ultimately I found that I was not able to probe further than the surface. Sierra
Leone is a relatively small country and the material memorial culture does not seem that vast neither. Actually, a national board identified only 12 memorial sites as worthy of being preserved – but of course, already the material memorial landscape has to be considered as being greater in number and diversity. The immaterial memoryscape could only be touched very much on the surface and large parts of it might not be accessible to outsiders at all.

At this stage, I have to acknowledge the weakness of this endeavour, which might also be a sign of whiteness that I was not aware of. The more I researched and wrote – or left out –, the more it became obvious to me that the subject of my essay overstepped the boundaries of the given framework. Therefore, this is a first and fragmented step along a path where not so many detours could be taken. Not as many aspects have been discussed in depth as are involved in the memory-cultures described, and not as many voices have spoken as I would have liked to hear. I feel that the main part is starting now when I will return to Sierra Leone to listen, learn, step back – maybe revise – as decolonial practice. I also hope to return with more strength and ideas on how to participate in Germany on the decolonization of streets, squares and monuments in cities, landscapes and our minds.

Memories rendered into words. But no. For here the past survives in the scent of a coffee bean, a person's history is captured in the shape of an ear, and those most precious memories are hidden in the safest place of all. Save from fire or floods or war. In stories. Stories remembered, until they are ready to be told. Or perhaps simply ready to be heard.


I am thankful to the reader to have followed me along this short stretch of a long uneven path.
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