Renaming Streets, Inverting Perspectives: Acts Of Postcolonial Memory Citizenship In Berlin

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In October 2004, the local assemblyman Christoph Ziermann proposed a motion to rename "Mohrenstraße" (Blackamoor Street) in the city center of Berlin (BVV-Mitte, "Drucksache 1507/II") and thereby set in train a debate about how to deal with the colonial past of Germany and the material and semantic marks of this past, present in public space. The proposal was discussed heatedly in the media, within the local assembly, in public meetings, in university departments, by historians and linguists, by postcolonial and anti-racist activists, by developmental non-profit organizations, by local politicians, and also by a newly founded citizens' initiative, garnering much attention. After much attention was given to "Mohrenstraße," the issue of renaming, finally came to include the so-called African quarter in the north of Berlin, where several streets named after former colonial regions and, most notably, after colonial actors are located.

The proposal to rename "Mohrenstraße" was refused by the local assembly. Nevertheless, the assembly passed a resolution that encourages the "critical examination of German colonialism in public streets" (BVV-Mitte, "Drucksache 1711/II") and, ultimately, decided to set up an information board in the so-called African quarter in order to contextualize the street names (BVV-Mitte, "Drucksache 2112/III"). However, the discussion of what the "critical examination of German colonialism" actually means, and if this should include the renaming of streets, continues today. As a result of this ongoing debate, postcolonial, anti-racist, and developmental non-profit organizations and activists try to inform the public about the problematic history of colonial street names and to raise public awareness by offering guided walking tours and organizing public discussions and exhibitions, while other actors, such as the Christian Democratic Party and the citizens' initiative "Pro African Quarter," staunchly defend these colonial street names against their critics.

The length and intensity of the discussion as well as the arguments put forward indicate that there is more at stake than the correct interpretation of colonial history or even the actual names of the streets. The discussion is thus not only about history, but also about the present social organization of a city that is highly influenced by and built upon migration, a fact that is differently evaluated by different actors. Considering the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and highly diverse condition of the three and a half million migration metropolis Berlin, combined with several forms of structural racism and racialized exclusions, the discussion about colonial and racist street names opens up a multitude of questions. As cultural memory scholar Michael Rothberg puts it:

> Cultural memory and discourses on the past do not themselves consti-
> tute institutionalized agencies capable of redressing injustices. However,

they can create arenas where injustices are recognized and new frameworks are imagined that are necessary, if not sufficient, for their redress. ("From Gaza to Warsaw" 538)

In this sense, discussing which histories and whose histories are part of the overall "history of Berlin" and who has the right to make claims to change the representation of historical actors in the public space means discussing who belongs to the city, who has a right to the city (Harvey), and who counts as a citizen.

In the following paper, I illustrate this thesis by first explicating my understanding of cultural or collective memories as negotiated and malleable "discourses on the past" (Pakier and Strath 4) that are (re)produced, challenged and changed by mnemonic practices in the sense of "a form of work, working through, labor, or action" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* 3). I depict Europe as a postcolonial place and then outline the colonial history of Germany with a special focus on the history of the debated colonial street names in central Berlin. I also provide an overview of the conflict about colonial and racist street names and introduce some protagonists. Subsequently, I outline notions of a racialized, exclusive, white German identity—which is based on a shared history of which colonialism is not a part—that are used by some actors to argue against the renaming of streets. I also describe the on-going claims of postcolonial, anti-racist, and developmental non-profit organizations and activists, as well as members of the Black Community, to rename streets bearing colonial and racist names, according to the logic of a postcolonial inversion of perspective as "acts of citizenship," following Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen. By renaming streets, postcolonial activists refer to German colonialism in a critical manner, try to inscribe postcolonialism in the material memory of Berlin, and constitute themselves in an act of "memory citizenship" (Rothberg and Yildiz), as people who belong to the city and who have the right to change and determine the city's cultural memory.[1]

Memory Conflicts in the Public Space: Debates of Belonging and Rights to the City

In their introduction to *A European Memory?*, Malgorzata Pakier und Bo Strath point to the "growing rhetorical power" of memory (4). Since the so-called memory boom in the 1980s, they state that social questions are increasingly articulated and negotiated through the medium of memory. This is partially due to the fact that memory—both in academic and political settings—is often used as an analogy to culture or tradition and, therefore, gets tightly linked to ethnic groups and questions about redistribution, recognition, and participation.

While Pakier and Strath acknowledge the immense symbolic power of memory, they, nevertheless, disagree with static, stable, and group-based notions of memory by claiming: "Individuals have memories but collectives do not. ... As collective phenomena, memories are discourses based on processes of social work and social bargaining" (6). They, therefore, contradict a common assumption in memory studies that conceptualizes memory as being the essence and simultaneously the property of an ethnic group. By claiming that groups remember "autobiographically" (Poole 36)

and that "thick relations" and cohesiveness are only possible between persons with a "shared past" (Margalit). So-called "Memory as Culture" concepts essentialize both memories and collectives (Uhl 82). As memory collectives—according to these approaches—are based on a shared material past and the same perception of this past to which members of a memory collective are naturally connected, collectives (together with 'their' memory) are assumed to stay stable and immutable throughout time and space. Neither can new members be affiliated (as they cannot catch up on the shared past), nor is the perception of the past going to change, as this particular perception provides the basis of group identity and cohesiveness. Due to these allegedly fixed, exclusive memories that determine groups and group members in the present, "Memory as Culture" conceptions regard memory communities as unavoidably incommensurable, contradicting, and conflicting (see criticisms by Erll, Pakier and Strath; Rothberg; Rothberg and Yildiz; Uhl).

Following Pakier and Strath, as well as memory theorist Michael Rothberg, I want to bring forward another perspective. Referring to Rothberg, I regard memory as "the past made present" (*Multidirectional Memory* 3) in a double sense. On the one hand, this definition indicates that memories—although they refer to the past—are produced in and for the present. On the other hand, the term "made present" points to the social construction of memories, the creation and production of memories through practices: "memory is a form of work, working through, labor or action" (3). Rothberg contradicts the assumption of a direct link between a pre-given memory and identity. He states that the "borders of memory and identity are jagged" (5). Memory conflicts in public space are, therefore, not a clash of already existing memory groups and 'their' memory. Conflicts about the public representation of history are, rather, highly creative settings in which actors and positions are generated through their mutual interaction. Rothberg comprehends "the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions, but actually come into being through their dialogical interaction with one another" (5). Following this perspective means to focus on the self-formation of actors in a memory conflict and to analyze the different significances, usages, and meanings of ethnic, racial, national, or other categories in this formation process. In their multiple ways of referring to the past and, hence, of legitimizing present claims, rights and belongings, the involved actors determine, change, and challenge their relationship to one another and arrange each other, according to different modes of belonging. These constructions and the legitimacy they are granted are of course affiliated with power relations. Nevertheless, legitimacy, subject constructions, and power can be rearranged and challenged in conflicting situations involving "a particular tension or turning, a point of potentiality and multiple possibility" (Kapferer 122). The particular area of memory and memory conflicts, according to Rothberg, cannot be analyzed in an isolated manner, but is connected to broader social debates and struggles. Memory conflicts can, therefore, on the one hand, be a site in which these debates are staged; on the other hand, they can stage a counter-reaction to other areas and levels of social organization (Rothberg, "From Gaza to Warsaw" 538).

Taking all of this into account, the debate about the renaming of streets bearing colonial and racist names is not about the confrontation of two divided, pre-given mem-

ories of the white colonizers and the black colonized, but rather about the negotiation of the question of who belongs to the city and, therefore, is a citizen—has the right to change the city's historicity and the representation of histories in the public space. This question goes beyond the actual case of renaming claims. Furthermore, the question of who the citizens of Berlin are, as well as which and whose histories are meaningful for its citizens, and should, therefore, be part of the overall history of the city, its historical self-perception, and its self-representation, becomes increasingly important regarding the multi-ethnic, highly diverse population of the migration metropolis of Berlin.[2] The case of the renaming claims provides the possibility to observe these negotiations: How are questions of belonging and rights negotiated through the medium of memory? Which modes of belonging and which identities are the actors involved constructing? What goals and imaginations of the future do renaming claimants envision?

Postcolonial Europe: Entangled Modernities and "geteilte Geschichten"[3]

In his essay "Irritating Europe," the literary and cultural theorist Frank Schulze-Engler describes the position of Europe in postcolonial studies as "literally everywhere and nowhere" (670). For tactics and strategies of "Provincializing Europe," as well as for criticisms of orientalism and the deconstruction of intellectual, political, and economic hierarchies, Europe is admittedly a point of attack and emancipation for Postcolonial Studies, but it is itself not described as a postcolonial locality:

> Europe has effectively been written out of the idea of a 'postcolonial world,' which in many varieties of postcolonialism continues to function as a half-defiant, half-nostalgic latter-day synonym of the 'Third World.' (Schulze-Engler, 670)

But Europe and Germany—as a part of both the old and the new Europe—are postcolonial places. The postcolonial situation inside Europe, firstly, refers to the presence of millions of "others" from the former colonies and their descendants, and additionally to the question of to what extent they can still be considered as "others" (Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*). Furthermore, concepts such as the "entangled modernities" approach of anthropologist Shalini Randeria emphasize the historical conditionality and the entanglement of Europe and its colonies (Randeria). Modernity, as Randeria stresses, is not an intrinsic Western product, but has developed through the interaction of Europe and its colonies. Thus, both entities—Europe and the colonies—are themselves a product of this entanglement. This is why Randeria, together with historian Sebastian Conrad, proposes to regard colonialism from a perspective of "geteilte Geschichten," focusing both on the shared and divided histories colonialism has produced (Conrad and Randeria). An elaborated exemplification of this thesis is, for instance, given by anthropologist Sidney Mintz in his study entitled *The Sweetness of Power*. Mintz shows that the establishment of the colonial sugar plantation system in the Caribbean was a precondition for the emergence of European capitalism (by making sugared tea and jam possible, as a rich, fast, and cheap non-cooked meal for workers).[4]

Interpreted from these contexts, colonialism played an important role in the devel-

opment of European modernity and, therefore, should be granted a prominent place in European public remembrance and in Europe's historical self-understanding. However, this is not the case. Although there has been a recent abundance of research and academic publications on colonial history,[5] colonialism has not been part of the dominant political self-interpretation of the New Europe after 1945. While the end of the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust became an essential starting point for the converging of European nation states and a process of inner Europeanization, most European states were still in possession of colonies. The injustice of colonialism was, consequently, never officially discussed, condemned, and remembered and, thus, subsists in new forms and transformations. Banishing the reevaluation of colonialism from the political agenda of this emerging Europe meant that legacies such as that of racism, the hierarchization of European and non-European peoples and cultures, and the willingness to accept the coexistence of 'internal' drives for democratization and 'external' authoritarian measures to safeguard Europe's new domestic arrangements were carried over from the old to the new Europe (Schulze-Engler, 672).

This gap in European memory applies even more strongly to the case of public remembrance of colonialism in Germany. Germany has a colonial past, although this part of its history is often forgotten, or at least trivialized, with reference to the comparably short period of direct colonial rule from 1884 until the end of the First World War, in areas of present-day Namibia (former Deutsch-Südwestafrika), present-day Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda (former Deutsch-Ostafrika), and areas of present-day Cameroon, Togo, Ghana, New Guinea and Samoa (Conrad 28f; Eckert and Wirz). However, the era of colonial thinking and colonial action in Germany started much earlier than 1884 and also played an important role after World War One in the national-socialists' "striving for space" in both Africa and areas in Eastern Europe (Conrad 96). During the area of direct colonial rule, Germany (then, the German Kaiserreich) disciplined the local populations of the areas that were viewed as German colonial property with brutal violence. The two most well-known colonial wars are the war in "Deutsch-Südwestafrika" from 1904 to 1907 (which ended in the genocide against the Herero and Nama population) and the so-called Maji Maji War in "Deutsch-Ostafrika" from 1905 to 1908.[6] German soldiers also took part in the Boxer War in China in the 1890s, where they participated in several massacres and punitive expeditions against the local population that rebelled against foreign rule (Conrad 50). Thus, the widespread notion that Germany was somehow outside of the historical occurrence of colonialism and its aftermath negates a critical part of German history.

Postcolonial Berlin: Local Traces of Global Entangled Histories

Traces of this colonial history—material evidence of colonial entanglements—can be found on a local level, in concrete places in Berlin. The case of colonial street names in Berlin and the claims to rename those streets underline geographer Doreen Massey's claim that the global and the local scale are not separable from each other. In her often cited essay, "A Global Sense of Place," Massey states that places cannot be conceptualized as self-contained units with "single, essential identities" and an "introverted, inward-looking history" (26). Furthermore, the specificity of a place is "constructed

out of a particular constellation of social relations meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (28). According to Massey, a place opens up multiple political, geographical, and biographical references and modes of interpretation. This is due to the current entanglement of different people and goods, as well as the "accumulated history of a place, with that history itself imagined as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages" (29). Nevertheless, the possibility of articulating these specific interpretations, as well as "the right to participate in the work of the imagination of a place," are restricted and not equally distributed, as, among others, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai points out. Specific layers of the history of a place are often covert, superimposed, and acknowledged to different extents. Their representation and remembrance in the current landscape of the city highly varies (Steyerl).[7]

Postcolonial readings of the cityscape in Berlin remain rather marginalized, although there is a "history from below" movement that marks (post)colonial places in Berlin by organizing guided walking tours, providing postcolonial city maps, contextualizing colonial and racist street names, as well as advocating for the renaming of "Mohrenstraße" in the city center of Berlin, itself one of the first targets of this new postcolonial critique. Resulting from its central location in the city center of Berlin, "Mohrenstraße" has a particular representative power and its meaning is highly contested. The naming of the street around 1700 referred to the beginning of the Brandenburg-Prussian slave trade in the 1680s. At that time aristocrat Otto Friedrich von der Gröben took possession of an area located on the West coast of present-day Ghana, naming the place and the fort built in the aftermath, after his sovereign and awarding authority—Friedrich Wilhelm, the Great Elector—"Großfriedrichsburg." With Großfriedrichsburg as a trading base, Brandenburg-Prussia participated in the transatlantic slave trade for over thirty years (Kopp, "'Mission Moriaen'"). When Friedrich Wilhelm I[8] sold the colony Großfriedrichsburg to the Dutch West India Company, he demanded twelve "negro boys" as part of the purchase price. Taking over the role of so-called "Hofmohren" ("Court Moors"), the abducted Africans were to decorate the king's army. They lived in barracks in today's Mohrenstraße that most likely got its name as a result of this circumstance (Deutsches Historisches Museum). Thus, postcolonial memory activists advocate for the renaming of Mohrenstraße, as in their eyes, the street reproduces a hierarchic, subordinating, and ultimately racist differentiation that was developed in the context of the slave trade ("Deklaration zur Umbenennung der Mohrenstraße"). At the same time, this racist differentiation is normalized and legitimized by the unchallenged presence of this representation on a street sign in public space.

The debated street names in the so-called African Quarter are problematic in a different, and for some reasons, even more obvious way, than the Mohrenstraße. The

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African Quarter evolved from 1899 onwards. Originally, zoo director Carl Hagen-beck planned to display animals and people from the colonies in a combined zoo and "Völkerschau" in the bordering present-day park area Rehberge, but these plans were never realized due to the outbreak of the First World War (Honold). However, with the growth of the working class and employee quarter, streets were added and systematically named after persons, places, and events that were connected to the German colonial project.

Postcolonial Memory activists advocate for renaming three streets here (Nachtigalplatz, Lüderitzstraße, and Petersallee) that are named after perpetrators of colonial war crimes—white male Germans who took advantage of and participated in colonial politics and exploitation.

Adolf Lüderitz was a salesman from Bremen, who bought land from the local Nama chief Frederiks in today's Namibia in 1883. Lüderitz is famous for the so-called miles swindle; after the contract was signed, he claimed that the area of twenty miles he bought should not be measured in the common English mile, which meant 1.7 kilometers, but rather, the Prussian mile, which meant 7.5 kilometers. As the Nama could not hold sway, the group lost all of its land. In 1884, the land was put under the protection of Germany and the colony "Deutsch-Südwestafrika" was established. The German colonial movement later stylized Lüderitz as the founder of Deutsch-Südwestafrika (BER 14).

Gustav Nachtigal is mostly known as a researcher, but he was also the first "Reichskommissar," the local administrative ruler of the newly founded colony "Deutsch-Westafrika." He also certified several land appropriations in present-day Togo, Ghana, and Cameroon (BER 15).

The most controversial street name in the so-called African Quarter is Petersallee. The National Socialists originally named this street in 1933 after Carl Peters. Peters, who appropriated land for the later-established colony "Deutsch-Ostafrika" from 1884 to 1893, was dishonorably released from his office as "Reichskommissar für das Kilimandscharo-Gebiet" because of his cruelty and despotism. It was the National Socialist Party that rehabilitated his "clampdown" and honored Peters as an exemplary colonial hero in their act of naming a street after him. After the street name was criticized in the 1980s, the street was rededicated to Hans Peters, a rather unknown local politician of the Christian Democratic Party, but the street name was never changed (BER 15). Given the historical context and the location of Petersallee in the heart of the so-called African Quarter, many people inside and outside of Berlin are most likely to still associate Petersallee with the original colonial officer bearing the name.

Debating Colonial and Racist Street Names in Berlin-Mitte

Berlin is divided into twelve administrative districts named "Bezirke." The district assemblies, the so-called "Bezirksverordnetenversammlungen," or abbreviated "BVV," have the legal right to name and rename streets that are located in their administrative district. Mohrenstraße and the so-called African Quarter are located in the administrative district "Berlin-Mitte" and are, therefore, handled within the same local assembly: BVV-Mitte. The BVV-Mitte consists of several committees and

subcommittees that are open to the public. The renaming of streets is mostly debated among the Education and Culture Committee, the Street Name Sub-Working Group, and the Memorial Plaque Committee. According to Berlin's Street Act, the renaming of streets is only legal if the relevant street is named after a nearby place that no longer exists, if renaming avoids the doubling of street names, or if renaming removes street names with a problematic ideological reference. Here, the act explicitly mentions streets that were named between 1933 and 1945 and that refer to National-Socialist ideology, as well as streets that were named between 1945 and 1990 and refer to the former German Democratic Republic. Furthermore, streets that were named before 1933 can be renamed if their retention encumbers the democratic self-understanding of Berlin and compromises the reputation of Berlin (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung). Street names that refer to the area of colonialism in a revisionist or racist way could, therefore, be changed, according to this prerequisite. Although more than sixty streets and four train stations have been renamed in the last 10 years in Berlin—not to mention the drastic renaming of streets after 1990—the renaming of colonial or racist street names remains highly-debated and contested. At present, the former Gröbenufer in Berlin-Kreuzberg (since 2007 May-Ayim-Ufer)[9] is the only street in Berlin possessing a colonial reference that has been renamed.

The public and political discussion of colonial and racist street names in Berlin commenced in 2004, when local assemblyman and representative of the Left Party Christoph Ziermann proposed a motion to rename "Mohrenstraße" in the city center of Berlin. The motion called on the local assembly to "abolish the discriminating naming 'Mohrenstraße.'" The motion further suggested that:

> [t]he search for a new name should take place in cooperation with the black community in Berlin to make sure that the new name signals a postcolonial, anti-colonial, and equality-based representation of Africa. The new name should, furthermore, offer the possibility of a positive identification with the city of Berlin to the black community. (BVV-Mitte, "Drucksache 1507/II," my translation)[10]

The motion was quickly picked up by the media and scornfully commented upon. Subsequently, Vice President of the International League for Human Rights Yonas Endrias and member of the Global African Congress Judy Gummich contacted Christoph Ziermann and organized a request to rename Mohrenstraße that was signed by more than twenty organizations. Yonas Endrias, Judy Gummich, and other representatives of postcolonial and anti-racist organizations and the Black Community in Berlin, as well as historian Ulrich van der Heyden and cultural theorist Susan Arndt were invited to participate in sessions of the Street Name Sub-Working Group and the Memorial Plaque Committee and to discuss the problematization of Mohrenstraße.[11] Before, both Arndt and van der Heyden had each written a dossier about the naming of Mohrenstraße for the Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration, Marieluise Beck, whose office was located at Mohrenstraße. The office moved in 2006, but Beck never commented on that move or on the discussion about renaming

Mohrenstraße. As a result of poor press exposure and the upcoming election, the motion to rename Mohrenstraße was withdrawn by Ziermann's party in the beginning of 2005. Nevertheless, in February 2005, the BVV decided on the recommendation of the Education and Culture Committee to establish a "panel for the critical examination of colonialism in public streets" (BVV-Mitte, "Drucksache 1711/II," my translation). With this decision, the specific problematization of Mohrenstraße was broadened and declared to be of common interest. The issue, then, was extended to the so-called African Quarter in Berlin-Wedding. Starting in July 2005, the panel was held four times, but was ultimately disbanded because not enough BVV members attended. Before, during, and after the discussion in BVV, purportedly wild renamings frequently occurred, both in Mohrenstraße and the so-called African Quarter. By adding Umlauts, Mohrenstraße was changed to Möhrenstraße (carrot street) several times. In the so-called African Quarter, colonial street signs were pasted over with the names of anti-colonial activists or famous people within the Black German Community.

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Over the course of several events, the discussion about the so-called African Quarter became revitalized in the BVV. Those events included: the publication of a dossier dealing with over seventy streets with a connection to colonialism in Berlin compiled by several postcolonial and anti-racist activists, as well as developmental non-profit organizations in 2008 (BER); a campaign for the remembrance of the 125th anniversary of the Africa Conference in Berlin, organized by a broad anti-racist coalition in the summer of 2009; the already mentioned renaming of Gröbenufer to May-Ayim-Ufer in the neighboring district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in the summer of 2009; and the exhibition *freedom roads!* by the NGO Berlin Postkolonial, dealing with the street names in the so-called African Quarter and organized in the summer of 2010. In June 2010, the then governing Social Democratic Party issued a press release declaring its intention to transform the African Quarter into a "place of learning and remembrance" and to eventually rename Nachtigalplatz, Lüderitzstraße, and Petersallee (Hanke, my translation). In the following months, the BVV-Mitte decided to install a remembrance plaque and to contextualize the African Quarter. As NGOs and political parties could not work out an agreement on the wording, they decided to print an NGO text, a BVV text, and a connecting text. In response, the newly founded citizens' initiative "Pro African Quarter" put forward an official request attacking the public financing of the remembrance plaque and started collecting signatures to combat the renaming of streets in the African Quarter. In the local election in September 2011, the Social Democratic Party became the leading party once again,

but afterwards formed a coalition with the Christian Democratic Party that had campaigned against the renaming of streets. The renaming of streets was deliberately dropped from the coalition contract. Nevertheless, postcolonial and anti-racist activists, as well as developmental non-profit organizations continue to promote the transformation of the so-called African Quarter into the "place of learning and remembrance" originally championed by the Social Democratic Party (Hanke). As the short summary of the course of the debate about colonial street names in Berlin-Mitte shows, the BVV might be the official place of discussion and the political institution that finally resolves the case. Nevertheless, the political debate extends to various other sites and involves several actors, such as scientists, activists, NGOs, journalists, residents, and politicians, on different levels. The analysis of the debate, therefore, cannot be restricted to the local assembly or even to party politics. The renaming of Gröbenufer, for example, was supported by local assembly men and women of the Green Party, whereas the BVV-representatives of the Green Party argued against renamings in "Berlin-Mitte." A local assemblyman of the Left Party introduced the proposal to rename Mohrenstraße, nevertheless, it was abandoned after the spokesman for cultural politics of the Left Party—in a position of higher authority—criticized the idea (Brauer). Moreover, the actual decision-making not only depends on the commitment of individual representatives, in addition to general societal dispositions and pressures, but also on the publicity received by and the promulgation of public assembly sessions, as well as the resulting absence or presence of certain politicians and activists.

Racialized Notions of a German Collective Memory: Exclusion and Delegitimization

The claims to rename racist or colonial streets in Berlin are often rejected with reference to a German identity that is thought of as exclusively white and based on a shared past. Some scholars explain the racialized notion of German collective memory through the notion of a double bind in the remembrance of the Holocaust that perpetuates its racist ideology: as white Germans were the perpetrators, they and their (biological) offspring are the only ones who bear the duty to remember, whereas the migrant (and non-white) population of Germany is said to lack a relation to that "indigineous" part of German history (Rothberg and Yildiz 36). With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the discourse of "ein Volk" (one people) once again became generally accepted and blurred the boundaries between the celebration of German unity and a racialized form of nationalism (Schneider). Following this "new German self-perception"—the Holocaust and the GDR serving as mnemonic benchmarks—black people and 'their history' of colonialism are neither seen as part of German history, nor part of the German collective. In the debate about colonial street names in Berlin, such a mindset can be found in statements that assert that, firstly, racist and colonial street names need not be changed because for (white) Germans this issue does not matter, and, secondly, black persons are not allowed to make claims to change historical representations in public spaces, as they are obviously not part of the "we" and, therefore, should deal with 'their own' street names. The spokeswoman for the citizens' initiative

"Pro African Quarter," Rita Handt, has articulated this view in the internet forum of the exhibition *freedom roads!*. She writes:

> Ich würde mich sehr wundern, wenn Afrikaner der Meinung wären, dass Deutsche in ihren Ländern die Straßen nach eigenem Gutdünken benennen dürften. Umgekehrt gilt für mich das gleiche, Straßenbenennungen in Deutschland sind nicht Sache von Ausländern, egal, wo sie herkommen.[12]

On the Homepage Voice of Europe, an anonymous user articulates this view even more drastically:

> An der Spitze der Umbenennungsforderer stehen sinnigerweise 'Gäste' aus Togo, N-wort (sic!)[13] die in ihrem eigenen Lande nicht zurechtkamen, von dort aus Furcht vor Strafe vor kriminellen Verbrechen flüchteten, um sich dann hier als politische Flüchtlinge auszugeben. Statt jedoch nun damit zufrieden zu sein, dass der deutsche Staat sie aushält und ihre Existenz sichert, beginnen sie, wie die oben erwähnten Gäste, sich nicht nur in Deutschland auf Dauer einzurichten, sondern auch das Land nach ihrem Geschmack umzugestalten. Wen interessiert dabei was die Deutschen denken?[14]

These drastic and racially exclusive positions are an exception even in the highly charged identity debate. Nevertheless, the binary contrasting of the categories white/German with black/African can be found in more complex and encoded arguments. For instance, the historian Ulrich van der Heyden writes in *Auf Afrikas Spuren in Berlin*: "A survey, interrogating African embassies in Berlin, shows that 'Mohr' or 'Mohrenstraße' is not perceived as offensive by the interviewed Africans" (8, my translation).[15] The assumption that embassies of African states can speak for all black people living in Berlin by representing a 'universal black' point of view, reflects the already mentioned logic, claiming that all blacks are naturally Africans and, therefore, on no account German, speaking with one voice and first and foremost, representing an outsider's perspective.

Another method of perpetuating the white/German and black/African divide can be found in the supposition that only blacks/Africans problematize racist and colonial street names, exemplified by the narrative of the leader of the Memorial Plaque Committee and the Street Name Sub-Working Group, Volker Hobrack, during the start of the debate:

> Da entzündete sich der Streit daran, dass einige schwarzhäutige Menschen gesagt haben, wenn sie durch die Mohrenstraße fahren oder mit der U-Bahn durch den Bahnhof Mohrenstraße fahren, dann fühlen sie sich diskriminiert.[16]

The ongoing problematization of Mohrenstraße by the Black Community is certainly true, but nevertheless, the public debate in the BVV and the local press was ini-

tiated by the white local assemblyman Christoph Ziermann, who on his daily way to work, responded negatively to the street name and, therefore, proposed a motion to re-name Mohrenstraße, whereupon Black activists contacted him.[17] The aforementioned assessment of Hobrack conjures up an image of strictly separate and binarily contrast-ed white/German and black/African histories and identities that unavoidably result in ascribing different kinds of belonging[18] and different kinds of perception. According to such a discourse, racism and colonialism relate to black, African sensitivities and are, therefore, regarded of no value to politics or a German collective historical memory.

Yonas Endrias has also addressed this issue. Referring to the institutional coopera-tion in the preparation process for an event in remembrance of the 125th anniversary of the Africa Conference in Berlin, Endrias criticizes how colonialism is merely as-cribed to the arena of migration and migrants. He claims:

> Aufarbeitung was Kolonialismus angeht sollte nicht Aufgabe des Mi-grationsbeauftragten sein, sondern gehört in den Bereich Kultur. Das ist direkt unter Wowereits Büro. … Aufarbeitung des deutschen Kolo-nialismus ist die Aufarbeitung der deutschen, europäischen Geschichte. Aber Kolonialismus schiebt man immer zu Piening [dem Integrations-beauftragten, Anm. J.E.].[19]

Another position that at first glance seems to acknowledge the entanglement of Ger-many and its colonies, but that is ultimately used to delegitimize the renaming claims, refers to the "not really colonial" origin of the activists:

> Dieser Text von den NGOs, der ist eben, steht ja hinten drin, wer den gemacht hat, wer dafür verantwortlich ist. Der oberste, der das gemacht hat, das ist jemand, der kommt aus Eritrea und die meisten Leute, die diese Texte gemacht haben, die kommen gar nicht aus deutschen Kolo-nien, viele kommen aus Ghana, aus Mosambik. (Handt)[20]

This statement is based upon the assumption that Black persons are only allowed to address colonialism, insofar as they are direct descendants of Africans from the former German colonies, but not as black residents of Berlin, who are concerned with racist and colonial street names in their home city.

These arguments that are used to reject the claims to rename racist and colonial street names in Berlin clearly demonstrate the interweaving of memory politics, identity politics, and spatial politics. With reference to a white German memory collective that is based on a shared past, Black Germans as well as Black residents of Berlin and all those who argue in support of the renaming claims are marked as Africans and 'outsiders' or foreigners, who are denied the right to make claims to change the space of the city. The prevalent employment of a categorizing system that contrasts black/African with white/German and assigns different rights to these cate-gories in the debate about colonial and racist street names in Berlin demonstrates the power of arguments that are based on fixed, essentialized, and group-based notions of memory and identity. They work to legitimize racialized exclusions and make

them socially acceptable through the backdoor of 'naturally' divided, rather than shared memories.

Inverting Perspectives: The Critical Remembrance of Colonialism in the Migration Metropolis

Anti-racist activists and developmental non-profit organizations advocate the renaming of streets for several different reasons and with varied arguments. Still, the single most important issue of all renaming claims is the call for a postcolonial inversion of perspective. Such an inversion was achieved with the renaming of Gröbenufer to May-Ayim-Ufer, as already mentioned in this article. At the dedication ceremony of the memorial plaque contextualizing the newly named May-Ayim-Ufer, Black German activist Joshua Kwesi Aikins conceptualized it in the following way:

> Unsere alternativen Namensvorschläge sollen sicherstellen, dass der koloniale Bezug der Straßen gewahrt bleibt, diese wichtige Epoche der Geschichte muss im Stadtbild der ehemaligen Kolonialhauptstadt Berlin erinnert werden. Erinnerung muss sein—allerdings aus einer veränderten Perspektive. Geehrt werden sollen nun diejenigen, die in unterschiedlicher Form antikolonialen Widerstand geleistet haben.[21]

By renaming streets in this manner, the colonial context is preserved, but colonialism is remembered in a critical manner that breaks with the colonial perspective. The goal is not only to remove the disagreeable names, but also to establish a practice of critical remembrance. Nevertheless, the claims to rename streets are not an end in and of themselves. For some activists, the evolving debates that are fueled by renaming claims are as 'important as the actual changing of the street name. Member of Berlin Postkolonial Christian Kopp elucidates:

> Das ist natürlich sofort Sprengstoff. Und dann gibt es diese Debatte über den Kolonialismus, weil dann gucken die Leute tatsächlich zumindest erst mal bei Wikipedia …. Die könnte man nie erreichen mit so 'ner 'Wir wollen jetzt mal über Kolonialismus reden'-Nummer. Das würden die nie tun, sich damit auseinandersetzen. Dann ist ja das nächste, über ihre Aktionen oder Gegenaktionen kommt es in die Presse. Es gibt eine Debatte. Es ist ein lokalpolitisches Thema.[22] (personal interview)

Talking and debating about colonialism, in addition to its critical public remembrance, is further seen as a way to raise the awareness of and problematization of current forms of racism, as well as the social organization of a society that is to a high degree constituted by migration. Walking tour advisor Josephine Apraku outlines:

> Ich finde die Beschäftigung mit Kolonialismus auch insofern wichtig, als dass es ja auch Teil von einer Migrationsdebatte sein kann. Dass es nämlich wichtig ist, dass man mit allen Leuten gleich umgeht und dass

es Zeiten gab, wo das nicht der Fall war. Ich finde das kann man prima miteinander verbinden.[23]

For this reason, many of the postcolonial initiatives and activists are also engaged in educational projects with school children:

> Diese Bilder vom armen Afrika, dem man helfen muss, das ist in der 4. Klasse noch nicht so präsent. Da hatte ich das Gefühl, dass es ganz schnell auch zu 'nem ganz klaren Unrechtsbewusstsein kommt. Also jemand kommt irgendwohin, nimmt jemandem das Land weg, das versteht jemand mit fünf Jahren ... dass die Weißen da Unrecht getan haben. Und es ist eher wenn man älter ist, dass man dann sagt 'Afrika ist ein Sonderfall, da mussten die Europäer…' (Kopp, personal interview)[24]

At the center of this postcolonial activism stands not just the "right remembrance" of the past, but also the implications that this past, as well as its critical examination, can have for the present, and the future of a society shaped by processes of migration.

Consequently, notions of binary and incompatible black and white memories do not make sense. In a presentation at Potsdam University in May 2011, Joshua Kwesi Aikins referred to the white rapper Promoe who inverts the phrase of the white man's burden.[25] Promoe raps that he can barely carry the burden of living in a society that is shaped by colonialism and racism and that privileges him as a white person, while discriminating against blacks. Nevertheless, he does not want to ignore this burden, but instead wants to share it and fight against it collectively: "And I can carry the weight / when we share the burden / ain't nothing that's too heavy for my shoulders / we can conquer the hate / we bring it up to the surface / and listen to what history done told us" (Aikins, "Berlin Remix"). Thus, remembering colonialism is not just seen as a matter for and of Black people, but as an issue and a responsibility for all. Starting from the present, multi-ethnic population of Berlin, the quoted activists see colonialism as an incisive example that warns of the dividing dangers of present forms of racism inculcated through the past, and demand that colonialism should therefore be a crucial part of public memory in Berlin.

Acts of Memory Citizenship: Inclusion and Radical Change

As I have already outlined, the discussion about the renaming of colonial and racist street names in Berlin goes much further than debating the changing of street signs. The actual conflict opens up a space in which questions of belonging and rights to the city are negotiated. The demands to rename streets are therefore rejected so persistently and tenaciously, I would argue, because they challenge some basic assumptions about the social organization of life in the city, namely the distinction between locals and migrants.

In their often quoted introduction to *Cities and Citizenship*, James Holsten and Arjun Appadurai differentiate between "formal citizenship"—meaning the legal status of a person and the rights and responsibilities that are associated with this status—

and "substantive citizenship," meaning lived practices and the possibility of effectively acting out rights. According to Holsten and Appadurai, formal and substantive citizenship are not necessarily congruent. Particularly in the global city, there are highly privileged and participating persons and groups without formal citizenship, while other persons and groups, despite formal citizenship, are highly deprivileged. Formal inclusion by citizenship, therefore, only partly defines actual possibilities, rights, responsibilities and modes of belonging and recognition. Beyond formal belonging, there are multiple borders and distinctions that differentiate citizens and inhabitants of a city and put them in multiple hierarchic relationships to each other. One of those inner borders refers to "origin" and ethnically coded notions of national belonging (Balibar, "At the Borders of Citizenship").

Social theorists Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen analyze actions that challenge and transform those notions of belonging and rights as *Acts of Citizenship*. Their aim is to shift the focus away from the legal and determined subjects and institutionalized, formalized practices of the nation-state towards "those acts when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (2). In the same volume, social scientist Peter Nyers refers to philosopher Jacques Ranciere's concept of "politics" to emphasize the overcoming of hegemonic subject positions by acts of citizenship. Acts of citizenship, therefore, do not just claim rights, but challenge the logic of the distribution of those rights, as well as the identities and subject categories that are associated with this logic of distribution. As Nyers puts it:

> Those who are denied the status of citizen can break into the 'consensual' system, interrupt this order, and assert themselves as visible and speaking beings. As Rancière (2006, p. 5) says, 'Politics means precisely this, that you speak at a time and in a place you're not expected to speak.' (165)

The claims to rename streets with a colonial or racist reference in Berlin can be analyzed as such an act of citizenship. Although some opponents deny them access, postcolonial activists break into the arena of "German history" by demanding the renaming of colonial streets.

The claims to rename streets according to a logic of a postcolonial inversion of perspective can be read as a claim to integrate the activists' perspective, as well as an occupation of public discursive space. By problematizing street names and advocating for their change, postcolonial activists transfer the streets into a politicized arena. They demand to be integrated into the formal production of meaning in the city in which they live and, therefore, to become visible as citizens and locals who have a voice in the production of meaning within the cityscape. But the renaming claims—as they are articulated by the formerly quoted activists—go even further: they do not just want to integrate or add their own perspective, but furthermore, demand a makeover of dominant historicity and a stronger consideration of colonialism. Therefore, they do not just claim to be integrated into the German memory collective, but also target the corpus of historical reference points, the foundation

upon which this memory collective is based. Colonialism, they state, is the history of both blacks and whites, and beyond that an important era to grapple with, regarding the mixed populations of Europe, as well as new (and old) forms of racism. By referring to colonialism as "geteilte Geschichte"—acknowledging both the dividing aftermaths of colonialism and the inevitable connections colonialism created—they overcome the racialized splitting of an essential white/German and black/African history from which the renaming opponents often draw. In a multi-ethnic highly diverse city like Berlin, the critical remembrance of colonialism is essential for everyone,[26] they assert. This means an essential break with the racialized binary categories—black/African/migrant and white/German/local—that renaming opponents use to argue against a critical remembrance of colonialism in public space.[27] In their acts of postcolonial "memory citizenship" (Rothberg, Yildiz), activists address a multi-ethnic, anti-racist memory collective created by the critical examination and mutual discussion of the German and European colonial past—a memory collective that recognizes and fights against contemporary racialized divisions and exclusions.

End Notes

1. This paper builds on the empirical research I conducted for my masters thesis in European Ethnology entitled "Postcolonial Memory in the Migration Metropolis. Shared/Divided Past(s) in the Conflict about Street Names in Central Berlin." The empirical data includes thirteen qualitative face-to-face interviews with different persons that took and/or take part in the debate of colonial and racist street names in central Berlin, fourteen participant observations from public discussions, workshops, local parliamentary sessions, and walking tours, a researched collection of newspaper articles, press releases, and printed records of local municipal assembly sessions, as well as posts in several internet forums.
2. Berlin's history of migration as well as the histories of migration of its inhabitants are diverse (regarding generation, origin, structural framing, gender, economic and legal status). Still, racism remains, and there is a wide range of anti-racist movements. Nevertheless, as I have already outlined, I do not believe that political action and an individual's race always go hand in hand, as I do not wish to argue that the fight for a critical remembrance of colonialism is an issue only for Black people. Therefore, I do not share the assumption that postcolonial memory activists are necessarily Black, but rather am concerned with the activists' political action and goals.
3. The German verb "geteilt" means both shared and divided. The term "geteilte Geschichten" is used by Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria to describe both the entanglements and the divisions colonialism has created.
4. Another historical example, dealing with the case of Great Britain, is provided by anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff in their essay on "Home-made Hegemony." They describe how stereotypes of "the wild" and the scandalizing of "missing domesticity" were used for both disciplining the working class in Great Britain and for proletarianizing the population in the colonies.

5. See for example Osterhammel, Pelizaeus, Hobuß and Lölke, Perraudin, and Heyden.

6. The war in "Deutsch-Südwestafrika" started when the German colonial governor decided to take seventy-five percent of the land from the local population and give it to German farmers, which actually meant dispossessing the Herero population of their livelihood. In this situation, the Herero rebelled and attacked the white farmers. When the German command was handed over to Lothar von Trotha, the conflict turned into genocide. Von Trotha ordered his troops to fire on the "rebels," including women and children, and families were interned in so-called concentration camps or chased into the Omaheke desert. More than three quarters of the Herero population were killed during the war. The Nama who also entered the war in 1905 lost half of their tribal members (Conrad 52). During the Maji Maji War in "Deutsch-Ostafrika," which also evolved out of a local resistance movement against foreign rule, more than 300,000 Africans died—compared to very few losses on the German side, which had been at an advantage concerning military technique, due to the utilization of machineguns (Conrad 53).

7. This "superimposition" of different layers of history is of course not naturally given, but another mode of constructing pasts. Especially in the case of Mohrenstraße, the different modes of separating or relating the street's (pre-)colonial, National Socialist, and GDR history are highly political ways of strengthening arguments for or against renamings. Due to the actual focus of this essay and constraints of space, I will not elaborate on this important aspect of memory construction.

8. The son of Friedrich Wilhelm, the Great Elector.

9. May Ayim (1960-1996) was an Afro-German poet 'activist.

10. "Das Bezirksamt wird gebeten, sich mit Nachdruck für eine Aufhebung der diskriminierenden Benennung 'Mohrenstraße' (sowohl der Straße als auch des Bahnhofs) einzusetzen. Die Suche nach einem neuen Namen sollte in Zusammenarbeit mit der afrikanischen Gemeinde in Berlin stattfinden mit dem Ziel, durch einen geeigneten Namen ein post- bzw. antikolonialistisches, auf Gleichberechtigung aufbauendes Afrikabild zu signalisieren sowie den hier lebenden Afrikanern symbolisch eine positiv besetzte Beziehung zu der Stadt Berlin zu ermöglichen."

11. Historian Ulrich van der Heyden has been heavily involved in the debates about colonial street names in Berlin (see for example van der Heyden, "Gröblicher Rufmord;" Aikins, Danielzik and Steinit, "Wie weiß ist der Elfenbeinturm?") and has mostly argued against renamings. He (co-)published several books on the colonial history of Berlin (see for example: van der Heyden, *Auf Afrikas Spuren in Berlin*; van der Heyden, *Rote Adler an Afrikas Küste*; van der Heyden and Zeller, *Kolonialmetropole Berlin*).

12. "I would be very surprised if Africans would be in agreement with Germans naming streets as desired in their countries. Conversely the same applies: street naming in Germany is not the business of foreigners, no matter where they are from" (my translation).

13. The N-word has been removed from this quote and replaced with *N-wort*, as the editor and author do not wish to reproduce this word in writing.

14. " The renaming claimants are headed by 'guests' from Togo, N-word (sic!) who did not get along in their own country, who fled for fear of punishment for criminal acts and then paid themselves off as political refugees. Instead of being satisfied with the German state maintaining them and securing their existence, they not only start to make themselves comfortable in Germany, but also start to remodel the country to their taste. Who cares what the Germans think?" (my translation).

15. "Eine Umfrage bei in der deutschen Hauptstadt ansässigen Botschaften afrikanischer Länder hat ergeben, dass 'Mohr' oder 'Mohrenstraße' für die befragten Afrikaner nichts anstößiges hat."

16. "The conflict sparked off because some black-skinned people said that they feel discriminated against passing through Mohrenstraße" (my translation).

17. Although the Black Community had probably already been debating this issue in a different public sphere, this highlights the fact that Mohrenstraße can and must be identified as a racist street name even by whites.

18. I use "belonging" here as a rather abstract anthropological concept.

19. "Addressing colonialism shouldn't be a duty of the migration commissioner, but the Department of Culture. Dealing with colonialism means dealing with German and European history. But colonialism is always pushed to Piening [the migration commissioner of Berlin, J.E.]" (my translation).

20. "This NGO text, at the end you can read who created it, who is responsible for that. The leader who did that is someone from Eritrea, and most people who wrote that text, they aren't even from German colonies. They are from Ghana, from Mozambique" (my translation).

21. "Our alternative proposals for names shall ensure that the colonial reference of the streets is preserved, this important historical epoch must be remembered in the former colonial capital Berlin. Remembrance is a must—but from a changed perspective. Honored shall be those who offered anti-colonial resistance in different ways" (my translation).

22. "This is immediately explosive, of course. And then, this debate about colonialism evolves; people at least inform themselves on Wikipedia. We would never reach them with a simple request like we wanna talk about colonialism.' They would never give thoughts to that. And that is the next step: Because of their actions and counter-actions the issue reaches the media. It's on the local political agenda" (my translation).

23. "I believe dealing with colonialism is also important insofar as this can be part of a debate about migration. That is to say that it is important to treat everyone equally and that there have been times when this wasn't the case. I think these things can easily be set in relation to each other" (my translation).

24. "These pictures of poor Africa that need help, they are not very prevalent among 4th grade students yet. I had the feeling that they are quick to develop a sense of injustice. Someone going somewhere, taking away land—a five year old understands that the whites did wrong. Growing older, people more likely say 'Africa is a special case. The Europeans had to…'"

25. "The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands" is a poem written by the British author Rudyard Kipling that was published in McClure's magazine in 1899. "The White Man's Burden" is about the white man's responsibility to colonize and therefore to civilize the rest of the world. Today the poem is seen as a symbol of imperialistic, racist, and colonial attitudes.

26. Not only should this occur in Berlin, but everywhere that colonialism is not acknowledged. Nevertheless, this particular case-study is focused on Berlin.

27. Black Germans' existence already breaks down this division, but their misrecognition as Germans, as witnessed in the arguments of the opponents of renaming, refuses to acknowledge this. Often, the legal national status of persons does not at all convince people to recognize them as "German." There are other categories of distinction within which racism works, such as culture or religion. Renaming proponents consist of white, black, and migrant people with and without a German passport living in Berlin and all should be part of the city and have the right to take part in public decisions.

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