

participants in this new debate, including the author of this review, have raised the question of whether the very consolidation of Holocaust memory, which Hughes celebrates in the first half of her book, might itself have led to certain “perverse” effects. At stake in that debate are the uses of Holocaust memory in the struggle over Israel/Palestine, the relation of anti-semitism to colonial and postcolonial forms of racism, and the status of memory in a multicultural, migration society. While I share Hughes’s distress about how conspiratorial and often frankly racist currents are eroding “an understanding of the past that was hard won and once widely shared” (106), I am also concerned that that hard-won understanding has itself come to produce illiberal effects.

The Perversion of Holocaust Memory offers illuminating capsule summaries of some central moments in the development of memory culture in the last thirty years, and it reminds us to keep important ethical and political questions about collective remembrance on the scholarly agenda. More research is now needed to fill out the picture and capture the contradictory complexity of our current moment.

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Decolonizing German and European History at the Museum

By Katrin Sieg. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021. Pp. vii + 316. Paperback \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0472055104.

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If one looks at Katrin Sieg’s research interest in theater and performance, the reader might wonder how the research links to her current monograph. However, if one approaches the art of museum curation under the premise of performance, the book offers interesting insights into how state museums orchestrate their exhibitions to engage the audience in critical discussions about nationhood, memory, power dynamics, continuities, and the need for change.

In her book, Sieg takes a closer look at the role of European museums in the context of coming to terms with their colonial past(s). While many museums in the last two decades have focused on decolonization, critique in recent years also has addressed ownership as part of the colonial power dynamics in relation to the Global South and the continuities of such. The debate about the repatriation of human remains and the acknowledgement of the extermination of the Herero and the Nama in Namibia as a genocide is just one of those examples. Activists, such as the NoHumboldt21! campaign have also criticized museums of performative actions, claiming decolonization cannot just be part of the curatorial changes of an exhibition but also needs to be reflected within the institutional structures of a museum in terms of ethnic and racial diversity and in collaboration with scholarly expertise from the Global South.

For her survey, Sieg examined museums in Germany, France, and Belgium, among which the German History Museum (GHM) in Berlin and the House of European History (HEH) in Brussels take up most of the analysis. While she focuses primarily on the German discourse, the book offers a comparative study, which engages the reader with the various politics(s), activism(s), and cultural production(s) of other European museums and their exhibitions

addressing the colonial past of their respective countries. New challenges of immigration caused by wars and natural disasters have set the focus on the European Union, its race relations, and its entanglements with countries in the Global South. By looking at the various actors who contribute to a museum's mission, Sieg's study is part of an "effort of making museums into areas where new institutional protocol assists the mobilization of colonial history for investigations of imperial presence" (6-7).

Avoiding a formal introduction of each country's colonial museums, Sieg sets the book into a framework of the actors starting with activist interventions in chapter 2, which challenged the Hegelian historiography in which Africa remains in the set-up of the imperial and colonial subjectification and advocated for accountability. Using the three aforementioned museums, the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, the former Royal Museum of Central Africa in Brussels, and the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris, Sieg highlights the different forms of collaborations often and still being approached with a hegemonic worldview. Picking up on the various forms of interventions, chapter 3 takes a closer look at the project *Colonialism in a Box*, a counter-narration to the history of colonialism at the GHM which challenged the "museum's narrative of democratization as Germany's premier national accomplishment" (84).

Chapters 4 through 6 examine the exhibition *German Colonialism: Fragments of Its Past and Present* showcased at the GHM from 2016 to 2017 by looking at the curation of the exhibition, its reflection of the involvement of the scientific, educational, and cultural institutions partaking in the colonial project, its involvement of members of the marginalized communities in the process, and the recreation of a more antiracist world order by reflection on the continuation of imperial order. Chapter 7 then thematizes the House of European History and its attempt to focus on the colonial past(s) as a European project. In her final chapter, Sieg focuses on the role of artists as part of the intervention, renewal, and decolonization of these museums. Using the art of Dierk Schmidt, Heba Y. Amin, and Kader Attia, Sieg argues that they "point to the limits and gaps of historical evidence and assemble different sources and modes of knowledge" (39).

In conclusion, Katrin Sieg's book serves as an intriguing entry point to understanding the coming to terms with the colonial past(s), its struggles, and the rethinking of museum structures beyond the state's control. However, diverting from the Eurocentric and Hegelian view does not mean allowing other views to graciously participate in the narration of a museum but rather investing in projects and initiatives and therefore smaller local museums that present a different narrative; and, as suggested by the activist-scholars Nicola Lauré al-Samari and Belinda Kazeem, to give space to minorities to tell their stories. One might even go a step further and question the presence of state museums in its core and legitimacy. What if we give the history to the communities affected rather than claiming to do better?

Finally, the book opens up further conversations of how to compare state-sponsored museums. For example, the exhibition *Looking Back* (launched 2017), a collaboration of the NGOs Berlin Postkolonial and the Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland (Initiative of Black People in Germany), currently displayed in the Museum Treptow-Köpenick, serves as an example of the need for diversity and the amplification of minoritized voices and offers a critical view into the 1896 Berlin Colonial Exhibition. Whereas many exhibitions on colonialism tell the story through artifacts, *Looking Back* uses biographies and portraits of those men and women put on display at the colonial exhibition and therefore offers a different look and insight into the life, suffering, and survival of people.

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