

Mario Laarmann, Clément Ndé Fongang, Carla Seemann,
Laura Vordermayer

Reparation, Restitution, and the Politics of Memory. A Methodological and Historical Introduction

What is it like to be living without burning anything?

Camille de Toledo

*The way in which we can address the irreparable is to still have in us
what Barack Obama famously called the ‘audacity of hope.’*

Souleymane Bachir Diagne

Paintings of a rainforest gradually swallowing up the stations of the cross in a Catholic park turned refugee camp on Pulau Galang, Indonesia.¹ A pile of wooden shoes that have once served subaltern Indian brick workers to endure their inhumane working conditions, the flipside of the promise of modern development.² Rhizomatic mindmaps tracing the creolization of the German language.³ The threat that runs through the different artworks at the 2022 Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art clearly carries the signature of this year’s curator: Kader Attia, whose artistic and theoretical work is preoccupied with the notion and the practice of *repair*.⁴ Be it his interest in the mutilated soldiers of World War I, often referred to as *gueules cassées* (Fig. 3, page 13), his fragmented globes held together by innumerable stitches (Fig. 1, page 4), or his broken mirrors, which trouble the self-image of the onlooker through cracks and metal brackets (Fig. 2, page 10) – repair is not a superficial or purely aesthetic category in Attia’s work, but a radical one that analyzes and engages the premises of the world as we know it. What the 2022 Berlin Biennale and Kader Attia’s own artistic work reveal is the violence that runs through Western Modernity; the social contract and world-system, as Immanuel

1 Tammy Nguyen, *Jesus is taken down from the Cross* (2022) and 13 other paintings in a series created for the Berlin Biennale 2022.

2 Birender Yadav, *Walking on the Roof of Hell* (2016), exhibited at the Berlin Biennale 2022.

3 Moses März, *Kreolisierung der deutschen Sprache* (2021–22) and other artworks in the series *Karten zur Kreolisierung der Welt*, commissioned for the Berlin Biennale 2022.

4 Research that led to the publication of this article was supported by a PhD studentship of the project “Minor Universality. Narrative World Productions After Western Universalism,” which received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 819931).

Wallerstein (1974) would call it, which has arguably combined democracy with capitalism, colonialism, racism and anti-semitism, and other forms of segregation and exploitation in a schizophrenic way since its inception.⁵ As Attia writes in his curatorial statement:

In fact, the present world is the way it is because it carries all of the wounds accumulated throughout the history of Western modernity. Unrepaired, they continue to haunt our societies. This world of wounds is based on the extraordinary crimes committed by modernity – from slavery to colonialism, with racism an ideological lever to establish the certainty of its supremacy over subjugated peoples, the West founded modern capitalism upon the brutalization of others. But while racist crimes and genocides have been normalized to justify the extraction of wealth from the Global South, the West has acted in just as genocidal a manner by constructing hatred against segments of its own populations, like that inflicted upon European Jewry throughout history, resulting in the singular crime of the Holocaust (Attia 2022, 22–24).

The Berlin Biennale's interest in Attia's notion of repair is neither an exception nor a coincidence, but rather, we would argue, a consequence of contemporary political and cultural debates. In the fields of cultural studies, memory studies, post-/decolonial studies, museology and anthropology, but also foreign politics, the concepts of reparation and restitution can be said to have gained renewed momentum over the past roughly two decades, and it is their urgency and transformative potential which have inspired this very volume. It aims to examine different discourses and practices of reparation, bringing together perspectives from cultural studies, memory studies, post- or decolonial studies, and literary studies. Throughout the book, contributions from these disciplines are complemented by literary and poetic texts as well as chapters drawing on philosophy, art, and literary studies in order to explore the multiple facets of reparation. We will introduce these various contributions on the following pages, as we attempt to provide an overview of the thematic complex at hand.

The notion of repair is clearly linked to the multiple claims for financial reparations in recent years, but it equally informs demands to retribute looted

⁵ This connection has been made multiple times. One might think of Aimé Césaire's critique of colonialism as the flip side of humanism in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955), Hannah Arendt's identification of European imperialism with Antisemitism and racial thinking in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), or just simply go back to the texts of influential republicanists such as Ernest Renan who would state quite frankly that a "nation which does not colonize is irrevocably doomed to socialism, to the war between rich and poor" (2011 [1872], 95), thus legitimizing both capitalism as such, and colonialism as one of its tools. For a more recent intervention one might also think of Ariella Azoulay's (2021) provocative postulation that "modernity is an imperial crime." Unless indicated otherwise, all translations into English are our own.

artworks, cultural objects, spiritual entities, and even human remains⁶ as well as the various politics of memory at work today – be it the French president Emmanuel Macron’s public repentance for colonial crimes,⁷ the heated debates in Germany on the multidirectionality of history and the singularity of the Holocaust,⁸ or the negotiation of Germany’s self-image in the wake of the recent reconstruction of the Prussian city palace in the center of Berlin.⁹ Highlighting the last two decades seems plausible as the year 2001 brought renewed attention to long-standing claims for financial reparations for slavery and colonialism, and this attention has grown ever since. In France, May 21, 2001, marks the passage of the *Loi Taubira*, which officially recognizes slavery and the slave trade as a crime against humanity. While this recognition has come a long way and implies important changes to French school curricula and commemorative culture, claims for financial reparation had been removed from the original text before presenting it to the *Assemblée nationale* (Tin 2013, 40–42). In contrast, the 3rd UNESCO World Conference against Racism, held in Durban in early September of the same year, brought the topic to global attention. Retrospectively, the conference is mainly remembered

6 For the German context, this renewed interest in the topic of restitution and provenance research is expressed, for example, in the establishment of the Department for “Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts” at the German Lost Art Foundation in 2019. For an overview of their work see Larissa Foerster (2021).

7 One of the strategies in Macron’s foreign policy is the commissioning of reports investigating France’s liability for crimes committed in its (former) colonies, such as the genocide in Rwanda, the Algerian War of Independence, or the looting of cultural objects as part of colonial endeavors. While this strategy is clearly one of reparation and has long influenced other European countries’s foreign policies, critics see it as a geopolitical tool of a “Colonisation 2.0” (Tampa 2022).

8 The current debate, also known as *Historikerstreit 2.0*, began in the spring of 2020, when the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, one of the best-known theorists of postcolonialism, was disinvited from the Ruhrtriennale. Mbembe, who in his writings reflects on the interconnectedness of the Holocaust and colonialism as two sides of the history of modernity, was accused of thereby doubting the singularity of the Holocaust. While critics of Mbembe thus defended the inviolability of German memory politics centered around the Shoah, his supporters argue that his reasoning is “an extension of German memory culture that also holds the potential for a multidirectional revision of remembrance beyond residual Eurocentrism” (Rothberg 2020). For an overview of the debate see also Urban (2022).

9 In 2002, the German parliament decided to rebuild the Prussian baroque city palace whose remains had been removed by the GDR leadership after WWII and replaced by the Palace of the Republic in the 1970s. Upon demolition of the latter in 2008, the so-called “Humboldt Forum” was erected and has opened gradually since 2020, holding various ethnographical collections on display at the time of writing. The building was sharply criticized from the beginning, as a “symbol of colonial power and genocide” (Dege 2021) as well as an expression of a conservative backlash and a negation of East German history (see, for example, Müller 2020).

for its clashes over Israel's role in the middle east, but it also saw the firm advocacy of a number of African countries and African-American NGOs for reparations. While these claims did not amount to much action at the time, they successfully reintroduced the topic to the global agenda, setting the ground for the founding of the *Mouvement International pour les Réparations* in Martinique in 2001 or the 2003 demands of reparation voiced by the Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to name but two examples.



Fig. 1: Kader Attia, *Chaos + Repair = Universe*, 2014. Sculpture. Mirror fragments, metal wires. Exhibition view “Sacrifice and Harmony,” MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt/Main, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua. Photo: Axel Schneider.

On a larger scale, this intensification of the discussion on reparations and repair in recent years seems to speak to the historical moment in which we still find ourselves today. As the anthropologist David Scott argues, the end of the Cold War in 1989 has brought a gradual return to questions of material injustices and a critical attention to the history and constitution of our social systems as such. Calls for financial reparation seem to be one important factor in this post-postcolonial era, or *postcolonial present*, as Scott (1999) calls it, and part and parcel of the larger process to repair what Attia calls the “world of wounds.” The great number of major events and publications since the Durban conference point to this observation, be it the 2013 establishment of the pan-Caribbean CARICOM Reparations Commission, the reparations paid by the UK to victims of their colonial rule in Kenya (also in 2013), the publication of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ influential *The Case for Reparations* in 2014, or

the much criticized *Aussöhnungsabkommen*, a reconciliatory treaty conceived by Germany and the Namibian government in 2021. The latter is addressed in Sahra Rausch's chapter (Part III of this volume), which elaborates on the different power-political interests at play in the official recognition of the crimes committed by Germany's colonial army against the OvaHerero and Nama between 1904–1908. As she argues in her discourse analysis of German newspaper articles and political statements, the Federal government officially recognized the committed colonial crimes as genocide as late as 2015 while at the same time denying concrete political or legal consequences as well as material claims put forward by the OvaHerero and Nama groups. The (post)colonial relationship between Namibia and Germany is equally relevant for Ibrahima Sene's analysis of Bernhard Jauermann's *Der lange Schatten* (2015) in Part IV: He argues that the novel generates a dialogue between different groups and actors involved, represented by individual characters in the narrative. In so doing, according to Sene, *Der lange Schatten* examines the conditions and the possibilities of reconciliation.

As Louis-Georges Tin has shown in his historical survey *Esclavage et réparations* (2013, 45), debates over reparations always need to be understood with reference to the context in which they arise, such as the historical moment, the actors involved, as well as the political interests and power relations at play. In the immediate aftermath of emancipation, for instance, it was hardly ever the formerly enslaved people who received reparations. Instead, the British, French, Dutch, and others compensated the plantation owners for the loss of their alleged 'property,' the US revoked its promise of '40 acres and a mule' after the end of the American Civil War, and Haiti was forced to pay reparations first to France, then to the United States, until 1947.¹⁰ For contemporary scholarship, at least two consequences arise from these observations: the need to analyze and contextualize historical and contemporary cases and discussions of reparations, and the urgency to determine the ethical, economical, philosophical, but also geo-strategical interests at play, on the side of both scholars and activists, but also other actors such as politicians and museums.

1 Material Reparations to Redress the Nazi Past

But what exactly do we mean when we talk about reparations? Historically, the practice of the defeated party paying indemnity after losing a war goes back to

¹⁰ A detailed account of these cases can be found in Tin (2013) or Araujo (2017), to name but two examples.

antiquity; it reflected the balance of power between the victor and the vanquished and was used primarily to cover war expenses, whereas the damages suffered in the civilian sector received little attention. This understanding of a *ius victoriae*, according to which the winning party was automatically entitled to claim indemnity, changed in the 20th century. In the peace negotiations after World War I, compensation was considered a debt to be paid by the party which had initiated the war and was thus held responsible for the damage caused. In the treaty of Versailles, indemnities became ‘reparations’ that were to be determined by a Reparation Commission – the question of compensation was now linked to the question of guilt. The categories of the damages which were to be compensated for are defined and listed in the treaty; they include damages inflicted on civilians “as a result of cruelty, violence or maltreatment” (as quoted in Günnewig 2019, 102).

After World War II, as decided upon in the Potsdam Agreement, Germany paid reparations to the Allies primarily in the form of contributions in kind, namely by the dismantling of industrial plants in the occupied zones and the delivery of goods. This practice came to an end with the increasing tensions of the Cold War: Demands for reparations were postponed and finally dropped in the treaty for the reunification of Germany, concluded in lieu of a peace treaty (Neiman 2019, 312). While the German government thereby considers the question of reparations to be concluded, Greek and Polish demands remain to this day.¹¹ Payment to Jewish refugees was settled by the Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany (*Luxemburger Abkommen*). The Federal Republic entered into agreement with the state of Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference on September 10, 1952, and accepted to pay a compensation of 3 billion German marks to Israel or to deliver it in the form of goods within 12 years. The payments were intended to support Jewish refugees who had acquired Israeli citizenship through immigration. In addition, 450 million German marks were paid to the Jewish Claims Conference, which were to be used for the settlement of Jewish refugees outside Israel (Hockerts 2001, 178–179).

As the historian Susan Neiman argues, for the Federal government at the time “it was crucial to avoid the word reparations” (2019, 312) in the context of the agreement. Not only did the term have negative connotations after the treaty of Versailles, but German politicians also wanted to circumvent a legal precedent. Instead, chancellor

¹¹ Recently, Poland demanded war reparations from Germany in the amount of 1.3 trillion euros (see Oltermann 2022). According to Krzysztof Wojciechowski (quoted in Paczkowski 2022), administrative director of the Collegium Polonicum, Poland’s ruling conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party is at least partially instrumentalizing the issue to distract attention from political failures and economic problems prior to the 2023 elections.

Konrad Adenauer used the German term *Wiedergutmachung* (“to make things good again”) in his speech to the German Bundestag on September 27, 1951, which later led to the 1952 agreement. Unlike the concept of reparation, which was codified in international law, *Wiedergutmachung* did not have any legal dimensions and thus underlined that the payments were made voluntarily. From the Jewish perspective, the term was rejected then as it is today. As the current representative of the Jewish Claims Conference, Rüdiger Mahlo, puts it:

The systematic disenfranchisement and persecution, the suffering, the barbaric destruction of Jewish life in Europe, the murder of entire families, the theft of property, the lives of murdered parents, grandparents, children cannot be repaired, cannot be “made good” (Mahlo, as quoted in Smolenski 2022).

Wiedergutmachung in this literal sense also implies the desire to undo the past, to pay off ‘debts’ without dealing with one’s guilt and responsibilities. The political scientist Samuel Salzborn transfers this diagnosis to the German way of dealing with their National Socialist past more generally, speaking of the repression of the Shoah in German commemorative culture in a psychoanalytical sense (Salzborn 2020). He thus admonishes us to critically question the way we deal with our histories and that despite different attempts to approach the question of reparation legally and materially, history can never be ‘undone.’

In the same context, material reparations have also posed various problems from the beginning. Although the German government has so far made payments of 80 billion euros to Jewish victims, by no means all of them have received compensation. Of 4.5 million applications for compensation payments submitted to date, one in four fails due to German bureaucracy: Often, Nazi persecution cannot be proven as files have been lost in the archives.¹² Other exclusions from compensation resulted from the 1953 Federal Compensation Act (*Bundesentschädigungsgesetz*), which legally defined compensations for individual victims of Nazi persecution. Compensations were paid to individuals who had lived within the borders of the Reich in 1937 and had been persecuted by the regime for political, racist, or religious reasons, or to the surviving relatives of Nazi victims. Besides the fact that financial compensation was intended only for German victims of Nazi persecution (Herbert 1989, 273–302), it also implied other problematic exclusions. As historians have shown, “the law excluded a number of victim groups in principle, in particular homosexuals, victims of forced sterilization under the ‘Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased

¹² This was reported by the radio station Deutschlandfunk on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the *Luxemburger Abkommen* on September 15, 2022 (Thoms 2022).

Offspring' [*Erbgesundheitsgesetz*], 'asocials,' as well as deserters or persons convicted of 'undermining military force' [*Wehrkraftzersetzung*]" (Hockerts 2013). Moreover, the Sinti and Roma, whose persecution under National Socialism was still interpreted as a legitimate 'security measure' even in legal commentaries on the Federal Compensation Act of 1954/55, were a particularly discriminated group (Sparing 2014). In most cases, they were not classified as persecuted and were denied the payment of indemnities.¹³ As the German example shows, the idea to practice *Wiedergutmachung* produced an idea of who was 'worth' being compensated and who was not and reveals significant limitations of a legal approach to the problem of reparation. The example shows that material compensation for injustice suffered is necessarily only *one*, on its own usually insufficient, side to processes of reparation.

2 Material and Symbolic Reparation

On a more theoretical level, the philosopher and novelist Kwame Appiah takes an etymological approach as his point of departure when theorizing the notion of "reparation." The Latin term "reparare" means to "restore" or "renew." Two slightly differing notions of reparation emerge from this, defining reparation either as the act of restoring, of giving back what has been wrongfully taken, or – since the past oftentimes cannot be undone – as the act of putting the victim in a state they would be in if they had not suffered the injustices done to them. Both definitions seem to face a number of obstacles as soon as one tries to apply them in practice, as Appiah (2004, 26–28) points out.

What seems clear is that the loss of human lives, the violence and the atrocities experienced by the victims of crimes against humanity cannot reasonably be measured in economic terms. What has been done is irreversible, and what has been lost is irretrievable. From a strictly economic point of view, even the material damage caused by colonial systems is difficult to put a number on, and where attempts to quantify it have been made, they show the enormous economic and structural injustices colonialism has induced. They reveal an apparent impossibility of repayment that would compensate for the loss suffered by colonized societies, arguably to this day: In 2017, Utsa Patnaik from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi estimated the value of the resources the British Empire drew from India from 1765 to 1938 at 9,184.41 billion pound sterling – ten times the United Kingdom's entire annual GDP in 2015 (Patnaik 2017, 311). The essentially unaffordable sum led

¹³ For a more detailed examination of the jurisdiction and (denied) compensation of the Sinti and Roma in the 1950s and 1960s see Stengel (2004).

the Indian diplomat and politician Shashi Tharoor to plead first and foremost for *symbolic* reparation: In his speech at the Oxford Union in 2015, he proposes that Britain should pay a symbolic amount of one pound per year during a period of 200 years – not as a compensation, but rather as a gesture of atonement. “The ability to acknowledge a wrong that has been done, to simply say sorry,” Tharoor argues, “will go a far, far, far longer way than some percentage of GDP in the form of aid” (Tharoor 2015, 14:42–14:47).

Reparation, therefore, must be thought of as a multifaceted concept in which we can distinguish at least two dimensions: a material and a symbolic one. Upon further reflection, it becomes evident that both dimensions are inextricably intertwined; while their relation to one another is of a dynamic nature, changing according to historical contexts and social and political conditions, neither of them can be omitted from our understanding of reparation. As Souleymane Bachir Diagne has recently put it, more is at stake than material questions in isolation:

We are talking here about the most radical loss possible [. . .], which is the loss of humanity itself. [. . .] It must be said that such a loss, the very loss of humanity, is by definition irreparable. [. . .] So, the concept of reparation – and this is the paradoxical nature of it – is about the irreparable; is about what is, in essence, beyond repair (Diagne 2020, 1:37–2:57).

A number of insights can be drawn from these observations on the loss of humanity and the idea of symbolic reparation. First, as Kader Attia shows, attempts at reparation cannot be understood as a return to an original, unbroken state, but rather as a process that implies an “awareness of the wound” (Attia 2018, 14) that was inflicted. ‘To repair’ in his approach means not to remove injuries, but to keep them visible, if need be, and integrate them in our understanding of history and the present. Second, the act of reparation points to the fact that humanity has not simply been destroyed on the side of the so called ‘victim.’ As Aimé Césaire (1955, 21) points out in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*, the perpetrator has simultaneously destroyed their own humanity. And third, to follow Diagne’s train of thought, in order to – not repair, but at least address – this irreparable relationship, a common effort for the future is necessary. “The way in which we can address the irreparable,” Diagne says, “is to still have in us what Barack Obama famously called the ‘audacity of hope’” (Diagne 2020, 5:11–5:23). In Diagne’s reflections it becomes also clear, then, that repair is a communal practice, the collective working for a more equitable future.

If material reparations, in the sense of a simple compensation, are often insufficient, the notion of ‘reparation’ can nevertheless not be a purely idealistic one either. Symbolic gestures without material consideration of the economic disadvantages that have been inflicted and – in many cases – passed on to living descendants, fall short of addressing the structural injustices the crime engendered.



Fig. 2: Kader Attia, *Repaired Broken Mirror*, 2013. Sculpture. Mirror, metal wire. Exhibition view “Repairing the Invisible,” SMAK, Ghent, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler. Photo: Dirk Pauwels.

Justice, in the words of the American philosopher Nancy Fraser (2004, 380), requires not only recognition, but also redistribution and representation; *symbolic* reparation is not the equivalent of *immaterial*. On the other hand, material reparations without a symbolic side to them can easily turn into an attempt at ridding oneself of a moral responsibility, too. This is what Achille Mbembe has in mind when he argues that restitutions of African looted art are insufficient without an apology or some other form of symbolic reparation. “So that the restitution of African objects is not the occasion for Europe to buy itself a good conscience at a cheap price, the debate must be recentred around the historical, philosophical, anthropological and political stakes of the act of restitution,” Mbembe writes (2019, 70), clearly positing the claim for restitutions within the framework of both material and symbolic reparation.

3 Reparation and Restitution

To place the discussion of the restitution of looted cultural artifacts during colonial times within the framework of reparation, as Mbembe suggests, shows the relevance of the debate beyond individual cases of injustice. What is at stake is –

on the side of western countries – the recognition of a colonial history and structural colonial legacies, which would be a prerequisite for processes of reparation. It is to this end that Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, in their 2018 report on the necessity and possibility of restitutions to Emmanuel Macron, have introduced the notion of an ‘ethics of relation’ which should be developed for and through processes of restitution, and of reparation in a broader perspective.

The struggles for restitution illustrate the importance of a more critical and self-reflective approach to the issues in question, revealing the different interests at play in processes of reparation. As Bénédicte Savoy (2021) has recently shown, the debate on restitutions had already been rather prominent between roughly 1965 and 1985. Interestingly, her archival research shows that in most cases, foreign offices were in favor of restitutions, hoping to better their political relations to formerly colonized countries, while an alliance of museum directors successfully managed to stifle the discourse (Savoy 2021, 198). Recent discussions on the politics of the so-called Humboldt Forum in Berlin on the one hand, and unapologetic German geopolitics on the other seem to continue this dynamic, as the alliance Barazani.berlin argues.¹⁴ With this backdrop, in Part II of this book Clément Ndé Fongang reflects on how to recreate conditions for a new relationship based on reciprocity and mutual respect between the Global South and the Global North. Through a historical and postcolonial approach, he questions the legal and institutional mechanisms of cultural cooperation between Cameroon and European countries as well as the conditions of negotiation for the restitution of colonial treasures to African communities of origin. Decolonization and restitution appear here as important steps towards the reinvention of global relations.

Simultaneously, on the side of the formerly colonized countries and societies, arguments for restitution highlight yet another important factor. Besides the idea of post-colonial healing and relation-building, which risks, not infrequently, being instrumentalized for western geopolitical goals, restitutions can also foster forms of self-reparation. As Ariella Azoulay (2019) points out, when it comes to cultural artifacts and practices, what has oftentimes been lost for good is the cultural context and original meaning of these objects, the knowledge about their creation processes, their functions, their formal and semantic relation to other objects as well as their impact. Therefore, what she proposes is the mining, the reinvention of a ‘potential history,’ a form of decolonization that does not necessarily depend on a (former) perpetrator’s willingness to re-establish an ethics of relation or to heal a common understanding of humanity. In the transcription of Kader Attia’s film *Les Entrelacs de l’Objet* | *The Object’s Interlacing*, featured in Part II of

¹⁴ See “Box 3” on the website of Barazani.berlin: https://barazani.berlin/box_3.

this volume, these ideas are developed further through a polyphony of voices influential in the contemporary discussion, such as Awa Cheikh Diouf, Bénédicte Savoy, Malik NDiaye, and others. The interweaving of their perspectives creates a dialogue that reveals the complexity of the topic of restitution, advocating at once for the possibility to revive cultural practices and epistemologies through the “resocialization” (Sarr and Savoy 2018, 56–59) of restituted objects (or subjects), and the necessity to keep in mind the mutable and productive nature of cultural practices and products.

Like Attia, Patricia Oster places the interconnectedness of objects at the center of her contribution in Part II, focusing on objects that originate from the European context and have been moved and displaced within it. She examines European statues in public space as protagonists of cultural transfer processes and thus as representatives of interwoven national histories. In examining a statue by the Swiss artist Urs Fischer, the bronze statue of Henri IV on Pont Neuf in Paris, and the Quadriga on Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate she analyzes how different symbolic levels of meaning overlap in statues as “silent witnesses” of a political history. The article is based on her intervention at the international summer school “Restitution, reparations, *Reparation* – Towards a New Global Society?” (9–13 September, 2021) at Villa Vigoni, German-Italian Centre for European Dialogue, and has been translated by Monique Rival.

Finally, Jonas Tinius and Angelica Pesarini start out with a reflection on the same Villa Vigoni in their chapter. As the authors point out, the research center is not only a historical, but also a symbolic site of reflection on reparation in a multi-national European context. Building on the anthropology of art, museums and curatorial theories, as well as Attia’s notion of repair, they conceive a “museum of disrepair” and propose ideas for future museology.

4 Memory Cultures and Reparation

The perspectives and discourses on reparation and restitution outlined so far have not been produced in a vacuum. Shaped not only by the obstacles and the criticism they have been facing, but also through the rivalry that might arise between different interest groups, struggles for memory and compensation are oftentimes connected to conflict and dispute. Understanding history and different commemorative cultures in this broader, interrelated perspective is the central idea of Michael Rothberg’s famous concept of multidirectional memory: Rothberg challenges the idea that memory – and different memory cultures – need to be competitive, or as he puts it, “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources” (2009, 3).

Often declared unique, the Holocaust, he argues, has also “enabled the articulation of other histories of victimization” (Rothberg 2009, 6) instead of preventing them. In the post-war period, the emergence of a public memory of the Holocaust was deeply intertwined and in dialogue with the process of decolonization, a minoritarian tradition Rothberg tries to reintroduce into the discourse.

Rothberg’s plea for a dialogical exchange and an interconnection of different commemorative cultures without equating them also contains a political and, consequently, ethical momentum: “When the productive, intercultural dynamic of multidirectional memory is explicitly claimed,” he posits, “it has the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice” (Rothberg 2009, 5). His hope is that, through the experience of a shared relation to the past, new forms of empathy and solidarity might arise in the future. Hannah Grimmer (Part III) emphasizes the role art can play in this confrontation with a shared and entangled past. Analyzing the sculptural artwork *La Reconstrucción del Retrato de Pablo Míguez* by Argentinian artists Claudia Fontes, she explores how the victims of various Latin American civil-military dictatorships, killed and made invisible both physically and socially, can be represented through visual art and thus, literally and symbolically, be restituted a face and a body. In the works she analyzes, art features as an important means for the materialization of history and memory, makes it possible to represent the unrepresentable, and can thus create a mnemonic place for individual and collective memories across the continent.



Fig. 3: Kader Attia, *Open Your Eyes*, 2010. Double slide projection. 80 slides each (detail). Courtesy of the artist. Collection MoMA New York, Collection Frac Pays de la Loire, Collection Moderna Museet Stockholm, private collection, and Galleria Continua. Photo: Martin Monestier, Musée du Service de Santé des Armées, Paris.

5 Reparation through Art and Literature

Beyond these reflections on visual art, the present volume also features a number of articles dealing with literature and poetry in relation to processes of reparation and restitution. What role can literature – and art more generally – play when it comes to processes of reparation? This is the underlying question, addressed with regard to a diverse range of texts and artworks. Can literature and poetry still be considered “miraculous weapons” against colonial oppression, as Aimé Césaire argued in 1946?

What seems clear is that the postcolonial school’s postulation of agency through literature, criticized by Robert Young as mere methodological *textualism* or “textual idealism” (Young 2016 [2001], 398) in a study that marks his post-postcolonial, material turn, requires more scrutiny. Instead of arguing for agency *within* literature, we would argue that tools for agency might be developed *through* literature and art. This is what Kader Attia has in mind when he reflects on the usefulness of adding yet another exhibition to the “seemingly endless profusion of sprawling, monumental exhibitions” that mirror “the material excess of this global overproduction” (Attia 2022, 22). What he calls the *agency of art* is not to be found in simple politics of representation, but in art’s capacity to deconstruct our understanding of the world “so that it may repair and evolve, generating new forms to interpret the present” (Attia 2022, 40). It is important to note that the artist is of course to a greater or lesser extent subject to the epistemologies of this present themselves. In his *Écrire en pays dominé* (1997), Patrick Chamoiseau considers this issue in a self-reflexive tone:

How to write when your imagination, from the early morning all the way to your dreams, is nourished by images, thoughts, values that are not your own? How to write when what you *are* languishes out of reach from the forces determining your life? How to write when under domination (Chamoiseau 1997, 17)?

Alongside his newspaper articles, essay collections, and political manifestos, Chamoiseau unapologetically posits his fictional work as a means of political intervention: His strategy as a writer is to scrutinize the dominant epistemologies he traces back to “colonial modernity” (Chamoiseau 1997, 17) in order to infuse them with traditional Martiniquan knowledge in his literary texts, referring to himself – and artists more generally – as “warriors of the imagination” (Chamoiseau 1997, 303).

In this idealistic sense, literature and literary studies could be seen as tools for decolonization and reparation in the impact they have on our understanding of the world – as a point of departure for all material change. They are central to a “logic of reparation,” as Rodolphe Solbiac would have it, which “pursues social transformation” (Solbiac 2018, 62) in its ability to describe the “world of wounds,”

its genesis and its reality, and to make it tangible for the reader. This is also the case for Berlin based writer hn. lyonga, his poem “*and I mean / and I am saying*” and accompanying essay “Half-Hymns, Prayers, and Fortifications” (Part IV). Necessarily subjective and situated in its view on the world, his writing denounces the violence emanating from German society for a Cameroonian subject in a personal and a structural sense. In so doing, it gains universal relevance in its ability to hold a mirror up to society at large and to demand an end to all forms of inferiorization, marginalization, and inequity.

If hn. lyonga denounces colonial legacies in the present, Ibou Diop reminds us that the decolonial potential of literature equally addresses the past and the future (Part IV). He traces the colonial epistemologies that have led to contemporary global inequality and structural racism – a situation he calls “coloniality” – and shows, through the example of Chinua Achebe, Assia Djebar, and others, how literature can be a source of reflection and inspiration for non-colonial ways of thinking and being.

All these observations are equally true for the work of Rome-based author Igiaba Scego, who addresses reparation and restitution as central topics in her short story “L'icona” (2018), here translated as “L'icône” by Laurent Vallance (Part I). The fictional story recounts the encounter of former Italian soldier Mario del Monte with Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, in the course of which del Monte returns to the king an icon stolen during the war in Ethiopia. As Markus Messling and Christiane Solte-Gresser point out in their contribution (Part I), the text addresses the topic of reparation with particular literary devices. They situate Scego's narrative in a broader context of definitional approaches to and discourses of the concept of reparation and argue that, in contrast to historiography, the literary text can employ specific aesthetic and narrative techniques (such as non-linear narration, focalization and narrative perspectives) to establish connections across time and geographical distance and bring into contact different experiences of history. In so doing, the literary text can be described as a micro-history – an individual experience disclosing its ties with historical processes on a larger scale.

Finally, in Part IV Alexandre Gefen suggests that the notion of repair can be relevant for the analysis of contemporary literature more generally and is not limited to reflections on coloniality: In line with critics such as Wolfgang Asholt (2013), Laurent Demanze (2019), or Markus Messling (2019) he argues that literature has observably returned to the question of reality in the course of the last three decades. In his chapter he questions the longstanding postulation of universal world literature, arguing that true universality can nevertheless be found in the concrete literary representations of the embodied vulnerabilities his work is dedicated to. These vulnerabilities even exceed the anthropocentric framework, as we should be well aware today and as he has shown repeatedly (Gefen 2021a; Gefen 2021b, 139–143): If

we are talking about reparation, with relation to literature or not, climate change and the destruction of nature seem of paramount importance.

6 Reparation and Ecology

The violent drawbacks of Western modernity are not limited to forms of intra-human exploitation but have equally caused the destruction of nature, only taken seriously now in the face of the undeniable global climate crisis. Natural resources are a universal necessity and as such require care and foresight, but their destruction most often hits already vulnerable and exploited communities. Fabiola Obame's article shows that the subjects and issues of postcolonial critique on the one hand and ecocriticism on the other are inextricably intertwined (Part V). Shattering the presumed certainties which form the basis for our understanding of the world, the ecological crisis can be considered a crisis for the values of our societies. In this context, Obame proposes that literature has the potential to convey a new ecological awareness by creating an environmental imagination: Drawing on aesthetic and narrative devices, literary texts can give a voice to non-human entities and reveal to what extent humanity and the ecosystem are dependent on one another. In her analysis, Obame focuses on Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974) as well as Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Bessora's *Petroleum* (2004), arguing that these novels demonstrate the consequences of colonization for the people who continue to suffer from it but also for the planet, and reflect on different ways to repair relations between human communities as well as between humanity and nature.

Lucia della Fontana's analysis of Antonio Moresco's *La lucina* aims in a similar direction (Part V). She argues that the fairy tale as a genre possesses a specific imaginative potential that allows a multiplication of perspectives and thereby explores innovative modes of coexistence. In this sense, it possesses the capacity to disregard the requirement of mimetic representation for (realist) literature and to deconstruct our perception of the world, developing new ways of cohabitation.

These reflections on a reparative potential of imagination are also pursued in Olivier Remaud's essays "On n'achève pas un glacier qui sauve un peuple" (2021) and "Trouble contre trouble: le glacier et l'être humain" (2021), translated into English for this volume by Jack Cox under the collective title "Trouble against Trouble" (Part V). Drawing on scientists and experts in the field, Remaud points out that icebergs play an important part in securing the equilibrium of marine ecosystems as they secure the stability of the water cycle, which all living beings depend on. Threatened by global warming, the collapse of the glaciers would be tantamount to a global catastrophe. In the face of these developments, Remaud

makes a strong case for a change in perspective: Instead of maintaining the reductive view of nature as a resource to be exploited, we should start taking seriously the various indigenous epistemologies that understand nature as animate and thus repair our relation to the multitude of animate and inanimate non-human actors.

7 Conclusion

Taking up the different threats developed in this introduction, we believe that in a truly transformative reflection on alternative and more equitable ways to conceive and inhabit the world, questions of ecology and of social justice should not contradict each other. Instead, they connect in the critique of our modern epistemologies and social systems that David Scott deems so necessary in our postcolonial present. Consequently, the central question the volume *Reparation, Restitution, and the Politics of Memory* asks and provides tentative answers for is this: How can we find a new and more equitable way to inhabit the world? It is in this sense that Camille de Toledo, in an eco-futurist play entitled *Witnesses of the Future*, asks the audience: “What is it like to be living without burning anything?” (de Toledo 2022). An intellectual provocation rather than a mere accusation, we are being asked to invent new ways of living that satisfy intersectional demands and are, at least in part, not yet readily at hand. In his essay *Habiter le monde* (2017), Felwine Sarr goes to the heart of this issue. His reflections on relationality explicitly include the relationship between humanity and nature, both animate and inanimate:

Building a *human society*, and more largely, building a *society of the living* is the challenge of our age. Constructing a society which recognizes all of its members by extending the spectrum of those who belong to the community to foreigners, to animal and plant species, to lost ancestors, to Mother Earth, to those who are not yet there. This widened understanding of society demands rethinking our image of similarity, but also questions of alterity and belonging. It calls for an expansion of the political and, as a consequence, pushes us to rethink our way of inhabiting this world (Sarr 2017, 16).

Sarr’s position might sound very philosophical in this passage, maybe utopian. Him being one of the actors at the crossroads between decolonization, ecology, restitution, and art, we nevertheless believe in the transformative potential his position envisions: The radical rethinking of our relation to each other and the world more largely, through all means possible, and the dedication to transform this reflection into action is the challenge of our time, and the only means through which we can address the (by definition irreparable) wounds of our shared modernity.

References

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Comprendre les réparations. Une réflexion préliminaire." *Cahiers d'études africaines* 173–174 (2004): 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.4518>.
- Araujo, Ana Lucia. *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade. A Transnational and Comparative History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Asholt, Wolfgang. "Un renouveau du 'réalisme' dans la littérature contemporaine?" *Lendemains – Études comparées sur la France* 38.150/151 (2013): 22–35.
- Attia, Kader. "La réparation c'est la conscience de la blessure." In *Décolonisons les arts!* Eds. Leïla Cukierman, Gerty Dambury, and Françoise Vergès. Paris: L'Arche Éditeur, 2018. 11–14.
- _____. "Introduction." *Still Present!* Ed. Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst. Berlin: Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2022. 20–41.
- Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism*. London: Verso, 2019.
- _____. *Modernity is an Imperial Crime* (23 April 2021). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYZIoRVKlv4> (4 March 2022).
- Césaire, Aimé. *Les armes miraculeuses*. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.
- _____. *Discours sur le colonialisme. Suivi du Discours sur la Négritude*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955 [2004].
- Chamoiseau, Patrick. *Écrire en pays dominé*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- de Toledo, Camille. *Witnesses of the Future*. Unpublished performance staged as part of the exhibition *The Pregnant Oyster – Doubts on Universalism* at HKW Berlin (30 June–3 July, 2022) https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_211571.php (21 September 2022).
- Dege, Stefan. "Berlin's controversial Humboldt Forum opens." *Deutsche Welle* (20 July 2021). <https://www.dw.com/en/berlins-controversial-humboldt-forum-opens-its-doors/a-58332615> (16 September 2022).
- Demanze, Laurent. *Un nouvel âge de l'enquête: Portraits de l'écrivain contemporain en enquêteur*. Paris: Éditions Corti, 2019.
- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. *What is Reparation? Rhinoceros asks . . .* Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2020). <https://www.rhinoceros-projekt.de/zeitschrift/das-projekt> (13 September 2022).
- Foerster, Larissa. "The Tide is Turning: Dynamics in the Postcolonial Provenance and Restitution Debate in Germany." *Europas Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten*. Ed. Stiftung Genshagen, 2021. 32–38.
- Fraser, Nancy, Hanne Marlene Dahl, Pauline Stoltz, and Rasmus Willig. "Recognition, Redistribution and Representation in Capitalist Global Society: An Interview with Nancy Fraser." *Acta Sociologica* 47.4. (2004): 374–382.
- Gefen, Alexandre. *Réparer le monde: La littérature française face au XXIe siècle*. Paris: Édition Corti, 2017.
- _____. *L'Idée de la littérature. De l'art pour l'art aux écritures d'intervention*. Paris: Corti, 2021b.
- _____. "De l'écologie à l'écocritique." *Espirit* (2021a). <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/alexandre-gefen/de-l-ecologie-a-l-ecocritique-43241> (21 September 2022).
- Günnewig, Elisabeth. *Schadensersatz wegen der Verletzung des Gewaltverbotes als Element eines ius post bellum*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019.
- Herbert, Ulrich. "Nicht entschädigungsfähig? Die Wiedergutmachungsansprüche der Ausländer." In *Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Eds. Ludolf Herbst and Constantin Goschler. München: Oldenbourg, 1989. 273–302.

- Hockerts, Hans Günter. "Wiedergutmachung in Deutschland. Eine historische Bilanz 1945–2000." *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49.2 (2001): 167–214.
- _____. "Wiedergutmachung in Deutschland 1945–1990. Ein Überblick." *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (7 June 2013). <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/162883/wiedergutmachung-in-deutschland-1945-1990-ein-ueberblick/> (16 September 2022).
- Mbembe, Achille. *Of African Objects in Western Museums*. Transl. Steven Corcoran. Münster: Rhema, 2019. 57–81.
- Messling, Markus. *Universalität nach dem Universalismus: Über frankophone Literaturen der Gegenwart*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2019.
- Müller, Yves. "Ein Volksschloss sicher nicht." *taz* (1 August 2020). <https://taz.de/Debatte-um-das-Berliner-Stadtschloss!/5707717/> (16 September 2022).
- Neiman, Susan. *Learning From the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Oltermann, Philip. "Germany Rejects Poland's Claim it Owes €1.3tn in War Reparations." *The Guardian* (2 September 2022). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/02/germany-rejects-polands-claim-it-owes-13tn-in-war-reparations> (16 September 2022).
- Paczkowski, Jakob. "'Das ist eindeutig Stimmungsmache vor der Wahl'", Interview with Krzysztof Wojciechowski. *rbb* (3 September 2022). <https://www.rbb24.de/studiofrankfurt/beitraege/2022/09/polen-deutschland-reparationen-pis-wahlkampf-interview.html> (21 September 2022).
- Patnaik, Utsa. "Revisiting the 'Drain,' or Transfer from India to Britain in the Context of Global Diffusion of Capitalism." In *Agrarian and Other Histories: Essays for Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri*. Eds. Shubhra Chakrabarti and Utsa Patnaik. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2017. 277–318.
- Renan, Ernest. *La réforme intellectuelle et morale*. Paris: Perrin, 2011 [1872].
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- _____. "Comparing Comparisons. From the 'Historikerstreit' to the Mbembe Affair." *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (23 September 2020). <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/comparing-comparisons-from-the-historikerstreit-to-the-mbembe-affair/> (16 September 2022).
- Salzborn, Samuel. *Kollektive Unschuld. Die Abwehr der Shoah im deutschen Erinnern*. Berlin, Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2020.
- Sarr, Felwine. *Habiter le monde. Essai de politique relationnelle*. Montréal, Québec: Mémoire d'encrier, 2017.
- Sarr, Felwine and Bénédicte Savoy. *Restituer le patrimoine africain*. Paris: Philippe Rey & Seuil, 2018.
- Savoy, Bénédicte. *Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst. Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage*. München: C.H. Beck, 2021.
- Scott, David. *Refashioning Futures. Criticism after Postcoloniality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Smolenski, Sonja. "Entschädigungszahlungen für NS-Opfer. Kampf um die Würde." *taz* (9 September 2022). <https://taz.de/Entschaedigungszahlungen-fuer-NS-Opfer!/15874999/> (16 September 2022).
- Solbiac, Rodolphe. "L'artiste, le savant et le politique dans la Caraïbe anglophone diasporique: de l'écriture réparatrice à l'action pour une transformation sociale réparatrice." *Études caribéennes* (2018). <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudescaribeennes.11698>.
- Sparing, Frank. "NS-Verfolgung von 'Zigeunern' und 'Wiedergutmachung' nach 1945." *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (18 March 2014). <https://www.bpb.de/themen/europa/sinti-und-roma-in-europa/180869/ns-verfolgung-von-zigeunern-und-wiedergutmachung-nach-1945/> (16 September 2022).

- Stengel, Katharina. *Tradierte Feindbilder. Die Entschädigung der Sinti und Roma in den fünfziger und sechziger Jahren*. Frankfurt am Main: Fritz-Bauer-Institut, 2004.
- Tampa, Vava. "Françafrique is Back: Macron's visit to Cameroon Signals Colonisation 2.0." *The Guardian* (26 July 2022). <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jul/26/franca-frique-is-back-macrons-visit-to-cameroon-signals-colonisation-20> (20 September 2022).
- Tharoor, Shashi. *Britain Does Owe Reparations*. OxfordUnion (14 July 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7CW7S0zxv4> (22 September 2022).
- Thoms, Katharina. "70 Jahre deutsch-israelisches "Wiedergutmachungs"-Abkommen." *Deutschlandfunk* (15 September 2022). https://share.deutschlandradio.de/dlf-audiothek-audio-teilen.html?audio_id=dira_DLF_5b709a2e (16 September 2022).
- Tin, Louis-Georges. *Esclavage et réparations. Comment faire face aux crimes de l'histoire*. . . Paris: Stock, 2013.
- Urban, Susanne. "The Shoah, Postcolonialism, and Historikerstreit 2.0. Germany's Past in Its Present." *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 16.1 (2022): 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2022.2065798>.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The Modern World-System*. New York, San Diego, London: Academic Press, 1974.
- Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2016 [2001].