

## Editorial

History matters these days a lot again. This time, a fundamental shift in the global memory landscape is not linked to a world war won or lost, does not celebrate the rise of a new empire or the outbreak of a revolution in a specific place. Rather, the murder of Georges Floyd, the one too many murders of a Black US citizen by a police officer, triggered an almost worldwide concern about who is actually remembered in public space – on the pages of school textbooks or in museums but also in the form of monuments and of street names. The slogan “Black lives matter” was not only an outcry against the lack of respect that so many Black people suffer when coming into contact with state power, but precisely also a call for recognition of the historical experience that the enslaved and those who descend from them had to go through.

This struggle for recognition aims to reshape the landscape of memory and challenges the self-evident assumptions that have dominated the historical consciousness of Western societies’ majorities. When and where it happens, it implies a painful departure from habitual views of history and this process does not take place in one country alone, but the protest movements communicate with each other, learn from each other and formulate their demands more and more in the form of universal messages. What we were able to observe was a new Atlanticism emerging that is not proud of having set the origins of the modern constitutional state by way of revolution and pioneered the industrial revolution, but that places the infamous middle passage at the centre of history and scandalises the central role of the enslaved in the rise of the plantation economy and the resulting inequality as the basis of a white supremacy that only seems the legitimate result of economic superiority.

At the same time, however, it is also about the reconstruction of national landscapes of memory that are finally being adapted to the fact that immigration societies are characterized by multiculturalism in the one way or the other. If this would only lead to confrontations with the mythification of white colonialism, it would probably be easy for many within the political elite to adapt to this change. A policy of apology for past crimes such as genocide and art theft has emerged in recent years, parliaments, presidents and prime ministers compete for the best wording in this sort of exculpation but have

sometimes difficulties to find the right addressee and to get domestic voters behind the recognition of historical guilt.

But the entire landscape of memory is at stake. In Germany, this is particularly visible in the fierce tensions that have arisen between those who argue for new priorities in remembering the global past including genocide and colonial oppression and its effects on contemporary societies worldwide, and those who argue, with equally good reasons, for an insistence on the central position of the commemoration of the Holocaust in the national memory landscape.

The eruptive character of the memorial overthrows and struggles over the renaming of streets and squares discussed in this double issue may have come as a surprise, but as a long-term trend, this change was predicted some time ago by many different voices. This opens up a wide field of activity for global history. First of all, it can help to take a global perspective that allows us to see how our own (national or regional) historical development is directly related to the suffering of people elsewhere on the planet and cannot be ignored, as historical teaching has done for over a century, especially in the West, but by no means only there. But this also means opposing new nationalist or identity-politics constructions that seek to draw legitimacy from the newly emerging landscape of memory. It is not the case that global history is only responsible for the large macro-historical contexts, while a national history is still needed for the needs of local identity. On the contrary, global history is also an invitation to take historical legacies of all communities, local, national, regional, or continental, as transnationally and transregionally connected.

While the authors and editors were working on this special issue of *Comparativ* on the fallen statues around the Atlantic, to our great regret, our esteemed colleague Marcel Dorigny (1948–2021), retired professor at the University of Paris VIII, passed away. Marcel Dorigny worked on the French Revolution, the first abolition of slavery (1794), the history and memories of colonial slavery and its representation in art. He led an open house and generously shared the results of his research. In addition, he was an exemplary engaged scholar, sharing his research findings with a wider audience and engaging in social debates about the history, legacy, and memory of slavery, always based on sound empirical findings, not ideologies. Co-editor Ulrike Schmieder takes this opportunity to thank him for his support and expresses her sympathy to his family and friends for their irreparable loss.

Matthias Middell / Katja Castryck-Naumann