



COLONIAL HERITAGE IN THURINGIA?!

ABOUT

The colonial past is increasingly gaining importance in all German federal states. In Thuringia, decolonial initiatives were the first to map (post-)colonial memory sites in Jena, Weimar, and Erfurt. Their work illustrates the entanglements of the federal state in the colonial project and the ways colonial imaginaries continue to have an impact in the present. At the same time, research activities regarding Thuringia's colonial heritage have also increased in recent years at the universities of Erfurt and Jena. In December 2021, a coordination office was established at both universities aiming to connect academic research with civil society initiatives.

In order to promote a dialogue and to initiate synergies for further research, academic cooperation and citizen science projects, the coordination office organises a congress, which will take place in Jena and Erfurt in summer 2023. The congress is characterised by two research interests:

- 1) A trans epochal approach which traces the colonial past back to Early Modern History and equally includes the history of the GDR as well as the transformation period from 1990 onwards. Consequently, the different temporalities of colonial entanglements as well as their (im-)material continuities are at the centre of investigation.
- 2) The congress follows an interdisciplinary approach to bring historical, sociological, political science and cultural science perspectives into conversation.

The trans-epochal and interdisciplinary contributions will be grouped according to the theoretical axes of *materiality*, *coloniality* and *decoloniality*. Furthermore, the congress seeks to engage in a dialogue by also offering workshop formats in which we want to discuss possibilities to decolonise research and teaching. By choosing Erfurt and Jena as locations for the congress, we want to emphasise the glocal dimension of Thuringia's participation in colonialism. Finally, the publication of an anthology aims at combining critical and artistic interventions alongside short academic contributions. In doing so, the coordination office wants to underline the importance of the colonial heritage in Thuringia's present and make it more accessible to a broader public.

With the axes of materiality, coloniality and decoloniality, the congress wants to spark the dialogue between different Thuringian actors. On all three levels, we want to bring university research into conversation with civil society positions.

Axis 1 Materiality

In this axis, we intertwine postcolonial studies with the material turn in the humanities and cultural studies to examine the coloniality of colonial collections. We depart from the understanding that collecting is a colonial practice, which was constitutive in the production of colonial hierarchies.

Axis 2 Coloniality

In the axis “coloniality” we address colonial patterns of thought that, in various (re)configurations, still structure the realities in formerly colonised and colonising societies today. We will also engage with the question on the relationship between the colonial past and contemporary racism. At the same time, however, the focus will also be on academic knowledge production and the question of how colonial and Eurocentric traditions are still reproduced at universities and in research institutions.

Axis 3 Decoloniality

The concept of decoloniality goes back to the Latin American research group “Modernity Coloniality/Decoloniality” which was founded in the 1990s. The group’s work aims to show the invisibility of non-Western knowledge and at the same time the impossibility to return to a pre-colonial time. Decolonisation is thus to be understood as a political practice that requires both the cooperation with civil society actors and the willingness to unlearn established Eurocentric norms and concepts. For this reason, the congress provides a forum for dialogue in order to challenge the premises of contemporary academic knowledge production.