

**Speech by Minister of State Katja Keul at the conference
“New Perspectives on German Colonial Rule - A
Scholarship Programme for Cooperative Research”**

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A protagonist in a book by the winner of last year’s Nobel Prize for Literature, Abdulrazak Gurnah, says: “You want me to tell you about myself as if I have a complete story. But all I have are fragments which are snagged by troubling gaps.”

With these words, he expresses what many people on the African continent feel.

Their history has been shattered to fragments by European colonialism.

Earlier this year, I visited Tanzania and met the descendants of Mangi Meli. Mangi Meli was a man who fought against colonial rule. Subsequently, he was hanged by the German governor in March 1900. His head was removed and has yet to be rediscovered.

One reason for this is that there are still thousands of unidentified human remains in museums and universities all over Germany and the rest of Europe.

As I spoke to his descendants, I realized: The German colonial government wanted to erase the memory of Mangi Meli. But in fact they went a step further and erased an entire cultural tradition. Colonialism interrupted the history and tradition of the Chaga people.

One descendant of Mangi Meli told me he had even travelled to Germany to find out about his own cultural heritage. The most important source on Chaga tradition is a book by the German missionary Bruno Gutmann. He tracked it

down in an antiquarian bookshop in Leipzig. However, it was no use to him, as it had not been translated into English.

Languages have been lost.

Knowledge has been lost.

Identity has been lost.

As Abdulrazak Gurnah writes: there are only fragments.

The impact of colonialism is felt to this very day.

Colonial rule left deep wounds in many countries, especially in Africa, – but also in Asia, the Americas or the Pacific region. It has caused or aggravated numerous conflicts, global inequalities and regional instabilities that we are seeing today. For a long time, Europeans regarded Africa as a continent of crises and poverty.

But let's be honest. Many of the conflicts that do indeed exist on the continent are the direct result of European colonialism. The workforce of many countries was enslaved and taken away. Economic resources were deliberately exploited. Borders were arbitrarily drawn. Colonialism was a system of injustice.

And this system was upheld by individuals and state entities. We have ignored this chapter of our history for far too long. As a society. As a government. And also as the Federal Foreign Office.

After all, the Federal Foreign Office was also part of the colonial system of injustice.

We are launching the German Colonial Rule scholarship programme today because we want to address this gap in our history. We want to shed light on what happened during colonial times. We want to know how colonialism affected communities at different times and in different contexts. And how it continues to do so to this day. We want to promote international research

on the role of German public institutions during German colonial rule. Furthermore, we want to avoid falling into the trap of taking a Eurocentric view.

This would simply be a continuation of colonial arrogance.

One of the legacies of colonialism is that until now voices from former colonies have not been adequately heard. The idea of our German Colonial Rule Programme is to deal together with the colonial past.

Therefore, it was essential for us that from the very start we elaborated the programme together with academics and researchers from countries with a colonial history.

One essential objective is to make information more accessible. After all, those who have access to information write history and determine the way it is dealt with. It should not be necessary to travel all the way to Germany to get information about your own past. Access to archives and digitisation are crucial.

The files of the former Imperial Colonial Office have now been digitised. I myself have downloaded the entire file on Rudolf Manga Bell. He is another example of extreme colonial injustice. He became king of the Douala kingdom. He was raised in Germany and believed in the German rule of law. He, therefore, petitioned the German government for breaking an agreement with the Douala kingdom. He was subsequently executed as a traitor. I recently met his descendant Princess Marilyn Manga Bell. At the end of this month, I will travel to Cameroon where I intend to follow up on the case of King Rudolf Manga Bell. A fitting appraisal of his fate is something very important to me. The case of King Rudolf underlines the necessity to examine further the role of German authorities during colonialism.

Dear scholarship holders and dear supervisors from Cameroon, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, the Philippines and Germany:

Thank you for being part of this journey. You will be carrying out research on our joint history. We need your perspectives. Our aim as the German Government is to bring the partnership with the countries of the so-called Global South to a new level.

But we all know: honesty is the cornerstone of good relations. Only if we reflect critically on our past, can we lay the foundation for an honest partnership in the future.

Some fear the war in Ukraine will monopolise all attention of our foreign policy in the years to come. But that would be a huge mistake. The Russian war shows just how closely our security and prosperity are interlinked. In Europe, we are working to avoid energy shortages.

But in many African countries, the Russian war is causing famine.

Strengthening the ties between Europe and Africa is one of my key priorities. Just today, I came back from Ethiopia where I took part in the Tana security forum.

In recent years, we have taken important steps forward. In March 2019, we adopted the framework principles for dealing with collections from colonial contexts. They are essential if we are to repatriate such pieces. We have successfully established a German contact point for collections from colonial contexts.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we signed the Joint Declaration on the Return of the Benin Bronzes and Bilateral Museum Cooperation.

What is more, we have also spelled out explicitly what Germans did in Namibia between 1904 and 1908. The atrocities committed against the Herero and Nama people amounted to a genocide.

You may know that we initialed a German-Namibian Joint Declaration in May 2021. It marks a milestone in our efforts to remember the painful past

and unite behind a common vision for the future. I am aware of the controversy around the Joint Declaration in Namibia. Our two governments stand by what we have jointly achieved.

And we are currently working on ways to settle the remaining open questions, so that the Declaration can be signed.

In recent years, Germany, like other former European colonial powers, has begun reflecting on its colonial past. I think if we look back at where we stood 10 years ago, we have come a long way.

But there is still considerable ground to make up. It is important to spread knowledge about colonialism more widely. Most Germans could probably not even name a single country that used to be a German colony.

Schools, universities and civil society play a crucial part here, as do activists with their endeavour to decolonise our mindset. I am very confident the German Colonial Rule scholarship will help improve knowledge about the role of German authorities during colonialism. I would like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for coordinating this fellowship programme. My particular thanks go to Professor Brockmeyer and Professor Lindner for their help designing the programme and to the Federal Archive for facilitating the archive work of the scholarship holders. I wish you all fruitful research and I very much look forward to hearing about your results.