

Transformative Archives

*Approaches and Perspectives for
(Historical) Civic Education*

A symposium of the Federal Agency for Civic Education in cooperation with the GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig

November 3rd & 4th 2022

**GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig/Museen im GRASSI
Literaturhaus Leipzig**



GRASSI
MUSEUM FÜR VOLKSKUNDE ZU LEIPZIG

d_id
diversität_
intersektionalität
dekolonialität



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Silke Briel (Anguezomo Mba Bikoro, 2022, P. 9)
Michelle Evans (Aubree Penney, 2022, P. 12)
Trinka Lat (Lizza May David, P. 10)
M. Lavitt (El-Tayeb, P. 9)
Lilian Scarlet Löwenbrück (Sinthujan Varatharajah, P. 7 und P. 13)
AJ Mitchell (Nico Rodriguez Melo, 2022, P. 11)
Zara Zandieh (Juliana Kolberg, 2019, P. 11)

“At its strongest, archival power is the power to decide what is and what is not a serious object of research, and, therefore, of mention or thought. That which is excluded becomes impossible to think or notice; the archival threshold can demarcate the limits of historical knowledge and thought itself.”

Spivak, Gayatri 1985

In this symposium, a critical perspective will be taken in regard to conventional archives and colonially informed archival studies. In this context spaces for reflection and exchange will be created in order to discuss the possibilities of illuminating hegemonic narratives and historiographies through so-called transformative archives on a transnational level.

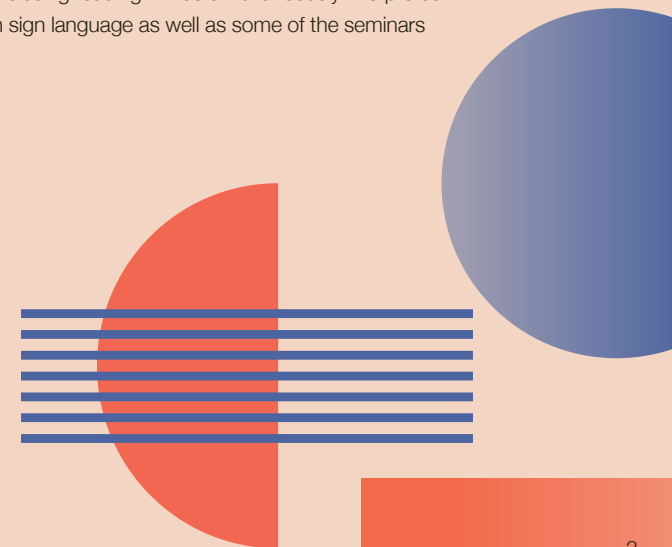
The question will be asked to what extent documenting, archiving and making marginalised (historical) knowledge available opens up possibilities for contemplating decolonial options in the memory-political landscape of Germany and beyond.

The focus will lie on questions of re_centering overwritten, erased or negated knowledge and narratives and connected to this, options of expanding the collective memory.

After introductory lectures and talks by and with **Prof. Dr. Fatima El-Tayeb** and **Prof. Dr. Gayatri Gopinath**, among others, different formats and practical examples of transformative archives or transformative archiving will be presented in parallel seminars.

The symposium will conclude with a reading from **Sinthujan Varatharajah's** debut novel: **an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen**.

All panel discussions and the closing reading will be simultaneously interpreted into GER./ENG. and German sign language as well as some of the seminars (see programme).



Venues

GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig/Museen im GRASSI


Johannisplatz 5–11, 04103 Leipzig


Literaturhaus Leipzig, Gerichtsweg 28, 04103 Leipzig
(7 minutes within walking distance to Museen im GRASSI)

All spaces are wheelchair accessible.

Information regarding COVID-19

We kindly ask you to test yourself prior to the event. Please wear a mask throughout the entire event. Masks can be removed during meals and when sitting.

 Interpretation into German sign language

 This part of the event will be streamed live

Programme Overview

November 3rd 2022

Literaturhaus Leipzig

4:30 pm **Registration**

5.00 – **Welcome/Opening Talks** ENG./GER.  

5.20 pm **Léontine Meijer-van Mensch** (GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig)
Ohiniko Mawussé Toffa (GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig)
Iris Rajanayagam (Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb)

5.30 – **Keynote Talk** ENG./GER.  

6.45 pm **Transformative Archives – Potentials and Pitfalls**
Fatima El-Tayeb (Yale University) and **Gayatri Gopinath** (New York University)
Chair: Iris Rajanayagam

7.00 – **Opening Panel** ENG./GER.  

8.30 pm **Black Cultural Archives London, Monument Lab Philadelphia and The Tamil Archives Project**
Chair: Ohiniko Mawussé Toffa and Iris Rajanayagam

GRASSI Museum

8.30 pm **Reception**

November 4th 2022

GRASSI Museum

11.30 am – **Parallel Seminars**

3.30 pm incl. lunch break
1. **Raju Rage**
Un_archiving (via Zoom) ENG.

2. **Kathy-Ann Tan & Nathalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro**
Embodied Archives ENG.

3. **Sinthujan Varatharajah**
Archives and Statelessness GER

4. **RomaniPhen e.V.**
Archiving the Movement GER. 

5. **xart splitta e.V**
Digital Archives GER. 

Literaturhaus Leipzig

4.30 – **Closing Panel** ENG./GER.  

6.30 pm **Delinking and New Futurities in the Context of Transformative Archives**

Imad Gebrayel (Humboldt University Berlin), **Chandra Frank** (University of Cincinnati), **Lizza May David** (Visual Artist) and **Isidora Randjelović** (RomaniPhen Archive, Berlin & Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin)
Chair: Ohiniko Mawussé Toffa and Iris Rajanayagam

GRASSI Museum

6.30 – **Joint Dinner**
7.30 pm

Literaturhaus Leipzig

7.30 – **Reading** ENG./GER.  

9.00 pm **Sinthujan Varatharajah**
an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen
Chair Q&A: Iris Rajanayagam

Closing Note ENG./GER.  

Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Ohiniko Mawussé Toffa, Peggy Piesche (Director Department for Civic Education and Plural Democracy/bpb, tbc) and **Iris Rajanayagam**

Reading

7.30 – 9.00 pm

Literaturhaus Leipzig

Sinthujan Varatharajah

an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen

Colonialism and what came after: Sinthujan Varatharajah's *an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen* is a hybrid of family history and political essay. It addresses the question of how colonialism has inscribed itself in our everyday lives. How do imperialist aspirations continue to affect the reality of our lives today – and more specifically: How do they influence current migration and asylum issues? Sinthujan Varatharajah points out that our colonialist past affects and surrounds us all – so omnipresent that we usually do not even notice.

This book is a search for traces. Starting point: a photo taken around 1991 at Hellabrunn Zoo in Munich showing Sinthujan's mother. The Tamil woman is from Eelam, the Tamil region of present-day Sri Lanka, and arrived in Germany as an asylum seeker in the mid-1980s. Seven years later, she stands face to face with two Indian elephants and one elephant from East Africa at the Munich Zoo. The young Tamil woman and the elephants have something in common: They have all come a long way. They have been abducted, displaced or had to flee and are now meeting in a foreign country, in this German zoo.

Sinthujan Varatharajah connects their own family history with the history of the settlers of Sri Lanka, colonial photography, the cultural history of zoos, museums and with botanical gardens in Europe. Their extraordinary piece reveals that postcolonial structures even extend to our perception of flora and fauna.

With great clarity, Sinthujan Varatharajah questions fundamental certainties and chooses a personal approach that stays with you.

Note on notations: Since the content of the text is concerned with questioning the Eurocentric perspective and thus also wants to deconstruct specific certainties about how we express things linguistically, many terms are italicized that stem from a colonialist logic or naming. These include, in particular, place and country names such as "Colombo", "Zambia", "British Northern Rhodesia," the cardinal points, but also concepts of time perception such as "present," "past," "modern," and other techniques and concepts.



Sinthujan Varatharajah is a freelance researcher and essayist living in Berlin, where they curated the event series *dissolving territories: cultural geographies of a new eelam*. They studied political geography and was part of the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art with the research and art installation *how to move an arche*. In 2017–2018 they were a board member of the European Commission's Advisory Council on Asylum and worked for several human rights organizations in London and Berlin over several years. Essays by Sinthujan Varatharajah have been published by *The Funambulist*, *Jacobin*, *Fluter*, and others.



Sinthujan Varatharajah
an alle orte, die hinter uns liegen
essay | 352 pages
€ 23,00 [D] / € 23,70 [A]
E-Book Germany: 16,99 €
ISBN 978-3-446-27291-0
release date: 26. September 2022 hanserblau

Short Biographies of speakers

Expert GRASSI Museum for Ethnology Leipzig

Ohiniko M. Toffa (Dr. phil) was born in Atakpame, Togo. He studied German and Cultural Studies at the University of Lomé. In the Master's programme "Borders", his main focus was German missionary and colonial history in Togo. His dissertation project dealt with a case study of the history of the North German Missionary Society, namely the missionary conception of the inspector Franz Michael Zahns (1862–1900). The dissertation proved the application of Christian morality (in this case-pietism) as a colonial knowledge and ruling technology. Between 2013 and 2015, Ohiniko M. Toffa worked as a lecturer at the University of Lomé, and from 2010 to 2015 he was a civil servant German teacher in Togo. Ohiniko M. Toffa is currently working on a project on collections from the former colony of Togo that can be found in the Völkerkunde Museums in Dresden and Leipzig. It is about more than 700 objects of the spiritual life of the colonised that were stolen. The ongoing project does not close the door to restitution.



Speakers

Anguezomo Mba Bikoro's visual and text work analyses processes of power and science fictions in historical archives that critically engage in migrational struggles and colonial memory, focusing on queer indigenous and Black feminist biopolitics central to the practice of ancestral healing. Anguezomo has developed frameworks of rituals and healing in performance work that often reveal the entangled colonial histories of migration at site-specific spaces to dismantle prejudices and build independent emancipatory tools for liberation, education & repair. Anguezomo is artistic director of Squat Museum in Gabon (2008), a mobile museum and performing archive, and Nyabinghi_Lab Collective (2020; non-profit). Their work has been shown in numerous international exhibitions and Biennales including the Dak'art Biennale (2012, 2018), Venice Biennale (2016), La Otra Bienal, Bogota (2013), and RAVY Biennale, Yaoundé (2018). www.anguezomo-bikoro.com



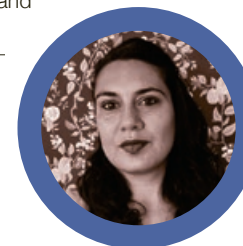
Lizza May David is a painter and transdisciplinary artist. Through abstract painting, installations and architectural interventions as well as collective works, she deals with the voids in personal and collective archives. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg and at the Berlin University of the Arts. Her recent exhibition participations include: *Spheres of Interest** at ifa Gallery, Berlin (2022), *Transition Exhibition* at Brücke Museum, Berlin (2022), *Die Vibration der Dinge* Triennale Kleinplastik Fellbach (2022), *Recent Aquisitions* at Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila (PH, 2022) and *Bahala Ka [What do I know?]* at Kunstverein Hildesheim (2020).



Fatima El-Tayeb is Professor of Ethnicity, Race, and Migration and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale University. She works on racism in Europe, focusing on strategies of resistance by racialised communities, particularly those that mobilise an intersectional queer art practice. She has published three books and numerous essays on the interaction of "race", gender, sexuality and nation (most recently *Undeutsch. The Construction of the Other in Postmigrant Society*, Unrast 2016). In addition to her academic work, she is active in anti-racist, migrant and queer of colour contexts.



Chandra Frank is Assistant Professor of Communication, Film and Media Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She writes in the areas of feminist queer diaspora in Europe, archival methodologies, the politics of water, sexuality, race and Dutch empire, and visual cultures.



Imad Gebrayel is a Lebanese designer, educator, and researcher based in Berlin. He has produced visual and theoretical works around self-Orientalism in Arab* design, counter-mapping, and archiving. He has co-founded various projects centering Arab-migrant experiences and is currently teaching at several academic institutions while undertaking ethnographic research on the negotiations of Arab-Arab identifications in Sonnenallee, part of his doctoral research at the Humboldt University of Berlin. His project stems from notions of difference within the presumed sameness of the Arab immigrant in Berlin and aims at informing research on migration, affect, and memory in the field.



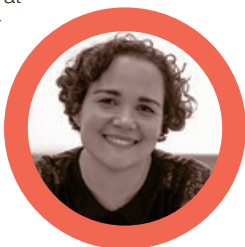
Gayatri Gopinath is Professor in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, and the Director of the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality at New York University. She works at the intersection of transnational feminist and queer studies, postcolonial studies, and diaspora studies, and is the author of two monographs: *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2005), and *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2018). She has published numerous essays on gender, sexuality, and queer diasporic visual art and culture in anthologies and journals such as *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *GLQ*, and *Social Text*, as well as in art publications such as *PIX: A Journal of Contemporary Indian Photography*, *Tribe: Photography and New Media from the Arab World*, and *ArtReview Asia*.



Latifa Hahn is the project coordinator of *The Living Archives* project at xart splitta. She studied Social Work (B.A.) and Practice Research in Social Work and Education (M.A.) at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin. As part of her master's thesis, she researched how people from the Afghan diaspora deal with ghosts. Further main topics she deals with are: Life in the Diaspora, Racism, Critique of Capitalism, Mental Health, Critical Social Work, Community Work and Critical Discrimination Research. In addition to her work at xart splitta, she is doctoral fellow in educational science at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. Her focus herein lies on strategies of politically positioned social workers in dealing with capitalist conditions in practice.



Hannah Ishmael is the Collections and Research Manager at Black Cultural Archives. Hannah has recently completed her PhD in the Department of Information Studies at UCL on the development of Black-led archives in London.



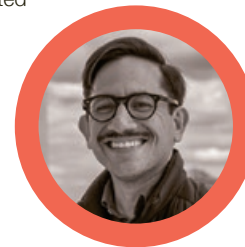
Juliana Kolberg is project manager at xart splitta, a non-profit association in Berlin that has been working in the fields of intersectionality, discrimination critique, (postcolonial) memory, decoloniality & empowerment and (historical) political education since 2012. Current main projects at xart splitta are [#CommunititesSolidarischDenken](#) and *The Living Archives*, which are about empowerment, solidarity(s) and a decolonial, resistant engagement with knowledge and its archives. Juliana's main topics are empowerment and intersectionality, disability(ies) and queerness from her own lived reality, especially from the perspectives of Black diasporic movements.



Gnanushan Krishnapillai is a community worker, researcher and beatmaker, looping and mashing his way through the archives. He rewinds and fast forwards, sampling and layering ghosts (stories) and prophecies (theories), hoping to connect and center marginalized histories. He is inspired by his hometown of Scarborough, where he grew up watching community members engage in development, activism, and mutual aid without institutional support. Previously, he has designed a walking tour for Doors Open Toronto (2019) centered on Indigenous peoples' presence in Scarborough, created a digital story on racialized masculinity for Planned Parenthood Toronto (2018), and written about nostalgia and placemaking for Asian Pathways magazine (2017). He currently works for a youth rights focused legal aid clinic.



Nico Rodriguez Melo was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia, Nico Rodriguez Melo is a curator and arts administrator interested in the potential of curatorial practices, site-specific interventions and printed publications as strategies for social change. In 2011 he co-founded the nonprofit organization SUR (formerly known as 4-18) and currently serves as co-director. Rodriguez Melo has resided in the US since 2016, where he has continued to work in the intersection of artistic practices and social change at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Maryland Institute College of Art, and currently as Associate Director of Projects at Philadelphia-based Monument Lab.





Aubree Penney is a fat, disabled Memphis-raised, Dallas-based curator, artist, and writer. Her work addresses power dynamics in art display, confronting the impossibility of neutrality or equity in institutional structures. Her curatorial practice is grounded in disrupting museums' prioritization of well and able bodies, and her ongoing research addresses the ties between colonial tendencies and mimetic expectations in museum policy.

Before joining Monument Lab as Assistant to the Director and Curatorial Associate, she worked with Tate Modern and the Yinka Shonibare studio. She collaborates with Belgium-born, London-based curator Riet Timmerman as the duo Call You in the Morning.

Isidora Randjelović is co-founder of the feminist romani archive RomaniPhen e.V. and works on issues such as memory culture and historical-civic education. She is lecturer and researcher at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin and teaches on racism, social movements and critical social work.



Dr. Vasuki Shanmuganathan is an artist, curator, and scholar. She works as a Research Associate with the Race, Ethics, and Power project at University of Toronto's Centre for Ethics. In 2016, she founded the Tamil Archive Project (TAP) collective in Scarborough, which combines art, knowledge sharing, and archival practices into accessible events for the local community. Vasuki has curated exhibitions for The Public Gallery, Scarborough Arts, and Make Room Inc as well as exhibited at Lakeshore Arts. Her digital artwork, transforming a highway underpass into a site for contemplation, was produced during the 2022 AR Knot Artist Residency (Ottawa). She is currently a participant in the Hypercity Artist Residency (Toronto) creating work on displacement and surveillance. Her most recent writing has appeared in Femme Art Review and SDUK.



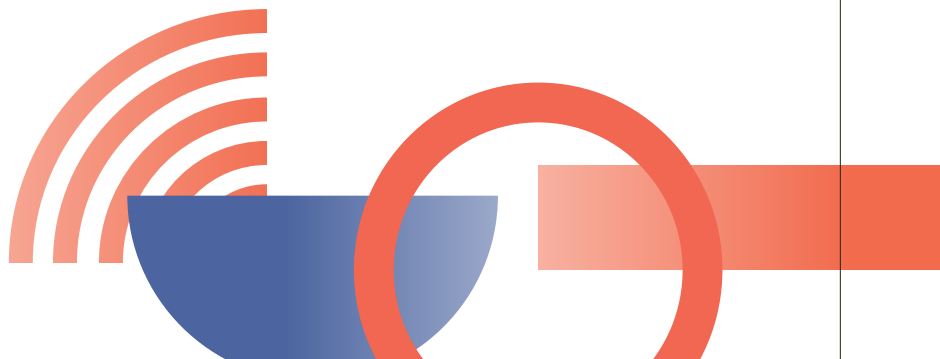
Raju Rage is proactive about using art, education and activism to forge creative survival. Born in Kenya, raised in London and living/working beyond, they explore the spaces and relationships between dis/connected bodies, theory and practice, text and the body and aesthetics and the political substance. Their current interests are around sustainability, economies, care, and resistance. They are a member of Collective Creativity arts collective and are a creative educator and independent scholar with an interest in

radical pedagogy. Raju has a theirstory in activism, self and collective organised queer/transgender/people of colour movements and creative projects in London and beyond from which their politics and works draw on and from. Raju has trained as a pastry chef and baker, worked in several community kitchens and been part of a baker's collective.

Kathy-Ann Tan is the founder of Mental Health Arts Space Berlin, a non-profit arts/project space that centers the mental health, well-being, experiences, knowledges, histories and narratives of BIPOC and marginalized artists and cultural workers. As a former academic, she works full-time as an independent curator, writer and scholar. She is also the initiator of DecolonialArtArchives (www.decolonialartarchives.com), an on- and offline platform and forum that connect artists, curators and cultural workers who interrogate colonial narratives in their work. Her practice revolves around creating spaces for conversation, exchange, sharing and empowerment for BIPOC communities in the arts and cultural scenes in Berlin and beyond.



Sinthujan Varatharajah is a freelance researcher and essayist living in Berlin, where they curate the event series *dissolving territories: cultural geographies of a new eelam*. They studied political geography and were part of the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art with the research and art installation *how to move an arche*. In 2017 – 2018, they were a board member of the European Commission's Advisory Council on Asylum and worked for several human rights organisations in London and Berlin over several years. Sinthujan Varatharajah's essays have appeared in *The Funambulist*, *Jacobin* and *Fluter*, among others.



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