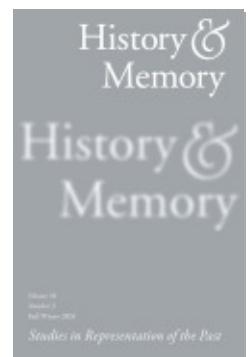




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1807 to Present

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Deconstructing a National Hero

The Changing Representation of the Prussian Sailor and Slave Trader Joachim Nettelbeck, 1807 to Present

SARAH LENTZ AND URS LINDNER

Joachim Nettelbeck (1738–1824) was a Prussian sailor who worked as a first mate on Dutch slavers, lobbied with three Prussian kings for the acquisition of overseas colonies, and became famous when his hometown Kolberg was under siege by Napoleonic troops in 1807. This article traces the heroization of Nettelbeck during the past two centuries and analyzes how this representation faced eventual crisis. After providing an account of Nettelbeck's biography, it examines how Nettelbeck was made a national hero and how his participation in the transatlantic slave trade was repressed in this process. Finally, it describes how decolonial civil society initiatives have shifted the public perception of Nettelbeck since 2008.

Keywords: Joachim Nettelbeck; transatlantic slave trade; colonialism; German nationalism; Kolberg; hero-making; decolonial activism

Transatlantic slavery and the slave trade are frequently viewed as a business of different colonial empires. However, the “hinterlands” and, in particular, German-speaking actors and territories were also involved. While historical research has increasingly addressed this topic during the last two decades and brought a number of different groups of German participants and beneficiaries to light, major research gaps still remain.¹ A notable example is the Prussian sailor Joachim Nettelbeck (1738–1824), who worked as a first mate on Dutch slavers and is still an eponym of streets and squares in thirty German cities.² During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Nettelbeck was venerated as a national hero for his

contribution to the defense of his hometown, Kolberg, against Napoleon in 1807 and for his efforts as an early colonial pioneer. Indeed, the Nazis used him as a propaganda figure to boost perseverance for the *Endsieg*. Even after 1945, there was no clear break in German memory culture: Nettelbeck continued to be heroized for his “patriotic deeds” and his engagement in pursuit of the “common good” in both East and West Germany. This only changed in 2008, when civil society initiatives started to challenge Nettelbeck’s commemorative presence as part of a broader attempt to come to terms with Germany’s colonial past and, ultimately, “decolonize” German society.

Nettelbeck is a paradigmatic historical figure situated at the intersection of early German nationalism, colonial aspirations and transatlantic slavery. In his autobiography, he did not only write extensively about his role in the defense of Kolberg and the slave trade but also briefly reported on his attempts to convince three Prussian kings to acquire overseas colonies. Since its publication in 1821–23, his memoir produced at least thirty-one editions and inspired more than twenty-five book-length adaptations (nine of them made explicitly for young readers), three plays (one of them authored by Nobel Prize laureate Paul Heyse), the most opulent Nazi propaganda movie of all time (directed by Veit Harlan) and innumerable newspaper articles. Given the significance of Nettelbeck as a popular memory figure, the extent to which scholars have neglected his biography and public representation is remarkable. The little existing historical research has focused almost entirely on his role during the defense of his hometown and on the Nazi propaganda movie *Kolberg*.³ It was only within the context of a civil society campaign to rename Erfurt’s Nettelbeckufer that one of the authors of this article, together with two colleagues, started to further analyze Nettelbeck’s work as a participant in the slave trade and colonial lobbyist.⁴

In this article, we aim at deepening and expanding this research by tracing the construction of Nettelbeck as a national hero during the past two centuries and by analyzing how this public representation faced eventual crisis. To that end, the article combines several perspectives, namely, historiographies of transatlantic slavery, colonialism and German nationalism, memory studies and research on heroes. Its main thesis is that Nettelbeck could become a national hero only via an erasure of his participation in the slave trade. We thus proceed in five steps. We start

by offering a description of Nettelbeck's biography, which, contrary to the majority of existing accounts, attempts to capture the multifaceted nature of his life. Second, we analyze how Nettelbeck was made a national hero from 1807 to 1989. We differentiate between two strands: the major “defender of Kolberg” narrative and the minor “colonial pioneer” construction. We then demonstrate that both these strands were premised on a repression of Nettelbeck's participation in transatlantic slavery. Third, we reconstruct six different strategies to illustrate how this silencing concretely worked. Fourth, we describe how, since 2008, civil society initiatives and scholars supporting them have broken the repression of slavery that was constitutive for Nettelbeck's status as a national hero. Finally, we close with some reflections on the relationship between this deconstruction and multidirectional memory.

THE MULTIFACETED LIFE OF JOACHIM NETTELBECK

What we know about Nettelbeck today is largely based on the information he provided in his autobiography, which was published shortly before his death in 1824.⁵ He was born in 1738 in Kolberg in what was formerly Eastern Pomerania and is now northwest Poland. For more than thirty years (1749–83), he worked as a sailor: first as a cabin boy, later as a helmsman, first mate, captain and ship owner in the North and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Atlantic. According to his memoir, he went to the Caribbean on seven occasions, including two voyages on Dutch slaving vessels. Already his first longer trip took him as a helmsman's boy on board a Dutch slaver in 1749. In the late 1750s and early 1760s, he embarked on four additional trips as a helmsman on Dutch merchant ships, this time directly to the Caribbean. In the course of these voyages, he established contacts with the German planter elite, especially in the Dutch colony of Suriname, which was based on the labor of enslaved people.⁶ The first two volumes of the autobiography narrate Nettelbeck's life as a sailor and his adventures, successes and setbacks.

First mate on Dutch slavers and colonial lobbyist

According to his account, Nettelbeck made a conscious decision in 1772 to sign up again on a Dutch slaver after losing his ship and suffering some personal blows of fate.⁷ Using the Transatlantic Slave Trade Data Base, this voyage can be reconstructed as follows: In October 1772, Nettelbeck set sail from Moerdijk as first mate on a ship called *Elisabeth*, which belonged to the Rotterdam-based company Coopstad en Rochussen and was commanded by Captain Jan Harmel. Off the West African coast, he switched to the *Sara Henrietta*, which was under the command of Captain Hendrik Santleven and set out for the “Middle Passage” in September 1773. Nettelbeck made the return trip to Europe as captain of a ship called *Jonge Jacob*, arriving in the Netherlands in June 1774.⁸ Despite “only” taking part in two triangular trips in the course of his life, Nettelbeck spent a total of three years in the slave trade. On his second trip, from 1772 to 1774, he served as first mate and was therefore the most powerful man on the vessel after the captain, making this disciplinary fortress function on the everyday level. According to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Data Base, the estimates for the *Elisabeth* and the *Sara Henrietta* indicate ca. 775 enslaved people, 108 of them having died on the ships.

We refer to Nettelbeck as a “slave trader” because he himself used the term to describe his own activities, while also suggesting that he had his own enslaved boy.⁹ In his autobiography, Nettelbeck provided a comprehensive account of his tasks in the slave trade and overall procedures aboard slavers, which were characterized by constant violence or, at least, the threat of it. For instance, he repeatedly referred to the whip as the ultimate “peacekeeper” in the daily affairs on board. Moreover, Nettelbeck alluded to the sexual exploitation of Black women and clearly stated that he, in his leadership position, either regularly employed force against the enslaved himself or ordered others to do so. Furthermore, he reported that, as first mate, he commanded a smaller longboat with which he independently sailed the West African coast to purchase enslaved people. Here he not only led the negotiations, but also had the opportunity to enrich himself in a private trade in gold dust.¹⁰ Having learned pidgin from a Black sailor to support his helmsman with the negotiations during his first trip on a slaver in 1749, he was able to buy enslaved men, women and children without a translator in the early 1770s.¹¹

When writing his memoir half a century later, Nettelbeck tried to distance himself from the slave trade—a behavior that can be explained by the strong disapproval that had also captured the Prussian public after the British had abolished the trade in 1807.¹² He condemned the practice while, at the same time, justifying his involvement in it:

Fifty years ago, this vicious human trafficking was considered a business just like any other, without eliciting much brooding about its rightfulness or wrongfulness.... It was not necessarily connected to barbaric cruelty against the purchased human cargo, which probably happened only occasionally; likewise have I, on my part, never advised or supported such atrocities.¹³

In this passage, Nettelbeck first denies the existence of a moral consciousness about the injustice of transatlantic slavery in the early 1770s. Then, he declares the violence of the slave trade an exceptional occurrence and only contingently related to this practice. Finally, in contradiction to his own descriptions of his involvement in the trade, he absolves himself from any personal responsibility.

Upon his return from his second trip on a Dutch slaver in the early 1770s, Nettelbeck started to lobby for Prussia to acquire colonies based on slave labor.¹⁴ According to his autobiography, he had “discovered,” on this voyage, an area around the river Corantijn—today the border region between Suriname and Guyana—that had not been claimed by any colonial power so far. In the mid-1770s, Nettelbeck petitioned Frederick the Great for Prussia to appropriate this territory, but he never got a reply. After Frederick’s death in 1786, Nettelbeck tried again with his successor, Frederick Wilhelm II, this time proposing provisions for a sustainable economic system. The colony at the southern shores of the Caribbean, Nettelbeck reasoned, would not be able to supply itself with a free labor force and, therefore, Prussia should resume its tradition of Great Fredericksburg and reopen a trading post at the Western African coast in order to purchase enslaved Black people. The petition made it to the responsible bureaucratic unit of the Prussian state, which, once again, declined it.¹⁵ After the victory over Napoleon in 1815, Nettelbeck made a third and final attempt with his friend and supporter, the great military reformer August Neidhardt von Gneisenau. According to the modified plan, Prussia should take away some of France’s Caribbean possessions.

Yet, Gneisenau, the strategist of Prussia's continental empire, declined the proposal again, emphasizing that Prussia should focus its energies on territorial expansion in Europe.¹⁶

Kolberg 1807 and Prussian nationalism

Nettelbeck retired as a sailor in 1783. He then acquired Kolberg citizenship and went on to earn a living through brewing and distilling spirits. In 1805 he became an honorary citizen representative (*Zehntmann*) and, as such, played an important role in the defense of Kolberg against the Napoleonic troops in 1807. The siege was laid in the midst of a lost war: Prussia's army had been devastatingly defeated in the battle of Jena and Auerstedt in fall 1806. Most of its fortresses had been surrendered due to the demands of their citizenries, the small and strategically unimportant Kolberg being one of the few exceptions.¹⁷ The defense was, therefore, primarily about "national honor," that is, not surrendering at all costs. On Nettelbeck's initiative, the aristocratic commander of the fortress, Ludwig Moritz von Lucadou, was replaced by Gneisenau, who applied a new defensive strategy. This constituted a trespassing of hierarchical social norms that Prussia's aristocracy was not willing to forgive for many decades.¹⁸ Additionally, Nettelbeck successfully commanded fire-fighting operations and the inundation work Gneisenau had assigned to him.¹⁹ Most importantly, Nettelbeck was strongly engaged in morally boosting the perseverance of the citizenry. In his autobiography, he proudly reports that he was willing to let his hometown burn to ashes and recounts how he threatened fellow citizens who were on the brink of surrender with death:

Gentlemen, Kolberg can and must be saved for the king, at all costs!... We citizens are all determined like one man, even if all our houses became piles of rubble, not to let the fortress be handed over. And if my ears ever hear anyone—be it citizen or soldier—talk about surrender: by a man's word! I would immediately ram this my saber through his body, even if I had to plunge it into my own chest in the next minute!²⁰

This fragment shows how Nettelbeck articulates the trope of the "death for the fatherland," which was central to a political formation that has been neglected by historical research for a long time: monarchist Prussian nation-

alism.²¹ According to the standard narrative, German nationalism emerged as part of the anti-Napoleonic war effort between 1806 and 1815. It was, so the argument runs, only with the writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernst Moritz Arndt and their reception that the nation became—amongst parts of the elites—an “ultimate value.”²² Critical scholarship, however, has demonstrated that the tipping point should be placed considerably earlier, during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63)—the first “global war.”²³ During this period, a competitive constellation emerged between monarchist Prussian nationalism, republican nationalism in southern Germany and liberal imperial nationalism sponsored by Vienna.²⁴ The monarchist Prussian nationalism had two main elements: the abovementioned “death for the fatherland” trope and an extreme cult around Frederick the Great.²⁵ The latter is also present in Nettelbeck’s memoir, where he relates that during a stay in Lisbon he encountered a wax figure of Frederick the Great. This episode is narrated as a nationalist awakening scene, a kind of Althusserian “interpellation,” where the figure of the king urges Nettelbeck to express his Prussian identity:

In the center, so authentic and natural, as if he were alive and soaring above, there was old King Frederick, with a magistrate’s sword in his hand, and in front of him a man, with wife and children, on their knees, apparently begging for justice.... I, poor fool, felt my heart beating so strongly ... that I was hardly able to contain my joyful patriotic melancholy. Well, I had to let it out! I had to enter the innermost circle; and no matter how well or poorly I managed to speak the foreign language, I declared: “My king! I am a Prussian!”²⁶

Thus, contrary to a persistent interpretation of Nettelbeck’s political stance, his occasional disregard of feudal privileges cannot be taken as a manifestation of liberal or even democratic beliefs.²⁷ He was a devout monarchist and there are no indications that he was a supporter of the Prussian reform movement, liberal constitutionalism or even the rule of law. This is evident from the way he dealt with Kolberg’s town assembly in 1809, after its election in accordance with the procedures of the reformed communal constitution. Nettelbeck felt offended for not having been asked to run for office and saw his private interests not sufficiently respected by the new body. He therefore went to the Prussian king and convinced him to dissolve the assembly.²⁸ For the rest of his life and during the first

decades after his death, this made Nettelbeck rather unpopular within his hometown. While he describes himself as having incorporated Pomerania's main virtue, honesty, and having done everything for the "common good," his claims in this regard should not be accepted without qualifications.

Within the history of German nationalism, Nettelbeck's case—and, especially, his autobiography—is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that, after the Prussian reform movement—including its creation of a new German national project—had failed, monarchist Prussian nationalism resurged in a rather undiluted way. Second, it reveals that this monarchist nationalism was not only the ideology of Prussia's emerging continental empire but also an aspirational force for acquiring overseas colonies. Nettelbeck was very explicit about this connection: "I was animated by my Prussian patriotism and thought and thought about why my king should not, just as well as England and France, have his colony and have sugar, coffee and other colonial commodities that are produced there."²⁹

THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL HERO: 1807 TO 1989

Heroes are not given: they have to be made and reaffirmed in narrations. They are, indeed, the effect of ongoing processes of heroization.³⁰ The defense of Kolberg became, as historian Roland Gehrke has observed, the "starting point for a national-political mythmaking, which was all the more powerful as it offered an important identificatory counterpoint to the epochal collapse of the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstedt."³¹ The Kolberg myth portrayed Gneisenau and Nettelbeck as triumphant heroes, the former possessing the military genius to save Kolberg, the latter outstanding as a citizen organizer and perseverance booster. As a "hero," Nettelbeck was wrestling with two adversaries: the French as the outer enemy and commander Lucadou (until he was replaced by Gneisenau) as the inner enemy.³²

This "defender of Kolberg" narrative has been the major strand of the heroization of Nettelbeck since 1807, but not the only one. To a minor degree, Nettelbeck has also been revered as an important precursor of Wilhelmine German overseas colonialism. There is an interesting temporal asymmetry between these two strands: Whereas the "colonial

pioneer” construction came to an end in 1945, the “defender of Kolberg” narrative lasted until 1989 and has been revitalized in current debates.

“Defender of Kolberg”

Already during the siege of Kolberg, the *Königsberger Zeitung* published, on June 1, 1807, a tribute to Nettelbeck that was based on Gneisenau’s reports to the king and perhaps even written by himself.³³ This article contains the ideological nucleus of all later adaptations of the topic: the hero making an altruistic sacrifice for the nation by exposing a manly determination not to surrender.

Everywhere does he show judiciousness, courage and patriotism. Nettelbeck does all this *for free*, and Nettelbeck *is not wealthy*. He is a miracle and, given his relentless activities, one must wonder from where he draws his strength. Only *one thing* could knock him down to the ground: if the commander surrendered and handed over the fortress. Indeed, he would not survive this disaster. But no! My good old man! Your commander will not inflict this heartbreak on you. He will rejoice you by valiantly resisting with his brave garrison, which the enemy already holds in holy awe. Hence, live long and be to your contemporaries an example of courage, action, and patriotism. *Germans, aspire to this! [Spiegelt euch daran, ihr Deutschen!]*³⁴

The article stresses qualities that are typically ascribed to heroes.³⁵ First, Nettelbeck is presented as an extraordinary individual, as an “example” and even a “miracle” who is distinguished from the masses. Second, he is ethically and affectively charged as a role model and Germans are exhorted to aspire to his behavior. Third, Nettelbeck is presented as an “agonistic” character who is full of “courage” and will never surrender. Fourth, his agency is so great that he becomes the center of narration. Even commander Gneisenau deeply cares for his emotional well-being. There is, however, an important difference between this article and Nettelbeck’s autobiography published some years later. The frame of reference of the latter is still (or again) Prussia, whereas in the 1807 article, published at the beginning of the Prussian reform movement, it is Germany. This tension will prove to be constitutive for the heroization of Nettelbeck during the nineteenth

century, as he was invoked as national hero both by monarchist Prussian nationalism and by bourgeois German ethnonationalism.

In an anonymous diary of the Kolberg siege published in 1808, the two main tropes of monarchist Prussian nationalism—“death for the fatherland” and the cult around Frederick the Great—are ascribed to Nettelbeck within one sentence: “With an enthusiasm of Roman stature did he love his home, the immortal *Frederick* and his descendants, and he would sacrifice his life for his fatherland and his king a thousand of times.”³⁶ Yet, the most impressive document of the Prussian nationalist veneration of Nettelbeck is Johann Daniel Ferdinand Negebaur’s “patriotic” book for young people, which was published in 1824 and then reprinted in 1841. This volume created a fictitious framework in which “old Nettelbeck” told a group of children about his life. In this book, the relationship between Nettelbeck’s involvement in the slave trade and its subsequent repression in public discourse—which will be discussed in more detail below—already becomes clear. Negebaur used Nettelbeck’s half-hearted distancing from the slave trade for an “othering” of this practice and turned it into a constitutive element of Prussian nationalist identity. When a fictitious Nettelbeck explains to children how the slave trade worked, they join in: “*Carl*: This is outrageous. *Ferdinand*: How much do we have to thank God that he made us be born as Prussians.”³⁷ Negebaur even praised the General Code for the Prussian States, which was established in 1792 and included a partial ban on slavery on Prussian soil, as one further reason to die for the fatherland and its king: “*Heinrich*: Therefore, the Prussians give their body and blood for the king, am I right, Father Nettelbeck? *Nettelbeck*: As your fathers have done during the recent war against the French. *Several*: I also want to be faithful to my king. *Nettelbeck*: That’s right, children.”³⁸

The most significant document of Nettelbeck’s heroization within bourgeois German ethnonationalism is an article written by the Catholic German poet and priest Eduard Duller. This text was included in his eight volumes on popular heroes published in 1849 during the failed March revolution. Duller starts his entry by describing the situation in 1806/7, depicting a scenario in which the people were confronted with superior forces of an enemy, “no matter whether it is an outer or an inner one.” Nettelbeck is presented as an ideal typical incorporation of “German civic sentiment,” as a “true German man of integrity [*ächter deutscher*

Biedermann],” who did not become fatalistic in this situation.³⁹ Instead, in a move that may be analyzed following Foucault as a manifestation of “pastoral power,” he is portrayed as having turned his former profession as a helmsman into a political vocation: Nettelbeck has steered his fatherland, “the vessel of communal affairs,” during the siege of Kolberg through the “storm” of existential danger.⁴⁰

In 1865, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, the poet Paul Heyse, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1910, published the national drama *Colberg*. At the center of this play is, once again, the “death for the fatherland” topic as expressed by Kolberg’s determination not to surrender to Napoleon. Its two heroes are Gneisenau and Nettelbeck, who enact a new coalition between military and citizenry. Heyse added two fictional characters to the Kolberg myth: Rose, Nettelbeck’s goddaughter, who, in conformity with hegemonic gender stereotypes, cares for the well-being of the nation and delivers a letter to the king in which Nettelbeck asks for Lucadou’s demise; and Heinrich, her brother, who is a merchant, self-declared cosmopolitan, admirer of Napoleon, rationalist and defeatist, whose gnawing criticism threatens Kolberg’s perseverance. In *Colberg*, Heinrich becomes the proper antagonist of Gneisenau and Nettelbeck. The apex of the play is a dramatic sequence of events subjecting Heinrich to an inner process of conversion, in which he renounces his rationalist-cosmopolitan beliefs and affirms the “death for the fatherland” ideal. While Prussia is the nationalist frame of reference of this drama, Heinrich’s final action before he collapses as a result of his injuries is to invoke Germany: “Hurrah for Kolberg! Salvation, freedom, cease-fire! Hurrah for Germany!”⁴¹

The reactions to Heyse’s play demonstrate that its fusion of monarchist Prussian nationalism and bourgeois German ethnonationalism was premature. Its performance was prohibited on state-sponsored Prussian stages. The corresponding aristocratic unforgivingness and narrow-mindedness regarding the “hero of Kolberg” had been ridiculed already in an article of the *Magdeburger Zeitung* in 1861: “During his lifetime, Nettelbeck had always been considered to be a good patriot, but in his grave he has become a subversive democrat.”⁴² Things changed, however, after Prussia expanded into the German Empire in 1871: Nettelbeck became an undisputed national hero. In 1884, a public space was named after him for the first time: Berlin’s Nettelbeckplatz. In 1890, Heyse was awarded the title

of honorary citizen of Kolberg. By the turn of the century, Heyse's drama had become mandatory reading in Prussian schools and a very popular play at German theaters.⁴³ In 1903, the city of Kolberg inaugurated a double monument of Gneisenau and Nettelbeck, in which the latter is depicted as welcoming and looking up to the former, who is portrayed as a Roman general. The monument received the blessing of Emperor Wilhelm II, who emphasized Kolberg's "spirit of patriotism and fidelity to the dynasty coupled with reckless willingness to sacrifice and bold heroism."⁴⁴ In 1904 and 1905, the cities of Bremen and Erfurt followed suit by naming streets after Nettelbeck.

Since then, Nettelbeck and the "defender of Kolberg" narrative could be invoked whenever it seemed appropriate within German nationalism, be it during World War I, the Weimar Republic or Nazi Germany. On the bicentenary of Nettelbeck in 1938, a new edition of his autobiography was published.⁴⁵ During World War II, the Nazis even circulated a field post edition of his memoir.⁴⁶ What is particularly interesting in Nettelbeck's heroization during the Nazi period is how smoothly it reinforced previous nationalist representations. The introduction to the 1938 edition provided a balanced overview of the existing literature and ended with the motto of the article from 1807: "Germans, aspire to this!" It even adopted an ironic distance toward nationalist invocations as articulated in Negebaur's book on "old Nettelbeck:" "It is a nice attempt to familiarize the youth with Nettelbeck's history. Of course, we people of the twentieth century feel uneasy about the slightly elevated tone, the great patriotic pathos."⁴⁷ In general, there are no indications that the Nazis "perfidiously instrumentalized" Nettelbeck, as one descendent of Nettelbeck has recently claimed.⁴⁸

This is also true for the propaganda movie *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan and commissioned by Minister Joseph Goebbels himself.⁴⁹ Goebbels undoubtedly considered the movie—premiered on January 30, 1945—to be his ideological wonder weapon in "total warfare" and, for this reason, provided Harlan with opulent resources. The movie was aimed at morally exhorting Germans not to surrender and to continue to believe in the *Endsieg*. Yet, Harlan and Goebbels did not have to make any additions to the existing representation of Nettelbeck in order to realize this purpose. Everything was there and could easily be found in his autobiography: death for the fatherland, willingness to sacrifice for

the nation, unconditional devotion to an authority figure and a slightly rebellious attitude toward traditional elites.

What is most interesting about the movie are the tensions between the minister and his director. Goebbels prohibited Harlan to take the drama of Heyse, against whom he had antisemitic reservations, as a template.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Harlan adopted the two fictitious figures introduced by Heyse into the Kolberg myth, Rose and Heinrich, but renamed them Maria and Claus, inverting their significance: Maria, played by Kristina Söderbaum, Harlan's wife, became a major character on par with Nettelbeck (Heinrich George) and Gneisenau (Horst Caspar), whereas Claus, played by Kurt Meisel, was relegated to a side figure. This move, however, caused new problems: Goebbels accused Harlan of directing a "Söderbaum movie" instead of following his orders and producing a "Nettelbeck movie."⁵¹

"Colonial pioneer"

The "defender of Kolberg" narrative is surely the major strand in the heroization of Nettelbeck. Nevertheless, there has been a minor strand that portrays Nettelbeck as a "colonial pioneer." An early document of this reception, situated within bourgeois German ethnonationalism, is an article published in the *Neue Würzburger Zeitung* in 1843: "The desire for German colonies and hoisting the German flag," the author writes, "has bestirred judicious men not only recently." One of them was the "famous citizen of Kolberg Nettelbeck, this model of a good patriot, whose life every German citizen should be familiar with."⁵² The article then re-narrates Nettelbeck's attempts to convince the Prussian kings to acquire colonies. The same pattern of reception can be found in an article in the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* from 1886, which quoted his autobiography over several pages and portrayed Nettelbeck as "a confident and warm proponent of the same ideas and ambitions, whose cause we have taken up, which today find more and more supporters in more and more spheres, and which over one year ago have finally been adopted by the imperial government as well, in order to be forcefully realized."⁵³ In 1903, some days after Kolberg's double monument for Nettelbeck and Gneisenau had been unveiled, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* reminded its readers that this "hero" was "also one of the first to consider the *acquisition of oversea colonies* through Prussia."⁵⁴

The “colonial pioneer” construction of Nettelbeck became even more salient within the colonial revisionism of the Weimar Republic, after Germany had lost its overseas territories following the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. In 1932, for example, an entire street complex in Munich was named after protagonists of German colonialism, the Nettelbeckstraße being the connecting road from which all the other roads departed. Ultimately, the “colonial pioneer” construction reached its peak during National Socialism. In 1936, the German writer Curt Maronde published a historical novel titled *Schiffer Nettelbeck*, in which its protagonist is portrayed as having two main goals in his life: the acquisition of overseas colonies for Prussia—without, however, enslaving people (!)—and the abolition of the slave trade.⁵⁵ This apparent paradox can be explained by the fact that the British Empire was attacked by Nazi propaganda for its involvement in the slave trade and slavery, while the “German” contribution to the fight against this injustice was praised.⁵⁶

Nettelbeck during German partition

Although a clear break with Nettelbeck in German memory culture could have been expected after 1945, this did not happen. There was only a retreat from the “colonial pioneer” trope, whereas the “defender of Kolberg” narrative continued to exist in both German states. Within the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Nettelbeck had henceforth a precarious status, marked by a discreet distance. The front cover of the 1954 edition of Maronde’s *Schiffer Nettelbeck*, for example, explicitly stated: “this is not a novel representing a great patriot,” advertising the book instead—in the vein of what Adorno called the “jargon of authenticity”—as an existential experience for the youth.⁵⁷ The 1987 reedition of Nettelbeck’s autobiography in Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s *Kleine Bibliothek*—published one year after the “Historikerstreit”—included only the first two volumes. The third, along with its entire “defender of Kolberg” narrative, reportedly rested on a forgery by Nettelbeck’s editor Haken.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the Kolberg myth persisted in the FRG, especially within local heritage societies and the associations of those expelled from former German territories after World War II. In 1964, for example, the Westphalian city of Gütersloh named a new street after Nettelbeck in an already existing ensemble commemorating Prussian heroes. The

proposal was submitted by the local heritage society to commemorate Nettelbeck's role during the siege of Kolberg and Paul Heyse's drama.⁵⁹ Moreover, within a volume published by the cultural foundation of the expellees' associations, the right-wing professor Hans-Helmuth Knüller reinvented the heroization of Nettelbeck with respect to bourgeois German ethnonationalism: Nettelbeck was now presented as a patriotic figure whose actions had boosted the Prussian reform movement and bourgeois self-consciousness.⁶⁰

In the Eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR), the remembrance of Nettelbeck took a different route.⁶¹ At the beginning, there seems to have been a willingness for a clear break. In 1950, Erfurt's Nettelbeckufer was renamed after Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, a prominent figure of the conservative resistance against Hitler. However, a shift occurred as early as 1952, when Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED), declared: "The national liberation struggle against the American, English and French occupiers in West Germany and for the overthrow of their vassal government in Bonn is the task of all peace-loving and patriotic forces in Germany."⁶² As historian Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann has demonstrated, the GDR adopted a positive stance toward the anti-Napoleonic wars, which served as a propaganda tool to fight the FRG's integration in the West.⁶³ Within that framework, Nettelbeck was rehabilitated: in 1956, Erfurt's Goerdelerufer was re-renamed Nettelbeckufer. In the preface to the 1953 edition of Nettelbeck's memoir, the "defender of Kolberg" was not only heroized for having fulfilled his "patriotic duties," but also included as part of a progressive history tale leading to the rule of the SED in the GDR.⁶⁴ This appropriation of early German nationalism was not limited to late Stalinism but remained a constant over the course of the entire GDR. A new edition of Nettelbeck's autobiography had been scheduled for 1990, but the project was not realized due to the fall of the Iron Curtain. Its introduction, however, was published in 1999 in an edited volume alongside articles by well-known liberal intellectuals like Jürgen Kocka. The author, the historian Rolf Weber, was still full of praise for the hero of Kolberg and his lasting love for the "fatherland," and only criticized Nettelbeck's royalist "delusions."⁶⁵

As the previous analysis has demonstrated, there were several shifts in the public representation of Nettelbeck between 1807 and 1989. However,

many elements also remained constant. As we will illustrate in the next section, one of these was the erasure of Nettelbeck's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

BOUNDARY WORK: THE REPRESSION OF TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY

According to Bernhard Giesen, triumphant and tragic heroes are not the only important figures for collective identification: there are at least two additional figures, namely, victims and perpetrators. Giesen argues that the switch from one of the first three figures to that of the perpetrator triggers the development of trauma: “Nazi Germany is a paradigm case of a society whose members imagined themselves as triumphant heroes but—after the collapse of its rule—had to realize that they had been perpetrators.”⁶⁶ This line of argument can also be applied to the heroization of individuals beyond a “collapse” like 1945. In order to uphold the image of the triumphant hero and prevent the figure of the perpetrator from intruding, an immense boundary work is necessary. This is what happened in the heroization of Nettelbeck from 1807 to 1989: both the “defender of Kolberg” narrative and the “colonial pioneer” construction rested upon the repression of Nettelbeck’s participation in transatlantic slavery and the slave trade. It is worth clarifying that by “repression” we do not mean that this aspect was never addressed. On the contrary, Nettelbeck’s activities were often mentioned and implied. Instead, we mean that the triumphant hero’s involvement in transatlantic slavery was never discussed in ethical terms, that is, as a moral wrong for which accountability is to be ensured and which needs to be addressed responsibly according to the standards of the contemporary observer.

Many of the texts about Nettelbeck primarily targeted young readers. Because the purpose of these writings was to entrench him as a role model for the youth, his work on slaving vessels was particularly problematic. For the “colonial pioneer” construction, this part of Nettelbeck’s biography was a constitutive threat, as it undermined what had become, during the nineteenth century, the “humanitarian-abolitionist” justification of German colonialism: its “Kulturmission” to liberate the colonized from their self-imposed, age-old tyranny of slavery.⁶⁷ Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the repression of Nettelbeck’s

involvement in transatlantic slavery took numerous forms. We outline six strategies, which we name after their main activity: omitting, misnaming, partializing, inverting, ethicizing and historicizing.

Omitting

In many works, especially those that focused on Nettelbeck as the heroic defender of Kolberg, his time as first mate on a slaver was simply omitted. A representative example is an article that appeared in the first German weekly *Pfennig-Magazin für Belehrung und Unterhaltung* in 1845. Despite a title hinting at the entire biography, the article only dealt with Nettelbeck's actions in 1807.⁶⁸ Even in writings that thematized Nettelbeck's life in all its breadth, the trade in Africans was not mentioned.⁶⁹ For instance, in several eulogies that circulated in newspapers after his death in 1824 celebrating him as "first citizen of Prussia," this episode of his life was eclipsed.⁷⁰ Also in later years, Nettelbeck was marketed as a splendid role model for young people. An advertisement for a new edition of his memoir from 1863—which certainly contained his descriptions of the slave trade—praised the work in the following manner:

This autobiography of the brave Nettelbeck is one of the most beautiful and best folk books we have. Nettelbeck was a genuinely German original; no better heart has ever beaten on German soil. His stories are so simple and honest-hearted, his mind so patriotic, upright, brave and manly that the book must make a deep and benevolent impression on the receptive heart of youth.⁷¹

The two classical omissions are, unsurprisingly, Heyse's play and Harlan's movie. In both works, there is no mention or hint of Nettelbeck's role as a first mate on slavers. In addition to the ethical problems that had to be circumvented, this had practical reasons as well. A play/movie has a plot and too much diversion is simply not helpful in keeping the attention of the audience. Engaging with Nettelbeck's life as a sailor, be it his participation in transatlantic slavery or the many of his "adventures," would have posed the threat of burying its central message—the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the nation—with too much information.

Misnaming

The second strategy for dealing with Nettelbeck's involvement in the slave trade was deliberate concealment. A typical example is an article published in the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitschrift* in 1822 that passed over Nettelbeck's slaving activities with the following words: “[he] made several important trips, namely, to the west coast of Africa and to Suriname.”⁷² The most blatant example of this strategy is the previously mentioned article from the *Neue Würzburger Zeitung* that honored Nettelbeck as an early advocate for colonies: “In 1773, he had made a voyage to Guyana, and a leak had forced him to head to the coast between Suriname and Berbice, where he found at the river Corentyin an immensely fertile landscape that had not been appropriated by any other European power.” Nettelbeck's work on a Dutch slaver in the search for a market in the Caribbean in order to sell enslaved people is here misnamed and euphemized as a “voyage to Guyana.” His ideas on Prussia's engagement at the west African coast constitute a similar case: “But he could not get the beautiful colony out of his mind; he even considered setting up again a trading kontor in Africa in order to supply the colony with black workers, as it was common back then.” While Nettelbeck himself had spoken explicitly of the need for Prussia to establish a slaving post at the Gold Coast, this endeavor becomes a “trading kontor” with enslaved Black people from Africa being similarly transformed into the abstraction of “black workers.”⁷³

Partializing

An alternative form of repression was to mention solely Nettelbeck's first voyage on a slaver, which he had undertaken at the age of eleven in 1749. For example, Duller's *Die Männer des Volkes* only states that young Nettelbeck, aspiring to be a sailor, boarded a ship “destined for the slave trade on the coast of Guinea.” About his later career in navigation, Duller writes: “Fresh and free, the heart and head always in the right place, he restlessly made one sea voyage after the other … and not just on the seas of Europe, but on the waters of other parts of the world as well.”⁷⁴ The partializing strategy can still be found in the World War II field post edition of Nettelbeck's autobiography, where his participation in the slave trade

as a grown man was also left out.⁷⁵ In these cases, Nettelbeck's time on a slaver was limited to his boyhood and excused by his youth.

An extreme example of the partializing strategy is Neigebaur's book on "old Nettelbeck," where the rejection of slavery became part of Prussian nationalist identity. In order to reach this goal, Neigebaur creatively rewrote his hero's participation in the slave trade. About his first voyage as a boy on a slaving vessel, the book states that this ship only went to "Guinea" to trade gold dust and elephant teeth. While the author did not conceal the fact that Nettelbeck's second voyage in the early 1770s was on board a slaver, he again phrased it in such a way that the Prussian sailor, as chief helmsman, bore sole responsibility for steering the ship and, beyond that, engaging in the gold and gemstone trade. Regarding the slave trade, Nettelbeck was presented as a complete bystander. Carl, one of the fictional children in the book, commented on this alleged abstinence with the following statement: "I am pleased that Father Nettelbeck did not deal with the shameful slave trade." The fictional Nettelbeck responded: "What are you thinking? I, a Prussian, could not have thought of something like that. I did my duty as a helmsman and took no part in this shameful trade."⁷⁶

Ethicizing

To reframe Nettelbeck's "difficult" past in a positive way, authors repeatedly fell back on adding an ethical dimension to his involvement in the slave trade. The preface to the GDR edition of Nettelbeck's memoir from 1953 is a vivid example of this strategy. In this text, Nettelbeck participated in "the abominable slave trade ... by trying to humanize it through personal kindness."⁷⁷ According to this rewriting, Nettelbeck tried to improve the slave trade in ethical terms, making it more humane. A weaker version of this tendency to ethicize Nettelbeck's participation in transatlantic slavery was to emphasize how "sincere" his later attitude toward slavery was. Thus, the GDR historian Rolf Weber wrote in 1999:

In his book, at a distance of half a century, Nettelbeck sincerely condemned the slave trade. However, he by no means tried to deny or minimize his participation, and his argument that according to the general understanding of his time the traffic in slaves was a busi-

ness just like any other may suggest that he did not recall this dark chapter of his life without a bad conscience.⁷⁸

Nettelbeck is here depicted as a good person who is haunted by his former evildoing and did not relativize anything—an interpretation that is refuted by Nettelbeck's own apologetic self-description.

Inverting

Another repression strategy was to retrospectively present Nettelbeck as being more critical of slavery than he actually was and to stage him as an opponent of the slave trade already during his time on board. For example, in a summary of the autobiography from 1826, Nettelbeck's involvement was discussed as if the Prussian sailor had always rejected the trade: "Even back then, when this craft was not yet in such disrepute, the philanthropic Nettelbeck disliked dealing with the trade in negroes."⁷⁹ Also in Robert Koenig's adaptation, published in 1873, additional statements critical of slavery are attributed to the fictional Nettelbeck when recounting his life story. It was emphasized that Prussia would actively oppose the slave trade if it only had "a colony over there!"⁸⁰ While Koenig reported in some detail on Nettelbeck's second journey aboard a slaver, he also left out numerous sections, such as the treatment of the enslaved during the Middle Passage, where Nettelbeck's exercise of violence becomes obvious. The most bizarre version of this strategy can be found in Curt Maronde's *Schiffer Nettelbeck*, where the Prussian sailor is presented as someone who had been an abolitionist for his entire life and who had always placed moral principles above self-interest and economic profit.⁸¹

Historicizing

As we have previously discussed, Nettelbeck's memoir used the "child of its time" apology. Consequently, this strategy is probably the most common framing in the texts that mention Nettelbeck's involvement in the slave trade, meaning that human trafficking was quite normal and therefore ethically unproblematic during his lifetime.⁸² Soon after Nettelbeck's death, the writer F. W. von Cölln openly opposed slavery: "That's how you treated people back then! Thank goodness, the shameful slave trade

will probably end completely soon.” However, he also emphasized that, by participating in the slaving business, Nettelbeck had done nothing wrong according to the standards of his time: “Without being ashamed of the slave trade, which was common at the time, he also did some business for himself here.”⁸³ Through this reading, the author could describe Nettelbeck as an impeccable character despite his central position aboard slavers.

The same strategy was still employed in the second half of the nineteenth century, as illustrated by G. Mensch’s adaptation of Nettelbeck’s memoir. The author did not only criticize slavery with strong words but also supplemented his work with a drawing of the slave market in Paramaribo and provided his readers with a short treatise on the history of slavery and the slave trade. Nevertheless, he also stated that these practices had been perceived as legitimate for centuries and, consequently, wrote about Nettelbeck:

A hundred years ago, the time had not yet come to assert the eternal, God-given rights of man; custom was more important than reason and Christianity; conventions were more powerful than the law.... The slave trade was a trade like any other. Should Nettelbeck have refused to use his knowledge and to serve a slave trader? It was enough for him to keep his hand away from cruelty, deceit and robbery.⁸⁴

Nettelbeck is here characterized as someone who merely “served” a “slave trader” and kept “his hand away from cruelty, deceit and robbery.” In his article in the *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, Katterfeld simply quoted the respective passage of Nettelbeck’s autobiography.⁸⁵ In the GDR reception, the “child of its time” trope can be found even literally: Nettelbeck was depicted “as an individual, being entirely a child of his time, such as with regard to the abominable slave trade, in which he participated.”⁸⁶ The following section will demonstrate that, even in the 2000s, this line of argument has remained popular.

FROM “HERO” TO “PERPETRATOR”: PUBLIC DEBATES ABOUT NETTELBECK SINCE 2008

After 1989, Nettelbeck fell, to a considerable extent, into oblivion. As “post-heroic times” had begun, the “defender of Kolberg” narrative seemed

to be somehow outdated and did not resonate easily with post-unification nationalism and racism. Nevertheless, Nettelbeck remained present—at least in the thirty German cities where public spaces were named after him. In 2008, postcolonial initiatives started to challenge his commemorative presence by exposing what had been repressed so far—Nettelbeck’s participation in transatlantic slavery. For them, Nettelbeck was no longer a hero, but a perpetrator of a crime against humanity. Accordingly, a dossier about street names linked to colonialism in Berlin presented Nettelbeck as someone who had been involved in human trafficking, a “captain on Dutch slavers,” and a “colonial lobbyist” for several decades.⁸⁷ In 2010, Nettelbeck was included in the traveling exhibition *freedom roads*, which problematized colonial street names. The entry on him was nearly identical to the one featured in the 2008 dossier, adding only that the Nazis had venerated him.⁸⁸

The first proposal to rename a street honoring Nettelbeck was made in Dortmund in 2014. After having been asked to review “charged street names,” the city archive suggested renaming six streets, amongst them Nettelbeckstraße. The justification placed some emphasis on the *Kolberg* movie:

Nettelbeck was involved in human trafficking as a captain on Dutch slavers and acted as a colonial propagandist for decades, well before the onset of German colonialism. He was highly honored during the Nazi era. In the movie *Kolberg* by Veit Harlan, he was presented as a hell-bent prophet of victory. In the movie, he states that the people of Kolberg would “rather be buried under piles of rubble than hand over their city.”⁸⁹

The submission of the proposal before the appropriate city body in November 2014 sparked a heated debate. The Christian Democrats claimed that Nettelbeck’s links to the Nazis were entirely constructed. The right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) argued that the Nazis had “abused” the sailor as they had done with the poet Friedrich Schiller. In turn, the Social Democrats stressed that Nettelbeck’s actions should not be evaluated according to the standards of his time. Otherwise, people responsible for the deaths at the Berlin Wall would also have to be exculpated, as this had not been illegal under GDR law. In response, the AfD claimed that Nettelbeck had not been a slave trader but only a worker aboard a

slaver—just as the snipers at the Berlin Wall had worked for criminals, thereby reinforcing another aspect of the repression strategy of historicizing. As regards personal responsibility, Christian Democrats compared Nettelbeck to a tax evader, which provoked the Green Party to insist on the difference between the slave trade and tax evasion. The director of the city archive, Stefan Mühlhofer, backed the proposal to rename the street by emphasizing that it was based on an all-things-considered judgment of Nettelbeck's actions. In the end, there was no vote in the city body on Nettelbeckstraße.⁹⁰

In spring 2020, the Initiative of Black People in Germany (Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland, ISD) and Decolonize Erfurt started a campaign to rename Erfurt's Nettelbeckufer after Gert Schramm (1928–2016), a Black survivor of the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald, an antifascist militant and bearer of the Federal Cross of Merit (the highest medal of contemporary Germany), who had been born on the very same street in Erfurt.⁹¹ Tahir Della, a leading activist of the ISD on the federal level, explained the demand to rename the street in the following way:

We, as ISD, have to realize again and again that, in Germany, people are still honored with street names when, in fact, they are not really honorable, to put it mildly.... The current eponym Joachim Nettelbeck (1738–1824) was a Prussian sailor who was involved in the transatlantic slave trade and tried to persuade three Prussian kings to acquire colonies, and, as the defender of his hometown Kolberg, became a nationalist “folk hero” and a prototype for the militarization of the German bourgeoisie.⁹²

Between 2020 and 2023, the Erfurt campaign organized a petition, support letters, rallies, (online) readings, glossy brochures, direct mails, a public screening of the Nazi propaganda movie *Kolberg*, a scientific report on Nettelbeck, and a series of conversations with experts titled “Im Dekolonialsalon,” where one of the authors of this article was invited to talk about abolitionism in Germany.⁹³ The campaign received intense media coverage, with more than fifty articles and reports in primarily local and regional mainstream media.⁹⁴ This press coverage fueled the public debate about Erfurt's colonial legacy, which had started with an exhibition titled *Colonialism in Erfurt, 1503 until Today* and decolonial city tours in spring 2019.

The campaign also had immediate effects transcending the locale. Referring to the Erfurt campaign, the city of Eberswalde, where Gert Schramm had lived for decades, decided to name the square in front of the train station after him in November 2020.⁹⁵ One month later, the city of Dortmund decided to rename its Nettelbeckstraße.⁹⁶ In August 2021, the city of Berlin decided to rename its Nettelbeckplatz. The local heritage association has suggested renaming the square “Platz der unbessungenen Heldeninnen” (Square of the Unsung Heroines) to honor local women who had saved Jewish compatriots during the Nazi era and who are commemorated in Yad Vashem.⁹⁷

In two brochures, Decolonize Erfurt and the ISD have emphasized the multiperspectivity of the campaign. Renaming the Nettelbeckufer as Gert-Schramm-Ufer would promote a “multidirectional memory culture,” connecting the remembrance of three German “regimes of injustice.”⁹⁸ Indeed, the ancestors of Gert Schramm, the Black survivor of Buchenwald, had been enslaved in the Caribbean: “The linkage of colonialism and NS, which in Nettelbeck’s case has its place on the perpetrator’s side, exists in his case on the victim’s side.” The renaming would provide a double “switch of perspective from perpetrator to victim.”⁹⁹ In this regard, Mirjam Elomda, from the local chapter of the ISD, has contextualized the Erfurt campaign within the Black Lives Matter movement:

At the moment, there are protests against racism and police violence all over the world. In the course of these protests, many people no longer accept that the slave trade and colonialism are honored in public space. With the renaming of the Nettelbeckufer as Gert-Schramm-Ufer, Erfurt has the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that Black people are recognized as equal members of the community.¹⁰⁰

Resistance against the renaming of Erfurt’s Nettelbeckufer has come from several sides. Residents of this street argued that a renaming would imply a “material, financial and physical effort” that is “simply not reasonable and also not proportionate.”¹⁰¹ The right-wing AfD launched a counter-campaign that built on the heroization of Nettelbeck in the GDR. The party argued that Nettelbeck should not be reduced to his participation in the slave trade, and instead analogized his trespassing of feudal social norms to the right-wing populist opposition against the “elites”:

Streets were named after Nettelbeck because he stood up for his city, did not shy away from conflict with the authorities and acted as a patriot in the fight against Napoleon. Hence, he became a folk hero because he worked hard for goals that are, for parts of the political spectrum, anathema, but are still appreciated by many people.¹⁰²

In spring 2021, Erfurt's social democratic mayor also sided against the renaming, arguing that the Nettelbeckufer had been named after the sailor to honor his role in Kolberg and not his involvement in the slave trade. He added that historical figures should not be judged on the grounds of contemporary standards, but on those of their time.¹⁰³ At this point, several well-known historians joined the public debate. In reply to the statements of the mayor, the historian Jürgen Zimmerer argued:

When a discussion arises about street names, as in this case, and the city decides not to allow a change, then this is de facto a new decision—which must be judged by our current ideas and values. Afterwards, the argument cannot be used as an excuse that back then, however, judgments were made according to other standards.¹⁰⁴

In this context, Zimmerer also questioned the appropriateness of a solely Eurocentric perspective on Nettelbeck's actions: “For the enslaved people, he was certainly not a role model, they surely did not agree. We just don't ask about it.” Reactions to renaming campaigns, Zimmerer further suggested, are so excessive because many majority Germans still do not want to allow Black Germans or people with a so-called “migration background” “a right to participate in negotiating German identity. That's the basic conflict in the struggles over memory and remembrance that we're now experiencing everywhere.”¹⁰⁵

Shortly afterwards, Erfurt's city council decided to organize a round-table where proponents and opponents of the renaming should come to an agreement. After a year had been spent in the preparations by the city administration, the residents opposing the renaming declared in summer 2022 that they were no longer willing to participate in the roundtable. The mayor then suggested that the city council should decide *not* to rename the Nettelbeckufer (although there had not been any draft proposal for the renaming in the council), and should, instead, rename an uninhabited part of a close-by street after Gert Schramm, which was actually a synthesis of

two former proposals from the right-wing AfD and the Christian Democrats.¹⁰⁶ In March 2023, the city council followed the mayor's suggestion with the votes from the AfD, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. In September 2023, Erfurt inaugurated its Gert-Schramm-Straße with a ceremony to which neither the family of the eponym nor the ISD, Decolonize Erfurt or the Buchenwald Memorial were invited.¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION: DECONSTRUCTION AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY

We have titled this article “Deconstructing a National Hero” and addressed the two sides of deconstruction—the negative as well as the positive. The former involves breaking down semantic boundaries and making visible what has been repressed in hegemonic narratives.¹⁰⁸ We have demonstrated that the heroization of the Prussian sailor Joachim Nettelbeck rested upon a repression of his involvement in transatlantic slavery. In doing so, we have differentiated two main narratives of this heroization and analyzed six strategies of boundary work shielding the triumphant hero from the gnawing consciousness of the injustice of human trafficking. We have then traced the negative work of deconstruction in situ, as it has been practiced by postcolonial civil society initiatives since 2008. These initiatives have overcome the repression and brought Nettelbeck’s work on Dutch slavers to the fore, making it a topic of public conversation. Due to social activism, the triumphant “hero” has turned into a “perpetrator,” who has been part of a crime against humanity that is still haunting us with its lingering effects. According to the activists, the ongoing tribute to such figures as eponyms of streets has to stop.

The positive dimension of deconstruction involves putting the parts together after the repression of some of them has come to an end. In a case like Nettelbeck’s, this is equivalent to the work of multidirectional memory. We have shown that such work has started in practice as well. The call for renaming streets has referred not only to Nettelbeck’s involvement in transatlantic slavery but also to his heroization as the defender of Kolberg and was explicitly couched, in the Erfurt campaign, in the language of multidirectional memory. What has not been accomplished so far, however, is a systematic reconstruction of the multiperspectivity of Nettelbeck as a public memory figure. Further research is needed in

this regard. Such a reconstruction would elaborate on several levels—the most important being the connections between German nationalism, colonialism and transatlantic slavery.

Nettelbeck is the best-known German individual who participated in transatlantic slavery. Rather than being an exception, he was but one German profiteer amongst many. His autobiography illustrates that large numbers of German-speaking individuals were involved not only in slaving vessels but also in trading posts and plantations.¹⁰⁹ While there have been individual efforts on the part of historians to research this topic for the last twenty years, there is currently a rise of systematic historical research on German involvement in the slaving business and the associated presence of enslaved and free Black people in the German-speaking territories, even before the late nineteenth century. It is safe to assume that this research agenda is interconnected with and influenced by the changing public discourse and, especially, the interventions of BIPOC and postcolonial civil society initiatives. In fact, this article is a case in point, as it would not have been written without the activism that has challenged the commemorative presence of the Prussian sailor and slave trader Joachim Nettelbeck. In our view, this clearly demonstrates that there are no insurmountable barriers between scholarship and political engagement. On the contrary, they may mutually enrich one another.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft, eds., *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680–1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016); Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Pia Wiegminck, eds., *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer and Sarah Lentz, eds., *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). See also Klaus Weber, “Mitteleuropa und der transatlantische Sklavenhandel: Eine lange Geschichte,” *Werkstatt Geschichte* 66/67 (2014): 7–30.

2. For an overview of the public spaces named after Nettelbeck in Germany, see <https://www.strassen-in-deutschland.de/nettelbeckstrasse-in-deutschland-4241655.html>. There are currently (May 2024) twenty-six Nettelbeckstraßen (the one in Bochum, however, refers to a creek, so there are actually twenty-five named after the Prussian sailor), three Nettelbeckwege, one Nettelbeckplatz and one Net-

telbeckufer. Only one of the thirty spaces, Erfurt's Nettelbeckufer, is in eastern Germany, while the rest are in the west. For two of the thirty spaces—Berlin's Nettelbeckplatz and Dortmund's Nettelbeckstraße—there has been a decision to rename them, which, however, has not as yet (May 2024) been realized.

3. Work focusing on Nettelbeck's role in Kolberg includes Hermann Klaje, *Joachim Nettelbeck* (Kolberg: Post'sche Buchdruckerei, 1927); Hans-Jürgen Eitner, *Kolberg: Ein preußischer Mythos* (Berlin: edition q, 1999), chap. 5; Roland Gehrke, "Kolberg – Taurogen – Breslau: Rezeption und geschichtspolitische Deutung der Napoleonischen Kriege in den preußischen Ostprovinzen," in Caroline Klausing and Verena von Wiczlinski, eds., *Die Napoleonischen Kriege in der europäischen Erinnerung* (Bielefeld: Transkript, 2017), 213–41. For the Nazi propaganda movie *Kolberg*, see David Culbert, "Kolberg: Goebbels' Wunderwaffe as Counterfactual History," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 125–41; Ulrich Gehrke, *Veit Harlan und der "Kolberg"-Film: Filmregie zwischen Geschichte, NS-Propaganda und Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Hamburg: Self-published, 2011); Dirk Kretzschmar, "Kolberg – der Film," *Jahrbuch der Schillergesellschaft* 60 (2016): 345–62.

4. Urs Lindner, Cécile Stehrenberger and Florian Wagner, "Stellungnahme zur Umbenennung des Erfurter Nettelbeckufer in Gert-Schramm-Ufer," Erfurt, April 6, 2020, <https://decolonizeerfurt.wordpress.com/wissenschaftliches-gutachten-zur-umbenennung-des-erfurter-nettelbeckufers-in-gert-schramm-ufer/>.

5. The first two volumes were published in 1821. The third volume, which appeared in 1823, was compiled by Nettelbeck's friend and editor, the Reverend Johann Christian Ludwig Haken, based on notes and conversations with the Prussian sailor. Still, there are strong reasons, as Hermann Klaje has demonstrated, to assign authorship to Nettelbeck himself. See Klaje, *Joachim Nettelbeck*.

6. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg: Eine Lebensbeschreibung, von ihm selbst aufgezeichnet und herausgegeben von J. C. L. Haken*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1821), 25–29, 36–37.

7. Ibid., 247–48.

8. Lindner, Stehrenberger and Wagner, "Stellungnahme."

9. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg: Eine Lebensbeschreibung, von ihm selbst aufgezeichnet und herausgegeben von J. C. L. Haken*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1821), 1, 100.

10. Ibid., 84, 89, 11–14.

11. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 1:25.

12. Sarah Lentz, "Wer helfen kann, der helfe!" *Deutsche SklavereigegnerInnen und die atlantische Abolitionsbewegung, 1780–1860* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

13. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 2:2 (translation by the authors, as well as all further quotations from German sources).
14. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg: Eine Lebensbeschreibung, von ihm selbst aufgezeichnet und herausgegeben von J. C. L. Haken*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1823), 21.
15. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 2:23.
16. Ibid., 219.
17. Olaf Jessen, “Das Volk steht auf, der Sturm bricht los!” Kolberg 1807 – Bündnis zwischen Bürger und Soldat?,” in Veit Velzke, ed., *Für die Freiheit – gegen Napoleon: Ferdinand von Schill, Preußen und die deutsche Nation* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009), 39–57.
18. See *Magdeburger Zeitung*, March 23, 1861.
19. Historians who have focused on the details of the Kolberg siege have argued that Nettelbeck massively exaggerated his contribution to the defense of the Pomeranian city and unfairly discredited Lucadou. Cf. Klaje, *Joachim Nettelbeck*, 110; Eitner, *Kolberg*, 108.
20. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 3:64.
21. The foundational text of the “death for the fatherland” trope is Thomas Abbt, *Vom Tode für das Vaterland* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1761).
22. Dieter Langewiesche, “‘Nation,’ ‘Nationalismus,’ ‘Nationalstaat’ in der europäischen Geschichte seit dem Mittelalter – Versuch einer Bilanz,” in Dieter Langewiesche and Georg Schmidt, eds., *Föderative Nation: Deutschlandkonzepte vom Mittelalter bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (München: Oldenbourg, 2000), 12.
23. For an overview, see Ute Planert, “Wann beginnt der ‘moderne’ deutsche Nationalismus? Plädoyer für eine nationale Sattelzeit,” in Jörg Echternkamp and Sven Oliver Müller, eds., *Die Politik der Nation: Deutscher Nationalismus in Krieg und Krisen 1760–1960* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002), 25–59.
24. Christian Jansen, “The Formation of German Nationalism, 1740–1850,” in Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234–59.
25. Eckhart Hellmuth, “Die ‘Wiedergeburt’ Friedrichs des Großen und der ‘Tod fürs Vaterland’: Zum patriotischen Selbstverständnis in Preußen in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Aufklärung* 2 (1998): 23–54.
26. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 2:164–65. On the concept of interpellation, see Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121–76.
27. For a current articulation of this apologetic view, see Joachim Nettelbeck and Alexandra Kemmerer, “Des Seefahrers Widersprüche: Ein Gespräch,” *Zeit-*

schrift für Ideengeschichte 1 (2021): 121–24. (Nettelbeck, a descendant of Joachim Nettlebeck, was born in 1944 and named after his ancestor.)

28. Klaje, *Joachim Nettelbeck*, 166–75.

29. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 3:20. It is not surprising that Nettelbeck himself used the language of patriotism. In Germany, nationalists have always called themselves patriots, as the case of the right-wing PEGIDA movement (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes) has shown in the 2010s. If the criterion for nationalism is that the concepts of nation, ethnos or fatherland become the ultimate political value, then Nettelbeck was clearly a nationalist. The research on early German nationalism to which we refer in this article has demonstrated that the distinction between benign pre-1807 patriotism and malicious post-1807 nationalism, which had guided earlier research, is untenable.

30. Ulrich Bröckling, *Postheroische Helden: Ein Zeitbild* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020).

31. Gehrke, “Kolberg – Tauroggen – Breslau,” 215.

32. The Kolberg myth also included a tragic hero: Ferdinand von Schill, whose cavalry charges were relevant only at the beginning of the siege and who was killed by the French in his premature insurrection against Napoleon in 1809. For the distinction between triumphant and tragic heroes, see Bernhard Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).

33. Klaje, *Joachim Nettelbeck*, 137.

34. Quoted from *ibid.* 139–40.

35. Tobias Schlechtriemen, “The Hero as an Effect: Boundary Work in the Process of Heroization,” *helden, heroes, héros* 5 (2019): 17–26.

36. *Tagebuch von der Belagerung der Festung Colberg im Jahr 1807: Nebst einem Anhang, enthaltend: authentische Nachrichten von dem Königl. Preuß. Major Ferdinand von Schill und dem Bürgerrepräsentanten Nettelbeck zu Colberg* (Berlin: Ernst Littfas, 1808), 120.

37. Johann Daniel Ferdinand Negebaur, *Der alte Nettelbeck: Ein Unterhaltungsbuch zunächst für die Preußische Jugend zur Beförderung wahrer Vaterlandsliebe* (Hamm: Wundermann, 1841), 134.

38. Negebaur, *Der alte Nettelbeck*, 133. For the partial ban on slavery, see Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, “Verhandelte (Un-)Freiheit: Sklaverei, Leibeigenschaft und innereuropäischer Wissenstransfer am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhundert,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 3 (2017): 347–80.

39. Eduard Duller, “Joachim Nettelbeck,” in Eduard Duller, ed., *Die Männer des Volks dargestellt von Freunden des Volks*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Weidinger, 1849), 318–19, 321, 328.

40. Ibid., 323. See Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, eds., *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208–26.

41. Paul Heyse, *Colberg: Historisches Schauspiel in fünf Akten* (New York: Maynard, 1894), 110. One may wonder whether the figure of Heinrich, as a merchant, self-declared cosmopolitan, admirer of Napoleon, rationalist and defeatist, invokes antisemitic tropes and whether *Colberg* is also a tale of Jewish assimilation: Jews are allowed to be part of the community as soon as they stop being rationalists and cosmopolitans, among other features. This would fit with Heyse's personal background, as his mother was from a converted Jewish family.

42. *Magdeburger Zeitung*, March 23, 1861.

43. Dirk Niefanger, "Colberg: Kontext, Poetik und Struktur von Paul Heyses Geschichtsdrama," *Jahrbuch der Schillergesellschaft* 60 (2016): 319–43.

44. Congratulatory telegram from Wilhelm II, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 7, 1903.

45. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Mein Leben* (Zeulenroda: Bernhard Sporn, 1938).

46. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Des Seefahrers und aufrechten Bürgers wundersame Lebensgeschichte* (Cologne: Schaffstein, 1942).

47. Rolf Italiaander, "Joachim Nettelbeck und seine Lebensgeschichte," in Joachim Nettelbeck, *Mein Leben*, 37, 27.

48. Nettelbeck and Kemmerer, "Des Seefahrers Widersprüche," 121.

49. Harlan is best known today for directing the antisemitic hate movie *Jud Süß* (1940). See Frank Noack, *Veit Harlan: The Life and Work of a Nazi Filmmaker* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

50. Veit Harlan, *Im Schatten meiner Filme* (Gütersloh: Siegbert Mohn, 1966), 181.

51. Goebbels's diary, June 5, 1943, quoted from Noack, *Veit Harlan*, 214.

52. *Neue Würzburger Zeitung*, January 17, 1843.

53. Dr. A. Katterfeld, "Joachim Nettelbeck als Vorkämpfer für eine Deutsche Kolonialpolitik," *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 6 (1886): 170.

54. *Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 18, 1903.

55. Curt Maronde, *Schiffer Nettelbeck: Der Roman eines abenteuerlichen Lebens* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1936), 36.

56. See, for example, Ernst A. Olbert, *England als Sklavenhändler und Sklavenhalter* (Berlin: Erich Zander, 1940), 25–29.

57. Curt Maronde, *Schiffer Nettelbeck: Der Roman eines abenteuerlichen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Jugendbuch-Vertrieb, 1954). In the new edition, Maronde claimed that Nettelbeck had pursued only one main goal in his life: the abolition of the slave trade. With regard to the front cover rhetoric of the postwar edition,

see Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964; New York: Routledge, 2002).

58. Joachim Nettelbeck, *Lebensbeschreibung des Seefahrers, Patrioten und Sklavenhändlers* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1987). Instead, the memoir was praised as an adventurer and sailor novel, providing information about the “dark sides” of the eighteenth century. The 1986 *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute) concerned the relationship between Nazi and Stalinist crimes and the question of German responsibility for the Holocaust.

59. Stadtarchiv Gütersloh, Bestand E Nr. 2222.

60. Hans-Helmut Knütter, “Joachim Nettelbeck,” in Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen, ed., *Ostdeutsche Gedenktage 1988* (Bonn: Self-publication, 1987), 124.

61. For an overview, see Urs Lindner, “Geschichtspolitik in der DDR: Wie kam der Sklavenhändler wieder zu Ehren?” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 1, 2021.

62. Walter Ulbricht, July 9, 1952, quoted from Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, “Die Befreiungskriege in der Geschichtspolitik der SED,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 6 (2017): 517.

63. Ibid. Thus, the following analogy was made: NATO was Napoleon, Adenauer, the first chancellor of the FRG, was one of their vassals, whereas the GDR and the Soviet Union reenacted the historical coalition of Prussia and Tsarist Russia that had liberated Germany from foreign occupation.

64. Fritz Zschech, “Vorwort,” in Joachim Nettelbeck, *Ein abenteuerliches Leben von ihm selbst erzählt* (Rudolstadt: Greifen Verlag, 1953), 5–8. There is even some friendly criticism toward Nettelbeck. The sailor had not completely understood the role history had assigned to him, that is, to stand for Germany’s national aspirations, and not for Prussia’s.

65. Rolf Weber, “Joachim Nettelbeck – ein royalistischer Patriot,” in Wolfgang Küttler, ed., *Das lange 19. Jahrhundert: Personen – Ereignisse – Ideen – Umwälzungen*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 1999), 105–18.

66. Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, 3.

67. Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

68. “Joachim Nettelbeck,” *Pfennig-Magazin für Belehrung und Unterhaltung*, January 11, 1845.

69. See, for example, Amalie von Helwig, “Ueber Joachim Nettelbeck’s Leben,” *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 59 (March 1822): 233–34.

70. “Preußen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 9, 1824.

71. “Literarische Mittheilungen,” *St. Galler Blätter für Unterhaltung, Belehrung und literarische Mitteilungen* 50 (1863): 201.

72. "Vermischte Schriften," *Jenaische allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 49 (March 1822): 392.

73. "Deutsche Seefahrt," *Neue Würzburger Zeitung*, January 17, 1843.

74. Duller, "Joachim Nettelbeck," 322.

75. Nettelbeck, *Des Seefahrers*.

76. Negebaur, *Der alte Nettelbeck*, 21, 137.

77. Zschech, "Vorwort," 8.

78. Weber, "Joachim Nettelbeck," 111.

79. "Joachim Nettelbeck," *Neuer Nekrolog der Deutschen* 2 (1826): 277.

80. Robert Koenig, *Der alte Nettelbeck und die Belagerung von Kolberg für die deutsche Jugend erzählt* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1873), 10.

81. Maronde, *Schiffer Nettelbeck* (1936), 136.

82. See, for instance, Willibald Alexis, *Nettelbeck* (Berlin: Carl Barthol, 1855), 7, 31–32; Hans v. Zoebelitz, "Der alte Nettelbeck," in *Daheim-Kalender für das Deutsche Reich: Aus dem Gemeinjahr 1907* (Bielefeld/Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1908), 100–113.

83. F. W. von Cölln, "Joachim Nettelbeck: Colbergs erster Bürger," *Didaskalia oder Blätter für Geist, Gemüth und Publizität*, April 19, 1824.

84. G. Mensch, *J. C. Nettelbeck; Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild für Jung und Alt* (Breslau: Eduard Trewendt, 1868), 58.

85. Katterfeld, "Joachim Nettelbeck."

86. Zschech, "Vorwort," 8.

87. See Joshua Kwesi Aikins and Christian Kopp, "Dossier: Straßennamen mit Bezügen zum Kolonialismus in Berlin" (2008), 4. As already explained, Nettelbeck served as captain on a Dutch slaver only when returning from the Caribbean and not during and before the Middle Passage.

88. freedom roads, "koloniale Straßennamen–postkoloniale Erinnerungskultur," <http://www.freedom-roads.de/frrd/akteur.htm>.

89. "Niederschrift (öffentlich) über die 1. Sitzung des Ausschusses für Bürgerdienste, öffentliche Ordnung, Anregungen und Beschwerden am 09.09.2014," <https://rathaus.dortmund.de/dosys/doRat.nsf/NiederschriftXP.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=A9B2C8E93CDB548AC1257D8C001E9051>.

90. "Nettelbeck- und Speestraße: Kontroverse Debatte um fragwürdige Namenspatrone in der Nordstadt," *Nordstadtblogger*, November 6, 2014, <https://www.nordstadtblogger.de/nettelbeck-und-speestrasse-kontroverse-debatte-um-strassennamen-der/>.

91. For overviews of the campaign, see Matthias Dell, "Erfurt zum Beispiel: Zur Frage der Straßennamen," *Merkur*, no. 880, September 2022, 42–53; Matthias Dell, "Umbenennung von Straßennamen: Das Erfurter Nettelbeckufer soll nicht den Namen von Gert Schramm tragen," *Zeit Online*, March 8, 2023. For further

information on Gert Schramm, see his autobiography: Gert Schramm, *Wer hat Angst vom schwarzen Mann* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011).

92. “Die Präsenz des Kolonialismus in Deutschland – Im Gespräch mit Bafta Sarbo und Tahir Della von der ISD,” July 8, 2020, <https://diefreiheitsliebe.de/politik/die-praesenz-des-kolonialismus-in-deutschland-im-gespraech-mit-bafta-sarbo-und-tahir-della-von-der-isd/>.

93. Sarah Lentz, “Deutsche Sklavereikritik um 1820,” digital conversation “Im Dekolonialsalon,” Erfurt, March 9, 2021.

94. See, in particular, Peter Reif-Spirek, “Debatte um Erfurter Straßennamen: Neue Blicke auf die Stadtgeschichte,” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, May 29, 2020; Sabine Schmolinksy and Florian Wagner, “Mögliche Straßenumbenennung: Geschichte als Ranke-Spiel?” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, July 24, 2020; Annegret Schüle, “Herzensangelegenheit oder reine Pflichterfüllung?” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, October 7, 2020.

95. Matthias Dell, “Ehrung von Gert Schramm an zentraler Stelle beschlossen,” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, November 27, 2020.

96. The draft resolution of the Greens included the following statement: “The reason for the reconsideration of the topic is the growing discussion about the crimes of the colonial past, particularly the activities of the initiative ‘Decolonize Erfurt.’” See “Niederschrift (öffentlich) über die 2. Sitzung der Bezirksvertretung Innenstadt-Nord am 09.12.2020,” <https://rathaus.dortmund.de/dosys/doRat.nsf/NiederschriftXP.xsp?action=openDocument&cdocumentId=E4EFEAB4CAA6B618C1258679003AE2B3>. In February 2024, the city body decided to rename Nettelbeckstraße after the Black German poet and activist May Ayim (1960–96). See “Die Nettelbeckstraße soll nach der Dichterin May Ayim benannt werden: Die Bezirksvertretung Nordstadt entschied über Straßennamen und Vereinsförderung,” *Nordstadtblogger*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.nordstadtblogger.de/die-bezirksvertretung-nordstadt-entschied-ueber-strassennamen-und-vereinsfoerderung/>.

97. Andrei Schnell, “Namensputz am Nettelbeckplatz,” November 17, 2021, <https://weddingweiser.de/nettelbeckplatz-umbenennen/>. Currently (May 2024), a commission is selecting three out of more than 500 suggestions for a new street name, which will then be decided upon in the responsible city body. See “Profiteur vom Sklavenhandel gewidmet: Umbenennung des Nettelbeckplatzes in Wedding rückt näher,” *rbb24*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2024/02/berlin-wedding-nettelbeckplatz-umbenennung-joachim-nettelbeck-sklavenhandel-Kolonialzeit.html>.

98. Decolonize Erfurt and Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland, “Das Nettelbeckufer und Erfurts koloniales Erbe: Aufarbeitung oder Verdrängung?,” June 6, 2020, <https://decolonizeffurt.wordpress.com/2020/06/06/neue->

infobroschure-das-nettelbeckufer-und-erfurts-koloniales-erbe-aufarbeitung-oder-verdrangung/?fbclid=IwAR2re7xDx_2UtCdAV5GUBPJaXRGsViZO0-8tDVNdvn-8fIVEm2WeK8Rrl0mc. On multidirectional memory, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

99. Decolonize Erfurt, “Zwölf Missverständnisse in der Diskussion zur Umbenennung des Nettelbeckufers,” November 22, 2021, <https://decolonizeerfurt.wordpress.com/2021/11/22/zwolf-missverstandnisse-in-der-diskussion-zur-umbenennung-des-nettelbeckufers/>.

100. Casjen Carl, “Umbenennung des Nettelbeckufers ist Chance für Erfurt,” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, June 16, 2020.

101. Letter from Dr. Rompf to Mayor Bausewein, June 29, 2020. Decolonize Erfurt reacted with a listing of the actual costs and effort. See “Die Umbenennung – Zahlen und Fakten,” <https://decolonizeerfurt.wordpress.com/die-umbenennung-zahlen-und-fakten/>.

102. “Nettelbeckufer bleibt!,” July 8, 2020, <https://afd-ef.de/nettelbeckufer-bleibt/>.

103. Holger Wetzel, “Bausewein gegen die Umbenennung des Erfurter Nettelbeckufers,” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, February 2, 2021.

104. Jürgen Zimmerer, “Denkmäler werden ständig errichtet und abgebaut,” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, February 11, 2021. See also the director of the Buchenwald Memorial, Jens-Christian Wagner, “Nettelbeckufer in Erfurt: Historiker für Umbenennung der Straße,” *MDR.DE*, February 22, 2021.

105. Zimmerer, “Denkmäler werden ständig errichtet und abgebaut.”

106. Dell, “Umbenennung von Straßennamen.”

107. Casjen Carl, “Gert-Schramm-Straße eingeweiht: Ist Nettelbeck-Streit in Erfurt beendet?” *Thüringer Allgemeine*, September 5, 2023.

108. Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy: The Language of Criticism and the Science of Man* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), 247–64.

109. Nettelbeck, *Bürger zu Colberg*, 1:36 and 2:22.

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