

Information document

Mémoires Complexes : La colonisation et ses Héritages multiples

Project in progress – May 2025

The "Mémoires Complexes: La Colonisation et Ses Héritages Multiples" is an initiative aimed at creating an international travelling exhibition organised from city to city. The aim of the exhibition is to explore, with rigour and nuance, the complexity of colonial history, focusing on the colonisation of African countries while incorporating comparative perspectives from other regions of the world. This exhibition is preceded by a research phase organised with partners such as universities, foundations and other associations. It actually involves field missions organised in several regions of Africa, to record oral histories and testimonies of descendants of colonised populations, paying particular attention to stories never told. Access to archives that have often been little explored, including administrative documents, correspondence and diaries from colonial periods. Photography, video and the collection of artefacts to document the tangible aspects of the colonial legacy.

The "Mémoires Complexes" exhibition aims to bring about a change in the way contemporary societies understand and relate to their colonial past. By encouraging a confrontation with narratives that are often ignored or contested, the project hopes to facilitate processes of reconciliation between communities, acknowledging the suffering of the past while exploring paths towards a shared future.

Basis of the project

The "Mémoires Complexes" project is part of a global context characterised by a critical and often contentious reappraisal of the colonial legacy. Both in the former metropolises and in the formerly colonised countries, there is a growing desire to re-examine the profound impact of colonisation on national identities and contemporary international dynamics. This movement is accompanied by intense public debate, decolonisation initiatives in academic and cultural institutions, and demands for the restitution of cultural objects looted during colonisation. At the same time, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and other anti-racist initiatives have reinforced the need to approach colonial legacies in a new light, demanding justice and recognition for historical injustices.

While the discourse tends to focus on the darker aspects of colonisation (systemic violence, expropriation of resources and structural injustices), it is imperative to recognise that this historical period also engendered profound societal transformations that continue to shape our present realities. Moreover, these developments should not be interpreted as a justification for colonisation, but rather as a recognition of historical complexities. The introduction of new infrastructure, such as railways, roads and ports, has shaped the economic geography of many African countries. Similarly, the introduction of an education system, although often designed to serve colonial interests, led to the formation of new intellectual elites who went on to play a crucial role in the struggle for independence. In Europe, the repercussions of colonisation are similarly visible, particularly through post-colonial migratory flows that have enriched, but also complicated, the socio-cultural dynamics of the former metropolises.

It is about recognising that colonisation was a multi-faceted process, marked by complex interactions between colonisers and colonised, and that it is essential to approach this part of history from a balanced perspective that takes into account the voices of the former colonised as much as the global dynamics that shaped this era.

Project objectives

1. Developing a nuanced historical perspective :

- To develop a more sophisticated and multidimensional understanding of colonisation.
- To highlight the destructive aspects while analysing the socio-economic and cultural transformations brought about.
- Transcend an exclusively negative reading to encourage critical and in-depth reflection on colonial history and its contemporary repercussions.

2. Promoting Intercultural Dialogue :

- To facilitate a constructive exchange between the various memories and perceptions of colonisation.
- To create spaces for dialogue between former colonisers and colonised countries.
- To foster intergenerational understanding by integrating the perspectives of younger generations and older people.
- Build bridges of mutual understanding and respect between different cultural communities.

3. Academic Excellence and Artistic Innovation :

- Establish strategic partnerships with leading academic institutions and renowned art schools.
- Produce a high-quality body of interdisciplinary research, combining academic rigour with artistic creativity.
- Involving renowned historians, anthropologists, sociologists and artists to ensure exceptional intellectual depth and aesthetic richness.
- To develop innovative methodologies for presenting and interpreting historical and

cultural data.

4. Accessibility and Linguistic Inclusiveness :

- Ensuring a bilingual (French and German) presentation of the exhibition to maximise its reach in Europe.
- To develop multilingual teaching materials to facilitate engagement with a diverse audience.
- Contribute to the enrichment of cultural and intellectual debates around colonisation in different linguistic spheres.

5. Societal and educational impact :

- To raise public awareness of the complexities of the colonial heritage and its influence on contemporary societies.
- To provide innovative educational resources for schools and universities.
- To stimulate critical reflection on current issues relating to cultural diversity, integration and international relations.

6. Museum Innovation :

- Designing interactive and immersive installations using cutting-edge technologies to create an engaging visitor experience.
- To develop digital tools that allow visitors to explore the exhibition's themes in greater depth, beyond the physical visit.

In pursuing these objectives, "Mémoires Complexes" aims to fundamentally transform the way we understand, discuss and teach colonial history. The project aims to create a lasting impact on public discourse, academic research and museum practice, thereby contributing to a more enlightened and inclusive society.