

# Stones May Break

## On the Politics of Monumentalization in Times of Toppling Statues

A Zoom-based webinar hosted by the Max Planck Research Group "Empires of Memory: The Cultural Politics of Historicity in Former Habsburg and Ottoman Lands"

5 October 2020, 13:30 – 15:30, European Central Standard Time

Recent months and years have testified to the evanescence of histories encased in bronze, iron and stone. In 2015, student protestors at the University of Cape Town initiated an ultimately successful movement to remove a statue commemorating the notorious colonial administrator and racist Cecil Rhodes. The Rhodes Must Fall campaign reverberated across the globe. More recently, in the wake of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020, Black Lives Matter demonstrators have powerfully interrogated public monuments to historical figures who benefitted from and advocated slavery and apartheid, leading to statues toppling on both sides of the Atlantic. In sum, memorials that were sites of amnesia and inattention for decades have become lightning rods for politics in the present. We take inspiration from the critical demands of this moment to pose a timely provocation: How can, and should, public forms of commemoration and memorialization proceed moving forward? While the anti-racist sentiments that have contributed to overturning statues are beyond reproach, the politics of monumentalization becomes murkier when the historical valences of a monument multiply.

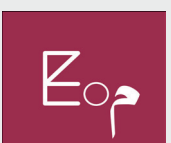
In this webinar, we gather together scholars from a variety of academic disciplines who have conducted research on monuments, political aesthetics, and public space more broadly to reflect on the re-



cent political drama surrounding statues and monuments. We seek new perspectives on a plethora of questions: Does the current imperative to topple racist monuments draw from earlier iconoclasm and idol-smashing? If so, how? What might we learn from statues and monuments that have fallen, and occasionally been re-erected, in the past? How should we understand the confrontation between anti-racist politics in the present and the material legacies of racism? How might the reappraisal and destruction of monuments yield to new constructions of collective memory that refuse the erasure of racist pasts? Can memorialization in the future proceed without repeating the sins of monumentalization in the past?



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## Speakers:

**Josephine Apraku**, Gunda Werner Institute,  
Heinrich Böll Stiftung

**Peter Kabachnik**, Professor of Geography,  
College of Staten Island, CUNY

**Banu Karaca**, EUME, Forum Transregionale Studien,  
Berlin

**Susan Neiman**, Director of the Einstein Forum

**Rahul Rao**, Senior Lecturer in Politics, School of  
Oriental and African Studies, University of London

## Participant biographies:

**Josephine Apraku** is an African studies scholar. She has been a lecturer at both the Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin, and at the Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies (ZtG) of the Humboldt University Berlin. Together with Jule Bönkost, Josephine heads the DB | Institute for Anti-Discriminatory Education in Berlin. She is a columnist for Missy Magazin, Edition F and Tagesspiegel.

**Peter Kabachnik** is a Professor of Geography in the Department of Political Science and Global Affairs and Coordinator of the Geography program at the College of Staten Island-The City University of New York (CUNY) and a member of the graduate faculty of the Earth and Environmental Sciences program at The Graduate Center-The City University of New York (CUNY). He received his PhD in Geography (2007) from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA). He is a political and cultural geographer, whose interests lie in the way that people interact with places, and the interplay between place, mobility, and identity more generally. He is currently working on a research project examining the role that personality cults play as a form of social and spatial control in authoritarian regimes. This project explores more broadly how personality cults function, how they act as a disciplinary mechanism, and how they engender practices of conformity and resistance. He also examines the role of cultural memory and memorialized landscapes in shaping national narratives, geopolitical contestations, and people's everyday practices. He is particularly interested in post-Soviet memory and the memorialized landscape in Georgia, focusing on contemporary understandings of Stalin. His previous research has investigated topics such as discrimination against nomadic Gypsy (Roma) and Traveler groups in the UK and the issues facing internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Georgia.

**Banu Karaca** works at the intersection of political anthropology and critical theory, art, aesthetics and cultural policy, museums and commemorative practices. Her publications interrogate the freedom of expression in the arts, the visualization of gendered memories of war and political violence, and visual literacy. She is the author of [The Na-](#)



[tional Frame: Art and State Violence in Turkey and Germany](#) (Fordham University Press, *forthcoming*) and co-editor of [Women Mobilizing Memory](#) (Columbia University Press, 2019). Banu is currently a EUME Fellow of the VolkswagenFoundation at the Forum Transregionale Studien Berlin. Her ongoing research examines how the twin processes of violence and dispossession have shaped understandings of art history and cultural heritage and how they have engendered material and legal modes of forgetting that continue to delimit debates on restitution and historical justice.

**Susan Neiman** is Director of the Einstein Forum. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Neiman studied philosophy at Harvard and the Freie Universität Berlin, and was professor of philosophy at Yale and Tel Aviv University. She is the author of *Slow Fire: Jewish Notes from Berlin*, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant*, *Evil in Modern Thought*, *Fremde sehen anders*, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists*, *Why Grow Up?*, *Widerstand der Vernunft. Ein Manifest in post-faktischen Zeiten* and *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*.

**Rahul Rao** is Senior Lecturer in Politics at SOAS, University of London. He is the author of *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (2020) and *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (2010), both published by Oxford University Press. He is a member of the Radical Philosophy collective and blogs at The Disorder of Things.



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