

Homes | Heimat: Post/colonialism, Narratives, Photography

Homes | Heimat is a participatory research and media initiative that examines the notions of "home(s)" and "be/longing" within the migratory narratives of students of colour. Employing storytelling, photography, and postcolonial methodologies, the project seeks to decolonize citizen science while fostering intercultural dialogue and lived representation. As an evolving initiative, it is designed to expand, reconfigure, and adapt through collaborative engagement, iterative feedback, and public participation. Launched in May 2024 at the University of Münster, Homes | Heimat pursues these objectives through a range of outputs, including academic publications, public lectures, and, most notably, a bilingual citizens' media installation.

Theoretical Grounding

"[A]nd citizenship shall be/a call/to kinship/that knows/no boundary/of skin (...)" concludes John Agard's 1998 poem, *Remember the Ship* (lines 42-47). Written with aspiration and nuance, the text encourages us to rethink citizenships as unbound by conventional notions of nationality and borders. Instead, the poem advocates for a broader interpretation of the term rooted in shared emotions, relations, and movements. Indeed, recent critical theorizations of citizenship have destabilised the concept by highlighting the geographical and historical contentions that underpin nationalist affiliations (Askins, 2016; Isin, 2002; Mee & Wright 2009; Yuval-Davis et al., 2016). Traditional definitions of citizenships often overlook more experiential aspects of citizenship that highlight emotions, relations, and movement, thereby rendering "certain groups strangers and outsiders" (Isin & Turner, 2002, p. 3).

These conceptualisations, thus, call for a broadening of 'citizenship' by incorporating lived dimensions. *Homes | Heimat: Postcolonialism, Narratives, Photography* (henceforth, *Homes*) builds on this tradition by examining expressions of home and be/longing by students with migratory backgrounds around German universities. Attuned to contexts of movement and post/coloniality, the project mobilises creative methods to decolonise citizen science and platform diverse voices. Drawing on Askins (2016) theory of 'emotional citizenry,' *Homes* stresses the connections between emotions and individuals in the co-construction of a body politic that extends beyond formal political structures. The mechanisms through which individuals articulate citizenship are increasingly shaped by transnational flows of migration, where the large-scale movement and the resulting ethnic diversity informs social identity at local levels. *Homes* brings these dynamics to the fore, emphasizing how migrant students and established communities navigate affective geographies to foster alternative forms of belonging in both private and public spheres.

In this regard, *Homes* asserts that the immigration of students significantly transforms not only the social landscape of Germany, but also its histories. We conceptualise history as malleable, rather than stable – it is moulded by influences and genealogies individuals bring with them. The narratives of migrant groups intertwine with the city's established histories, generating alternative recollections that enrich the communal memory. To genuinely move toward a postcolonial perspective, it is crucial that the genealogical memories of colonisation are affirmed in academic and social discourses. Rather than being treated as remnants of history, these memories should be understood as an ongoing

condition that directs the experiences of many students in the city. In specific, we ask: What role do family histories, migration, and visual narratives play in shaping fluid understandings of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ among students from post/colonial backgrounds? How do these recollections intersect with the larger historical and cultural contexts of Münster?

To this end, a central concern of *Homes* is to propose a postcolonial schema of citizen science and media. Postcolonial theory seeks to decentre Eurocentric discourses by interrogating the concept of national citizenship and exploring the diversifying potential of storytelling (Blaagaard, 2021). Despite this potential, citizen science has been relatively delayed in integrating postcolonial critique. Eitzel et al. (2017) thus note, “[b]ecause citizen science is a form of knowledge production, citizen science terminology has the power to allow some peoples’ knowledge to be included and the knowledge of others to be excluded” (p.1). By integrating postcolonial approaches, citizen science can thus recognise the contributions of diasporic communities in shaping economic, cultural, and social landscapes, such as those within university contexts.

Methods and Contexts

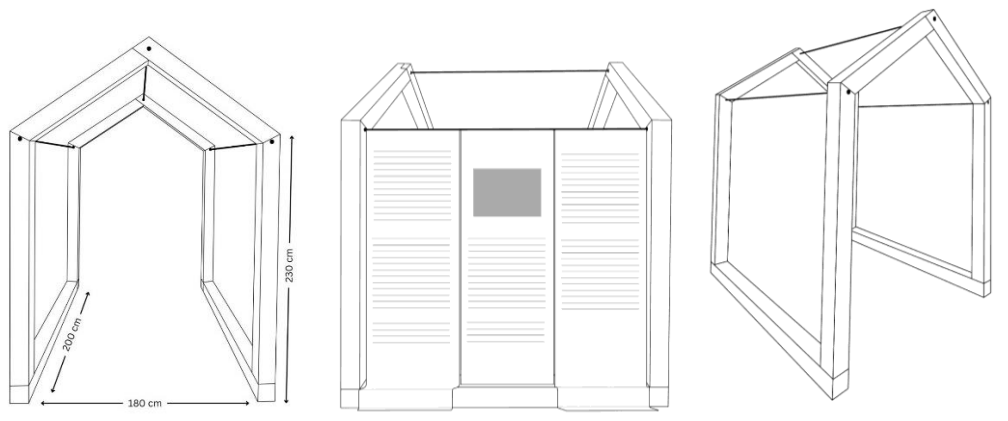
Homes commenced in May 2024, with an open call for participation extended to students, staff and members of the University of Münster. Participants were invited to contribute by engaging in storytelling and interviews centred around the ‘oldest’ image from their family archives. The response exceeded our expectations, leading to the involvement of eight students with connections to diverse geographies, including India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Germany, the United States, Canada, Jordan, Trinidad & Tobago, Peru, Gambia, and Senegal. In the January of 2025, the installation won the **Citizen Science Wettbewerb** of the University of Münster, equipping it with funds to pursue its objectives.

To address these narratives, *Homes | Heimat* employs a multi-method research framework integrating citizen science, community-based participatory research, interview-based embodied storytelling, and decolonial arts practices. These methodologies inform a range of outputs, including academic publications, public lectures, workshops and, most notably, a traveling bilingual citizens’ media installation. This installation incorporates transcribed storytelling sessions, audio excerpts, family archive photographs, and creative artifacts, providing established communities with multimodal engagement with the lived experiences of migrant students. By offering an accessible entry point into narratives of migration and belonging, the project aims to foster deeper intercultural dialogue and critical reflection.

A central tenet of *Homes | Heimat* is co-curation, wherein interviewees and visitors actively participate as co-curators, shaping the project’s trajectory and development. **Through this collaborative model, we invite you to engage with us in further developing and expanding this initiative.** Through the installation and public forums, the project will create spaces for citizens to reflect on their own perceptions of home in relation to the experiences of others. This dialogic process promotes the bridging of cultural divides and deepening mutual understanding.

Installation: Facts and Figures

- The installation utilises **two wooden scaffolds** in the shape of a house. Each scaffold is 230 cm in height, 180 cm in width, and 200 cm in depth.
- Fabrics, with the student's narratives printed on it, are affixed to the scaffolds. Each 'house' exhibits four narratives, to a total of eight narratives.



- To maximize accessibility, all narratives will be available in both English and German.
- The texts are supplemented with cleaned interview recordings, allowing visitors to engage with the 'voice' of the co-curators.
- By including audio recordings, the installation also caters to individuals with visual dis/abilities, ensuring a more inclusive experience.
- To elicit encounters and interactions, the installation will prominently feature an 'expression wall,' where individuals can freely contribute their feedback, share stories, and express their own experiences.
- Notably, these contributions will serve as sources of data in their own capacity, allowing for the democratisation of knowledge production.
- the installation will be accompanied by a series of lectures, workshops, curatorial walks and other events. These lectures aim to contextualize the narratives presented in the installation, providing a deeper understanding of how historical and contemporary experiences of migration intersect.
- The specific programme will be decided in consultation with the visiting venue to ensure that the installation is a collaborative endeavour and serves the interests of the students and visitors of the venue.

Snapshots from the Pilot Installation

To gain a better understanding of the installation, and its modalities, please refer to the images set out below from our pilot installation:



Outlook

Homes presents a hopeful perspective, asserting that attending to relationalities, when cast in the frameworks of colonial displacements, has the potential to yield fresh insights, methods, and support mechanisms, fostering the development of more equitable and resilient societies. However, simultaneously, it refrains from adopting a romanticized view. Instead, it underscores the imperative for care and sustained, attentive listening to both migrant and established communities. This involves a keen awareness of the journeys—both metaphorical and literal—that both groups undertake, the thresholds they navigate, and the diverse manifestations of displacement that persist. With this, we invite you to join us in expanding this project further, co-creating a network of solidarity that embraces diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives. Whether through dialogue, artistic expression, research, or direct engagement, we see this as a collective endeavour—one that thrives on collaboration, mutual learning, and a shared commitment to reimagining belonging in ways that are just and sustainable.