

*Remembering (Post)Colonial Violence: Silence, Suffering & Reconciliation.* Eva Bischoff, Martin Buber Society of Fellows, Hebrew University Jerusalem; Elizabeth Buettner, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 19.06.2014–20.06.2014.

**Reviewed by** Alexander Bräuer

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At the German Historical Institute in London, Eva Bischoff and Elizabeth Buettner brought together several international scholars interested in the ‘relationship between silence and enunciation in constituting the collective memories of (post)colonial violence’. This conference report appeared first in: German Historical Institute London Bulletin Vol 36 (2014), No. 2, pp. 113-6. The workshop approached the subject from three starting points: the metropole, the postcolonial Global South, and the settler colonies. It emphasized an interdisciplinary approach with a strong focus on historical perspectives. As the organizers outlined in their opening remarks, issues of reconciliation and genocide tend to overshadow the remembrance of (post)colonial violence. The workshop addressed these topics, without neglecting to examine how language and the relationship between individual and collective memories shaped the process of remembrance.

ELIZABETH BUETTNER (Amsterdam) opened the first panel on the metropole with addressing the question of nationalism, monarchy and colonialism. Belgium and the visit of the young monarch Boudewijn in the Belgian Congo in 1955 provided a vivid example of how these processes interacted and thereby reinforced each other. All three groups acted out of a threefold crisis: the monarchy battled with their involvement in the Nazi occupation, Belgian national identity was un-

dermined by the opposition of Flemings and Walloons, and its colonial project was under fire from strong anti-colonial movements.

In a similar fashion, JÜRGEN ZIMMERER (Hamburg) connected the remembrance of German colonial history with the defining moment of German national identity: the Holocaust. Focusing on questions of reconciliation, he demonstrated how on the one hand contemporary grass root groups challenge the silence of German colonial history, for instance by changing street names or claiming the restitution of human remains. The German government, on the other, is still reluctant to recognize the genocide on the Herero and Nama people. Yet, most discussions concentrate on the question of reparations, whereas questions of language and shame are also at stake, haunted by the specters of the Holocaust. Zimmerer concluded that as long as the Holocaust serves as a model for the German colonial history, a reevaluation and recognition of colonial violence proves difficult to achieve.

The film ‘The Last Tango in Paris’, starring Marlon Brando, provided an example for TODD SHEPARD (Baltimore) to discuss sexual (post)colonial violence in the process of the articulation of French national identity during the 1970s. Shephard focussed on how the connection between sodomy and the “Arab man” in the film served as a metaphor for Anti-Arab racism. His

analysis revealed that both, metaphor and racist thinking, also permeated discourses and politics of the French radical Left, for example the 1970s French feminist movement. This colonial legacy has been left unchallenged until today, the speaker concluded.

An important observation for the metropole – and therefore present in all three presentations – was the role of media for the remembrance of (post)colonial violence. In Elizabeth Buettnner's example, the photographs and paintings depicted the visiting monarch as the father of a happy Belgian-Congolese society. Jürgen Zimmerer presented a public debate about German colonial history influenced by various media sources and Todd Shepard used a film in order to illustrate the connection between sexuality and violence in France. These examples show that especially for the metropole the role of the media in remembering (post)colonial violence cannot be underestimated.

The keynote address of DIRK MOSES (Florence) identified one of the major problems in remembering (post)colonial violence. By looking at the local arena, he concluded that the process of "coming to terms with the past" involves a simplification of complex and multidirectional forms of violence. For the memory of genocide, for example, a classification in perpetrator and victim becomes necessary to identify with the latter. As a result, certain forms of violence are highlighted and others silenced. In fact, as Moses demonstrated, coming from a local perspective it is even problematic to assume a clear distinction between "colonial" and "postcolonial" violence. The formal process of decolonization was by no means crucial for the forms of violence in the former colonial states. Rather a postcolonial politics of remembrance, integral to the process of nation building, hides or silences certain "colonial" forms of violence while highlighting others.

BRITTA SCHILLING (Cambridge) showed in her presentation on colonial architecture and remembrance in Namibia the relationship between

(post)colonial violence and materiality. German white settlers remembered their homes without violence even though their physical construction as well as everyday life very much drew on forced indigenous labour. Private material spaces such as the home seem to be a "safe place" to talk and remember colonialism. However, Schilling's closer look reveals how colonial violence also permeated the private sphere.

The following presentation by EVA BISCHOFF (Jerusalem) argued for the importance of considering specific cultures of remembrance, by addressing the memory of the "Black War" within the Tasmanian Quaker community. She showed how Quakers avoided addressing the complex and multidirectional colonial violence of this conflict because of their belief in Quaker peace testimony and their identification with social improvement and justice. In doing so, they drew on specific cultural techniques of silencing in order to avoid conflicts and to create a homogenous community. These strategies are particularly visible, Bischoff argued, in the 1880s as the remembrance shifted from individual memories to a collective memory.

ANDREA L. SMITH (Easton, PA) applied an anthropological perspective on French colonial memory by discussing the remembrance of the involvement of the "Pieds-Noir" (European settlers in Algeria) and Algerian soldiers in French military forces during the First and the Second World War. Whereas historians have demonstrated their crucial role in both conflicts and descendants carry vivid family histories, contemporary public discourse remains silent on their contribution to the war efforts. Yet, a careful examination of cemeteries and other places of public remembrance, as Smith exemplified in her talk, can make their role visible again.

All three presentations utilized the settler state as a starting point for the remembrance of (post)colonial violence and illustrated the different cultures of remembrance, which influenced

the strategies of remembering, as Eva Bischoff's example vividly showed. The panel also exemplified the important role of material remains – the German Colonial house in Britta Schilling's and the war cemeteries in Andrea L. Smith's example – for the process of remembering, especially in settler states.

In the third and last panel NORMAN SAADI NIKRO (Berlin) presented his analysis of the dynamics of the Lebanese oral history project "Bad-na Naaref" (We Want to Know), in which high school students conducted audio interviews with members of their parents' generation who had lived through the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Looking at the interview situation, Nikro unfolded the complex and sometimes contradicting processes of negotiating remembrance between the different generations involved.

GABRIELLE LYNCH (Warwick) dealt with the performance of the Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission between 2009 and 2013. As Lynch demonstrated, the staging of the public hearing was not only crucial for the acceptance of the Commission, but in the end also shaped the process of remembrance itself. Just like the German colonial memory (as well as that of other colonial genocides) is structured by the Holocaust, the performance (and remembrance) in Kenya is arranged along another powerful model: that of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Taken as a whole, the workshop revealed that research about remembering (post)colonial violence is, very much like the topic itself, a work in progress. Central questions, for instance about the differences between the memory of (post)colonial violence and other memories of individual and collective violence, constitute a desideratum for future research. These open questions are of particular relevance with regard to claims of financial retribution and developing new models of memory in order to come to terms with complex

and multidirectional forms of violence in (post)colonial remembrance.

### **Conference Overview:**

#### *Welcome*

Andreas Gestrich (Director GHIL)

Eva Bischoff (MBSF, Hebrew University Jerusalem)

Elizabeth Buettner (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

#### *Panel 1: Haunted by Spectres: Memories of Colonialism in the Metropole*

Chair: Indra Sengupta (GHIL)

Elizabeth Buettner (Universiteit van Amsterdam), Royal Questions: Belgium, the Congo, and the Uses of Colonial Legacies

Jürgen Zimmerer (University of Hamburg), Colonialism, Holocaust and German National Identity

Todd Shepard (Johns Hopkins University), "L'Arabe au sexe-couteau": Discussing Sodomy, and Power in 1970s France

#### *Public Keynote Lecture*

A. Dirk Moses (European University Institute), (Post)Colonial Violence and the Terror of History

Chair: Eva Bischoff (MBSF, Hebrew University Jerusalem)

#### *Panel 2: Constitutive Voids: Silence and the Settler State*

Chair: Elizabeth Buettner (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Britta Schilling (Cambridge University), The Houses of (Post-) Memory: Remembrance, Silence and Colonial Architecture in Namibia

Eva Bischoff (MBSF, Hebrew University Jerusalem), Sounds of Silence: Quaker Settlers Remembering and Forgetting the 'Black War'

Andrea L. Smith (Lafayette College), Settlers and Silences in French Colonial Memory

#### *Panel 3: Postcolonial Violence and the Forgetfulness of Reconciliation*

Chair: Valeska Huber (GHIL)

Norman Saadi Nikro (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin), *Between Memory of an Event and an Event of Memory: Transgenerational Memory in Lebanon*

Gabrielle Lynch (University of Warwick), *Bringing the Audience Back in: Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and the Efficacy of Public Hearings*

Concluding Discussion

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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