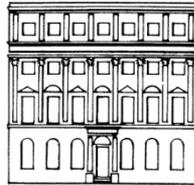


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Remembering (Post)Colonial Violence: Silence, Suffering, and Reconciliation
Conference Report

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Remembering (Post)Colonial Violence: Silence, Suffering, and Reconciliation. Workshop held at the GHIL, 19–20 June 2014. Conveners: Eva Bischoff (Martin Buber Society of Fellows, Hebrew University Jerusalem) and Elizabeth Buettner (Universiteit van Amsterdam).

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'. 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 by addressing the question of nationalism, monarchy, and colonialism. Belgium and the young King Badouin's visit to the Belgian Congo in 1955 provided a vivid example of how these interacted and thereby reinforced each other. Representatives of each acted out of a threefold crisis: the monarchy battled with its involvement in the Nazi occupation; Belgian national identity was undermined by the opposition of Flemings and Walloons; and Belgium's 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-roots groups challenge German colonial history's silence, 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 of the Herero and Nama people. Yet most discussions concentrate on the question of reparations, whereas issues of

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

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language and shame are also at stake, haunted by the spectres of the Holocaust. Zimmerer concluded that as long as the Holocaust serves as a model for German colonial history, a re-evaluation and recognition of colonial violence will prove difficult to achieve.

The film *Last Tango in Paris*, starring Marlon Brando, provided an example for Todd Shepard (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore) to discuss (post)colonial sexual violence in the process of articulating French national identity during the 1970s. Shepard focused 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 the discourses and politics of the French radical Left, for example, the 1970s French feminist movement. This colonial legacy has been left unchallenged to the present day, the speaker concluded.

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

The keynote address by Dirk Moses (European University Institute, Florence) identified one of the major problems in remembering (post)colonial violence. Looking at the local arena, he concluded that the process of 'coming to terms with the past' involves a simplification of complex and multi-directional forms of violence. For the memory of genocide, for example, a classification into 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, 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 violence took 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.

In her presentation on colonial architecture and remembrance in Namibia, Britta Schilling (Cambridge) illustrated the relationship between (post)colonial violence and materiality. German white settlers remembered their homes without violence, even though their physical construction and everyday life there to a large extent drew on indigenous forced labour. Private material spaces such as the home seem to be a 'safe place' to talk and remember colonialism. However, by taking a close look, Schilling revealed that colonial violence also permeated the private sphere.

The following presentation by Eva Bischoff (Jerusalem) pointed to 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 multi-directional 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 were particularly visible in the 1880s, Bischoff argued, as remembrance shifted from individual to collective memory.

Andrea L. Smith (Lafayette College, Pennsylvania) applied an anthropological perspective to French colonial memory by discussing remembrance of the involvement of the *Pieds-Noirs* (European settlers in Algeria) and Algerian soldiers in French military forces during the First and 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 showed 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 that influenced strategies of remembering, as Bischoff's example vividly showed. The panel also exemplified the importance of material remains—the German colonial house in Schilling's paper and war cemeteries in Smith's example—for the process of remembering, especially in settler states.

In the third and final panel Norman Saadi Nikro (Berlin) presented his analysis of the dynamics of the Lebanese oral history project

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'Badna 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 (1975–90). Examining the interview situation, Nikro unfolded the complex and sometimes contradictory processes of negotiating remembrance between the different generations involved.

Gabrielle Lynch (Warwick) dealt with the performance of Kenya's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission between 2009 and 2013. As Lynch demonstrated, the staging of public hearings was not only crucial for the acceptance of the Commission, but ultimately also shaped the process of remembrance itself. Just as the German colonial memory (and that of other colonial genocides) is structured by the Holocaust, performance (and remembrance) in Kenya is based on 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 for financial retribution and developing new models of memory in order to come to terms with complex and multi-directional forms of violence in (post)colonial remembrance.

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