

(Post-)colonialism between Cameroon and Germany. Science, Knowledge and Justice

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The conference set out to explore questions of knowledge production and diffusion with regard to German colonialism in Germany and Cameroon. Its aim was to investigate possible structural imbalances in the academic field. Researchers from the two countries had an opportunity to enter into a dialogue in the various conference panels. It is against the backdrop of scholars from Cameroon and other former German colonial territories being disconcertingly underrepresented and the knowledge produced in their academic sphere being hardly acknowledged in Europe. The questions whether the global North executes a sort of cultural hegemony in the academic sphere over the global South and whether mutual recognition may not gain ground were at the heart of the conference.

KUM'A NDUMBE (University of Yaoundé I) opened the conference with an appeal to Western intellectuals to take note of outside interventions in African affairs being grounded in the colonial past. Drawing a wide range from the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 to NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, he demonstrated an African intellectual's perspective on the past in the present. In concrete terms he stressed the structural imbalances in knowledge production and institutional dispositions with regard to Cameroon and Germany. While German research institutions were present in Cameroon, this was not the case vice versa. He underlined his personal initiative in founding a research group on German colonialism in Cameroon which in 1980, had in-

terviewed 180 Cameroonians on the German colonial period in Cameroon. The foundation AfricAvenir with its headquarters in Douala served according to Kum'a Ndumbe as a documentation center with regard to German colonialism, where printed works as well as private property were stored and made available to the public. The sustainability of such a single initiative was to become a case in point during the conference.

CAROLINE AUTHALER (Heidelberg) with her paper on the „Historiographies of the German-owned plantations in the anglophone part of Cameroon“ (1925-1933) made a strong and convincing case for combining postcolonial and empirical methods in what she called network approaches both with regard to historical agents and to the sources used. She showed how research methods and designs already pre-shape research questions and themes. Her project's ambitious aim is to uncover multi-layered and entangled agencies by combining multiple sources which introduce diverging perspectives.

WALTER GAM NKWI (Buea) pondered on the „Myth of 1916/19 as a historical break in Cameroonian history and drew attention to the fact that periodisation is linked to perspective. With regard to the plantation areas in the anglophone part of Cameroon German ownership ended only in 1939 in the mind and experience of many people, since after 1924, the vast majority of plantations were rebought by their former German owners. This observation - calling into question what in conventional historiography is considered a simple fact - was at the same time puzzling and convincing and more such deconstructions of „facts“ were put forth by the audience, e.g. the „beginning“ of German colonialism in 1884.

The Panel „Lieux et Milieux de mémoire“ focused on the memory of (German) colonialism in Cameroon as expressed and preserved by Cameroonians in oral traditions with regard to landscape, buildings or infrastructure and in written traditions, e.g. literature. JOSEPH WOULDAMMIKE (Maroua) evaluated mainly physical traces of the German presence in Northern Cameroon and the oral traditions attached to them and spoke of an abundance of sources concerning German

colonialism in Cameroon and not a scarcity as is conventionally done - especially from a Western academic perspective. REGINA SCHLEICHER (Frankfurt am Main) neatly completed his argument with regard to literary texts by Cameroonian authors, such as „Bedi-Ngula - l'ancien marquisard“ by René Philombe that have thus far not received much attention by historians. In the discussion Kum'a Ndumbe cautioned that colonialism was not the beginning of Cameroonian history and historical research should always be aware of the situation preceding colonialism in order not to re-write a neo-hegelian, or following his opening speech, Sarkozian vision of African past and present into the historical narratives.

The second day opened with the presentation of two projects by artists both with a specific relation to German colonialism in Cameroon. MILTOS OULIOS of Kanak TV presented the film „Re-colonize Cologne“, realized in 2005 starring a King from Cameroon who arrives in Cologne in a Mercedes, carried by white servants bowing before him and annexes part of the city in the name of the multitude, giving out „global passports“. ANDREAS LANG - a photographer - presented his ongoing project inspired by the diary of his great-grandfather. The diary describes his involvement in military campaigns primarily in Northern Cameroon as a non-commissioned officer in the German colonial army. Queries from the audience revealed that his colonial engagement had not been an issue within the family. Lang's ultimate aim is to show through photography that landscape is not innocent - in this respect his project corresponded to the pictures Woudammike had shown about the traces the battle fought at Mora during World War I had left in the rocks in its vicinity.

As an experienced university teacher and researcher on German colonialism ALBERT-PASCAL TEMGOUA (University of Yaoundé I) set out in his lecture to explore the „Themes in Research and Teaching of German colonialism in Cameroon“. He devoted his whole professional career to this era and methodologically combines written and oral sources. As a Cameroonian from West Cameroon he did research in Northern Cameroon as a cul-

tural outsider and - as he recalled when he first entered the archives in Potsdam in the former German Democratic Republic, he was hardly trusted with the historical files. He presented to the audience a selection of published works - which he deemed the canon for researching and teaching German colonialism in Cameroon - as well as a selection of theses defended by Cameroonian students. Works published by German authors in German seemed almost completely absent from his list. He re-evaluated the work done by Kum'a Ndumbe and his interdisciplinary research group founded in 1980 at the University of Yaoundé and his translations of German texts in order to make them available to Cameroonian students. Temgoua himself pointed out that language, the gothic script and the inaccessibility of files held in German archives were the major impediments for Cameroonian scholars to focus on the German colonial era in Cameroon. As an answer to these constraints he put forward the use of oral traditions by Cameroonian scholars, many of whom originated from the region of their study. Temgoua's presentation clearly envisaged a number of reasons why academic exchange between Cameroon and Germany - in both directions - remains difficult. Imbalanced infrastructures regarding funding, publication and diffusion of findings - certainly play an important role in the decoupling of knowledge systems in Germany and Cameroon, as mainly stressed by Kum'a Ndumbe. As an effect, a certain impossibility of communication exists at this point. To highlight it with just one example, when asked about the methodology used at the University of Yaoundé with regard to oral tradition, Temgoua resorted to the way a student has to cite it in his work. It seemed that the work with oral historians - some of their names were continually and consensually mentioned by Cameroonian scholars during the conference - is self-evident in such a way in Cameroon that it is deemed irrelevant to dwell on it. While both - the German and the Cameroonian researchers - repeatedly cited „oral tradition“ the word entails diverging (research) traditions - an elusive fact quite at the focus of interest of the conference.

Deepening the focus on methods, ULRIKE

SCHAPER (Berlin) most aptly demonstrated the ways in which knowledge about African law had been produced under colonial conditions and the disturbing continuities into the research practices of today. Her double focus (1) on the production of colonial knowledge and (2) on African agency in this process allowed her to reconcile postcolonial critique with actor-centered approaches which is quite an achievement in African history against the backdrop of postcolonial theory as carried out in Germany (and generally in Europe and North America). When SYLVIE ANDELA BOMBONA (University of Yaoundé I) presented the possibilities of using private archives existing in Cameroon - and here she implicitly had only written and material sources in mind - she stressed that on the one hand there actually existed quite a number of private archives and that on the other hand the majority of them were difficult to access. Her paper gave the only clue in the conference on historical research with relation to the Cameroonian government: By law all historical documents held by private persons can be declared of public interest and thus be seized. Under these conditions it might seem wise not to let researchers know about possibly important private documents. Such an endeavor could be perceived as illegitimate (from the perspective of the state) or as subversive, stressing agency. An open question would be whether to emphasize African agency within historical narratives is one thing but when carried out in the present becomes unacceptable. Discussions during the conference showed how thin the line to become patronizing was. One Cameroonian participant detected a lack of trust as an impediment to a communication on equal terms.

Pertinent questions were also raised in the panelist discussion. ANDREAS ECKERT (Berlin) stated a certain tension between efforts by scholars based in Europe and North America to overcome historical narratives restricted to the space of one nation and research paradigms in Cameroon in which the nation state seems unquestionably present as the ultimate container in which the German era took place. He admitted continuities in research practices and a certain hierar-

chy of knowledge centers - although not unhistorically so, since publishing houses had been most active in African in the 1960s and 70s. He finally raised the ultimate question whether global criteria for good history, for good methods and for good publishing exist.

ALBERT-PASCAL TEMGOUA highlighted the working load with which Cameroonian professors are confronted and stressed that he had come to Germany with one mission which was to make the written documents kept in archives in Germany available in Cameroon. HANS-PETER HAHN (Frankfurt am Main) reverted to collection of material and its preservation, bearing in mind not only oral but also archeological findings. He also drew attention to the diffusion of historical findings through teaching and mentioned the potential of digital archives, for example the picture archive of the former German colonial association (DKG) held by Frankfurt's university library. KUM'A NDUMBE enforced a point he had made throughout the Conference, i.e. to carry out historical research on the pre-colonial time and finally he strongly called for personal and private initiatives in order to build up African research structures, publishing houses, journals and funding agencies in order to free African scholarship from global imbalances. The panelists ultimately agreed that such structures were direly needed in Africa but had to be brought into being by sole African agency in order to overcome colonial legacies inherent in the presently existing global knowledge system(s).

The conference was marked by a visible divide in discussions and interests. It clearly demonstrated that knowledge systems, historiographies and methods in Cameroon and Germany differ considerably although not completely. It became evident that the space in-between is difficult to evaluate and address and thus also difficult to close. Before asking why the respective historiographical traditions are not mutually recognized the communication process must not be single-tracked any longer but has to be based on a much broader debate. Issues to be addressed as first steps are as basic as one participant put it: Why do we want to know? But also: What do we want to know and how can we find

out? Answering these questions from diverging positions might lead ahead into a different direction than re-iterating imbalances or simply ignoring them and thus continuing hierarchical relations.

Conference Overview:

Introduction (Stefanie Michels)

Opening Lecture: Appel à l'intelligentsia européenne et nord-américaine pendant l'agression concertée de leurs gouvernements contre les peuples africains en 2011 (Kum'a Ndumbe III., University of Yaoundé)

Panel I: Historiography

(Chair: Susanne Heyn)

Caroline Authaler (University of Heidelberg): „Historiographies of the German-owned plantations in the anglophone part of Cameroon“

Walter Gam Nkwi (University of Buea): „The Myth of 1916/19 as a historical break in the History of Cameroon and Germany“

Panel II: Lieux et Milieux de mémoire

(Chair: Parfait Bokohonsi)

Joseph Woudammike (University of Maroua): „Tradition orale et monuments comme source d'écriture de l'histoire allemande au Cameroun“

Regina Schleicher (Goethe-University Frankfurt): „Post-colonial Yaoundé“

Artists' Space

(Chair: Ulrike Hamann)

„Uropa in Kamerun“ (Andréas Lang)

„Re-Colonize Cologne“ (Miltos Oulios, Kanak TV)

Lecture

Albert-Pascal Temgoua (University of Yaoundé): Themes in Research and Teaching of German colonialism in Cameroon – the path behind and ahead

Panel III Methods of researching and teaching (Chair: Ronja Metzger)

Sylvie Andela Bambona (University of Yaoundé): „Access to private archives in Cameroon. Opportunities and torments“

Ulrike Schaper (Free University Berlin): „Eu-

ropean Experts and African objects of study? The production of knowledge on African laws in the German colony Cameroon“

Panelist Discussion: Shared or Divided History?

(Chair: Stefanie Michels)

Andreas Eckert (Humboldt University, Berlin), Hans-Peter Hahn (Goethe-University, Frankfurt/Main), Kum'a Ndumbe III. (University of Yaoundé), Albert-Pascal Temgoua (University of Yaoundé)

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