

Provincializing European Memory

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From 23 to 25 September 2015 the Network in Transnational Memory Studies NITMES, led by Utrecht University in cooperation with the Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform (FMSP), convened at Goethe University Frankfurt. The conference titled „Provincializing European Memory“ offered various activities, ranging from a Master Class with Ann Rigney, to presentations by international memory scholars, to TED-talks presented by early stage researchers, to official book launches. Central to the conference were five sessions engaging with the project set out by the conference title.

The title „Provincializing European Memory“ draws on the critically acclaimed and ground-breaking study „Provincializing Europe“ by the postcolonial studies historian Dipesh Chakrabarty.¹ Yet, as the conference organizer ASTRID ERLI (Frankfurt am Main) pointed out in the introduction, while Chakrabarty's critique of historiography evolves from and remains indebted to the 19th century project of history writing, engaging in the project of „Provincializing Europe“ from the interdisciplinary field of memory studies harbours the potential to more fundamentally move beyond the paradigms and approaches of European methodologies. This becomes particularly clear and relevant, when historiography is regarded as just one aspect (or one medium) of memory among others. Memory Studies today is not only dealt with in various disciplines, but also functions as a node for interdisciplinary research. However, much of memory research and memory practice is steeped in paradigms that were developed in Europe and North America, for example, the idea of the nation as a key „framework“ of memory, the notion of the Holocaust as a global symbol, the *lieu de mémoire* as an

expression of modernity, the specific structure of testimony, the strong memory-identity link, or the focus on violence and trauma in memory studies. The conference contributions sought to challenge European paradigms of memory with presentations from across disciplines - comparative literature, film and media studies, history, and sociology.

The project of provincializing European memory, Erll suggested, can be tackled in several ways: Firstly, by studying the adaptations and reconfigurations of European sites of memory outside of Europe („Travels and Translations of European Memory Models“). In this vein, Ann Rigney studied the reception of Walter Scott in India, and Rosanne Kennedy discussed „provincializing truth-telling“ in Sierra Leone. Secondly, memory studies may understand „Europe-as-Province“. This entails looking at alternative and non-mainstream memories in Europe, as in Sébastien Fevry's presentation on the commune or in Barbara Törnquist-Plewa's presentation on Ukraine, as well as studying the logic of non-European memories. In this regard, the conference had a specific focus on the global South, such as Uma Dhupelia-Meshtrie, Birte Heidemann and Pavan Malreddy, and on „Indian Ocean Memories“, by John Njenga Karugia. Thirdly, a focus on „connective memories“ reveals that the idea of „a pure European memory“ is in itself an invention. Such entanglements of European and non-European memories were studied, for example, by Paolo Vignolo on Columbian memory sites and by Frank Schulze-Engler with a transcultural approach to WW2-memories (watch presentations on <<http://www.memorystudies-frankfurt.com/events/provincializing-european-memory/>>).

The first session analysed entanglements, linking memories from inside and outside Europe that transformed both memory cultures in transnational processes. In „The Reception of Walter Scott in India: Remembering as Anti-Colonial Resistance“, ANN RIGNEY (Utrecht) presented the echoes of

¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, reissue with a new preface by the author, Princeton, NJ 2008 (1. edition 2000).

Walter Scott's writings in works by Indian authors in Bengali, Urdu and Gujarati. Rigney discussed three different forms of engagement with the original works. One form was 'silent appropriation', in which plot structure and narrative devices were taken over but filled with content applying to the Indian environment and the Bengali language. The second form Rigney discerned was 'hostile imitation,' in which the original representation was appropriated and opposed. As a third strategy, 're-appropriation' revealed a creative engagement in which Mahatma Gandhi supplemented a poem with cultural, political and religious aspects to express his particular nationalist cause for India. PAOLO VIGNOLO (Bogota) discussed a particularly entangled site of memory in Columbia Santa María la Antigua of Darién, considering the historical conflicts and present interaction with it. After centuries of neglect, Santa Maria was claimed as a site of memory for the first Spanish urban settlement, but also for the history of slavery and slave revolt. Vignolo not only showed how the political environment shaped commemoration strategies and content, but also how citizens engaged with these through cooperation, evasion and revolt. The presentation highlighted that the entangled paradoxes generated by different memory policies and practices makes Santa María la Antigua of Darién a particularly complicated challenge.

The second session discussed negotiations of gender and truth in national and transnational postcolonial settings. In „Provincializing Truth-Telling: Memoirs from Sierra Leone“, ROSANNE KENNEDY (Canberra) discussed the tension between transnational and local memory studies with the example of Aminatta Forna's memoir „The Devil That Danced on the Water: A Daughter Remembers“. The memoir demonstrates the possibilities, hindrances and frictions when concepts such as truth and justice are applied to local contexts. The search for truth and justice, Kennedy argued, is not only challenged with archival and investigative research, but also with local and transnational demands. A transnational discourse, thus, on the one hand informs local and particular applications and on the other hand exposes itself to frictions in these 'sticky engagements'. BIRTE HEI-

DEMANN (Potsdam) and PAVAN KUMAR MALREDDY (Frankfurt am Main) in „Subaltern Memories? Gender, Nation and 'Immediation' in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict“ discussed Niroshi De Soyza's widely read memoir „Tamil Tigress: My Story as a Child Soldier in Sri Lanka's Bloody Civil War“. They argued that while European memory studies underwent a post-national turn, memory discourse in some post-colonial settings has to be understood in the retardation and conflict of becoming a nation. This postcolonial process is further complicated when considering subaltern memories that seek expression within and against a masculine discourse of nation building.

The third session focused on memory cultures that exhibited traces of pre-colonial memory and pointed beyond the impact of colonisation. In „Studying Cultural Memory in Indonesia“ PAUL BIJL (Amsterdam/Leiden) discussed instances of cultural memory in Indonesia and demonstrated their potential to provincialize theories and methodologies of European Memory Studies. Investigating conceptions and performances of memory in disjunctive, furtive and elusive discourses in Indonesia, Bijl exhibited the limitations of European cultural memory studies. He argued that these theories and methods need to be adapted when applied outside of their provincial European context. Non-European concepts may therefore add decisively to memory studies. Lastly, he emphasised the presence of entangled memories, which appeared Indonesian but were shaped in relation to other regions, like the Middle East, India or China. FRANK SCHULZE-ENGLER (Frankfurt am Main) in „When Remembering Back is not Enough: World War II and the Dual Agenda of Provincializing Europe in Indian and New Zealand Literature“ discussed the limitations of applying the post-colonial paradigm of 'writing back' to memory studies. In the endeavour to join postcolonial studies with memory studies the concept of 'writing back' has recently received attention. Schulze-Engler pointed out that this concept is limited by its reactive, Europe-centred implications and applies only to specific historical developments that ignore wider ranging and intricate entanglements. With the ex-

ample of two novels he then demonstrated that provincializing European memory sometimes simply means bypassing it.

African-Asian connections across the Indian Ocean and on the African continent were the focus of the fourth session. In „Re-Locating Memories: Transnational and Local Narratives of Indian South Africans in Cape Town“, UMA DHUPELIA-MESTHRIE (Western Cape) presented a survey of oral history practices in South Africa with specific attention to Indian memories of place and space in Cape Town. Analysing several cases of oral history, Dhupelia-Mesthrie described Indian narratives of dispossession and relocation against broader South African narratives of community destruction and loss. The discussion revealed the significance and intricacy of space, where long distance travels across the Indian Ocean represented a minor challenge but short distance overland connections appeared as insurmountable challenges. JOHN NJENGA KARUGIA (Frankfurt am Main) in „Connective Indian Ocean Memories: Towards a Braver Afrasian History“ discussed African-Asian connections across the Indian Oceans and the memory cultures these create. Apparent in the connective Indian Ocean Memories is a shift from competitive to multidirectional memories, connecting African countries with Mauritius, Indonesia, China and India amongst others. Karugia analysed local, national and transnational memory projects, revealing their particular memory practices and their political implications. While his field work confirmed a positive thrust, Karugia ended with a call for more inclusive memory practices.

The fifth and last session focused on revolutionary movements that challenged the boundaries of European memory practices. In „Memory Politics in Contemporary Ukraine: Reflections from a Postcolonial Perspective“, BARBARA TÖRNQUIST-PLEWA (Lund) analysed the development of memory practices following the „Euro-Revolution“ at Maidan square and the Ukraine in general since 2013. In the wake of ‘Euromaidan’, Törnquist-Plewa recognised a general shift from socialist to nationalist and Europe-oriented memory practices. These practices find expression in social, political and legal develop-

ments. Regarding these developments, she subsequently asked whether memory culture in postcolonial Ukraine reveals hybrid tendencies. The combination of anticolonial and nationalist memory practices, she argued, reveal such a hybridity and a double temporality. SÉBASTIEN FEVRY (Louvain) in „Beyond National and European Frames: The Commune’s Memory in Films“ argued that the Paris Commune’s memory represents an alternative to a generally trauma and nation-state focused memory studies. Tracking its resurgence in various protest movements around the world, such as Indignados, Occupy Wall Street or at Tahrir Square, Fevry claimed that the Paris Commune’s memory functions as a specific template that travels across time and space. Analysing it in relation to Rabah Ameur-Zaimèche’s film „Les Chants de Mandrin“, he pointed out its orientation towards the future, its utopian dimension and the emphasis of celebration rather than commemoration. The Paris Commune’s memory, Fevry argued, is not specifically French or European, but the template of a utopian time to come.

Opening up new perspectives not only in theoretical research objectives but also in the practical conference set-up, „Provincializing European Memory“ included several innovations to enrich the general program of presentations. First of all, Ann Rigney, leader of the NITMES network, offered a master class to invite discussion of her recent work on transnational memory. The TED talks by early stage researchers presented new memory studies projects. These presentations were embedded in the conference program to stimulate discussion and creative innovation from fields as broad as Francophone, Museum and Translation Studies. Lastly, book launches of new publications in memory studies completed the varied conference program. On-going memory practices crossing national and European borders were also the focus of a visit to the Historical Museum Frankfurt (and its „Bibliothek der Alten“) and a walking tour about commemorative projects at Goethe University Frankfurt, led by STEFFEN BRUENDEL, director of research at the Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre. These events highlighted that memory studies is a theoretical, a

practical and sometimes even an activist undertaking.

The conference ended with concluding remarks by Astrid Erll, Rosanne Kennedy, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Ann Rigney. This panel aimed at a reflection on and discussion of the development of memory studies and its necessary innovations. The conference „Provincializing European Memory“, it was argued, challenged conceptions in memory studies that were often taken to be universals, such as the connection between individuality, memory and identity. Acknowledging, in other words, the contingency of the concepts and objects of memory studies, further research would have to more explicitly and in greater detail map connections, exchanges and trajectories in the genealogy of this research area. It would have to interrogate the implications of its specific languages to further develop concepts and analyse objects. Recognising the centrality of language, translation in memory studies will also be an aspect that demands further investigation. Consequently, the language and concepts of the disciplines engaging in memory studies have to be interrogated just as further disciplines and research fields should be opened up to memory studies. In relation to this conference, it was asked, how would different disciplines provincialize European memory (studies) and how would the endeavour to provincialize European memory work in other contexts outside of Europe? While the conference from 23 to 25 September at Goethe-University Frankfurt certainly brought to fruition a timely combination of postcolonial and memory studies with detailed investigations and highly relevant theoretical interrogations, it also revealed that this event could only be the beginning of transnational memory studies' attempt to „provincialize Europe“.

Conference Overview:

Master Class with Ann Rigney (Utrecht University) on „Transnational Memory“ (IG 1.414), Historical Museum Frankfurt

Opening and Introduction (Astrid Erll, Goethe University Frankfurt)

Session 1

Ann Rigney (Utrecht University, the Netherlands): „The Reception of Walter Scott in India: Remembering as anti-colonial Resistance“

Paolo Vignolo (National University of Colombia, Bogota, Colombia): „On the Ruins of a Foundational Myth: Postcolonial Paradoxes of a Memorial Site of the Spanish Conquest in Colombia“

TED-Talks on New Projects in Transnational Memory Studies (1)

Jarula Wegner (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Rethinking Countermemory: Remembering Transcultural Tensions“

Andrea Gremels (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Transculturalizing Memory in French HipHop“

Zhang Yingjie (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Translation and the circulation of memory in world society: remembering the Nanking Massacre“

Sarah Czerney (Herder Institute Marburg/Goethe University Frankfurt): „Situating Europe - national museums as media of European historiography“

The „Campus Westend“ as a Site of Memory: A Guided Walk with Steffen Bründel

Session 2

Rosanne Kennedy (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia): „Provincializing Truth-Telling: Memoirs from Sierra Leone“

Birte Heidemann (University of Potsdam) and Pavan Kumar Malreddy (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Subaltern Memories? Gender, Nation and 'Immediation' in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict“

TED-Talks on New Projects in Transnational Memory Studies (2)

Sayma Khan (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Changing Dynamics of Remembering Partition in Urdu Literature“

Hanna Teichler (Goethe University Frankfurt): „'No wonder us Indians are all the shifts!' Reconciliation and the Search for the Transcultural in Canada“

Sophie Opitz (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Connected Narratives – Aesthetics and Memory Culture in Conceptual War Photography“

Erin Högerle (Goethe University Frankfurt): „Transcultural Memory in the Migration Film“

Session 3

Paul Bijl (University of Amsterdam): „Studying Cultural Memory in Indonesia“

Frank Schulze-Engler (Goethe-University Frankfurt): „When Remembering Back is not Enough: World War II and the Dual Agenda of Provincializing Europe in Indian and New Zealand Literature“

Session 4

Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie (University of the Western Cape, South Africa): „Re-Locating Memories: Transnational and Local Narratives of Indian South Africans in Cape Town“

John Njenga Karugia (Goethe University Frankfurt, AFRASO): „Connective Indian Ocean Memories: Towards a Braver Afrasian History“

Session 5

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Lund University, Sweden): „Memory Politics in Contemporary Ukraine. Reflections from a Postcolonial Perspective“

Sébastien Fevry (Université catholique de Louvain, UCL, Belgium): „Beyond National and European Frames: The Commune’s Memory in Films“

Final Discussion with Astrid Erll, Rosanne Kennedy, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Ann Rigney

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