

Confronting the Colonial Past! ‚Askari‘, Lettow-Vorbeck and Hamburg’s entangled (post-) colonial legacies

Veranstalter: Jürgen Zimmerer, Forschungsstelle Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe
Datum, Ort: 28.02.2018–02.03.2018, Hamburg
Bericht von: Markus Hedrich, Forschungsstelle Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe, Universität Hamburg

Hamburg as a major transportation hub was key in establishing the German colonial empire. Various sites of memory bear witness to the City’s colonial legacy. *Lieux de Memoire* like the University of Hamburg (founded as the „Colonial Institute“ in 1908) or the Baakenhafen from where Lothar von Trotha and his „Schutztruppe“ embarked to commit the Herero-Nama-Genocide, 1904-1908. In 2014, the City of Hamburg founded the Research Centre Hamburg’s (post-)colonial legacy at the University of Hamburg to research and evaluate the cities violent colonial past. The conference „Confronting the Colonial Past!“ explored discourses of colonial violence and visibility plus the interconnections of colonialism and globalization, and put a spotlight on (contemporary) (post-)colonial representations as well as on discourses of commemoration.

JÜRGEN ZIMMERER (Hamburg), director of the Research Centre, opened the conference with a programmatic introduction that classified colonialism as a dynamic form of proto-globalization. Zimmerer highlighted that Hamburg represented the economic and cultural dimension of German colonialism and that the city was full of these colonial traces. Uncharted *lieux de memoire* like Hagenbecks Zoo with its „Human Zoo“-exhibitions or the Chamber of Commerce that have to be identified and historically contextualized. Zimmerer emphasized that the University of Hamburg was a pillar of colonial power before it also became a site of critical engagement with colonial history in 1967/68 with the demolition of the Wissmann-Memorial, and that it now had to play an active part in establishing a city wide postcolonial memory concept as well as in the process of reconciliation.

OLIVER HUCK (Hamburg), Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, underlined that the Faculty is eminently engaged with the colonial past and that he is grateful that the successful Research Centre is part of the UHH. Hamburg’s „Contributions“ to colonialism were the focus of the first panel, that was opened by KIM SEBASTIAN TODZI’s (Hamburg) talk on Hamburg’s merchants and the city’s rise to Germany’s „Engine of Empire“. While Hamburg merchants in the 19th century initially benefited significantly from British free trade policy and informal colonialism, the memorandum of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce of July 1883 represents a paradigm shift, as it actively demanded the annexation of colonies in Africa. Todzi concluded, that colonialism and capitalism are deeply intertwined and identified Hamburg’s merchants as driving force behind the formation the German colonial Empire. CAROLINE HERFERT (Hamburg) addressed colonial discourses and performances in Hamburg’s entertainment sector around 1900. Hamburg’s theatres like the „Thalia“ or Hagenbecks human zoo addressed colonial events in various ways – for instance by playing embarking troops to the Herero-Nama-genocide – and racist performance practices like black-face merged with the Orientalist discourse in a colonial „staging of the Other“. FLORIAN WAGNER (Erfurt) challenged three carefully crafted myths about Hamburg, the „capital of port pride“, and its harbor. Wagner disproved the myth that „Hamburg is a city of free trade“ with the city’s massive involvement in the Reich’s sea power, and foiled Hamburg’s claim of advocating „soft colonialism“ by emphasizing the city’s heavy historic involvement in human trafficking. Finally, Wagner deconstructed the narrative that Hamburg is cosmopolitan by referencing the Hamburg Institute for Tropical Medicine and the racialized medical *Cordon sanitaire* it laid around the African colonies and the borders of the East.

The second panel „Creating ‘Heroes‘“ centered on colonial narratives and practices. Starting with Walter Benjamin’s definition of the hero as a central figure in the imaginary world of modernity MICHAEL PESEK (Hamburg / Berlin) opened the panel with a

paper on constructing „colonial heroes“ like Emin Pasha and Hermann von Wissmann and with them the pantheon of Weimar colonial heroes. At first „scientific travelers“ were the main form of colonial representation, but in the 1880s military force became central to the narrative of the colonial hero. ULF MORGENSTERN (Friedrichsruh) viewed the colonial ambition of German chancellor Otto von Bismarck through the lens of Bismarck’s official summer residence Friedrichsruh. After rejecting the establishment of formalized colonies in 1884/85 Bismarck gave up his opposition at least for a short period of time and turned into *the* colonial head of government. In Friedrichsruh Bismarck was frequently visited by „colonial heroes“ and the chancellor’s summer residence became a *Mise-en-scène* of the German Empire colonial dreams. In the last talk of the session REGINALD KIREY (Hamburg / Dar es Salam) came to the conclusion that Tanzanian discourses of Cultures of Remembrance were used to enrich – and manipulate – the present. After WW1 the Tanganyika-territory saw a constant fight for commemoration. In the 1920s British authorities tried to suppress German heroic memories. The 1930s with the rise of the NSDAP saw intensified politics, while the post-war-period’s main commemorative event was the British support of the restitution of the skull of Chief Mkwawa from Germany.

In the evening CARSTEN BROSDA, Hamburg’s Minister of Culture and Media, delivered his well-received Welcome Address that integrated the conference main themes in a political context. Brosda highlighted the fact that colonial amnesia was dwindling, „and that is“, said Secretary Brosda, „a good thing“. Brosda stated, that the conference was a milestone in revisiting Hamburg’s colonial history, and that with the „Koalitionsvertrag“ (coalition treaty between CDU, CSU and SPD) the topic of (post)colonial Cultures of Remembrance has reached the federal level. Then Brosda formulated a sentence that resulted in sustained applause: „Human remains should be buried, and we should simply accept the consequence of this statement.“ Brosda closed his speech with the notion that it is important to sharpen our perception of the historic effects of colonialism and to use political instru-

ments like „Städtepartnerschaft“/twin cities to intensify the North-South-Dialogue.

The first conference day concluded with OSWALD MASEBO’s (Dar es Salaam) keynote address „Entangled Histories: Dar es Salaam – Hamburg“. Sharing his thoughts on the colonial archive, Masebo voted for a profound paradigm shift in writing the history of the (German) colonies. Historians have to zoom in on the daily life of the Tanzanian people; Masebo highlighted that archival research in colonial archives almost always perpetuates colonial discourses because it relies on the voices of the colonizers. This must be countered by an oral history-based historiography that helps to generate genuinely Tanzanian identities and that captures the Tanzanian’ heroes as well.

The conference’s second day started with the panel „Artistic Interventions“ that introduced the Research Centre’s project Visual History of the Colonial Genocide. The project combines two Namibian artists working with colonial photographs taken in Namibia in the time of Herero-Nama genocide. NICOLA BRANDT (Windhoek / London) presented her video work „Indifference“; VITJITUA NDJIHARINE (Windhoek) deconstructed the historical photographs as entirely created for the colonial gaze. Ndjiharine emphasized that the photos visually generated a dehumanizing and flattening image of Namibia and reacted to the colonial discourses of visual violence by identifying images with moments of sympathy, emotion and empowerment.

The fourth panel „Institutionalizing Memories“ discussed archives, knowledge, and its present-day implications. PHILIPP OSTEN (Hamburg), director of Hamburg’s Medico-historical Museum, offered an insight into the complex status of Human Remains in the Medico-historical Museum’s collection. 22 Skulls, gathered for „anthropometric research“ around 1900, were recently localized in the Museums Neuropathological collection. Osten gave an account of his fight for the restitution of the human remains to Herero-representatives that is invariably undermined by the Federal Foreign Office with procedural arguments. DIANA NATERMANN (Leiden) then drew attention to Hamburg’s historical contributions to visualizing Africa

and the „Mecklenburg-Collection“, a historical collection of photographs taken in German African colonies that visually created binary and stereotypical legacies of Africa.

The conference’s last panel „Confrontations“ addressed contemporary politics of commemoration. DENISE TOUSSAINT’s (Johannesburg) paper on the student movement #RhodesMustFall focused contemporary South African discourses of memory, power/knowledge, and decolonization. #RhodesMustFall – the 2015’ successful movement that removed the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town – turned out to be only the firestarter of a much bigger need: to decolonize institutions, public spaces, and, above all, the university. MERYEM CHOUKRI, TOM GLÄSER, and JONAS PRINZLEVE (Hamburg) then showed how present-day colonial amnesia is key in stabilizing the ‘cosmopolitan’ image of Hamburg. Colonial representations such as buildings and street names are not only deeply embedded in structures of racism but simultaneously help to reconstruct them, which is why a comprehensive city-wide concept of commemoration is needed, which involves affected communities and actually give justice to its name. A postcolonial reading of „Speicherstadt“ and Hafencity took center stage in the last talk of the session. TANIA MANCHENO (Hamburg) argued that even Hamburg’s youngest district (founded in 2008) and its World’s Cultural Heritage site has a specific colonial inheritance. Mancheno showed that bridge saints like James Cook and Christopher Columbus subliminally indicate colonial ambition, and that while colonizers are portrayed individually, non-European areas (e.g. „Überseequartier“) appear as typified spaces.

The public part of the conference opened with a keynote address by MICHELLE MOYD (Bloomington, ID), which was held in the Ernst-Cassirer-lecture hall. In her paper „Askari Afterlives: Soldiers, Veterans, and Memory“ Moyd drew attention to the social and cultural history of African „Askari“-soldiers in Germany’s colonial army and their roles as „violent intermediaries“ of colonial power. In the post-war era in Tanganyika they were marginalized, while in Weimar the

„Askari“ became a standard trope of colonial discourse and a powerful symbol of Germany’s former military glories.

A public panel discussion brought together (some for the first time) eminent stakeholders to discuss Hamburg’s city-wide concept of postcolonial commemoration. With TOBIAS BERGMANN (Hamburg), for the first time a president of Hamburg’s Chamber of Commerce took part in a discussion about (post-) colonial history and responsibility of his institution. Bergmann signaled the Chamber of Commerce’s willingness to actively participate in the process of coming to terms with the colonial legacy but he also defended the legitimate interests of Hamburg’s economy. AMELIE DEUFLHARD (Hamburg), Director of the theatre Kampnagel, emphasized that it is crucial to deal with the colonial past and highlighted the fact that inviting African artists can help to create a link between Africa and Germany. BÖRRIES VON NOTZ (Hamburg), Chief Executive Director, Historic Museums Hamburg, stressed that changes take time and that cultures of remembrance are always the result of a societal discourse while REINHARD BEHRENS (Hamburg) identified the schools as possible venue to educate the public on the history of colonialism. MILLICENT ADJEI (Hamburg) emphasized that colonialism has led to racism and xenophobia, and demanded that its victims be involved in decolonizing urban spaces at all times. The lively debate, moderated by JÜRGEN ZIMMERER (Hamburg) clearly showed that the attempts to come to terms with its (post-)colonial legacy is gaining ground in Hamburg. It was fitting that in his opening remarks the director of the Research Centre „Hamburg’s (post-)colonial legacy/Hamburg and (early) globalization“ could announce that the Deputy-Mayor and Senator for Culture, KATHARINA FEGBANK (Hamburg) had announced on that day that the work of the Research Centre would be funded for a further five years.

The last conference day started with an excursion to a *lieux de mémoire* that gave the impulse for the formation of the Research Centre and the development of the city-wide concept of commemoration: the former „Lettow-Vorbeck“-barracks with its „Lothar

von Trotha“-building and the 1938 „Askari-Reliefs“ by artist Walter von Ruckteschell. There was no dissent among the excursion participants that the area, with its racist implications, has to be properly contextualized.

In his concluding remarks Jürgen Zimmerer highlighted the important question of prioritizing the different *lieux de mémoire* in the city’s concept of postcolonial commemoration. He also emphasized the need for establishing meeting formats, in which scholars from the Global South and the Global North could meet on a regular basis, and not just in Europe. In exploring the interconnections of colonialism and globalization as well as colonialism’s present-day effects and implications, the conference made an important contribution to Hamburg’s attempt to grapple with its (post-)colonial legacy, and showed that dialogue is possible, and key to the process of reconciliation.

Conference Overview:

Introduction & Welcoming Remarks

Jürgen Zimmerer (Hamburg) / Oliver Huck (Hamburg)

Panel 1: Contributions

Kim Sebastian Todzi (Hamburg): From Free Trade to Imperialism: Hamburg Merchants and the German Colonial Empire“

Caroline Herfert (Hamburg): Performing Colonialism: Stagings of the Other in Hamburg’s Theatre and Entertainment

Florian Wagner (Erfurt): Hamburg: Port History as Colonial History

Panel 2: Creating „Heroes“

Michael Pesek (Hamburg): Glorifying Colonial ‘Heroes’: From Wissmann to Lettow Vorbeck

Ulf Morgenstern (Friedrichsruh): Reassessing Bismarck: Towards a Postcolonial Reading“

Reginald Kirey (Dar es Salaam/Hamburg): The Imperial Race for Colonial Commemorations in Tanganyika: 1920s–1940s

Welcoming Address

Carsten Brosda (Minister of Culture and Head

of Hamburg’s Ministry of Culture and Media)
Keynote

Oswald Masebo (Dar es Salaam): Entangled Histories: Dar es Salaam – Hamburg

Panel 3: Artistic Interventions

Nicola Brandt (Windhoek / London) / Vitj-tua Ndjiharine (Windhoek): Art Project – Namibia and Herero-Nama Genocide

Panel 4: Institutionalizing Memories

Philipp Osten (Hamburg): Human Remains: From Discovery to Restitution

Diana Natermann (Leiden): Hamburg and its Role in Visualizing Africa: A Perturbed Legacy

Panel 5: Confrontations

Denise Toussaint (Johannesburg): Falling Statues, Rising Debates: South African Discourse on Decolonization Three Years after #RhodesMustFall

Tom Gläser / Jonas Prinzleve / Meryem Choukri (Hamburg): Quo Vadis Hamburg: Dealing with Genocide and Colonial Amnesia in a Local Context

Tania Mancheno (Hamburg): In Between the Speicherstadt (UNESCO World Heritage Warehouse Complex) and the Hafencity: The Many Facades of (Post-)colonial Memory.

Public Keynote

Michelle Moyd (Bloomington): Askari Afterlives: Soldiers, Veterans, and Memory

Public Panel „Dealing with Hamburg’s (Post-)colonial Legacy“

Hamed Abbaspur (Eine Welt Netzwerk Hamburg e.V.) / Millicent Adjei (Arbeitskreis Hamburg Postkolonial) / Reinhard Behrens (Beirat „Geschichtsgarten Deutschland-Tansania“) / Tobias Bergmann (Handelskammer Hamburg) / Amelie Deuffhard (Kampnagel – Internationales Zentrum für schönere Künste) / Böries von Notz (Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg)

Final Discussion / Wrap Up

Tagungsbericht *Confronting the Colonial*

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Past! ‚Askari‘, Lettow-Vorbeck and Hamburg’s entangled (post-) colonial legacies.
28.02.2018–02.03.2018, Hamburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.08.2018.