Collecting, Classifying, (Re)presenting: Archives, Museums, Textbooks and the Politics of the Past

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The archive, the museum and the textbook are three different institutions dedicated, among other functions and objectives, to the preservation, creation and diffusion of evidence, narratives and images of the past, which are related directly to questions of power and identity. Over the last two centuries, their evolution has been closely linked with the rise and the fate of the modern nation state and bourgeois society. This is because they were used as instruments for conveying ideas of progress and civilization, of a past in terms of national and imperial superiority as well as for self-affirmation and legitimization. Currently, each of the three institutions has become a productive field of research informed particularly by cultural history and the history of knowledge. One of the main desiderata, however, remains a comparative perspective which embeds the analysis of their objects in a transcultural approach, especially referring to the „West" and the „East" resp. the „Global South" as well as the relations and interactions between the three sites of memory and knowledge. As the Director of the German Historical Institute, MARTIN BAUMEISTER (Rom), underlined in his introduction, this was the aim of the conference, by bringing together scholars, mostly situated in Europe and North America, who study colonial and post-colonial India and who specialise in the history of archives, museums, and textbooks in the Western context.

The first session of the conference was concerned with the theme of exercising „politics of the past" through school textbooks. LUIGI CAJANI (Rom) examined the reworking of Cold War conflicts in the manuals since 1989, as well as in a global perspective. The

age of „memory boom" and „democratization of history" of the following decades was the effect of a process that combined and integrated post-colonial claims, ideology of human rights, and victim empowerment. At the same time, however, the interference of religious and political leaders and social movements on the delicate issue of the preservation and reworking of historical memory has also increased. These factors contributed to transforming history into a „battlefield", which led the governments of many states to attempt forms of control over textbooks and teaching programmes. By analysing some case studies of history textbooks from the Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala, JANAKI NAIR (New Delhi) discussed the influence of issues concerning politics, culture, and identity such as the challenges of linguistic diversity and regional communities claiming their own memory and their respective „historical heroes".

STEFFEN SAMMLER (Braunschweig) questioned what he defined as „industrial standards" of textbooks and their repercussions on the teaching of history: among others, narrow disciplinary divisions, excessive uniformity of teaching units and topics, which leave little room for an experimental conception of the teaching of historical disciplines.

The keynote lecture by MARKUS FRIEDRICH (Hamburg) was dedicated to 'global' approaches to the history of archives and the most recent trends in this field of study. The history of archives and archival practice has in fact undergone a profound revision process in recent years. This has advanced, for example, the relationship between archival science and theory of historiography, and the identification of research directions that have still not been widely explored in this area of study, such as those concerning the 'forgotten' and 'lost' archives. Friedrich identified a history of archives on a global scale as the main challenge of future research. The lecture effectively highlighted how the main risk to be avoided in this direction of research is the projection of western conceptions, a question that still remains controversial in other disciplines, yet already addressed for some time by the so-called 'global turn'. Non-western tradi-

tions obviously have their own history and organisation of sub-disciplines (for example genealogy), which differ radically in concept from Western ones.

The focus of the second section of the conference was the use of archives in the early modern period as a practice of affirmation and management of colonial power. ERIC KETELAAR (Amsterdam) considered archival documents from the Dutch United East India Company (VOC) dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Only a small part of the complex organisation and administration of this megacorporation's information network has survived. The VOC's papers are an exemplary case of archives distributed in several countries (in the Netherlands and former colonies, but also in London and Paris) and the VOC's history an example of research on the above mentioned 'lost archives'. The paper by CARLO TAVIANI (Rome) demonstrated the relevance of the bank of San Giorgio archive, founded by the Republic of Genoa in 1408, for the economic history of the early modern period. The account and record books containing the credit notes of wealthy Genoese families and merchants document their financial transactions and investments in the colonies of the Republic (among others in Corsica and Crimea). If, on the one hand, the San Giorgio archive has been scrupulously cared for since its foundation until today, unlike other archives, any historian who tries to relate to these funds is faced with more than one historiographic problem.

The third section dealt with the connection between historical memory and colonialism from the perspective of the representation and reworking of colonial heritage by different, European and non-European, countries through museum exhibitions and textbooks. BERBER BEVERNAGE (Ghent) presented a paper written together with ELINE MESTDAGH (Ghent) on the case study of reopening the Africa Museum in Belgium in late 2018. The paper highlighted the deep ambivalences towards the attempt to transform the showcase of King Leopold II's notorious colonial enterprise of the so-called Congo Free State into a modern Africa Museum as a place of critical debate on colonial heritage. The bias between the 'post-colonial' image advertised today by the museum itself and severe criticism by different parties – media, UN, citizens of Afro-Belgian origin – can be explained by the failure to rework the colonial events as well as by poor collaboration with the Belgian communities of African origin. LARS MÜLLER (Hannover) examined the evolution of representing the colonial question in German textbooks and museum and exhibition catalogues. From the 'colonial exhibitions' and the 'Völkerkunde' sections of 19th-century museums, imbued with colonial propaganda, we arrive at a more detached language and the first references to the natives as victims in the 1950s and, finally, to the period of explicit criticism against German colonialism beginning in the 1980s. HANNAH FEDER (Göttingen) presented results from her doctoral thesis (in preparation) on the extra-European ethnological collections of Lower Saxony. Referring to the collections kept at the University of Göttingen and their founder and curator, she illustrated how the interaction and opposition of different approaches to colonialism, to collecting, and to methods of classification, create complex dynamics which must be investigated by integrating provenance research, history of knowledge and colonial studies. The approach towards a particular object exhibited in the ethnological collections – the human body and its parts –can tell a lot about legal and political controversies that may arise in the management of this type of exhibition material in the post-colonial age. This was the subject of DAMIANA OTOIU's (Bucharest) paper, which was based on some disputes that took place in France in 2012 regarding some human remains first exhibited in a Parisian museum and finally returned to South Africa.

The second keynote lecture, by NEELARDI BHATTACHARYA (New Delhi), examined how the renewed conception of the history of archives and the 'archival turn' influenced Indian history textbooks: this emerges for example from a different treatment of colonial history, which removed many of its stereotypes, and from the introduction of direct sources into classic narratives typical of textbooks.

The fourth section was dedicated to the

organisation of public memory and to contested multiple pasts. Using the example of an archaeological mission conducted in Egypt by various countries and institutions in the 1960s, WILLIAM CARRUTHERS (Norwich) illustrated how different political interests already collide during the excavation phase. Decades later, the presence – or absence – of traces of that expedition in archives, museums and textbooks posed both diplomatic and historiographic problems. The preservation of historical memory through the conservation of destroyed buildings, maintained as much as possible in their original conditions, was the subject of DIVIANI CHAUDHURI's (New Delhi) talk. In her comparison of two museums, in Beirut (Lebanon) and Amritsar (India), she stressed their high symbolic meaning, as graphic representations of the traumatic memory of violence and destruction of civil war and the partition of India and Pakistan, and their crucial role in the transmission of the memory of conflicts which had been removed from textbooks and official historiography. SHAIL MAYARAM (New Delhi) considered an 'archival pluralism' in India made up of official colonial archives, archives of institutions, local archives and oral traditions as places of interaction between the memories of colonialism and nationalism.

The fifth section brought together contributions focusing on less 'official' archives and actors. HILLA DAYAN (Amsterdam) analysed the difficult preservation and transmission of minority memories in light of the story of the „Maabarot", temporary immigrant and refugee absorption camps which hosted Jews of Middle Eastern origins in Israel through the 1950s and early 1960s. The destruction of the camps, the difficulty of accessing the institutions that keep official documents, censorship and the removal of this story from the official school narrative have partially been replaced by the oral testimonies of the survivors, by inter-generational communication within the families and the organisation of independent archives. The following two papers investigated the relationship between archival collections and new media. The National Film Archives of India, studied by RAVI KANT (New Delhi), is a rather particular case of a film archive: it is not organised by profes-

sional archivists, but rather communities of collectors and fans. Archives of this kind pose specific challenges, partly unknown to the other collections discussed during the conference: the transformation of ephemeral material into archival resources, the integration of old and new media, the need to correctly save the material to prevent its disappearance, the dependence on donations from private individuals such as fans. RAVI VASUDEVAN (New Delhi) considered commercial advertising as an method of archiving in India between the decades following the First World War and the 1970s, considering a plurality of archives, different in terms of both „official" status and ease of access: government and business archives as well as archives of media companies.

The final discussion, moderated by MARTIN BAUMEISTER (Rom) and RIEM SPIELHAUS (Braunschweig), focused on common points and threads linking the presented papers, including the role of knowledge production actors, the relationship between the institutionalisation and administration of memory on the one hand and marginalisation, exclusion, and oblivion on the other. The transcultural approach, comparing and linking „West" and „East" as well as colonial and post-colonial situations, and the integration of research into archives, museums and textbooks under the specific lens of preservation, representation, reworking, alteration and/or loss of historical memory, were all considered particularly rewarding.

Conference overview:

Martin Baumeister (Rom): Welcome and Introduction

I: Teaching History and Politics of the Past
Chair: Lutz Klinkhammer (Rom)

Luigi Cajani (Rom): Political Conflicts and History Education after the Cold War

Janaki Nair (New Delhi): History Textbooks and the Building of 'Historical Temper': Some Thoughts from India

Steffen Sammler (Braunschweig): The Persistence of Industrial Standards in Textbooks. Economic History as Burden and Benefit in Overcoming Nationalism and Eurocentrism

in History Education

Keynote Address

Markus Friedrich (Hamburg): Between History and Politics. Modernity, the State and a Global History of Archiving

II: Establishing and Exercising Colonial Power
Chair: Andreas Gestrich (Trier)

Eric Ketelaar (Amsterdam): Archiving Euro-Asian and Intra-Asian Trade. The Centres of Calculation of the Dutch United East India Company (VOC)

Carlo Taviani (Rome): Investing into the Past, Accounting for the Future: The Living Memory of the Bank of San Giorgio's Archives (15th-20th centuries)

III: Representing and Confronting a Colonial Past
Chair: Indra Sengupta (London)

Berber Bevernage (Ghent) / Eline Mestdagh (Ghent): The Last Colonial Museum no Longer? How the Renovated Africa Museum Attempts to Deal with its Colonial 'Curse'

Lars Müller (Hannover): Politics of Memory and Difficult Knowledge. The Representation of Colonialism in Textbooks and Museums in Germany

Hannah Feder (Göttingen): Researching Colonial Provenances and Understanding Processes of Meaning Making through Academic Collections

Damiana Otoiu (Bucharest): (De)Museifying Racial Taxonomies. The Display and/or the Restitution of Human Remains from French Ethnographic Museums

Keynote Address

Neeladri Bhattacharya (New Delhi): Narrative, Trace, Memory: Writing School Text Books After the Archival Turn

IV: Organizing Public Memory and Contested Multiple Pasts
Chair: Veena Naregal (New Delhi)

William Carruthers (Norwich): History Repeating Itself? Archives, Museums, Textbooks and the Politics of the Past in 1960s India

Diviani Chaudhuri (New Delhi): Museums, Textbooks and Alternative Archives: Ordering Public Memory in Beirut and Amritsar

Shail Mayaram (New Delhi): Archival Pluralism and the contestation over memory

V: Organizing Public Memory and Collective Identities
Chair: Riem Spielhaus (Braunschweig)

Hilla Dayan (Amsterdam) Dwelling in the Past: 1950s „Maabarot" in Israel and their Afterlife

Ravi Kant (New Delhi): Cinephile as Intermedia Collector: People's Archives of Hindi Cinema

Ravi Vasudevan (New Delhi): Archiving Publicity: intersecting infrastructures Colonial and Independent India c.1920s-1960s

Final Discussion

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