Proceedings of the Memory Studies Thematic Workshop Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO)

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Since its renewal in roughly the 1980s, memory studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary field of research, traversing psychology, history, sociology, cultural and literary studies. Organized by Saadi Nikro (Berlin), the Zentrum Moderner Orient's thematic workshop focused on a comparative assessment of 'how particular approaches to researching memory frame their terms of reference, initiate concepts, and generate specific research paradigms,' as he points out in the workshop's outline. Presentations were designed to evoke 'both textual / discursive and social / contextual examples to better grasp the practical significance of concepts and methods for research.'

In the first panel MICHAEL ROTHBERG (Urbana-Champaign) explained the outcome, possibilities and opportunities of what he calls 'multidirectional memory.' As an example Rothberg presented the emergence of Holocaust memory during the process of decolonization in the 1960s. He argued that from a historiographical point of view both phenomena have to be put into dialogue and emphasized that the dynamics of memory have to be rethought. According to him the proposition in memory studies that the congregation of different historical memories creates competition between them is wrong. Instead, Rothberg argued that historical memories do not follow a logical model and could even produce new ways of multidirectional memory. To underline this argument, Rothberg pointed to examples of interaction between Holocaust memory and other historical memories like the works of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and Edgar Morin, in which Holocaust memory and the memory of colonial racism come together.

In the following discussion workshop participants dealt with questions on whether historical memory is 'possessive,' and if there could be a possibility to avoid a competitive scenario between different historical memories. Participants brought forth their own research experiences and pointed to the hegemonic use of historical memory by different actors in order to lobby for their particular cause. Discussing the competitiveness between different historical memories, Rothberg argued that this is not a an obligatory product of comparison, but rather that positions move and even overlap between competition, uniqueness, differentiation, equation and solidarity.

In the second session KATHARINA LANGE (Berlin) discussed 'collective memory' in the work of Maurice Halbwachs, and then evoked an opposition between 'dead' history and 'lived' memory informing the views of Pierre Nora. Lange summarized Nora's definition of memory as a pre-modern phenomenon and a spontaneous act of recollection, a representation of the past which can be found in archaic societies. In the second part of her presentation she mooted Nora's notion by relating it to her own research field of tribal history in northern Syria. Lange described the results of her fieldwork on the tribal groups of the 'Shawaya' in northern Syria and argued that the Shawaya groups represented the past in an oral form of long genealogies, stories, anecdotes and narratives. As this oral history is mostly narrated by elderly men who are regarded as experts of history, Lange stressed that tribal history in Syria is a male-dominated sphere. Nevertheless Lange highlighted that female members of the Shawaya also contribute to the oral history of their tribe, but more by talking about the way of everyday life. In respect to Nora's notion of 'sites of memory,' Lange concluded that this concept of memory is not present within the efforts of the Shawaya to represent the past, and that historiographical references and historical facts are the actual focal points of their thinking.

In the discussion that followed, the attendees pointed out that Pierre Nora was working in France when he formulated his notion of *lieux de mémoire*, and highlighted that his concept should not be read as a model applicable to different areas, but rather as a refer-

ence for further research. In addition, the discussion raised the question about the uses of the different historical narratives of the 'history experts,' namely the elderly men on the one hand and the women on the other. Lange answered that the 'official history' of the elderly men produces a kind of public sphere, even if it is limited, when we consider that women cannot attend the gatherings. Nevertheless Lange highlighted that the narratives of women could be recognized as a kind of social history, which fills a gap in the effort of the Shawaya to narrate the past, especially as the 'official history' concentrates more on the political sphere.

SONJA HEGASY (Berlin) dealt in her presentation with the transformative dynamics encompassed by the work of memory. Hegasy referred to the boom of memory studies and of 'memory projects' implemented by governmental or non-governmental institutions, and even individuals in civil war-torn societies or states with a dictatorial past. Such projects document atrocities and human rights violations, and extend into ethical considerations of history and memory. Hegasy presented examples of memory projects in Lebanon and Morocco, such as the digital collection project *Memory at work: A guide for Lebanese on Peace and War*[1], which was launched in 2012 by the NGO *UMAM Documentation & Research*, and which, according to Hegasy, tries to counter the 'historical amnesia' in the political sphere of Lebanon, in respect to the civil war (1975-1990). As another example, she presented the work of the *Equity and Reconciliation Commission* (*Instance Equité et Réconciliation–IER*), created in 2004 by King Mohamed VI in order to reconcile victims of human rights abuses committed during the 'Years of Lead' (1961-1991) in Morocco.[2] Although the commission launched communal reparation projects, Hegasy highlighted that only few of these projects are working in the field of 'preserving memory,' while the overwhelming majority of the partly EU-funded projects are realized in the traditional development sector (agriculture, infrastructure, etc.). Starting from this discrepancy Hegasy raised the question of relationships between 'forgetting' and 'memorializing,' and concluded her presentation by

referring to the theses of Aleida Assmann and Christian Meier, in which the two authors describe the act of forgetting as a pacifying force, and in which they argue for a balance between the two 'actions.'

The ensuing discussion turned on questions concerning the role of archives and the relationship between 'forgetting' and 'memorializing.' Referring to the special situation in Lebanon, Makram Rabah (Beirut) argued against the idea of an 'amnesia culture' in post-war Lebanon, stressing that many figures of the Lebanese political sphere run their own memory projects, as they well understand that forgetting does not necessarily serve as a pacifying force. Furthermore the attendees suggested that the two forces of memorializing and forgetting are always co-present and situated in a relation of interdependency. In reaction to this, Hegasy pointed to the concept of *Erinnerungskultur*, which in the German context is almost a synonym for remembering the Holocaust and the victims of National Socialism. She pointed out that the ambition within German society to forget the Nazi past produced in the end a foundation for Germany's self-identity as a society and nation with a high degree of memory culture.

In the following presentation KARIN MLODOCH (Berlin) spoke about the connections between memory and traumatic experiences in the contexts of excessive violence and war. Drawing on her own research project on traumatic memories of Kurdish women, who had survived the Anfal Campaign (1988-89), Mlodoch depicted the concept of trauma as a memory phenomenon. From a psychological point of view the traumatized person fluctuates between avoiding the traumatic memory and searching for it. Outcomes of this searching process are trauma narratives, which are characterized by very detailed statements but also by erratic references to place and time. In respect to the special situation of the survivors of the Anfal Campaign, Mlodoch highlighted that

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[1] A guide for Lebanese on Peace and War, <http://www.memoryatwork.org/>, (16.3.2014).

[2] United Nations Institute of Peace, Truth Commission Morocco, <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-morocco>, (16.3.2014).

the women linked their own individual traumatic experiences in their narratives with the traumatic experiences of relatives, neighbors and friends, and consequently produced a collective memory. In contrast to this, Mlodoch criticized the notion of 'collective trauma.' In her opinion the use of the term is incorrect, as a trauma cannot be transferred to a collective group, society or nation. Mlodoch emphasized the deep difference between directly experiencing violence and war and just knowing about it second hand.

In the discussion the attendees considered the role of the creators of narratives for the emergence of traumata. Mlodoch stressed that it was the production of collective memory that made it possible for the Anfal women to recognize and represent their suffering, rather than the narrative of a third person. She closed by saying that the Anfal women produced a collective memory independently, which somehow stabilized their psychological situation. This stands in remarkable contrast to the male survivors of the Anfal campaign, who – without the experience of collective memory – remain in a much poorer psychological state.

The next session of the workshop was given by SUSAN SLYOMOVICS (Los Angeles), with her talk 'Memory and Visual Anthropology.' Slyomovics' contribution dealt with the complex and intertwined pasts of visual anthropology and photography in the context of 19th century colonized Algeria. She focused on the question of how photographs were used for reconstructing the past and how they could function as memory devices. Highlighting the historical overlap between the discovery of photography, the development of visual biometric technologies in the 1820s, and the French colonization of Algeria in 1830, Slyomovics referred to the prevalent comprehension of photography in late 19th century Britain and France as an exact replica of reality. This notion had a great impact on colonial photography and especially on contemporary visual anthropology. The aforementioned historical coincidence made Algeria into a 'scientific' laboratory for French anthropologists, who produced photographs in the context of anthropometric classification systems and racial sciences to catego-

rize Algerians into different types, sorted in order of hierarchy. Asking about the complex legacies of colonial French photography, Slyomovics presented colonial tourist postcards of Algeria and compared them with the French-imposed ID photos of Algerians and photographs taken by French anthropologists. Examining especially the portraits, Slyomovics referred to the work of Alphonse Bertillon, who in his ambition to produce a complete portrait of criminals, resorted to Carl Damann's technique of profile photography of colonized persons. In the last part of her lecture Slyomovics drew attention to the Algerian ID photos and argued that these, which according to Slyomovics were born out of colonial or post-independence repressive violence, were transformed into memory devices. As an example, Slyomovics pointed to Algerians who use the ID photos of murdered or disappeared relatives during the Civil War of 1990 as 'sole evidence' of their existence.

Discussing the connection between visual anthropology and memory studies, participants raised the question of the role of pictures of political prisoners in the demonstrations of mostly women in Algeria and Morocco. According to Slyomovics, the particular form of the ID photos is regarded as the most intimate material object representing disappeared persons. For that reason the ID photos have an 'iconic quality,' as they are used in demonstrations as a reference to time, showing disappeared persons in the past. Recognizing the significance of colonial photography archives for memory studies, participants directed the question of the rereading possibilities of these archives to Slyomovics. Here she emphasized that questions of who took the photo, where it was taken and whom it showed can often be easily answered, but that these photographs were not related to the violent context in which they were produced. Slyomovics closed by stating this relational setting as the most fruitful way to reread colonial photography archives.

The last lecture of the workshop was held by BETTINA DENNERLEIN (Zurich) on 'Memory and Gender,' in which she gave participants an insight into her research. Working on the discursive articulations of the Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission,

Dennerlein observed that the memory work of the commission is almost completely channeled through the language of human and women rights. Concentrating on this issue, Dennerlein dealt with the limiting, and at the same time enabling aspects of the categories 'women' and 'gender.' According to her, both these categories have a strong generalizing dimension and are almost used as synonyms. Dennerlein offered two approaches to answer the question about how the category of 'gender' works within the discourse of memory politics. On the one hand there is the analytical approach, in which the researcher can look at the discourse and its context to detect the norms and organizing effects of the category on the discourse itself. On the other hand there is the possibility to approach the question from a more theoretical perspective, through which the notion of 'gender' could be reread. Here, Dennerlein pointed to Joan Wallach Scott's article 'Gender: Still a useful category of analysis' from 2010 and summarized Scott's position, outlining how in the last decades the category of 'gender' accrued an ideological connotation, which consequently restricted it's function as a critical category. Nevertheless, Dennerlein went on to point out, Scott argues for a critical rereading of the category, regarding how the construction of sexual differences can reconstitute 'gender' as a useful and critical category for legal and political discourses.

The following discussion raised the question of how to connect the gender perspective to memory studies. Dennerlein highlighted here the organizing effects of categories like 'women' or 'gender,' especially in the field of memory politics and reflected on these organizing effects as the entry point for her research. According to Dennerlein, the constructed category of 'women' is an organizing force with regards to politics and social phenomena. For that reason the category as such cannot be neglected for any historical research.

Conference Overview:

Michael Rothberg (Urbana-Champaign), Multidirectional and Collective Memory

Katharina Lange (Berlin), History and Memory

Sonja Hegasy (Berlin), Transformative Exigencies of Memory

Karin Mlodoch (Berlin), Memory and Trauma

Susan Slyomovics (Los Angeles), Memory and Visual Anthropology

Bettina Dennerlein (Zurich), Memory and Gender

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