



Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Workshop: Colonialism and Transgenerational Memory in Europe

21.09.2022–22.09.2022

Organiser:

Markus Wurzer (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Research Group: Alpine Histories of Global Change)

Venue:

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany

Call for Papers

In recent years, colonialism, its memory, and diverse legacies have been studied in various ways and contexts, demonstrating how colonial pasts still shape the present. While scholarship has dealt with colonial remnants, for instance in museums and public spaces, another 'venue' of collective memory has hardly been addressed: the sphere of family memory. The lack of research is even more surprising because transgenerational memory is considered to be one of the most important modes of collective memory, especially when it comes to the transmission and construction of a historical consciousness.

'Ordinary' colonial agents, soldiers and the like brought home such objects as postcards, photographs or 'keepsakes' as well as stories, which, in Europe, families pass down through the generations. This workshop starts from two premises. First, this process significantly shapes the collective imagination of the colonial past. Secondly, family memories are not apolitical: when kept over the generations such narratives and objects pass down interpretations of colonial realities that are based on everyday colonial knowledge and that support particular imageries such as the idea of 'white' superiority. In addition, it can be assumed that the myth of the 'good' colonialist, as circulated in many European societies, has been so powerful because this historical imagination is rooted within the personal level of the family. Usually, they imagine their relatives who were involved in colonial enterprises as decent and morally upright colonialists and vehemently reject the possibility that they participated in colonial violence. The latter is always externalised and attributed to other groups, other actors, or even other colonial powers.

Therefore, it is high time to address colonialism in transgenerational memory. This workshop will ask how and which memories of a colonial past have been passed down in European families whose forbears were involved in processes of de/colonialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries either as colonisers or colonised. Possible paper topics include but are not limited to:

- theoretical approaches to the concept of transgenerational/family memory;
- methodological reflections on questions of restitution as well as how to survey, archive, and analyse family collections of colonial origins;
- empirical case studies dealing with oral histories as well as various objects (photographs, militaria, letters, war spoils, etc.) which originate from colonial contexts, and which are passed down in families along with narratives of colonialism;

- the question of how generations of children and grandchildren positioned themselves with regard to familial entanglement in colonialism with a particular focus on violence and racism. What episodes do families (not) remember?
- practices of meaning-making within families: What do family members do with the colonial objects handed down? Do they collect, modify, destroy, sell, or use them? What meanings do children and grandchildren create in such processes?

Paper proposals from history, memory studies, postcolonial studies, literature, anthropology, sociology, archaeology, heritage studies, and related disciplines are welcome. The workshop will take place on 21 and 22 September 2022 at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale. Proposals should be submitted to [wurzer\[a\]eth.mpg.de](mailto:wurzer[a]eth.mpg.de) by **15 June 2022**.

Your application should include a provisional paper title, a short CV, and an abstract of max. 300 words. The workshop is generously funded by the independent MPI research group 'Alpine Histories of Global Change' (see: <https://www.eth.mpg.de/alpine>). Invited speakers will be reimbursed for travel and accommodation costs.

Contact:

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