Europe and Colonial Knowledge, 1500–1850

Veranstalter: Maria-Theresia Leuker / Jakob Vogel, Zentrum für vergleichende Europäische Studien (ZEUS), Universität zu Köln
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Since the publication of Cohn's „Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge" in 1996, the concept of 'colonial knowledge' has been applied in manifold research.[1] The workshop „Europe and Colonial Knowledge, 1500–1850", organized by MARIA-THERESIA LEUKER (Cologne) and JAKOB VOGEL (Cologne) for the Centre for Comparative European Studies (ZEUS) at the University of Cologne, aimed at relating this concept to the early modern era, conceived here as a period of dynamic change, yet qualitative difference from 'modernity'. In his introduction Jakob Vogel pointed to the institutional framework of ZEUS as an ideal setting for an interdisciplinary and regionally diverse debate of colonial knowledge. As overarching themes for this workshop he then identified European moulds of knowledge, interaction and circulation in non-European regions, and, finally, the place of colonial knowledge in the broader research context of the evolution of modern European science.[2] Maria-Theresia Leuker expanded this field, regarding actors such as travellers and missionaries, their individual approaches to the accumulation of knowledge, and the specificity of the non-European regions they encountered. She referred to the complex relation of knowledge and power and the hierarchies implied. In regard to the attribution or label of colonial knowledge, she asked to critically analyse the practices of knowledge production and to reach beyond the oversimplification of binary oppositions such as local–scientific or centre–periphery, especially by looking at the preservation of objects, the transport of data, or the means of translation.

The two presentations of the first session „Knowledge Transfers" centred on texts and images, both in the literal sense, as windows of opportunity to analyse the construction of factual knowledge as well as shifting worldviews among early modern Europeans. In her analysis of Olfert Dapper's 1668 compilation „Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten", BETTINA NOAK (Berlin) concentrated on the use of traditional *topoi* in the explanation of Africa and Africans to his European audience. She pointed to Dapper's interpretations of the christianized kingdom at the Zaire river, complete with „Reichsadel" and insignia, and the engravings his publishers commissioned after the descriptions in the manuscript, with an illustration of the Congolese capital in a landscape reminiscent of the Rhine valley. Not having travelled to Africa himself, Dapper took up his work in the context of the commercial voyages to India and Dutch domination in parts of Western Africa that had created a demand for information on terrain, people and politics. HANCO JÜRGENS (Amsterdam) introduced a pietist–enlightened knowledge divide with his study of German missionaries' „faith, knowledge and company networks" in Tamil Nadu, 1750–1810. Based on the periodical published by the Francke'sche Stiftungen in Halle, Jürgens illustrated the replacement of the person- and speech-oriented streetwork of the first group of missionaries, with religious practice as point of reference, by the object- and print-oriented natural history research of a second group, with close connections to academic societies in Bengal and Germany. Subject to enlightened criticism in German circles, the latter regarded their Indian contemporaries as people in the stage of human childhood who needed education, uplifting and civilization, symbolized by schools and churches in the Indian public sphere, and anticipating developments in 19th century colonialism.

The first session's discussions focused on the role of imports in the social construction of academic/scientific knowledge in Europe: the incorporation of non-European information into European texts; the materiality of

[1] Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India (Princeton Studies in Culture, Power, History), Princeton, NJ 1996.

[2] For a North-North case study on the 'scientific revolution', cf. Sara S. Gronim, Everyday Nature. Knowledge of the Natural World in Colonial New York, New Brunswick, NJ/London 2007.

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knowledge in Europe, e.g. the production of engravings; the spaces of knowledge, e.g. the circulation of books in collections and libraries; and the (financial) self-interest of the author-researchers. This lead to the question if 'colonial' is a fitting category for those dynamics of intellectual exchange and representation within Europe itself.

The second session „Actors and Representations" comprised three presentations from PhD-students, all of whom concentrated on the dynamics of discourse. Ethnologist ANNA-TERESA GRUMBLIES (Cologne) discussed knowledge hierarchies, making use of J. Agrawals 1995 concept of „scientization".[3] First, she sketched how the intensified research on local knowledge in development studies from the 1970s onwards set out to overcome the dichotomy of scientific and indigenous knowledge systems, but, especially in the field of ecology, could not establish new practices. Second, to make visible the deep roots of this dichotomy, she focused on specific encounters of nascent European science with non-European local knowledge in the case of Jacobus Bontius. In what is now Indonesia, Bontius depended on local informants and practices such as women's medicine and cooking recipes, and his studies in the South of India serve as proof of permeable borders and hybridity. With the institutionalisation of European science and the rising value of individual discoveries, though, common knowledge was devalued and indigenous informants were muted. Translations, classification and standardisation removed local contexts, and finally led to the commodification of knowledge in European hands. Turning from the tropics to the polar regions, historian PASCAL SCHILLINGS (Cologne) asked if these were „resisting representation" because, exotic as they were, they offered no material objects to collect and therefore no basis for comparison within the already established knowledge system of European science between 1770 and 1850. On his voyages instigated by the „Pacific craze" in the learned circles of the late 18th century, Captain Cook crossed the Antarctic circle three times and returned with the impression of an ice archipelago as a „country doomed by nature", while the voyages' artists W. Hodges and G. Forster were struggling to represent this country in traditional oil paintings. Participants in the discussions pointed out the contrasts between processes of scientific globalisation and academic/commercial nationalisation in Europe, and, connected to the problems of scale and perspective, the contrasts of verbal and visual representations and, again, their respective 'colonial' character.

This tension was exemplified when KATHRIN REINERT (Cologne) debated „visual fantasies on Latin America" from an area studies perspective. Adding racism as another factor shaping representations of knowledge, she showed how the taxonomy of the *sociedad de castas* with its 16 racially defined groups, materialised in sets of paintings, served as a marker of social status in the households of Spanish and Creole elites in pre-Revolution Mexico. When the new government concentrated on nation-building and officially banned the castas, this visual strategy against the fluidity of boundaries and redefinitions of social codes (*calidad*) was outdated. Leaning on artistic developments in European metropoles, *costumbrismo* paintings and 'type' photography were established as new means of self-expression for bourgeois households, while casta motives and forms constantly re-emerged. Here the discussion centred on processes of translating and localising knowledge: the (dis-) continuities within the different media and markets of science on the one hand and the arts on the other, and the importance of the specific historical contexts of the colonial in inter-continental comparisons.[4]

The two keynote lectures both tapped into the European networks that made possible the circulation of knowledge across geographical boundaries and cultural barriers. SIEGFRIED HUIGEN (Stellenbosch/ South Africa) examined the construction of knowledge within the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and presented the genre of chorography (the art of describing or mapping a region or district) with one of his case studies,

[3] Arun Agrawal, Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge, in: Development and Change 26 (1995), pp. 413–439.

[4] Cf. Daniela Bleichmar et al. (eds.), Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800, Stanford, CA 2009.

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„François Valentyn's Construction of the Geography of the Cape of Good Hope" in 1726. Central to his lecture was the distinction between a static geography based on personal observation (the immediate Cape region) and a dynamic one (western South Africa), based on privileged access to VOC documents. By the time of Valentyn's stay at the Cape, the Dutch expansion into Khoikhoi territory, consequence of the extensive food production by so-called freeburghers for the VOC, and the subsequent transformation of the landscape into a neo-Europe, were well underway. Valentyn's visitor perspective was not only emotionally charged – elements of the African landscape were seemingly a physical threat, barren, desolate, and wild – but was inspired by the Dutch landscape discourse of the time – he described the cultivated land as pretty, elegant, and delightful. Horticultural knowledge was localized and colonialised when the process of transformation from a *locus terribilis* to a *locus amoenus* included the removal of Khoikhoi settlements and their social reduction to mere labourers. Huigen applied elements of actor-network-theory to the European scientific interest in indigenous nature, exemplified by the impulses for a VOC-financed expedition to Namaqualand in the North, the production of differing journals afterwards, and the inscription of the findings as an „immutable mobile" into Valentyn's account. The VOC network lost its key position only in the late 18th century, when scientists began to travel, collect and research on their own.

In his „reflections from a circulatory perspective" on colonial knowledge as a category in the history of science, KAPIL RAJ (Paris) turned against reification and essentialism and defined colonial knowledge as „enabling domination over colonial subjects" (what does it do?), only to point out the crucial role of indigenous people in the formation of that knowledge (where does it come from?) and the Europeans' role as „seeing eye". The translation of one local epistemology into a European one could therefore only be fragmented and again, in line with specific practices, locally applicable. He suggested an alternative representation of knowledge accumulation as continuous processes of multi-directional connections and flows. In three case studies, he analysed the formation and impact of texts crucial to the history of botany and medicine, including the cultural appropriation of 'Indian' knowledge by European actors and the subsequent co-production of local knowledge. Raj referred to Diego Garcia da Orta's *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas e Cousas Mediçinais da Índia* (1563), that in Clusius' Latin version became the founding text for the upcoming university of Leiden, to Hendrik A. van Rheede's *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* (1678–93), modelled after the *Colóquios* with its specific multi-lingual references, and finally to Nicolas l'Empereur's *Jardin de Lorixa* (early 18th cent.), with a localised frontispice, modelled after the *Hortus Indicus* and paying tribute to Indian contributions. In his concluding remarks Raj stressed the mutable character of these mobiles, as the botanical studies were transformed even on their way from manuscript to print edition, and the aspect of intermediation, as performed by those traveller-authors who remained long enough to develop the familiarity with local knowledge that was absolutely necessary for their work.

The final discussions involved exchange about the intellectual and material factors shaping the practices of science in colonial settings: European genres and rhetorical techniques to make foreign knowledge accessible, including the botanist authors' problems with classification valid across language systems; the longstanding difference between commercial and intellectual interests; and the private character of research projects, with ministers and doctors imprinting the forms they were trained in on their material.

In the end, the workshop proved the convenors' impulse for differentiation in space and chronology and called for further (micro-) studies to explore the complexity of knowledge discourses and practices. This exploration should take the question of colonial knowledge further beyond the history of science, following the steps already taken into the fields of cultural and social history to include the gender dimensions of cultural brokerage[5] as well as the role of knowledge in the

[5] Cf. Lynn Zastoupil, Intimacy and 'Colonial' Knowledge (SFB 485 Norm und Symbol, Diskussionsbeiträge,

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formation of colonial identities; the acquisition of material goods by purchase, exchange, or theft and their contested voyages through collections and museums[6]; and the global dimensions of entangled natural and cultural histories.[7]

Conference Overview:

Part I: Workshop

Maria-Theresia Leuker / Jakob Vogel (both Cologne): Introduction

Section 1: Knowledge Transfers

Bettina Noak (Berlin): Mit fremden Augen? Koloniales Wissen in Olfert Dappers Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten (1668)

Hanco Jürgens (Amsterdam): Enlightenment between Prussia and India: Faith, Knowledge and Company networks of German missionaries in Tamil Nadu, 1750–1810

Section 2: Actors and Representations

Anna-Teresa Grumblies (Cologne): Colonial Interest in Indigenous Ecological Knowledge: Scientific Endeavors, Developments and Processes of Scientisation (16th–18th century)

Kathrin Reinert (Cologne): Visual fantasies on Latin America: Casta painting, costumbrismo and 'type' photography

Pascal Schillings (Cologne): Resisting Representation? The Polar Regions and British Colonial Knowledge, 1770–1850

Part II: Public Keynote and Discussions

Section 3: Networks and Circulations

Siegfried Huigen (Stellenbosch/South Africa): François Valentyn's Construction of the Geography of the Cape of Good Hope (1726)

Kapil Raj (Paris): On 'Colonial Knowledge' as a Category in the History of Science: Reflections from a Circulatory Perspective

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9), Konstanz 2000.

[6] Cf. Amiria Henare, Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange, Cambridge 2005.

[7] Cf. Julie Cruikshank, Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters & Social Imagination (Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series), Vancouver/Seattle 2005.

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