HT 2018: Close Distance. Soziale Segregation in Handelsimperien und Kolonien

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So far away and yet so close (So nah und doch so fern) – The Section „Close Distance. Social Segregation in Trading Empires and Colonies", organized by CORNEL ZWIER-LEIN (Bamberg / Erfurt) and FLORIAN WAGNER (Erfurt / West Berkeley), called for a history of segregation and exclusion in the *longue durée* in contexts of imperial and colonial expansion, starting with early modern examples of newly „aggregated" societies in colonial port cities and merchant settlements. The categories „race" and „space" which are currently dominating research on the governmentalities of colonial and post-colonial times seemed too narrowly defined and therefore, to the organizers and contributors of the panel, not adequate as an approach for historicizing forms of proto-segregation, that is, arrangements of living physically close together yet remaining distant on other epistemic levels. The organizers, therefore, chose the metaphor of „close distance" to open a field for questions without conceiving of this as a universal paradigm. In the introduction, Cornel Zwierlein suggested a focus on processes of cognition and communication – the epistemic level of segregation – taking this as a heuristic starting point for historicizing across periods. He proposed to recur in this context to the central category of ignorance and ignoring. Ignoring (the other) is an action which lays down the foundation for distance and also reproduces it. The focus on ignorance might offer appropriate access to research on segregation across the periods, because through this the epistemic activity itself, which produces distance, is put into the center of investigation, while its objects and references might change. The question, therefore, might be how social borders and physical and cognitive distance between men can be a function of forms of ignoring.

Florian Wagner emphasized that for nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial history it would equally be fruitful to concentrate on the softer epistemically oriented question of „close distance" instead of the narrower concept of racial segregation, at least for a moment. The decisive advantage would be that this grants also a certain degree of agency to the „colonized": contrary to the segregation laws and norms which the Europeans imposed on the native population, ´distance´ could be performed by Europeans and indigenous alike towards each other. To analyze these situations of closeness and distance would allow for the provision of a nuanced picture of colonial power and the inspection of how the indigenous population conceived of distance and otherness.

KELSEY CHAMPAGNE (Yale) started the section off with her contribution on „Belief and (Un-)Belonging: Catholicism in the British Atlantic, 1660–1714", concerning the social exclusion of Irish Catholics in England´s Northern American and Caribbean colonies. She studied what was associated with „catholicism" by Protestants as well as Catholics in this period and these colonial contexts: England´s global expansion enabled the Catholics – threatened by exclusion and persecution in their homeland – to open up spaces of tacit acceptance within the colonies. However, following the political and religious chaos of the „Glorious Revolution" (1688/89), the situation changed and all forms of „otherness" – ´indigenous´, ´black´ and ´catholic´ – became perceived, without difference, as a threat to the hegemony of the white Protestant English. After the experiences of the „Glorious Revolution"(1688/89), the Catholics´ potential as a threat was based rather on fear of revolts, conspiracies and Catholic violence than on the content of religion itself. To be catholic meant in this context first of all to be a potential conspirator and collaborator of the French, of the indigenous and of the black slaves, and thereby to endanger Protestant interests. Through this, „Catholic" even developed into a category of ethnicity. The Irish suffered most from this uncertainty about whether they counted as an „alternative" part of white society or as foreign to it:

in a 1699 census on the Leeward Islands, they were not recognized as part of the „white" population. Finally, even for those Catholics who were recognized as „white", the constant discrimination by Protestants still profoundly slowed down the integration of Catholics into a coherent British national society.

That this integration was eventually successful was mostly to the merit of the Catholics themselves, who had taken up an active role by adapting to the conditions of their environment and who had started to address the question of what it meant to be Catholic. Therefore, debates on the status of the papacy and the role of lay people started within catholic communities and sometimes led to division and small forms of schisms. Many Catholics did not identify themselves first of all through their confession, but rather through their national and political belonging. Catholics had experimented with several techniques to pacify and balance their somehow contradictory status in Protestant England. As a consequence, they sometimes claimed a part of the national and imperial identity for themselves, which was not, for them, defined by the necessity to belong also to the Church of England. It was, therefore, not the state but the people, not the average Anglican but the marginalized „Other", who first grappled with a Britishness entirely disentangled from the Church.

REMCO RABEN (Utrecht / Amsterdam) addressed in his contribution „Moral communities in Dutch Asia: Trust and exclusion in colonial societies in panic" the social realities of the economies of trust and distrust among the different ethnic groups in Dutch Indonesia´s Batavia at the time of the so-called „Chinese Revolt" of 1740. He started off by emphasizing that colonial cities and societies had generally been migrant societies which resulted in a huge diversity of composition, but also included processes of melting and mixing up. As a result, colonial societies were extremely complex places, where race, occupation, religion, class and legal status constantly interplayed with each other and which directed the definition of social boundaries. He advocated, therefore, for a revision of past approaches to colonial themes and their central categories of race and space: colonial societies

did not derive their dynamics simply and predominantly from colonial policies of segregation and separate treatment, instead recognizing that these are webs of moral spaces, which were determined by location and occasion, by immigration and adaptation. By doing so, one could see colonial society not merely as the result of a basically racist system of foreign domination, but as a very dynamic place where colonial laws and colonial machinations were only one part of the story. He proposed the category of „moral community" to describe this. The term indicates that ethnic or racial difference did indeed exist and that these were commonly acknowledged, but that social interactions, ranging from market transactions to family networks, and from trust to suspicion, existed too. To illustrate this for the Dutch VOC, Raben engaged first of all with sources and court papers concerning the so-called „Chinese revolt" of 1740 in Batavia. These sources are enlightening because they present the voices of European and non-European inhabitants of the colony. By analyzing the sources, Raben demonstrated that ethnic segregation outside of Batavia existed primarily only on paper and that the Chinese and Javanese mixed with other Indonesian groups. „Localization", on the one hand, and „mixing" across ethnic borders, on the other: belonging to „moral communities" dominated the choice of marriage partners, daily social interaction and therefore also the question of whether to raise weapons against the VOC or remain loyal. Against this background, Raben judged it necessary to revise the master narrative of the „Chinese Revolt" of 1740, first of all because „local" Chinese had tried to escape from the conflict without taking up arms. Though some of these „local" Chinese had finally adhered to the revolt, most of them had been „newcomers" from China and therefore really strangers who spoke the language badly and who largely remained among themselves. The 1740 event therefore demonstrates clearly how ambivalent the ethnic order of „close distance" in an early modern colonial society was – with tendencies of mixing and melting as well as of division and conflict.

CORNEL ZWIERLEIN (Bamberg/Erfurt) then addressed the problems of „ignoring the

other" with regard to the religious interaction between the Western Merchant Colonies in the Levant and the Eastern Churches, 1650–1800. As a case study, he first examined the schism within the Greek Melkite and schismatic Patriarch of Antioch around 1724. The paper laid a strong emphasis on the „average" European Levant merchant. It addressed the question of how far the European merchant nations were to be recognized as culturally „open" and penetrated by oriental cultures, or to what extent they remained rather a closed sphere, within an environment loosely coupled and interconnected with these cultures. On the one hand, all narratives concerning the 1724 schism showed that the merchants were highly involved in the religious affairs of the Orthodox church – the English Protestants as well as the French Catholics, with many of them drawn in through financial support for one or the other Eastern parties within the conflict. However, changing the perspective from third-person descriptions and narratives of chains of events – as found in the correspondences on Greek affairs of consuls and the Congregation of Propaganda fide in Rome, closer already to diplomatic documents – to the world of the merchants as encapsulated in the chancery records, merchant letters, account books and other more personal documents such as diaries, one gets different ideas than by reading the letters of consuls or missionaries. The papers of a Levant merchant family such as the Boddingtons, for instance, excels through a lack of any reference to turmoils and momentous struggles such as the 1724 schism, though the merchants were living in Aleppo or Constantinople door by door with the Greeks and other Eastern Christians. The diaries, though evidently commenced before the departure from London and continued throughout the stay abroad in the Levant, are very much concentrated on the homeland. Merchant letters are quite strictly concentrated on commercial affairs; private letters – if available and distinguishable at all from the former – are similarly silent concerning these matters, apart from short comments on politico-religious problems that hinder transport and commercial communication. Probatory inventories certainly often contain items of Ottoman, Jewish, Armenian or other Eastern provenance and were often written in those languages, but this seems to have been restricted to contracts, credit records, bills and similar documents. This is not just the result of merchants' general disinterest in ´culture´ or ´religion´ in general: the chancery records, probatory inventories, surviving sermons by the chaplains or priests serving in the merchant nations, and the book catalogues created after a merchant's death or bankruptcy in the Levant – all these reveal a vivid cultural life in the Western merchant communities. However, those libraries seldom contained even a single book in a non-Western language – and if it did, this was a dictionary. Through this, a certain duality of communication, or different levels of exchange, of openness and closure, becomes visible: on the one hand, a polyglot and efficient interaction of the European merchants with their Levantine counterparts for purposes of commerce and, on the other hand, a relatively high-profile indifference on the level of religious and cultural interaction – excepting here famous examples of missionizing merchants taking part, indeed, in affairs like the schism, who were known by name from Rome to Constantinople, from Paris to London. A more complex shaping of the semantic and epistemic intersections and intercourses between Western merchants and Ottoman subjects becomes evident: these people lived and communicated with each other, yet not on all levels to the same degree of intensity, and it included significant gaps of ignorance and knowledge. This was partly due to the specific character of the merchant nations whose populations were constantly changing and were largely composed of short-time inhabitants, though the colonies themselves were established for decades and centuries. The epistemically „semi-open" and „semi-open" profile of these merchant colonies meant therefore that they did indeed perform forms of „close distance" and „proto-segregation" which were isomorphous, but in no way homologous, to the realities of segregation of the nineteenth century – even if these were physically implanted into and built upon the same places, houses and khans as their former early modern precur-

sors.

Finally, FLORIAN WAGNER (Berkeley / Erfurt) focused in his contribution on the measures of racial segregation which colonial administrations took as consequence of the processes of professionalization of colonial exclusion politics and the scientificization of colonial anthropology. Individuals in the colonies had always experienced the colonial realities as different degrees of closeness and distance. Closeness and distance were not necessarily contradictory and could occur at the same time. Of the different forms of segregation, legal segregation was the most common in Africa. As a consequence of its implementation, the changing balance and reciprocity of closeness and distance was becoming more obvious.

In the interwar period, colonial administrations and anthropologists had declared that „European" law and African customary law were incompatible, thereby laying the foundations for legal segregation in the African colonies. The cultural relativism supported by the anthropologists suggested that „non-Europeans" living in their own climate and in a different non-European environment should be governed by their own laws. The empirical research necessary for the implementation of a dual legal system, taking account of the local traditions and customs as well as the codification of indigenous customary law, had been undertaken by the colonial administration and offices in large projects and enterprises. The result of these research projects was, by the end of the 1920s, the introduction of a dual legal system in many African colonies.

The hereby propagated cultural relativism stood in for colonial politics of segregation of and between African legal communities, founded on an allegedly complete knowledge of „the other". This legal dualism was therefore a chimera as the African legal communities were in no way autonomous from the colonial administration. Even worse, the Europeans often added „invented traditions" and modifications to what was presented as empirically researched and faithfully-rendered indigenous customary law, consequently actually codifying it to their own advantage. The relationship between native customary law and European law was therefore in no way static, but changed according to the given interests of the colonizers. If this had served their cause they would even have defined the indigenous customary law as diametrically opposed to European and „civilized" law – and at the same time, they modified native law and amended it with rules that were „closer" to European law – again, if they deemed this necessary. A typical process was to add norms to the indigenous customary law which allowed Europeans to acquire land from the Africans. The relationships between native customary law and European law were in no way stable but were always changing according to the given interests of the colonizers. Taken as such, performing „close distance" was an instrument for the implementation of legal dualism within the African colonies. Thinking about these colonial situations in terms of close distance enables us to go beyond the dichotomies inherent in both colonial and postcolonial theory. This does not mean that racist attitudes and segregation policies based on binary constructions of difference should be ignored. Rather, searching for examples of close distance helps us look at concrete situations that give room to the agency of those who have hitherto played a passive role in colonial historiography. (English editing by Rebecca Van Hove)

Panel Overview:

Heads of panel: Cornel Zwierlein (Bamberg / Erfurt)/Florian Wagner (GHI West Berkeley / Erfurt)

Kelsey Champagne (Yale): Belief and Unbelonging: Catholicism in the British Atlantic, 1660-1714

Remco Raben (Utrecht / Amsterdam): Moral communities in Dutch Asia: Trust and exclusion in colonial societies in the 18th century

Cornel Zwierlein (Bamberg /Erfurt): Ignoring the Other's Religion? Western Merchant Colonies in the Levant and the Eastern Churches, 1650-1800

Florian Wagner (GHI West Berkeley/Erfurt): Cultural Relativism, Labor Migration and Racial Segregation in Colonial Africa (1890-1930er)

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