

Migrations, Crossings, Unintended Destinations: Ecological Transfers across the Indian Ocean, 1850-1920

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In the age of empire, thousands of species of plants and animals migrated between Australia, Asia, and Africa. Some of these species were transferred by humans for economic, scientific or aesthetic reasons. Others traveled between the continents without human intention. Some of these transfers and migrations have received much attention from historians, others have been neglected. So far, there is no comprehensive analysis of the history of species transfer and ecological change in the Indian Ocean region in the age of empire. This workshop therefore brought together leading experts from Australia, New Zealand, India, the USA and Europe to discuss the potential an integrated environmental history of species transfer across the Indian Ocean might have.

In her introduction, ULRIKE KIRCHBERGER (Kassel) outlined the key issues of the workshop. She addressed the problem in how far the species transfers across the Indian Ocean can be regarded as belonging to a coherent spatial unit. She also dealt with the question of how to structure the transfers across the Indian Ocean on the spatial level and asked how to develop spatial categories to connect different transfer processes with each other. Furthermore, she referred to the problem of agency and participation. It was declared an important aim of the workshop to examine how different groups of European, African, Asian, Australian and non-human participants have to be related to each other. Following animal studies and multispecies concepts, the workshop aimed to investigate the agency of plants and animals in the context of these transfers. These non-human participants unfolded their own dynamics in the

course of the transfers. Europeans who „acclimatized“ species to „improve“ colonial environments often lost control over the transfers they had initiated. To problematize the dimension of „the unintended“ was therefore defined as an important goal of the workshop.

These issues were subsequently addressed in six panels. The first one dealt with transfers in different imperial contexts. NUNO GRANCHO (Lisbon) examined species transfers which were initiated by Portuguese officials, missionaries and merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. He analyzed processes of knowledge and species transfer in the Portuguese-Asian contact zones, and he investigated trans-imperial Portuguese-Dutch exchanges which took place despite imperial competition. Furthermore, Grancho showed how knowledge production in the contact zones of the Indian Ocean region was translated in the famous natural histories that were written at the time. Grancho's paper demonstrated the frequency and density of ecological transfers in the so-called „early modern“ period. It highlighted the continuities of species transfer from the early centuries of European colonialism to the nineteenth century.

BRETT BENNETT (Sydney) then turned to the British empire and examined the role introduced species played in the context of national identity formation in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He defined local, national and international scales and demonstrated how politics and imaginaries of botanical origin shifted and worked within and between these scales. He showed how evolutionary theories of the origins of the Cape and Australian floras (for example the idea that Australia and South Africa had their origins in a lost southern continent Gondwana), served to explain the similarities between the vegetations of South Africa and Australia. These ideas underlined perceptions of closeness between the white settler societies in South Africa and Australia as „Sisters of the South“.

In the second panel, ANNA HAEBICH (Perth) dealt with the way the West Australian Nyungar people treated their natural environment. She referred to concepts of land and perceptions of the Indian Ocean. After

analyzing botanical knowledge systems and practices of the Nyungar, she showed how their ecosystem was destroyed by the species transfers and networks of the European colonizers. She concentrated on the German botanist Ludwig Preiss who collected botanical specimens in West Australia and connected the botanical world of the Nyungar to the global knowledge networks of colonial science.

JAMES BEATTIE (Wellington) focused on the ecological networks between New Zealand and the Indian Ocean region in his paper. He dealt with a group of former employees of the East India Company who settled in New Zealand for their retirement. Since the officials of the East India Company were anxious that the Indian climate would be detrimental for their health, they hoped to find better environmental conditions in Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, moving to New Zealand would give them the chance to remain active in Australasian trade. When they changed locations, they often introduced plants and animals from India to New Zealand and tried to acclimatize them on their estates. These „biota barons“ used the money they made in India to create landscapes which would fulfill their economic interests, suit their lifestyle and remind them of India.

The significance of islands in the networks and transfers across the Indian Ocean was addressed in the next panel. GWYN CAMPBELL (Montreal) examined the species transfers which centered around Madagascar. He analyzed transfers which were part of the Monsoon exchange between Asia and Africa, and he referred to the introduction of species in the context of French and British expansionist ambitions on the island in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both imperial powers began to cultivate cash crops and brought domesticated animals to Madagascar. At the same time, Europeans began to explore Madagascar's unique flora and fauna and dispatched specimens to botanical gardens in the Indian Ocean region and beyond.

VIPUL SINGH (Delhi) concentrated on the Andaman Islands east of mainland India. He explained that these islands were of strategic interest for Britain throughout the nine-

teenth century. They served as a flagpost to secure Britain's imperial possessions around the Indian Ocean, and they were used as penal settlement for deporting convicts from the mainland. Soon after they had established themselves on the Andamans, the British authorities initiated the clearance of the forests to establish European-style agriculture. As a result the natural environment of the islands was destroyed; the native population was marginalized and suffered from diseases brought by the British.

In the fourth panel, RUTH MORGAN (Melbourne) analyzed the transfer of meteorological information between Australia and India. In the arid regions of British India and the Australian colonies, recurring draught posed a major problem for the imperial rulers. Therefore, they cultivated the science of weather forecasting. Predicting the weather was regarded as a means to manage the consequences of natural disasters and thus to keep control over the imperial project. As scientists in Australia and British India believed themselves to be in similar climates, they were keen on exchanging data and comparing the results of their research. By showing how expectations of the future influenced environmental policies, the paper addressed the temporal dimension of ecological transfers.

HARIPRIYA RANGAN (Melbourne) problematized the dimension of temporality and chronology of ecological transfer by examining the history of landscape transformation in the Ethiopian highlands over a long period of time: from 8.000 BCE until the present. She criticized that environmental histories of the Indian Ocean region are still too focused on sources from the colonial archives. Therefore, they automatically follow the periodization of colonial expansion. She argued for a different methodological approach. Bringing together paleoclimatic datasets, data from biogeographic and geomorphological studies of different highland sites with sources from historical archives, she shed new light on the relations between climate change, land instability, migration and demographic shifts in the Ethiopian highlands.

The next panel dealt with the history of Australian trees in India and Africa. The

workshop participants first discussed the paper of DAVID ARNOLD (Warwick). It dealt with the introduction of trees from Australia to South India in the second half of the nineteenth century. During „India’s Australian period“, as Arnold called these decades, connections and movements of plants, animals and people between the two continents were particularly intense. He concentrated on the introduction of Australian casuarina, acacia and eucalypt to South India and analyzed the ideas and discourses associated with these transfers. Furthermore, he examined the impact the imports had on the South Indian environment and society.

SIMON POOLEY (London) then investigated the introduction of plants to the Western Cape of South Africa. He dealt with the same species as David Arnold when he described the ways the Cape was transformed by the introduction of Australian eucalypts and acacias. Pooley examined the socio-economic impact of species introductions to the Cape and the new forms of forest management which resulted from the introduction of the Australian trees; he also explained how the fire ecology of the Cape changed as a consequence of the introduction of new species.

The workshop then proceeded to the last panel. From different disciplinary perspectives, it discussed the migration and transfer of animals and zoological knowledge in the Indian Ocean region. THOMAS F. MCDOW (Columbus, Ohio) examined the scholarly networks of A. S. G. Jayakar, an Indian physician who was appointed a surgeon to the British residency in Muscat in the Arabian Peninsula. There, he became one of the most important collectors of zoological specimen for the British Museum. McDow analyzed Jayakar’s role as a cultural go-between who was connected with the centers of imperial science in London and, at the same time, managed to develop a network of Arabian informants who helped him acquire specimens from remote environments of the peninsula which were not accessible to Europeans.

LISA JENNY KRIEG (Bonn) dealt with the circulation of the Phelsuma day gecko in the Western Indian Ocean world. Her paper applied concepts from animal studies and emphasized the agency of the animals in the

transoceanic transfers. She pointed out that the animals involved in zoological transfers often discovered their own migratory paths. The Phelsuma day geckos were transferred from their original habitat in the Indian Ocean region to different places of the earth by European scientists in the late nineteenth century. However, they soon escaped human control and established diaspora populations on different islands of the Western Indian Ocean.

In his thought-provoking final comment, CHRISTOF MAUCH (Munich) developed perspectives for future research. He criticized that historians dealing with transfers of species across the Indian Ocean are too often bound by the conventions of history of science and suggested that more attention should be devoted to the agency of the natural environment. Historians should not only examine the agency of the plants and animals that were transferred across the Indian Ocean, but include other ecological categories and sites which influenced the transfers, such as the agencies of the sea and of the winds. He encouraged the participants to look more at „environments-in-between“ and argued that hybrid ecological spaces such as the shore, ports and shipwrecks should play a more prominent role in research on transoceanic species transfers. In this way, new studies on species transfer could move beyond established approaches, such as network analysis, and come to a more differentiated picture of spatiality and coherence of Indian Ocean transfers. These and other points he made were taken up in the final discussion. The participants exchanged arguments about interdisciplinary approaches, about the usefulness of regarding the Indian Ocean region as a coherent space and other aspects of the topic.

Conference Overview:

Ulrike Kirchberger (University of Kassel): Introduction

Session 1: Politics

Moderator: Christof Mauch (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich)

Nuno Grancho (Lisbon University Institute): The Estado da Índia ecological Networks and Transfers in the Indian Ocean

Brett Bennett (Western Sydney University):

Sisters of the South: Plant Migration and National Identity in Australia and South Africa

Session 2: People

Moderator: Ulrike Kirchberger (University of Kassel)

Anna Haebich (Curtin University): Colonization, Collectors and Custodians in Noongar Boodja

James Beattie (Victoria University of Wellington): Thomas McDonnell's Opium: Circulating Plants, Patronage and Power in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Worlds

Session 3: Islands

Moderator: Roland Wenzlhuemer LMU Munich)

Gwyn Campbell (McGill University): The Migration of Flora and Fauna to and from Madagascar, c.1790-1850

Vipul Singh (University of Delhi): Flag-Post in the Indian Ocean: The Peopling of the Andaman Islands; 1780's to 1900's

Session 4: Water

Moderator: Milinda Banerjee (Presidency University Kolkata / LMU Munich)

Ruth Morgan (Monash University, Melbourne): Prophecy and Prediction: Forecasting Drought in British India and the Australian Colonies

Haripriya Rangan (University of Melbourne): Landscape Histories of the Indian Ocean World: A View from the Water

Session 5: Plants

Moderator: Heather Goodall (University of Technology Sydney)

David Arnold (University of Warwick): India, Australia and the Exotic Empire: Tree Introductions into South India, c. 1850-1914

Simon Pooley (Birkbeck College, University of London): Invasive Plants and Fire in the Cape Peninsula

Session 6: Animals

Moderator: Ursula Münster (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich)

Thomas F. McDow (Ohio State University): Zoological Specimens, Zoological Knowl-

edge: Collecting Indian Ocean Arabia

Lisa Jenny Krieg (University of Bonn): Endangered, Invasive, Pet, Commodity: Gecko Circulations and Value Transformation in the Western Indian Ocean

Final Comment

Christof Mauch (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich)

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