

Familiarising the Colony: Distance and Proximity in Dutch and German Colonial Photography and Visual Culture

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Organised as a Dutch-German collaboration between Leiden University and the University of Cologne, this workshop on colonial photography and visual culture took place in early July 2021. The workshop focused on European colonial photography and visual culture more broadly between 1850 and 1950, investigating the diverse ways in which photography was used to create a sense of familiarity between the colonies and the metropole. Moreover, the specific functions of colonial photography not only for familiarising the colony, but also with respect to the long-term effects of colonial visualities and the legitimisation and spread of racist stereotypes were addressed during the workshop. While the workshop included researchers from all stages of their academic careers who presented their most recent academic working papers, one panel featured artistic perspectives on colonial visuality. Initially, the workshop aimed to shed light on the ways images from and of the colonial world influenced Europeans that never saw colonialism with their own eyes. Finally, it went well beyond its initial focus on German and Dutch colonial visual culture, both geographically and medially.

In the first panel, *Intermedial Perspectives*, three presentations set colonial photographs in relation to other forms of media and archives from the colonial era. LORENA RIZZO (Basel) presented her current research project that taps into the vast multimedia archive of the Dammann collection stored at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien. Particularly her investigation of how the Finnish missionaries' audio archive from the early 1950s relates to textual and visual sources of the collection provided much food for thought about

how intermedial approaches enable us to pay respect to the archives' materiality.

CAROLINE BRÄUER (Cologne) analysed the interplay of textual and visual sources in the German illustrated magazine 'Kolonie und Heimat'. She showed how depictions of German visual icons, such as scenes of tea time or images of churches, were used to familiarise the colonial world to German audiences and promote colonialism.

While the focus of ANA CAROLINA SCHVEITZER's (Berlin) work lay exclusively on photographs, her analysis placed these photographs in the broader context of 'colonial work situations'. Focusing on photographs from German South-West Africa, Schweitzer illustrated the relationship between photographs, physical places, and abstract spaces. The imagery rendered places abstract and portrayed individual workers merely as natural assets to the situation defined by labour. Audiences in Europe would perceive the non-white workers, stripped of their individuality, as naturally fitting into the space defined by hard physical labour.

The second panel, *Artistic Interventions*, took a leap into current debates on colonial legacies in the US, the Netherlands, Namibia, and Germany. Artist and cultural scientist VITJITUA NDJIHARINE (Windhoek / Stuttgart) presented some of her past projects which critically engage with the archival as well as geopolitical legacies of colonialism. Ndjiharine's works seek to interlink investigations of her ancestry, the desire to give back dignity to the people portrayed in colonial photographs, and her special eye for the intimacy of photographs. For one of her past projects, she „clothed“ photographs of naked female individuals from the colonial era. In directing the viewers' gaze away from the women's brutal nakedness, Ndjiharine illustrated how artistic intervention enables us to focus on novel aspects of these visuals. Recently, however, Ndjiharine has grown critical of the ways her clothing style imposes ideas of gender on the individuals portrayed. Accordingly, she worked out the *Mirrored Reality Installation* in which she replaced the contours of individuals portrayed in colonial photographs with mirrors.

Film-maker TIM VAN DEN HOF (Rotter-

dam) presented two of his projects which focus on questions of remembrance, preservation, and how we can look at the past from a new perspective. The documentaries *Monumental Crossroads* (2018) and *The Images of Piet Hein* (in production) chronicle the legacies of controversial monuments in the South of the United States and The Netherlands and the different reactions they continue to provoke. Van den Hof's documentaries vividly show the deep societal rifts that spark the dispute over monuments, the need to find a reconciliatory path forward, and ultimately the power monuments possess.

For the third panel the organisers chose to focus on colonial violence; a necessary and important yet very delicate issue. Strikingly, the panel's first paper, *Private Visual Reporting? Representations of the Herero-Nama War in Illustrated Postcards in Imperial Germany*, focused on the absence of violence in visual mass media. CEYDA ÜNLÜ (Cologne) argued that most postcards which were sent from German Southwest Africa to Germany between 1904 and 1907 did not include depictions or descriptions of violence. These postcards generally omitted the Herero and Nama war that simultaneously raged in modern-day Namibia. Ünlü argues that the clear absence of violence in German visual mass media testifies to a colonial self-expectation that considered colonial wars trivial and their outcomes predetermined. Her brilliant paper showed what familiarisation meant in practical terms and what aspects of colonialism did not find their way into European mass media. One aspect that future scholarship should focus on, however, is the role mass media played for colonised societies.

LIESBETH OUWEHAND (Amsterdam) delivered the second and final paper in Panel three. Her analysis of the life of a photograph of the Balinese Puputan—a form of collective suicide—touched upon both the use of photographs as historical sources as well as the implications of digitisation. There are intricate ethical and copyright-related problems to making scenes of human suffering available online. But the digitisation of colonial photographs also influences their value as sources. Online, the photographs exist exclusively in their historical context. Digitisa-

tion entirely strips them of their materiality.

The fourth panel focused on long-term effects of colonial photography. In their presentation, JAN BECKER (Leiden) and LEONIE RUPP (Leiden) argued that the time for a transnational conceptualisation of colonial imagery is long overdue. In analysing the transnational and at times global circulation of postcards depicting colonial images, Becker and Rupp showed that the racist, pejorative notions transmitted through these postcards were universally comprehensible, and thus colonial imagery was not restricted to national boundaries. They emphasised the long-term effects colonial imagery had not only for former colonial powers but also for indirectly involved European states and even the EU. The transnational legacies of colonial visuality are severely under-researched.

DIANA NATERMANN (Leiden), finally, took a step back and reflected on the junctures from ego document to archive. Natermann used a German colonial photographic collection from the MARKK (Museum am Rothenbaum: Kulturen und Künste der Welt) in Hamburg, Germany, named the Mecklenburg Collection, as a starting point. The mentioned collection was used to portray a rich, under-exposed yet 'typical' Central-African and German colonial photographic collection from the years 1910/11 to then thematically move on to the early twenty-first century by venturing into the question of modern-day museums and their role in preserving but also making available and decolonising colonial photographic archives.

In his concluding remarks, JENS JÄGER (Cologne) emphasised the importance for future research to pay more attention to visual orders and to go beyond the limitations of academic research to explore these orders. One possible way, according to Jäger, is collaboration with artists and artistic interventions. Furthermore, he pointed out the lack of research on mass media in the Global South, which was equally relevant for and part of the development of a certain visual culture. Particularly the question of whom to focus on when researching mass media and visual culture more generally sparked a vivid discussion between the workshop participants. Referencing the presentation by Becker and

Rupp, Jäger underlined that „we still think too nationally“ and we should take greater account of the fact that colonial and visual culture was and is inevitably transnational.

Whereas the workshop offered an abundance of novel insights into the history and the legacies of colonial visual culture, it ultimately posed even more new questions. There is plenty of work to do for scholars and artists and colonial visuality has rarely been more topical.

Conference overview:

Panel I: Intermedial Perspectives

Lorena Rizzo (Basel): „What Else Must I Say or Add?“ – (In)audible Northern Namibian Pasts

Caroline Bräuer (Cologne): „In Word and Image?“ Visual Culture in the Magazine *Kolonie und Heimat*

Ana Carolina Schweitzer (Berlin): Framing Colonial Work Situation: Photographs from the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (DKG) Archive

Comments: Ali Shobeiri (Leiden)

Panel II: Artistic Interventions

Vitjitua Ndjiharine (Windhoek / Stuttgart): German Colonialism and Namibian Art

Tim van den Hoff (Rotterdam): The Images of Piet Hein: A Documentary About the History of an (Un)wanted Icon

Comments: Johannes Müller (Leiden)

Panel III: Visualising Violence

Ceyda Ünlü (Cologne): Private Visual Reporting? Representations of the Herero-Nama War in Illustrated Postcards in Imperial Germany

Liesbeth Ouwehand (Amsterdam): The Circulation of Atrocity: the Puputan Bali Case Study

Comments: Diana Natermann (Leiden)

Panel IV: Long-Term Effects

Leonie Rupp and Jan Becker (Leiden): Putting Colonial Imagery in Perspective: Investigating Transnational Visual Legacies

Diana Natermann (Leiden): (Post-)Colonial Images and How Museums Can Address Their Heritages

Comments and Concluding Remarks: Jens Jäger (Cologne)

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