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Science, Race, and Identity in the Global South. Basel Graduate School of History, University of Basel, 13.10.2014.

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Science, Race, and Identity in the Global South

The workshop âScience, Race, and Identity in the Global Southâ offered the opportunity to present and discuss aspects of ongoing research and work in progress.

It commenced with CHRISTINE WINTER (Sydney), who explored the ambiguities of racial identity in the colonial and post-colonial Global South through a case study of identity-building among people of mixed-race and German-origin in the South Pacific. Winter argued that her protagonistsâ sense of belonging remained fluid in the German and postcolonial Pacific. Individuals took on multiple identities at a time long before modern conceptions of identity as fluid constructs had taken hold, as she showed with vivid examples. Rejecting a peripheral model of identity which takes âGermannessâ to weaken and fade away in the South, Winter argued for the notion of a Samoan or New Guinean âGermannessâ existing in its own right and form amid its particular politico-cultural and historical context.

LUKAS AFFENTRANGER (Basel) examined the personal, political, social, and economic context of mid-nineteenth-century German scientific expeditions in Africa by means of a case study of the German naturalist-explorer Wilhelm Peters (1815-1883). Peters, who collected in Portuguese-ruled Mozambique in the 1840s, viewed his endeavours there and the knowledge he would gain through travelling in the region as crucial to his aspirations for an academic career in Germany. At a time in which pre-unification Germany did not have political or strategic reasons to fund large expeditions, Peters had to seek patronage and support from influential individuals as well as private and state institutions in both Germany and Portugal. By pointing to the lack of prior knowledge on Mozambiquan nature, Peters was able to secure funding from the Prussian state as well as support from Portugal, allowing him to travel and collect extensively in south-east Africa for nearly two decades and to return to Germany with a large collection of natural specimens, awaiting an academic career.

SEBASTIAN BEESE (St. Gallen) started his research project â a collective biography of German engineers in (ex-)German colonies in Africa between 1880 and 1970 â earlier this year. He began his presentation by placing the cohort of engineers in their social context, accounting for their choice to seek employment in Africa, and examining how their deployment influenced their later careers in Germany. Secondly, he explored their perceptions of crucial guiding notions such as âprogressâ, âcivilisationâ, and the âtechnically possibleâ which were to underpin their work in Africa. Through a study of archival sources such as diaries and letters, Beese aims to critique the notion of âthe typical colonial engineerâ while also tracing the network of personal relationships and ties which made their progression within the profession and in the colonial context possible.

TIZIAN ZUMTHURM (Bern) explored how understandings of race affected the practice of medicine in the LambarÃ©nÃ© hospital founded by the German-French theologian and medical missionary Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) in French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon). Zumthurm argued that Schweitzer represents an am-

biguous legacy, the founder of an influential hospital meant to embody his ethics of âEhrfurcht vor dem Lebenâ, but which in reality reproduced colonial inequalities and prejudices through strict ethnic segregation and inferior treatment of African patients and staff. Today, Schweitzer remains a paradoxical figure, a celebrated humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who seemed unable or unwilling to fully challenge the racialized structures of colonial life.

Through a biographical account of the career of the influential nineteenth-century French ornithologist Jules Pierre Verraux (1807-1873), ETIENNE AUBERT (Basel) described the need for further research on a collector whose career took him to southern Africa, Australia, South-East Asia and beyond. Aubert argued that by tracing the network of knowledge to which Verraux contributed through his collections, correspondence, and involvement in numerous scientific societies, a picture of the development of natural science can emerge at a defining period in the disciplineâs history when its professionalisation and commercialisation were becoming entrenched and natural history museums â with an ever-growing need for collections from all over the world â were rising in public stature.

Through a textual analysis of written accounts of human skull and skeleton collecting by three German naturalist-collectors operating in the first half of the nineteenth century in southern Africa, PATRICK GROGAN (Basel) examined the practice in its socio-cultural and commercial contexts. The refusal of slaves and servants to aid and abet the collectorsâ attempts to gather human remains suggests a conflict over the meaning attached to the human corpse as an object. Grogan also argued that the practice cannot be seen in isolation from the growth of racial sciences such as phrenology and craniometry in early-nineteenth-century-Europe, nor should the career ambitions and financial incentives which drove collectors to pursue the activity with great vigour and frequent disregard for local laws and cultural taboos be overlooked.

Through a Foucauldian understanding of knowledge, TANJA HAMMEL (Basel) focused on the âbirthâ of archaeological research in South Africa. She placed Thomas Bowkerâs (1807-1885) collecting and interpreting of the stone implements in the context of his political ideology and career. As a member of parliament, Bowker sought to gain compensation for the settlersâ lost land in the Frontier Wars. Via evidence of stone tools he aimed to demonstrate that âa white raceâ had inhabited southern Africa before the Bantu or Khoisan. While in Kimberley in the 1870s, his sister Mary Elizabeth Barber (1818-1899) explained perforated stones (commonly called âBushmen stonesâ) to be the sole remnants of a lost Jewish tribe to justify diamond digging in Kimberley. Hammel concluded by analysing the production of history in contemporary local museum displays which decontextualize Thomas Bowkerâs actions and collections in a way that perpetuates such myths.

The workshop closed with a short final discussion in which the richness of research topics discussed and the numerous possibilities for further research were noted.

Conference Overview:

Tanja Hammel / Patrick Grogan (Basel), Introduction

Christine Winter (Sydney), Science, Race & Identity in the Global South

Doctoral Presentations
Lukas Affentranger (Basel), "Je demande Votre Protection pour un jeune savant trÃ¨s distinguÃ©, le Dr. Peters" â The Preparation of a Scientific Expedition in the mid-19th Century

Sebastian Beese (St. Gallen), The Increased Prominence of German Colonies in Africa through the Work of German Engineers

Tizian Zumthurm (Bern), Exceptional, Archaic, Ordinary? Race & Medical Practice in Albert Schweitzerâs Hospital in Lambarene 1913-65

Etienne Aubert (Basel), Jules Pierre Verreaux â Ornithologist, Collector, Taxidermist

Patrick Grogan (Basel), Natural History Collectors & the Appropriation of Human Skulls & Skeletons: Towards a Case Study of German-led Collecting Expeditions in early Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa

Tanja Hammel (Basel), Colonizing the Past: The Bowkersâ Contributions to Prehistoric Archaeology

Closing Discussion

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/

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