



The Circulation of (Post)Colonial Knowledge: A Transpacific History, 1800-1980. Christa Wirth, University of Zurich, 13.03.2015—14.03.2015.

Reviewed by Janna Kraus

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The Circulation of (Post)Colonial Knowledge: A Transpacific History, 1800-1980

âThe Circulation of (Post)Colonial Knowledge: A Transpacific History, 1800-1980â was the title of a workshop that took place at the University of Zurich 13-14 March 2015. During those two days 10 panels were held, each of which included the presentation of a paper, ranging from project proposals to published texts, a comment given by another attendee, and a discussion with the audience. The panels were divided into four knowledge clusters: I Science, II Law, III Economics, IV Health and Care.

In her introduction, main organiser CHRISTA WIRTH (Zurich), who also presented a paper later that day, pointed out the importance of the topic as well as possible difficulties. She explained that the main question was how knowledge, techniques, and practices travel within a transnational framework. This perspective, she said, was essential to the focus of Zurichâs history department on global history. She also elaborated on specifics of the conference: for example, what and where is the Pacific? How can we think of this space? As a site of knowledge encounters, or maybe as the product of intersections and migratory paths? Uniting all the different approaches presented at the workshop was a tendency to look at particularly long periods within empirical situations while keeping in mind the asymmetrical material realities of empire, says Wirth.

Six panels were included in the first cluster on Science, making it the most prominent part of the workshop. In the first panel, ROBERT-JAN WILLE (Munich) argued that the imperial activities in the Dutch Indies

were the result of collaboration between American, German, and Dutch practices and ways of knowledge production. Wille reflected on the use of the term âPacificâ even if it does not appear in his sources, saying that there were networks constituting the geographical region he was referring to. In the discussion he explained that to him the Pacific was a stage for the conflicts between different imperial powers competing for influence while still learning from and influencing each other. The validity of this approach to the Pacific was a matter of discussion throughout the workshop.

MARIEKE BLOEMBERGEN (Leiden) brought up the topic of actual, physical circulation. She presented her work on state engagements around Javanese heritage sites around 1900 as well as the travels of objects related to those sites. Since a large number of those antiquities travelled as gifts, Bloembergen refers to the work of Marcel Mauss to explain the importance of gift exchange for heritage formation.

The topic of the third panel was the first draft of a paper by CHRISTA WIRTH (Zurich) about the framing of the Peace Corps volunteering experience by work done in the social sciences by people associated with the University of Chicago and the Ateneo de Manila University. She showed how the SIR (Smooth Interpersonal Relations) model influenced volunteers and their experience and also how Catholicism was a vital part of successful communication between Americans and Filipinas/Filipinos. Wirth also explained how this experiment fits in with the general trend towards government-financed area studies

in the US at the time, and also how the knowledge generated in Chicago and Manila was an essential part of the Peace Corps training and managed to live on in Philippine Studies until the 1980s.

Co-organiser BERNHARD SCHÄR (Zurich) connected the Pacific to the location of the workshop. He claimed that not only did Swiss individuals take part in exploring and exploiting the Pacific, they also used the scholarly accounts generated about that part of the world to make sense of the prehistoric findings in their own country. Schär sees this strategy of referring to the Pacific as systematic and fundamental for the way the Swiss past is conceptualised in his sources.

The paper presented by BENJAMIN ZACHARIAH (Heidelberg) questioned the usefulness of so-called post-colonial studies in general, tackling another part of the workshop's program. Zachariah said that the time of absolute truth claims is over; therefore it is not productive to attack them any longer. He also argued that the validation of a claim through a sense of inherited victimhood or other forms of subjectivity will not lead to success since all participants would be able to claim some kind of victimhood. In order to argue effectively, one has to be able to work with a commonly communicable principle. This led to a discussion of other ways of writing inequality in history with references to the canonical works of Spivak and Said, amongst others. Zachariah clarified in the discussion that although the restoring of excluded voices from history was an important step that has not been quite completed, he believes that it is not possible to move forward without finding other ways to do so.

On a more concrete level, HILARY HOWES (Canberra) demonstrated the challenges of showing the restrictions of knowledge production by looking at individuals. She talked about the life and work of two German-speaking naturalists who visited the Pacific in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Howes focused on the restrictions put on the researchers by institutions, for example, via funding. She showed how their different backgrounds and ways of financing their expeditions as well as the scientific interests of their time shaped their research. As commenter LISA FORD (Sydney) pointed out: "They were probably very observant but you can only find what you're looking for."

Moving away from the topic of science and towards the law, KONRAD LAWSON (St Andrews) talked about his work concerning treason trials in the Philippines after WWII. This work is part of a bigger project on war

time atrocities and the politics of treason. In the case of the Philippines, US-American forces gathered the testimonies and other material and handed them to the local authorities to prosecute the accused. The differences between local elites and the general populace also led to diverging opinions, but those were flattened by local historians later on, according to Lawson. He explained he was surprised to find the debates in the Philippines very much in sync with those in China and France at the same time, stating that although it is not possible to actually track the circulation of these ideas using his sources, their simultaneous occurrence is evident. The challenges of following the circulation of ideas from a global perspective became clear. Kapil Raj (Paris) pointed out that even though the metaphor of circulation might be problematic, it is still preferable to other concepts such as flow. SUJIT SIVASUNDARAM (Cambridge) summarised Lawson's dilemma: "Ideas don't move visibly but they are still in different places." A warning against losing sight of the historic particularities came from Allan Lumba. He feared that looking for patterns might erase the Philippines and recommended a look back in time to the 1910s to fully grasp genuinely Filipino ideas and topoi.

Switching from the law to economics, ALLAN LUMBA (Cambridge, MA) used the third panel of the day to present his paper on the connections between racial anxieties and economic knowledge in the Philippines. By looking at the way financial experts, both American and Filipino, legitimised their authority, Lumba was able to show how racialised argumentation was used to deny the Philippines economic autonomy. In order to do this successfully, it was essential to have "scientific" knowledge about races to hide the racism of the oppression behind a surface of (economic) science.

For the fourth and last topic of the workshop, Health and Care, JUDITH FRÄHLICH (Zurich) addressed discrepancies between macro- and micro-level discourses on drug use from a global perspective. She explained that while the 1920s and 1930s were the peak of the global prohibition discourse, it was also then that the consumption of opiates was discussed in a distinctly positive manner in Japan. Fräulich reads this as a form of protest against state control. The discussion then led to the question of perspective in the writing of global history. Martin Dusing (Zurich) spoke in favour of starting from a micro-historic perspective of the Japanese intellectuals participating in that counter-discourse. It became clear that to understand the situation in Japan it would be necessary to look beyond the European narrative of medicalisation and criminalisation.

HOLGER DRÄSSLER (Cambridge, MA) paper about the training of Samoan nurses brought up a different perspective on the question of health and care. His use of the term *pidgin knowledge* citing Harald Fischer-TinÃ© caused a discussion about different kinds of knowledge and the appropriateness of this term. While Kapil Raj amongst others spoke against it, citing Peter Galison as an example of the term's unsuccessful application as well its derogatory connotations, MONIKA DOMMANN (Zurich) and Judith FrÃ¶hlich praised Galison's effort to bridge the gap between anthropology and the natural sciences and argued that it works on a metaphorical level.

It became evident throughout the workshop that each paper had to deal with the way it conceptualises the Pacific and how that relates to other ideas of the same area such as the Sea of Islands or Oceania. The danger of using the Pacific as a laboratory for imperial interests has been thoroughly discussed, if not always avoided. There was also a noticeable trend to favour longer periods of time as a means of avoiding over-generalisation. Unfortunately, there was no time to give further thought to Zachariah's idea to approach the Pacific as Braudel did the Mediterranean. This might be a project for future endeavours.

Conference Overview:

Knowledge Cluster I: Science

Panel 1

Chair: Christa Wirth (University of Zurich)

Robert-Jan Wille (Deutsches Museum, Munich), The Transnational Network of Tropical Botany in the Dutch Indies: A Pacific Nexus Between German Laboratory Science and American Agriculture

Comment: Sven Trakulhun (University of Zurich)

Panel 2

Chair: Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge)

Marieke Bloembergen (Leiden University), Exchange and the Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java

Comment: Bernhard SchÃ¶rr (ETH Zurich)

Panel 3

Chair: Bernhard SchÃ¶rr (ETH Zurich)

Christa Wirth (University of Zurich), The U.S. Peace Corps as a Science Experiment in the Postcolonial Philippines

Comment: Allan Lumba (Harvard University)

Panel 4

Chair: Allan Lumba (Harvard University)

Bernhard SchÃ¶rr (ETH Zurich), The Swiss Pacific: Networks, Knowledge, Practices

Comment: Marieke Bloembergen (Leiden University)

Panel 5

Chair: Sven Trakulhun (University of Zurich)

Benjamin Zachariah (University of Heidelberg), A Good Time To Be Brown? Postcolonial Studies and Legitimation In and Across Context(s)

Comment: Hilary Howes (Australian National University)

Panel 6

Chair: Judith FrÃ¶hlich (University of Zurich)

Hilary Howes (Australian National University), Anthropological Results of a Journey in the South Seas: The Production and Circulation of Knowledge about Pacific Peoples by German-speaking Traveller-Naturalists, 1865-1914

Comment: Lisa Ford (University of South Wales) (via Skype)

Knowledge Cluster II: Law

Panel 7

Chair: Christa Wirth (University of Zurich)

Konrad Lawson (St Andrews University), Between Post-occupation and Post-colonial: Framing the Recent Past in the Philippines, 1945-1946

Comment: Monika Dommann (University of Zurich)

Panel 8

Chair: Konrad Lawson (St Andrews University)

Allan Lumba (Harvard University), Racial Anxieties and Economic Knowledge in the Decolonizing Philippines

Comment: Harald Fischer-TinÃ© (ETH Zurich)

Knowledge Cluster IV: Health and Care

Panel 9

Chair: Robert-Jan Wille (Deutsches Museum, Munich)

Judith FrÃ¶hlich (University of Zurich), The History

of Opiates in Imperial Japan

Comment: Martin Dusingber (University of Zurich)

Panel 10

Chair: Martin Dusingber (University of Zurich)

Holger DrÄssler (Harvard University) (via Skype),
The Education of Miss Pepe: Samoan Nurses and the Politics of Colonial Care, 1900â1924

Comment: Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge)

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

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