

Conference:

IMPERIAL CULTURE IN COUNTRIES WITHOUT COLONIES: AFRICA AND SWITZERLAND



Basel, Switzerland
October 23-25, 2003

European explorers, travellers, missionaries, officials and others returned home with specific experiences and images of Africa. These played an important role in shaping European ideas, identities and practices. Even Switzerland, a country without colonies, had its own imperial culture.

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Historisches
Seminar

The social sciences today see the global nature of human existence as a primary field of concern. This new emphasis on globalisation has led some to reflect more deeply on the long history of interdependence that links Africa to Europe. Twenty years ago, historians showed in great detail just how the economies of Africa – and other parts of the colonial world – contributed to the development and modernization of Europe. Today the focus has moved to the cultural colonization of Africa by Europe; but it has also come to rest on the contribution of Africa to the modernity produced in Europe during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We are now aware that Europeans revitalized their own artistic traditions with new forms of music, dance and story telling that they discovered in Africa. That they pushed the frontiers of science into Africa and, with the help of local communities, discovered new species of animals and plants, as well as new ways of locating these discoveries in space and time. In this sense, Africa contributed to the new ways in which Europeans came to perceive themselves and their world at the end of the nineteenth century. As the Comaroffs remind us, "the colony was not a mere extension of the modern world; it was part of what made that world modern in the first place".

Power was an important ingredient in this world. In Africa – and elsewhere on the edges of their world – Europeans found communities against which they could measure their own achievements, define their own beliefs, customize their customs, and establish their norms. Through their experiences in Africa, Europeans were able to develop an "imperial culture" at home. Susan Thorne has recently shown how the experience of missionaries in Africa encouraged the middle-class in England to develop a "missionary spirit" that resulted in a racialization of the poor and the working class. More generally, Thorne and others have shown that experiences in Africa cannot be compartmentalized or separated from experiences in Europe. Instead, they stress how Europeans used what they had learned in Africa to shape their perceptions of the metropole and to develop their practices at home.

Our object in this conference will be to test these questions in a metropole without colonies: Switzerland. Travellers from Samuel Brun in the seventeenth century to Johann Ludwig Burckardt and Werner Munzinger in the nineteenth century incorporated Africa into a world dominated by Europe. Soldiers such as Daniel de Meuron and Henri Menu Minutoli established important ethnographic collections that were later built on by Swiss scientists like Butikofer, Keller and Schinz. Arnold Theiler emigrated to the Transvaal from Aargau at the end of the nineteenth century to establish the greatest veterinary institution in the southern hemisphere. Gottfried Roth and Henri Berthoud mapped large parts of Africa.

So, despite being "a small country without colonies", Switzerland had a deep interest in Africa. This concern was driven by geographical curiosity, cartography, anti-slavery agitation, commercial enterprise and scientific

interest. But it was particularly stirred by evangelical enthusiasm. Swiss missionaries became pioneering linguists, cartographers and anthropologists. Here one thinks of Gobat, Mabille, Ellenberger, Jacottet, Chatelain, Junod, Berthoud, Perregaux, Christaller (in reality a south German), and many others. Much of the work of these evangelical intellectuals appeared in the bulletins of their missionary societies and in a voluminous Sunday school literature, while the more scientific aspects appeared in various Swiss scientific journals. The geographical societies, particularly those of Geneva, St Gallen, Neuchâtel and Bern, also played a major role in stimulating and organizing the exploration of Africa. Many of their members were involved in the fight against the slave trade and, later, the struggle for colonial reform. These activities produced vibrant images of Africa that were carried into many Swiss homes, long before the advent of radio and television. These images of life in Africa served to define and reinforce Swiss ideas about politics, morality, generosity, frugality and civic virtue; and they furnished the Swiss with a mission to the world that was at once spiritual and secular. In the hands of others, these images had a more sombre outcome. Carl Vogt found a strict racial hierarchy reflected in this reading on Africa; and Johann Bachofen discovered an enchanted evolutionism. At the same time, national exhibitions and "human zoos" seemed to bring Africa to Swiss cities in ways that underlined European notions of superiority and tutelage.

The conference will examine the extent to which Swiss history was made in the corners of the European world. At the same time, it will look at the contribution of Swiss societies and individuals to the history of that part of the world that is Africa.

The conference will take place on 23-25 October 2003 in Basel, Switzerland. Information about participants, locations and papers will be sent in May 2003. In the meanwhile, titles of proposed papers, and correspondence, should be sent to: pascal.schmid@stud.unibas.ch

CULTURE IMPERIALE DES PAYS SANS COLONIES : L'AFRIQUE ET LA SUISSE

De nos jours, la nature globale de l'expérience humaine est devenue un champ de recherche prioritaire pour les sciences sociales. Cet accent nouveau sur la globalisation a conduit certains à repenser la longue histoire des liens d'interdépendance qui unissent l'Afrique et l'Europe. Il y a une vingtaine d'années, des historiens ont montré de façon très détaillée à quel point les économies africaines – comme celles d'autres parties du monde – ont contribué au développement et à la modernisation de l'Europe. Aujourd'hui, même si la recherche se concentre plutôt sur la colonisation culturelle de l'Afrique par l'Europe, le rôle que l'Afrique a joué dans la construction de la modernité européenne à la fin du 19^e et durant le 20^e siècle y occupe aussi une place de choix. Comme l'ont bien exprimé les Comaroff, « la colonie n'était pas qu'une simple extension du monde moderne; elle était partie intégrante de la construction de ce monde moderne lui-même ».

« Petit pays sans colonies », la Suisse a néanmoins eu de longue date un grand intérêt pour l'Afrique. S'il s'est exprimé dans des domaines aussi divers que la géographie, la cartographie, la lutte contre l'esclavagisme, le commerce ou encore la recherche scientifique, le moteur premier de cet intérêt fut un grand enthousiasme pour l'évangélisation de cette « terre païenne ». Ainsi, des missionnaires suisses sont devenus des pionniers en matière de linguistique dans de nombreuses parties de l'Afrique, et d'autres ont produit des recherches remarquables pour leur époque dans les sciences naturelles, aussi bien qu'en anthropologie et en cartographie.

En retraçant les itinéraires africains de certains de ces missionnaires, voyageurs, soldats et scientifiques, cette conférence se propose d'examiner dans quelle mesure l'histoire de la Suisse s'est construite aux confins du monde européen.

Traditionnellement, l'histoire suisse s'est en effet limitée à sa dimension domestique, alors que l'histoire de « l'Outre-mer » était considérée comme un domaine à part, une discipline minoritaire traitant des événements extérieurs au pays. En se concentrant sur la manière dont la culture de la Suisse moderne a été influencée par l'histoire de son interaction séculaire avec l'Afrique, cette conférence vise à remettre en cause certaines de ces limites et carcans disciplinaires.

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IMPERIALE KULTUR IN LÄNDERN OHNE KOLONIEN: AFRIKA UND DIE SCHWEIZ

Die Sozialwissenschaften dieser Tage begreifen die globale Natur der menschlichen Existenz als ein primäres Forschungsfeld. Dieses neue Interesse an globalen Zusammenhängen hat auch die lange Geschichte der gegenseitigen Abhängigkeit, die Afrika und Europa verbindet, ins Blickfeld der Forschung gerückt. Vor zwanzig Jahren haben Historiker detailliert gezeigt, wie die ökonomischen Systeme Afrikas - wie auch anderer Teile der kolonisierten Welt - zu Entwicklung und Modernisierung in Europa beigetragen haben. Heute hat sich der Fokus auf die kulturelle Kolonisation Afrikas durch Europa verschoben, umfasst aber auch den Einfluss Afrikas auf die vom Europa des späten 19. und des 20. Jahrhunderts hervorgebrachte Moderne. So erinnern uns die Comaroffs daran, dass „die Kolonie nicht bloss eine Ausbreitung der modernen Welt war; sie war Teil dessen, was die Welt überhaupt erst modern machte.“

Obwohl die Schweiz ein "kleines Land ohne Kolonien" war, bestanden durchaus Interessen am afrikanischen Kontinent: geographische Neugier, Kartografie, Antisklaverei-Aktivitäten, kommerzielle Unternehmungen, wissenschaftliche Interessen. Doch in erster Linie basierten Schweizer Interessen in Afrika auf evangelischem Enthusiasmus. So gehörten Schweizer Missionare in verschiedenen Teilen Afrikas zu den ersten Linguisten und produzierten - für ihre Zeit ausserordentliche - kartografische und anthropologische Werke.

Indem sie die afrikanischen Erfahrungen der Missionare, Wissenschaftler, Reisenden oder Soldaten nachzeichnet, wird die Konferenz untersuchen, wieweit Schweizer Geschichte in der Peripherie der europäischen Welt gemacht worden ist. Traditionell befasst sich die schweizerische Geschichtsschreibung hauptsächlich mit inländischen Entwicklungen, während Überseegeschichte als separate, marginale Disziplin und Teil des Studiums auswärtiger Ereignisse betrachtet wird. Die Konferenz soll diese Grenzen überwinden, indem sie zeigt, wie die Kultur der modernen Schweiz durch die lange Geschichte des Kontakts mit Afrika beeinflusst worden ist.

Kontakt: pascal.schmid@stud.unibas.ch