

## CfP

### Contested Knowledge in the Atlantic World (1600-1900)

#### International Symposium, Hamburg University, June 28-30, 2013

The symposium brings together scholars from various disciplines to investigate the impact of recent shifts in critical perspective on the academic perception of the Atlantic world.

While earlier models, such as the focus on European transatlantic migrations (often perceived as a one-way-street), on American political and economic dependency on Europe, or on the Atlantic world as a system divided into centers, peripheries, and semi-peripheries have brought about important scholarship, postcolonial and globalization theory have complicated some of the assumptions of a scholarship often based on hierarchical theories about the relationship between Europe (or the Europeanized 'West') and the 'rest'. The Atlantic world is increasingly seen as a complex and dynamic contact zone (Pratt) and a rhizomatic and diasporic system of conflicting interests that has its origin in the forced migration of human beings (indentured servants, convicts, African slaves, Asian laborers). This new perspective on the *Black Atlantic* (Gilroy), the revolutionary *Red Atlantic* (Linebaugh/Rediker), and the oceanic realm as the space for the emergence of alternative mobilities (Paul/Ganser), is coupled with similar critical shifts in the study of continental encounters between European colonizers and the indigenous populations: the master narrative of genocide and violent conquest, though still valid in many regards, is supplemented by narratives of cultural exchange and transculturation – of geographical information, of medical knowledge, of religious ideas, and not least of human beings – go-betweens whose bodies and minds become the sites of conflicting identities in cultural borderlands.

While scholars of Asian history can rely on a rich pre-colonial textual documentation, the situation is more difficult for the Americas, for Africa, and for Polynesia. Here, scholarship very much depends on combining critical readings of European texts with cross-disciplinary collaboration with experts on 'material' artifacts. The symposium therefore wants to put special emphasis on investigating particular *sites and localities* of cross-cultural knowledge

formation in the Atlantic world between c. 1600 and c. 1900 (see Mignolo). The most classical of sites in which epistemological struggle is enacted are, from a European perspective, texts. We therefore invite critical readings of Atlantic colonial texts that investigate issues of dialogism and polyvocality arising from situations of cultural conflict and cohabitation and that discuss, e.g., inscriptions of indigenous knowledge in European texts, the transformations of the semantics of colonial discourse, the impact of reception and the marketplace on textual production, etc. For the reasons state, we regard it as necessary to integrate non-textual evidence – archaeological sites, architectural structures, iconographic evidence, material culture, oral traditions. Given the asymmetrical distribution of power in colonial conflict zones, these are often the only remaining media where one can find articulations of non-Western perspectives and indigenous agency. Our interest in sites of contestation includes an understanding of the significance of real and symbolic places, spaces, and territories within the larger framework of cross-cultural processes. We therefore invite papers addressing aspects of spatiality – whether in maps and geographical discourse, in the form of specific borderlands such as the coast or the desert, in the form of sacred sites, or specific cross-cultural sites of scholarly interest like the archaeological dig.

Obviously, a postcolonial perspective on the Atlantic past cannot be limited to the Atlantic ocean itself (perceived as a closed geopolitical zone) but has to expand its view to areas connected with the Atlantic economy and culture (which was always entangled with other socio-economic areas both before and since the European voyages of ‘discovery’).

Reminiscent of discussions about the “dispute of the New World” (Gerbi), the symposium also seeks to look for sites of contested knowledge within the highly diverse knowledge system of Europe itself which, far from being homogeneous, is divided into elite knowledge and popular knowledge, with an increasing number of strata in between, and which can be seen to form different (regional, national, disciplinary, ideological) schools of knowledge about and around the Atlantic world.

Contributions to the conference are invited to consider the critical examination of such processes of knowledge formation – both in the period under discussion (approx. 1600 to 1900) and in the scholarly discourses of our own day. How and why did certain knowledge gain the upper hand and sometimes rise to almost mythical status (e.g. the persistent

assumption among anthropologists and historians that Native Americans whom the Europeans encountered were recent nomadic immigrants unrelated to American high cultures; or the widespread denial of historical coevalness to indigenous cultures – Fabian); which knowledge was ‘unthinkable’ in the sense that it could not be accommodated into existing epistemological frameworks; which knowledge was erased, deformed, mythologized, etc.

The symposium will be hosted by Hamburg and Rostock universities. Papers will be published.

Organized by:

Dagmar Freist, Oldenburg; Alexandra Ganser, Erlangen; Sünne Juterczenka, HU Berlin;  
Susanne Lachenicht, Bayreuth; Gesa Mackenthun, Rostock; Claudia Schnurmann, Hamburg;  
Astrid Windus, Hamburg

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Gesa Mackenthun

Rostock University

[gesa.mackenthun@uni-rostock.de](mailto:gesa.mackenthun@uni-rostock.de)

<http://www.iaa.uni-rostock.de/lehrende/nordamerikanische-literatur-und-kulturwissenschaft/mackenthun/>