



01.01.2022
31.12.2025

PROJECT TEAM



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Colonial Commodities – Entanglements in German and Cameroonian History

Summary

The project examines the multimodal relationalities of German colonial history and their aftermath in Germany and Cameroon. German industrialization, colonization, media of mass culture and African plantation economy, enslavement and infrastructures of transport are deeply intertwined. Their historical entanglements are discussed by focusing on two exemplary cases of 'colonial commodities', each of which is associated with different practices of power and knowledge: Cocoa/Chocolate and Cinchona/Quinine.

Working at the intersections of Science and Technology Studies (STS), Media Studies and Archaeology we follow the materials, colonial practices and knowledges related to them, their conditions of production, their routes of transportation as well as administration, their material and medial transformations, their discursive and visual attributions.

The project puts in dialogue research into colonial history in Germany and Cameroon and enables a discussion on the relationality of media history and colonial history for a range of disciplines within African Studies (literature studies, film studies, cultural history, Science and Technology Studies) and beyond.

Key Questions

We focus on the substances of cocoa/chocolate and cinchona/quinine and situate their modes of existence in architectural remains and local memories of plantations, in botanical knowledges and colonial administrative practices, in labor conditions, in storage and transport infrastructures, as well as in visual and other media practices.

Our key questions are:

- Under which conditions have the substances been 'cultivated', which transformations have they undergone, which industrial production procedures and infrastructures have they passed? And how have they transformed landscapes, social conditions and industrial production?
- How have media accompanied these processes, which relationalities between material and medial procedures can be observed?
- How are both materials linked to taste and concepts of aesthetics? In what ways do they enact an unmarked whitening

of the senses, shaping both academic and embodied everyday life?

- Which practices of resistance and disturbances in colonial/medial/industrial relations around cocoa/chocolate and cinchona/quinine can we observe?
- How and to what effects are intersectional categorizations of race, gender, class inscribed in these relations?
- How do these relationalities inform (or haunt) our current knowledges?

Methods and Concepts

The project's methods are situated at the crossroads of cultural history, discourse and media theory, science & technology studies, infrastructure studies, archaeology, postcolonial studies, feminist, gender & queer studies. We understand the substances cocoa/chocolate and cinchona/quinine as 'material-semiotic actors' (Haraway) and locate them in a web of relationalities to practices of European colonialism, capitalist-industrial forms of value creation and infrastructures, intersectional power relations of race, class, gender, and academic and corporeal knowledges around aesthetics.

The research is organized around four sub-projects that focus on different dimensions and are in close dialogue to each other:

- One sub-project undertakes an archaeological and historical study of environmental, spatial, socio-cultural, economic and geopolitical dynamics by analyzing the transformation and restructuring of Cameroonian rural landscape and the way of life in the wake of German colonial plantation economy of cocoa and cinchona.
- One sub-project undertakes a colonial and industrial material history of cinchona/quinine focusing on botanic cultivation



Roads created by German colonial administration lined with mango trees (photo). On the outskirts of these roads were settled, willingly or by force, the populations relocated from the villages of the bush. These populations represented a labor force for the plantations created by the Germans.



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in German colonies, on infrastructures of transport between Cameroon and Germany, on industrial production in Germany, on quinine's use in malaria control and the remnants in popular culture (Gin&Tonic).

- One sub-project undertakes a media/cultural study about the colonial relationalities of cocoa/chocolate to urban mass culture, the history of technical media and industrial production in Germany analyzing various visualizations and contemporary new media formats.

- One sub-project follows relationalities of cocoa/chocolate to taste and aesthetics and how these enact power relations of race, class, and gender. These discussions are historically related to the philosophy of Enlightenment which defines people who are capable of aesthetic judgement and refined thinking as having a "sense of taste" – which becomes visible as a 'whitening of the senses' that feeds into European racism.

Vision

Following two exemplary colonial materials allows a multidisciplinary study of the relationalities of colonialism, industrialization and mass media through a precise analysis of the situatedness(es) of these substances and the transformations they bring forth. The project aims at a critique of often overlooked epistemic legacies of these knowledges up to the present day.



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We put research into colonial history in Germany and Cameroon into dialogue thus enabling a discussion around colonial relationalities for a range of disciplines within African Studies (literature studies, film studies, cultural history, STS) and beyond. Our vision is to contribute to historical and political debates about the colonial legacies of the relationalities of Germany and Cameroon taking into account violence and intersectional power in German colonialism as well as recent approaches of decolonization of knowledges of the Global North.



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Relation to the Cluster's Aims and Goals

By implementing the concepts of relationality, multiplicity, and reflexivity into our epistemology of following the substances of cocoa/chocolate and cinchona/quinine we will trace and map German colonial history of Africa and its long-lasting legacies. We examine the mutual and intertwined comings-into-existence not only of these 'colonial commodities', but also of Germany and Cameroon. We ask how these relations have been made and which knowledges and intersectional power effects have been comprised. Both substances perform/exist as multiple objects where we expect to observe multiple modalities of

relations of coloniality, industrialism and media technologies. Our aim is to open up for de-centering of methodologies of African Studies and to move towards self-reflexivity and multiple epistemologies. By questioning the epistemic legacies of the knowledge practices around two exemplary colonial commodities, we will reflect critically about modes of knowing from the Global North, thereby opening space for non/decolonial thinking and a re-configuration of African Studies.

Further Links / Key References

Find more information on the project here:
<https://medienwissenschaft.uni-bayreuth.de/wissenschaft/colonial-commodities/>



Right: Drawings of Cinchona Barks (Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1794-1868). *Flora brasiliensis. Supplement Specimina IXX Generum Cinchonae et Pali-cureae (e familia Rubiacearum)*. Edited by Karl W. Hiersemann, Leipzig 1915.)



German Quay stairs at the edge of the Boumba river in Moloundou (East region of Cameroon) 19.3.2015 (Photo: Salamatu)