

Historical and current knowledge production and dissemination in ethnology/cultural anthropology

(Workshop of the working group “Museum” and “History of Anthropology”)

In the period when "Völkerkunde" (Ethnology/Cultural anthropology) was constituted as an independent discipline, most early ethnologists agreed with the colonisation of non-European territories. At the same time, they moved between cooperation and criticism. Objections were raised, for example, to concrete procedures of the colonial administration, missionary efforts and ways of dealing with the people in the subjugated territories. Ethnologists nevertheless offered their knowledge of the situation in the respective countries, participated in various committees, speculated in return on the upgrading of their discipline and profited from colonial structures. They undertook their field studies in a system of striking asymmetries of power, in which, however, informants and other actors on the ground often played a central role in the generation of knowledge.

The first part of our workshop will focus on early field studies and the (in)visibility of informants and their significance. How did ethnologists present the results of their research and collections to museums and universities, what traces did they leave behind in collections and archives? To what extent can approaches to a dialogical or polyphonic production and dissemination of knowledge be identified long before the writing culture debate? In the second part, examples from recent practice will be discussed that show successful or failed attempts to counteract an imbalance in knowledge production and dissemination in museums and universities and to cooperate on an equal level. Discussions about who speaks with, for or about other actors, which legitimations are used, and rights claimed, are often central questions in the reconstruction of knowledge and access to it – and cause for controversial (professional) debates. Language: German, English is possible

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