

# Introduction

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At a time when our increasingly digitalized world overflows with an abundance of information and storage technologies, we sometimes have to be reminded that knowledge also gets ‘lost’. Especially in situations of cultural encounters past and present, we have to ask which knowledges are not easily appropriated by or translated from one cultural sphere into another, remain at the margins of cross-cultural exchanges because of a seeming lack of significance, or are hidden away in barely accessible archives. While most colonial regimes have been, according to Ann Laura Stoler, “knowledge-acquiring machines” (Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties” 55), there can be little doubt that the knowledge they admitted into their epistemic universe was far from universal: some items of knowledge were suppressed because they challenged the status quo, and others simply did not fall into the rather utilitarian categories required by colonial regimes geared toward an ever more efficient development of colonial practices (for a case study of the British Empire, see Drayton). This has led (and continues to lead) to the loss of a massive archive of knowledge, which various representatives of ‘postcolonial’ historiography are now in the process of retrieving. In order to emphasize the dynamic character of the loss of knowledge during cultural – especially colonial and imperial – encounters, we have chosen the term ‘fugitive knowledge’. Fugitive knowledge is not gone but absent, meaning that it is still somewhere. This volume brings together a number of case studies that demonstrate how knowledge becomes transient, evanescent, and ephemeral in cultural contact zones.<sup>1</sup>

But ‘fugitive’ also conjures up the term ‘fugue’. Edward Said suggested one of its key elements, the counterpoint, as a metaphor for an awareness of the entanglement of “simultaneous dimensions” within the modern imperial formation (“Reflections on Exile” 186). While the musical counterpoint is too strictly ordered to offer itself as a description of the fuzzy and often unpredictable realities of cultural encounters and their texts, those encounters are adequately described as being polyphonic: a contrapuntal fugue if you will. They consist of a contest between different voices, even though historiography has often canonized only one of them – the voice of the ‘victor’. The chapters here address such cases of intercultural polyphony and epistemic contest, and they seek ways to trace the dynamics through which knowledge becomes fugitive and is exiled from the historical archive.

1 These are a few synonyms for ‘fugitive’ from the OED.

The fugitivity of knowledge is also inherent in our attempts at definition. Our concept's referent may change with the different contributions due to the diversity of fields and critical approaches represented here. This semantic flexibility of the concept allows it to be applied in synchronic as well as diachronic perspectives, to critical readings 'against the grain' of some archives as well as to other archives hitherto unacknowledged documents. It is up to the reader to decide about the productiveness of the fuzzy term in describing the fuzziness of cultural encounters.

For a better understanding of what we mean by the fugitivity of knowledge, let us look at an example. In 1610, the British colony at Jamestown was experiencing increasingly difficult relations with the local Pamunkey tribe, on which it very much relied for survival. In the middle of a series of hostile acts, which ultimately led to the abduction of Pocahontas, representatives of the two cultural groups also enjoyed peaceful moments. This was doubtless because both sides felt the need to get along with one another, a policy that had made them exchange several young men to live with the other group, learn its language and customs, and act as translators and mediators.

In *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania*, the earliest 'history' of Jamestown colony – that is, the first chronological narrative of the events – the secretary of the colony, William Strachey, reports on a visit paid to his ship around Christmas time by Iopassus, a brother of Powhatan and uncle of Pocahontas. Iopassus expresses his curiosity about one of the men reading from the Bible. Strachey asks young Henry Spelman, one of the English go-betweens, to explain an image of the creation of the world to the Indian in his own language, which Iopassus seems to appreciate.

But the classic colonial scene of religious instruction is then inverted by Iopassus, who offers to tell the English listeners his own people's creation story. This is followed by a long passage quoting Iopassus's narrative about a great hare, his marvelous creation of animals and humans, and his battles against fearsome cannibal spirits.<sup>2</sup> Strachey considers this a pretty garbled tale – he begs the boy to ask Iopassus to "proceed [...] in some order" and to make the story "hang together the better." But his intervention is frustrated by Spelman, who tells Strachey that he is "vnwilling to question him [Iopassus] so many things lest he should offend him." Thus the old man continues his story of creation, some of which must certainly have been blasphemous to Christian ears. Yet, the British now want to know more: the captain of the ship where the interview takes place asks the boy to ask Iopassus about the Indians' beliefs about life after death, upon which Iopassus renders a beautiful description of his tribe's notions of life in the otherworld. Here the people who have died

2 The quote cannot be rendered in full here but is not lost to modern scholarship. See Mackenthun, *Metaphors* 254–55.

run in this pleasant path to the rysing of the Sun, where they fynd their forefathers living in great pleasure in a goodly field, where they doe nothing but daunce and sing, and feed on delicious fruiets with that great Hare, who is their great god, and when they haue lived there, vntill they be starke old men, they saie they dye there likewise by turnes and come into the world againe. (Strachey 102–3)

Having presented the lengthy quotation of the Indian's speech, Strachey reasserts an ethnographic-colonial position: "Concerning further of the religion, we haue not yet learned, not indeed shall we ever knowe all the Certaynty either of these their *vnhalloved mysteryes* or of their further orders and pollicyes vntill we can make surprize of some of their Quiyoughquisocks" (103; emphasis added). The "Quiyoughquisocks" are Pamunkey spiritual men – members of the intellectual elite whom the colonists quickly identified as their major antagonists. The scene of intercultural exchange about religious ideas ends at this point, and it remains an exception in Strachey's text, whose main purpose is to demonize the Indian leaders and accuse them of such barbarous deeds as cannibalism and infanticide.

Strachey's *Historie* was not published until 1849,<sup>3</sup> which means that the knowledge about Pamunkey religious views that it contains never entered intellectual circulation in colonial British America. The elements of Iopassus's story have since been corroborated by other European colonial sources containing similar material from other tribes of the Algonquian language group (see Mackenthun, "Unhallowed Mysteries"). In his capacity as the colony's secretary, it was Strachey's duty to document the events that occurred there. Due to the presence of Spelman who, as his response to Strachey shows, was familiar with the language and customs of the Pamunkey, the text of Strachey's otherwise hostile account seems to possess a large measure of authenticity. Yet, this unique early document of Algonquian spirituality remained largely unknown and unrecognized by scholarship, even after its publication. Apart from its physical unavailability (three manuscripts slumbered, one each, in the British Museum, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and at Princeton University – Wright/Freund xvii), Strachey himself identifies possible reasons for this neglect: the story Iopassus tells was to Strachey largely incomprehensible, incoherent, and "unhallowed," i.e., 'unholy': not in keeping with the Christian belief system.

Although disqualified as a "pretty fabulous tale," the story from a different culture was able to survive. Though certainly distorted through translation and transcription, the words of Iopassus do seem to constitute a case of relatively faithful and disinterested recording. This may be explained by the widely observed fact that sixteenth-century European travelers to America were not impelled exclusively by commercial desires but also by intellectual curiosity

3 This leaves Captain John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1625) as the first printed history of that English colony.

about other cultures. In Strachey's text, these two motivations make strange bed-fellows, as they do in texts by Bernardino de Sahagún, Thomas Hariot, and many others.

We want to use this episode as a prototype of what we mean by the fugitivity of knowledge in cultural contact situations. By virtue of so often being confined to the margins of our epistemic system, this fugitivity shares certain characteristics with "subjugated knowledges" evoked by Michel Foucault and retrieved by the history from below (Foucault 81, 83; Hock and Mackenthun 8–16; Sharpe). The concept of fugitive knowledge, however, differs from what Foucault has called the "savoir des gens" in that it evokes less the idea of a ready-made counter-hegemonic archive waiting to be uncovered but the processual nature of epistemic procedures, the fact that knowledge is being made, and consequently also unmade. Knowledge that is fugitive is not so much lost as relegated to the edges of our attention, languishing in a state of dismissal, and for a variety of reasons readily ignored or disarticulated.

Our understanding of fugitive knowledge – as the asymmetrical and selective preservation of knowledge in cultural contact zones – resembles what Sebastian Jobs calls "uncertain knowledge" – rumor, gossip, denunciation, and the like – in that it often occurs in situations of epistemic or political crisis (Jobs 4, referring to Jean-Noël Kapferer). Jobs has in mind the uncertainties created by racially legitimated inequalities in slave societies. Indeed, as Julius Scott, Marcus Rediker, and Peter Linebaugh have indicated, unofficial, often orally transmitted, and potentially subversive knowledge proliferates in situations of war, conflict, or systemic social inequality. They point, for instance, to the existence of a widespread communication network among African American seamen through which information about slave rebellions and the revolution in Saint-Domingue (1791–1804) was transmitted in the late eighteenth century.

Ann Stoler draws a connection between the kind of "epistemological uncertainty" expressed in the preceding examples and the textual evidence found in colonial archives. Uncertainty, she suggests, can be deduced from the disparate forms in which knowledge is found to be "unwritten." She distinguishes between "what was unwritten because it could go without saying and 'everybody knew it', what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said" (*Along the Archival Grain* 3). Regarding archives in dynamic terms – as "archiving-in-progress" – Stoler places particular emphasis on the rhetorical composition of archival records – their "prose style," their "repetitive refrain," their "acts of persuasion," their "genres of documentation," and so on (20). In her contribution to this collection, Gunlög Fur makes similar points about the significance of the rhetorical constructedness of evidence. Especially in cultural and colonial contact zones, epistemic lacunae occur not only because libraries and archives fall victim to natural or human disasters (earthquakes, fires, wars) but they are also the result of discursive processes of silencing. Following Stoler (and Foucault, and Pierre Macherey), we can say

that the silences of the colonial archive are actually constitutive of that which is being said (Foucault, *Order of Things* 129–32; Macherey 79–80).<sup>4</sup>

The Strachey-Iopassus exchange confirms Stoler's and Jobs's claims that knowledge is not a static but rather a dynamic process – though captured in different states in different media – and the result of social, communicative interactions and negotiations. This case also shows that in intercultural contexts such communication is often impeded by a lack of understanding and ideologically determined prejudices.

While the epistemological void or ambiguity in our current knowledge systems has been a point of interest since the first volume in this book series (Mac-kenthun and Juterczenka 10), the papers collected here take a closer look at the mechanisms of preservation and loss of knowledge during cultural encounters. These mechanisms are both material and intellectual, and are arguably interrelated. Materially, the preservation of knowledge from earlier historical periods depends on the durability of the media in which it is stored, as well as the archives where it is kept, and the access admitted to these archives. Furthermore, problems of translation arise when epistemic systems are recontextualized across time periods, social strata, or language groups. Though the written or printed text is not the most permanent medium (compared to, say, petroglyphs or other inscriptions chiseled in stone), texts prevailed as the privileged communication medium in Western culture. Yet their preservation in libraries and archives can be less secure than one might hope. Whenever we learn of the accidental or wanton destruction of a library of manuscripts and rare prints not yet digitalized – whether in Weimar, Cologne, or Timbuktu – most of us will experience this as a great loss to our cultures and to humanity as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, much knowledge, though preserved in archives, is excluded from general circulation because it has remained unprinted and unreproduced. Knowledge excluded from mass reproduction is at best dormant if not dead knowledge. The story of Iopassus remained unknown and unshared during colonial times because Strachey's text was not printed until 1849, and even then it was never produced in larger print runs.

4 The idea can be traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche's famous insight in *Morgenröthe* (*Dawn of Day*, 1881; section 523), where he poses the "insidious question": "When we are confronted with any manifestation which someone has permitted us to see, we may ask: What is it meant to conceal? What is it meant to draw our attention from? What prejudice does it seek to raise? And again, how far does the subtlety of the dissimulation go? And in what respect is the man mistaken?" (Engl. translation after Project Gutenberg).

5 This is not to say that digitization is the solution to all problems of textual preservation. Missing or faulty contextualization, limited access, and the fragile, often privatized infrastructure of digital archives call for a critical investigation of the digital form, its potential, its vulnerabilities, as well as solutions for addressing these issues.

Furthermore, knowledge might be linked quite intimately to human bodies,<sup>6</sup> as Stephan Kloos reveals in an essay in this volume: Certain (elite) agents are often the physical carriers of unwritten knowledges, the bearers of oral wisdom or important historical narratives. Persecuting, incarcerating, or killing such agents constitutes a direct threat to the proliferation of knowledge.

Politics (on the macro- but also on the microlevel) is thus another obvious dimension that plays into the fugitivity and loss of knowledge in situations of cultural contact. A seemingly insignificant, yet perhaps paradigmatic example of this type of knowledge suppression is discussed – among others – by Ricardo Salvatore in this volume, when he shows that it was not Hiram Bingham who ‘discovered’ the site of Machu Picchu as the local population had known about it for years. Visiting the famous Inca ruins today, one can immediately appreciate the contestedness of the claim to primacy when observing no less than four memorial plaques hanging side-by-side at the entrance of the ruins: one for the “discoverer” Bingham (from 1961), two for the “scientific discovery” made by Bingham (from 1948 and 1986, respectively), and one paying homage to Melchor Arteaga Richarte and his son, who had used Machu Picchu as farming grounds and had led Bingham to it upon his enquiry in 1911 (this plaque dates from 1999). The fugitivity of this piece of crucial knowledge becomes evident when the interested tourist strolls through the archaeological site and eavesdrops on several guided tours: a majority of guides still attribute full recognition for the ‘discovery’ to Bingham. In a region whose economy counts almost totally on Machu Picchu visitors, local guides and Peruvian businesses (such as PeruRail, which offers train service to Machu Picchu in a 1920s-styled train named after Bingham) seem to have opted to uphold the imperial dream of the foreign discovery of this archaeological treasure for a paying audience not yet ready to accept non-Western agency in the endeavor.

The knowledge about the long-standing local awareness of Machu Picchu’s existence is not subjugated knowledge: in fact, as mentioned, it is readily apparent at the site’s entrance. Nevertheless, to ‘discover’ it, one has to turn one’s eyes away from the organized tours, and pay attention to the margins of the site’s spectacle: it is fugitive knowledge.

While in some cases religious institutions like the Vatican or colonial governments prevented ideologically ‘blurred’ documents from being printed (as in the case of Sahagún or Poma de Ayala), in other instances knowledge was and is suppressed in order to uphold relatively local power structures. On a purely material basis, of course nothing ever gets lost. In her book *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman draws philosophical conclusions from some nineteenth-century writers’ obsessions with the phenomenon of dust as a waste product of the industrializing world. Proposing a “philosophy of dust,” she argues that, contrary to waste, dust is part of

6 The entanglements between human bodies and the generation of knowledge in situations of cultural contact were investigated in volume three of this series, *Embodiments of Cultural Encounters*.

an eternal circularity, of “nothing ever, ever going away” (166). This reminder of the transience of all things (in the sense of the medieval-early modern concept of *vanitas*), however, refers to an existence beyond the world of meaning and, therefore, knowledge. Dust, the ultimate destination of all worldly things, the terminus of fugitivity, is a subsemantic category. As dust, the artifact has ceased to signify; it can no longer be used as evidence for anything.

Against the backdrop of final dissolution (not into nothingness but into meaninglessness), our examples deal with instances of material circulation in cultural contact zones that are still epistemically significant. They also establish that the materiality of knowledge cannot be separated from its intellectual and ideological aspects. The essays assembled here predominantly analyze transactions of knowledge in colonial contexts, i.e., in situations of asymmetrical cultural contact. Political hegemony is achieved by direct control of territories, human bodies, and the social interaction between human beings, but also, significantly, by control of human minds. Early modern colonizers were well aware of this fact and made certain that indigenous epistemological traditions were destroyed, denounced, and interrupted. The destruction of Mexican codices by Franciscan friars, documented by the first-generation mestizo Diego Muñoz Camargo in his *Descripción de Tlaxcala* of 1585, illustrates this process (Fig. 1).

The image can be seen to visualize a competition for epistemic hegemony, with the deities and ancient rulers angered and potentially liberated from textual control by the friars’ firebrands. They seem to come to life in the flames of the auto-da-fé, as so many demons liberated by the sorcerer’s apprentice. Camargo’s drawing also reminds us of the strange tendency of colonial powers to document their acts of devastation, thereby leaving a trace of the former existence of the knowledges they have gone to such lengths to repress. From a diachronic perspective, such traces – such knowledge of the absence of knowledge – can often initiate the critical reexamination of established historiographies, myths, and narratives.

The image shows that the friars were very conscious of the fact that these codices were indeed texts – thus contradicting later assertions that textual media were completely unknown to and not produced by indigenous Americans. This contention was later expanded into the claim, made under the influence of Hegel’s nexus between textuality and historicity, that Native Americans, and other ‘primitive’ peoples, had no history because they had no texts. Until quite recently, Western scholarship was almost slavishly dependent on the existence of (printed) texts as the only medium considered to be reliable. While visual media, material artifacts, architectural forms, archaeological findings, and spatial structures are now beginning to enjoy a certain degree of respectability in historical scholarship (for a recent assessment, see Windus and Crailsheim), the same cannot be said about indigenous oral traditions (but see Cruikshank; Finnegan). These sources are only beginning to receive the attention they deserve in historical and, interest-



Fig. 1: Destruction of Mexican Codices. Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala* (c. 1585). Sp Coll MS Hunter 242 (U.3.15) folio 242r (Glasgow University).

ingly, juridical contexts (Brown; Echo-Hawk; Southwest Aboriginal Land and Sea Council).

In addition to the destruction of non-European archives and the denial of non-European forms of communication, another reason for the fugitivity of knowledge is that the contents of these communications were regarded as obscure and ‘incoherent’. As Strachey’s example establishes, knowledge was frequently denounced because it was considered disorderly and “unhallowed” – not conforming to European notions of order, intelligibility, and intellectual tradition. The medieval stories about the Viking voyages to Newfoundland were held to be mere myths and fairy tales; only the archaeological discoveries at l’Anse aux Meadows in 1960 proved them to be, at least in part, trustworthy. In this volume, Neil Safier provides another example of how a colonial text considered too fabulous to be taken seriously now has to be reassessed because its contents is corroborated by archaeological evidence. Thus, one scientific practice that flowered in the soil of impe-



rialism reinforces the knowledge formerly repressed due to ideological assumptions about the lacking cultural competence of ancient and non-European people.

The preservation and transmission of knowledge in cultural contact zones, then, is more often than not vastly selective; different or unfamiliar knowledge was and still is as a matter of course disarticulated by being belittled, demonized, and pathologized. Walter D. Mignolo has suggested the useful term “coloniality of knowledge” to capture this phenomenon. Referring to a 1989 essay in which Aníbal Quijano first outlined the concept, Mignolo (and other former members of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group collective) use the term “coloniality”<sup>7</sup> to describe the ongoing colonial access to, distribution, production, and reproduction of knowledge, an often subtle process that ultimately excludes and occludes alternative epistemes (see Mignolo, *Local Histories*, and Mignolo, *Darker Side*). While other scholars had already diagnosed such a “Euro-America-centrism” (Lenz), Mignolo and other decolonial authors go a step further by urging us (meaning, first and foremost, academics) to ‘decolonize’ our own epistemic systems, our own scientific methods, and our own understanding of our profession, which is, after all, the generation of knowledge.

Although most contributions in this collection examine cases of epistemic fugitivity in colonial and cultural contact zones, the Viking example shows that similar processes also took place ‘within’ cultures, and that European cultures were and are less homogeneous than many of us were taught through nationalist historiographies.<sup>8</sup> The marginalization of knowledge of the Viking voyages in the sagas of Christianized chroniclers is in some ways comparable to the suppression of indigenous knowledge in America. In both cases, epistemic effacement can be seen as a response to epistemic transformation and crisis.

‘Crisis’ is a concept that can be applied to most cross-cultural meetings, especially those of first contact, war, or hostile relations. Fugitive knowledge frequently occurs at just such times of social exigency and transition. With the encounter between Europeans and indigenous cultures, the societies of the latter faced severe social, political, and epistemological crises that encompassed the slow and gradual transition into Western-style modernity. Yet, as Sanjay Seth demonstrates in this volume, as a modern sociological category ‘crisis’ also runs the risk of being misapplied to the psychological conditions of colonized subjects. What modern sociology and psychology regard as ‘identity’ or ‘religious crisis’

7 Mignolo had previously introduced other critical terms into the matrix of a postcolonial vocabulary, which are supposed to derail our common train of thought by making us think outside of established epistemic concepts. These include “border gnosis,” “post-Occidentalism,” and “colonial difference” (all from *Local Histories/Global Designs*, passim).

8 We write ‘European’ often as a conventional shorthand for ‘Western, imperial powers’. However, the essay by Liina Lukas in this volume reminds us that we need to differentiate between European regions and social groups, which had varying degrees of involvement in the colonial formation. Disarticulated knowledges slumber in the midst of Europe. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s call to “provincialize Europe” is still a programmatic goal rather than a completed state of academic research.

may not be experienced as such by non-European people because their concepts of identity and religion may differ from those of Western science. Members of cultures that entertain a plural and non-dualistic sense of self and spiritual choice may be less shaken by false alternatives if they retain a certain amount of ideological leeway to build their own versions of self and spirituality. In cases of calculated and forced deculturation, however, this latitude does not exist. In Indian mission schools in the US and Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, indigenous identities were systematically erased and the passing on of knowledge thus disrupted.

Until lately, scholarship has been reluctant to include the hybrid products of such conflictive epistemological confrontations. As a result of empirical studies and conceptual proposals such as Richard White's "middle ground" (1991) and Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" (1992), which suggested more nuanced – and more complex – situations 'on the ground' of cultural confluences, an increasing number of scholars regard once more common forms of knowledge canonization as, at best, much too simplistic, and at worst itself part of the colonial project. To combat the persistent denial of the coevalness of non-European cultures (Fabian), a variety of attempts are now underway to empower knowledges that were heretofore effaced or marginalized. This volume is part of that effort.

Even so, in reconstructing the multidimensionality of historical knowledge, the archival situation is often disastrous. Having diagnosed the problem – the selective, fragmented, and asymmetrical preservation of epistemic structures – scholarship is in need of a cure. As Gunlög Fur points out in her chapter, the remedy first and foremost consists of developing more intricate methods of reading the documents of cultural encounters. Hegemonic sources can be read not only with but also against their grain. Peripheral information can be pulled to the center, fragments and "shards" can be pieced together to form a new picture of epistemological encounters.

These issues are not new. Writing twenty years ago on the scant documentation of the indigenous reality in the Amazon basin, Neil Whitehead complained about the "woefully insubstantial" status of modern scientific research, due to the tendency of modern scholars (especially "literary" and "historicist" ones) to concentrate on "either small episodes within texts, or a tiny selection of texts." Whitehead demanded that scholars pay more attention to the "mimetic elaboration" of the cultural encounter performed in these texts, and he insisted that it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of "symbolic convergences" between different cultures – the fact that cultural repertoires may share certain symbolic elements even if no direct influence can be affirmed (87–89). We can observe again and again how in the documents of cultural encounters mythical materials are productively, and for the reader hopelessly, mixed with seemingly accurate observations. For Whitehead (here referring to Sir Walter Raleigh's account of his voyage to Guiana in 1595), colonial texts are "flawed lenses"; nevertheless they do indeed "refract" something of the social reality of the encounter (88).

In other words, the documents of cultural and linguistic contacts always contain “partial truths” (Clifford) and produce “blurred genres” (Geertz). It requires competence in critical reading in order to analyze them. This includes a keen attention to seemingly superfluous, incoherent, and eccentric material. Readings that are adequate to the complexity of cultural contact situations require a combination of the insights to be gained from the perspectives of various disciplines, as well as the use of their analytical tools.

A more recent concern for many scholars has been a critical reassessment of the theoretical models we use in our daily work, most of which have grown out of the tradition of the Western European or US-American academy, reiterating its preoccupations and blind spots. The aforementioned Walter D. Mignolo and other adherents of the ‘decolonial option’ are deeply suspicious of what they see as colonial theories and thinkers, and attempt to replace them with supposedly indigenous concepts which, they argue, can be fruitful in efforts to unhinge the modern colonial world system. Often these ideas come from Latin America, but Mignolo has underlined that other world regions, like China, might also offer alternative epistemic concepts (Mignolo, *Dark Side* 321). This reCanonization, however, has drawn sharp critiques from feminist and postcolonial critics, who accuse decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, Catherine Walsh, and Arturo Escobar of using the disguise of indigeneity to cater to the tastes of a globalized, yet Western-based, white and male academic community immersed in postcolonial identity politics (see Rivera Cusicanqui). As these discussions demonstrate, it is a difficult and contested step from exposing epistemic gaps in our knowledge systems to finding ways to try to fill them. What has become increasingly clear is that any endeavor to repair the damaged cross-cultural archive can only be successful when it taps into the strengths of diverse disciplinary fields – when it actually attempts to bridge the chasms that were dug by the Western educational system – and moves toward a more holistic approach of knowledge acquisition. Education – whether “aesthetic” or more general – is the means for doing so (Spivak). This project of interdisciplinary ‘decolonization’ represents an enormous challenge for scholars who trained for years, or even decades, in their respective fields, as well as for institutions designed to uphold the barriers between these fields. And it is far from certain whether these attempts can overcome, even partially, the impairment resulting from the destruction and resultant loss of alternative epistemologies. Yet, to paraphrase a famous aphorism by the Mexican indigenous guerilla group EZLN, which serves as a crucial inspiration for many decolonial thinkers: Through constant questioning, we have to move forward.<sup>9</sup>

To take another small step in this direction, the present volume therefore brings together insights from various scholarly disciplines, including literary stud-

9 “Preguntando caminamos” is one of the mottos of the EZLN, featured prominently in many discussions on their policy-making, see e.g. Aguirre Rojas, Conant, Holloway, Huffschmid, Khasnabish, Zugman Delacioppa, and the edited volumes by Midnight Notes and REDaktion.

ies, history, and archaeology. All contributions approach their material (texts, images, collective memories, and social practices) from a number of theoretical and methodological angles. Because information can be ‘there’ without being ‘seen’ if the ideological and disciplinary lens of just one discipline is employed. A broadening of the vision can afford access to the fugitive knowledge that lies beyond.

## Chapter Summaries

The first section, *Contesting Imperial Knowledges and Colonial Myths*, begins with an essay in which *Gunlög Fur* provides an initial model of colonial knowledge’s selectivity. In “‘But in Itself, the Law is Only White’: Knowledge Claims and Universality in the History of Cultural Encounters,” she discusses various aspects of colonial knowledge contestation between different groups of Native Americans and colonial newcomers in North America and between Samis and Swedes in Northern Scandinavia. Drawing on examples of indigenous people and cultural go-betweens asserting their sovereignty against the power claims of colonial representatives, Fur uses these cases in order to raise methodological points about how to read these polyvocal texts which, being texts, are after all part of the colonial archive. Siding with historians like Michael Witgen, Fur insists on the necessity of reading colonial texts without ideological blinders and with an acute regard for seemingly irrelevant information and submerged meanings. She refers to the incompleteness of such “shards” of indigenous knowledge preserved in the colonial record, and she encourages us to include the seeming “margins” of these documents in our analysis because “[m]argins have the potential of subverting conventional narratives.” She also traces the process by which indigenous perspectives were sidelined – moved from center stage into ornamental vignettes – in the colonial iconography of Sweden. Such symbolic acts were disputed both by indigenous voices in colonial texts and by indigenous oral tradition, retrieved today by Sami and Native American scholars. And these articulations uphold a very different account of the process of cultural and territorial dispossession. With Johannes Fabian and Dipesh Chakrabarty, Fur contends that the practice of historiography is itself deeply involved in writing such voices out of the record. She couples this critique with an appeal to modern scholars to become methodologically adept at meeting the challenge of the colonial archive.

Taking a fresh look at the early modern myth of El Dorado, *Neil Safier* in “Fugitive El Dorado: The Early History of an Amazonian Myth” contrasts two sets of evidence: first, early modern European travelogues of the Amazon River basin region, which Safier reads against their ideological grain, and second, modern archaeological findings that testify to the fact that the Amazon, rather than having been the ‘pristine’ or ‘paradisiacal’ place of the colonial imagination, contains a large number of ancient and once cultivated anthropogenic landscapes.

Knowledge of this latter state makes hitherto neglected colonial narratives, such as Gaspar de Carvajal's mid-sixteenth-century travelogue *Descubrimiento del río de las Amazonas*, seem less 'fabulous' in their descriptions of indigenous agriculture, horticulture, and domestication of animals. Carvajal's narrative only became part of transatlantic knowledge circulation in 1894. It is itself a 'lost' text, and we are left to speculate about whether the inattention to which it was subjected was somehow related to the incongruousness of the information it contained.

Section two, *German Colonialisms: Texts, Territories, and Social Belonging*, consists of two essays dedicated to two German colonial territories, the Baltic and Southwest Africa. In "Who holds the Right to the Land? Narratives of Colonization in Baltic-German and Estonian Literatures," *Liina Lukas* investigates the interplay between history, historical novels, and efforts of nation building in the Baltic states from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. Comparing Estonian and Latvian national epics written under the rule of the German-speaking elites, Lukas reminds us that even long before the age of the "invention of tradition" (to use Hobsbawm and Ranger's phrase) questions of territorial belonging played a pivotal role in the constitution of proto-nationalities: all the texts she interrogates are preoccupied with the question "to whom the land belongs" and, consequently, which bodies have a right to live on it. Historical novels – "fictions of nation building," as Nina Gerassi-Navarro has called them (*Pirate Novels*) – negotiate this question by depicting iconic events of the past from different perspectives throughout the centuries: the subordination of pagan Estonians and Livonians under German-speaking Catholic elites was narrated first as an act of *reconquista*, reincorporating heathen lands into a pan-European Catholic realm. With the first burgeoning of nationalism in the late eighteenth century, however, this narrative changed into one of subjugation, which lent itself to efforts of nation building in the long nineteenth century, finally privileging both Estonian and Livonian narratives over Baltic-German viewpoints. Lukas makes manifest how this trajectory links with narratives of nation building in both Western Europe and North America, and presses us to widen our postcolonial perspective to include regions like the Baltic. Lukas's case study underlines the interconnectedness between literary and socio-political agency, creating a hotbed in which historical knowledge is always questioned and 'national historiographies' decide which knowledges are privileged and which are sidelined – but never without contestation.

Shifting the view from the scene of German colonization of Eastern Baltic to that of Southwest Africa, *Daniel Walther*, in his essay "Double Liminalization: The Historiography of German Colonialism and Reading the Marginalized in Colonial Texts," queries German historiography's still marginal treatment of Germany's colonial history on that continent. Walther argues that for a long time the investigation of German colonialism suffered from a fixation on the overwhelming crime of the Holocaust, thus converting the colonial past into an artifact of fugitive knowledge: always on the brink of scientific and popular remembering, but never fully present. Only after the revolutions of 1989 and the fall of

the Berlin Wall could a new interest in Germany's colonial past emerge which, as Walther maintains, profited from the turn toward cultural studies and transnational perspectives in the humanities and history. A concurrence with the new research paradigm of the history of everyday life, however, carries the danger of losing sight of the peculiarities of colonial practices, thus once again relegating the still ephemeral research on Germany's colonialism to the sidelines. To counteract these tendencies, Walther urges a postcolonial rereading of texts produced within the colonial environment. His essay includes an exemplary discussion of two source texts that admit a glimpse into the machinations of imperial policy from a subaltern point of view, thereby confronting the perpetuation in German historiography of the exclusion and fugitivity of subaltern subjects in a process Walther calls a "double liminalization."

Section three addresses *Epistemic Transfers and Blockages between Asia and Europe*. The understanding of fugitive knowledge promoted in this volume also includes cases of epistemological misperception in colonial contact zones. *Sanjay Seth's* essay, "A Question of Moral Crisis," critically investigates claims made by both colonizers and some of the colonized that educated Indians experienced moral crisis and disarray as a result of their exposure to Western knowledge in the schools and universities established by the British rulers. This crisis was assumed to arise from an incompatibility between Christian and Hindu beliefs and values. Seth critiques this reduction of intercultural processes to religious categories, and in an intriguing reading of the sources he suggests that the 'crisis' is the product of Western proto-psychological reasoning rather than a matter of what actually happened for educated Indians. He evinces that Indians who underwent Western pedagogical training developed strategies that made it possible for them to straddle different moral codes and systems. Their lived relation to the real escapes the grasp of the Western concepts and categories that were used to explain their 'immoral' behavior. Seth consequently questions the adequacy of Western knowledge for explaining its own effects. More generally, he wonders about the status of the knowledge produced when the categories of modern Western thought are applied in order to apprehend and explicate a transitional society like colonial India.

The essay "(Im-)Potent Knowledges. Preserving 'Traditional' Tibetan Medicine Through Modern Science" by *Stephan Kloos*, on the other hand, suggests that what was once on the fringes of knowledge in one cultural field can become prominent in another. Emphasizing the importance of the material aspects of knowledge systems, Kloos shows how Tibetan doctors manage to safeguard their 'traditional' medical practices within the hostile environment of 'modern' science, while concurrently dealing with the forced exile of their medicine's practitioners from Tibetan territory. Through a transnational negotiation over quality control in the medical sector (which, en passant, problematizes what kinds of medicine are considered appropriate in Western societies), Tibetans artfully position their unique knowledge of plants, herbs, and natural ingredients within a current

Western desire for non-Western, ‘traditional’ medicine, thereby renegotiating not only the boundaries of what is commonly labeled ‘scientific knowledge’, but also attempting to sustain a Tibetan national identity deeply connected with that medical knowledge. While Tibetan medicine – once on the brink of oblivion due to the forced displacement of its practitioners – now enjoys a strong presence within a global, market-driven economy, this very development threatens what Tibetans regard as the practice’s essence: the careful collection of ingredients and the personal ethics of the doctors (*amchi*) that assure the medicine’s success. Within our capitalist mode of production and distribution, what is considered to be the Tibetan way of producing and administering herbal cures is increasingly becoming a fugitive source of knowledge, which in a way is akin to the earlier threat of physical extinction faced by the Tibetan exiles.

Section four, *Speculative Knowledge in Colonial America*, is dedicated to knowledge that was prevented from entering the scientific canon. In “The Morality of the Moon,” *R. A. Kashanipour* examines the interstices of a non-Western Enlightenment episteme with its colonial counterparts by rescuing from obscurity the works of Manuel de Rivas, a Spanish friar who at the end of the eighteenth century dared to critique colonial authorities on the Mexican peninsula of Yucatán. To this end, Rivas issued angry pamphlets in the Mayan language that detailed ecclesiastical misbehavior using metaphors originating in Mayan subaltern experiences. Rivas also showed his profound understanding of Mayan cosmology through the elaboration of an almanac that attempted to unite two distinct scientific discourses (Mayan science and Western Enlightenment). Needless to say, these endeavors were considered heresy by the Catholic Church and Rivas was quickly incarcerated. Unrepentant, he embarked on realizing what Kashanipour regards as the New World’s first case of science fiction. Rivas’s tale, which features an Earthling visiting the moon, negotiates attitudes of morality and scientific progress: the Earthling – a French scientist – comes upon a society governed by the principles of Enlightenment, while on earth the inquisition (in tandem with evil alien forces from the sun) threatens human(ist) progress. Due to the ‘blurred’ and therefore ‘heretical’ nature of Rivas’s works, the Inquisition suppressed his writings for centuries. Kashanipour’s essay discusses a prime example of the splits between diverse sets of knowledge and colonial power relations, which led to the rejection and subsequent fugitivity of nonconcordant epistemologies.

In one of its meanings, the fugitivity of knowledge refers to the massive blanks in the historical record that are often evoked but just as often ignored when investigating particular phenomena and events. In his essay “The Man Who Faced the Saber-Toothed Cat,” *Pedro de Luna* introduces one of these forgotten agents from the colonial contact zone in America, the Danish naturalist Peter Wilhelm Lund. In 1843, Lund discovered human bones mingled with the bones of extinct animals in caves in Minas Gerais, Brazil. The scientific community, which was intent on finding a replacement for the waning Biblical narrative of earth’s

history, should have been electrified by this discovery, which attested to the fact that man had been present in America – and in the world – for much longer than had been assumed by such scholars as Georges Cuvier. But Lund, himself a Cuvier disciple, instead of brokering his work in a bid for scientific celebrity status, suddenly ceased his investigations; his discovery left hardly a trace in the historical record. As Luna argues, there were many reasons for Lund's actions, or rather inactions, among them his ill health, slow access to publication, and, perhaps most decisive, the financial problems that had arisen from failed speculative investments he had made in the colonial economy. Moving between a spiritually disquieting understanding of the Brazilian deep past and an ill-fated commercial venture in the colonial present, Lund brings together in one historical figure some of the major aspects of the coloniality of knowledge. Geographically peripheral and epistemologically unacceptable for many of his contemporaries, the knowledge Lund produced, and then chose not to pursue any further, was perhaps too 'fuzzy' and confusing to gain entrance into the Western scientific canon.

Section five, *Embattled Historiographies Between Latin America and the United States*, speaks to the effects on the United States' investment in knowledge production in Latin America. Shifting to Central American history of the nineteenth century, Victor Acuña's essay "Connected Histories of the United States, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica" takes a look at the Mesoamerican isthmus, a region which has recently come into the spotlight of public attention but is usually confined to discussions of early American civilizations. Acuña sees the reason for this marginalization as practiced not only by the dominant producers of academic knowledge in the US (who regard the isthmus as home to an American antiquity and neglect other aspects of its rich, modern history), and sharply takes to task a "brand of methodological nationalism" in both US and Central American historiography. As a countermeasure, Acuña commences his essay under the auspices of *histoire croisée*, analyzing how one particular event in Nicaragua – the partial takeover of the country by an alliance of US mercenaries (so-called filibusters) – has been discussed in three different national historiographies. While the incident serves as a pillar of national identity in Costa Rica, its status in Nicaragua is enmeshed in a complicated liaison with the Sandinista revolution of 1979 as the foundational myth of the modern Nicaraguan nation. In the US, on the other hand, the event was left on the bottom shelves of historical curiosities along with other (ultimately unsuccessful) imperial adventures. Examining how different actors shaped these diverging national perspectives, Acuña reminds us of the long-neglected "crossings and connections" in the research on the Nicaraguan filibuster episode, which situate the small isthmian country right at the center of an extended process of US national aggrandizement, expansionism, and imperialist aspirations. At the same time, the filibuster event also serves as the nucleus of a fervent Nicaraguan nationalism by imagining it as the focal point of national unity in the face of an external enemy. The filibuster episode thus plays myriad roles in the national imaginary of the three countries Acuña investigates; yet, aca-



demics have failed to consider a comparative perspective, operating – and continuing to operate – according to the dogma of nationalist narratives of collective identity, accompanied by politically driven “emphases and silences.”

In “US Scholars in South America and the Question of Imperial Knowledge,” *Ricardo Salvatore* enhances Acuna’s argument by examining how in the nineteenth and early twentieth century US scholars sought to incorporate South America into their realm of politico-academic research. Pushed forward by a range of scholars from different disciplines, their projects amounted to what Salvatore calls “disciplinary interventions,” an imperial drive provoked by an intimate entanglement between the scholars’ career ambitions and the need of governmental agencies to acquire academic knowledge in service of political and economic imperatives. In his essay, Salvatore reminds us that the nations south of Panama were considered off-limits for direct imperial interventions, in stark contrast to their Central American neighbors, who were regarded as fair game for US tutelage. Furthermore, South America in the late nineteenth century was rendered a forgotten region by US researchers, urgently to be rediscovered by self-proclaimed scientific conquistadors. The geographical, social, political, and economic knowledge accumulated by US scientists consequently portrayed South America as a field of scholarly political experimentation: comprising societies on the brink of modernity, which were to be shaped into Fordist perfection with US assistance. In spite of critical voices from these very scholars, who warned against adopting a simplistic, overly optimistic approach, policy makers and their academic colleagues rapidly melded the knowledge gleaned from field trips into a new research area: Latin American Studies, later to evolve into Area Studies, an eminent branch of Cold War US foreign policy. Salvatore’s contribution not only traces the imperial foundations of this academic discipline, but also delineates how knowledge about the complexity of raw data is silenced when the (political) need to use these data is articulated by powerful actors.

An Epilogue by *Ali Behdad*, one of the leading experts in discovering and analyzing unknown literary and visual archives of cross-cultural encounters, concludes this volume.

In it, Behdad artfully weaves together an investigation of his family’s photographic archives with a postcolonial critique of social “anamnesia” that denies agency and visibility to “epistemologically repressed” subjects – both diachronically and synchronically. He strongly argues for a “committed and sustained engagement with the politics of contemporaneity” to counter the ongoing effects of this anamnesia.

In their respective ways, all the essays in this collection gesture toward the cross-cultural dynamics of power involved in the making of our modern knowledge system. They provide examples of how decisions are made about what counts as (scientific) knowledge, how and in what form it is preserved, how it is (re)used and in which contexts, and the ways in which it is blocked from further usage. To a great extent these decisions determine if (and in which configura-

tions) knowledge becomes fugitive, at least for a specific time or a specific group of people. Yet, resistance lurks in every act of domination, and so the ongoing project of getting hold of fugitive knowledges is not a futile enterprise, but is instead an important step toward a better understanding of past and present cultural encounters.

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