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## SUMMARY

This study explores how the Missionaries of Mariannhill and their associates strategically positioned photographs—as well as other objects and media—in between themselves, their subjects, potential new recruits, their benefactors, and various other interlocutors. The study also shows that this did not exclusively happen for the purpose of propaganda between Natal (South Africa) and Europe. It thus explores the—often unexpected—consequences, as well as the limits of this strategy and its analysis.

In order to make photographs more effective, the missionaries propped them up with other media—and vice versa: “ethnographic” objects, exhibitions, theatre performances and *tableaux vivants*, texts, paintings, postcards, church decorations and paraphernalia, propaganda films, and even religious relics. In order to study how such media assemblages do this work, or instead work unexpectedly, this study considers various social processes of image transfer. For this purpose, it treats the mentioned media as “mimetic capital” (Greenblatt 1991).

Colonial photographs in general may therefore best be understood through specific situations of intermediality, as experienced by the photographers, the photographed, as well as other consumers. In such situations, White colonial actors often presented Africans as “imitators”, while they themselves consciously plagiarised images at the same time. In fact, various actors reproduced images bi-directionally between Natal and Europe. Not only did Europeans reproduce and engage with imagery depicting Africans, but also Africans engaged with related image conventions. The latter actively participated in the circulation of representations of “own” and “other”, either in Africa or in Europe. In many cases, makers of media claimed such images to mirror an alleged reality, leading to a representational realism. The terms “mimesis” and “capital” therefore appear appropriate, as in combination they allow for the description of both the imitation and the employment of images, objects, textual narration, as well as conventions of bodily performances.

For the purpose of propaganda, Mariannhill Monastery established an exceptional complex of interlinked institutions, which provided media that the missionaries used in conjunction, either in temporary or permanent constellations. For almost 60 years since the 1880s, the monastery simultaneously ran a multiplicity of commercial workshops, a photographic studio, a museum, many churches, theatre performances, an archive, a library, as well as a printing press. This constellation can be referred to as a localised “exhibitionary complex” (Bennett 1995), which not only allowed images and objects to thrive, but especially the ideas on them. This study deals with this exceptional situation in four parts, by studying the historical production of knowledge on and through photographs, as well as their ongoing impact through the intersections of images, spaces, objects, and subjects.

The missionaries and their associates invested considerable effort to convince their benefactors and other allies to support their projects. These allies had to believe in both the quality and the truthfulness of these projects’ representations. In the process of creating allegedly “truthful” knowledge, the photographers and journal editors at Mariannhill experienced “epistemic anxieties” (Stoler 2009), as they were well aware of the potential epistemological flaws in the media they employed. In order to balance these anxieties, the missionaries sought

ways to modify, enhance, certify, and authenticate the media they circulated. At the same time, they had to adjust them to particular social, technological, and not least aesthetic shifts taking place since the 1880s, both in South Africa and in Europe. Using their representations to mediate between an imagined Black society on the one hand, and an imagined White European society on the other, Mariannahill Missionaries eventually developed a considerable influence in the (re-)production of representations of Natal. By doing so, images, spaces, objects, and human actors became “entangled” in the sense that the work of propping up had to be continued perpetually, so that the construct would not collapse (Hodder 2016).

The image traditions influencing Mariannahill’s photographs were European studio conventions and aesthetics; the South African photographic tradition established by coffee table books and tourist guides since the early 1860s; from the mid-1890s onwards “ethnographic” photographs; and foremost artistic “genre themes”. The idea of “genre” weaves through all chapters of this study, as written instructions to capture typical “daily live” existed in all involved economies. Photographic, artistic, touristic, ethnological, and missionary lobbies all materialised their own desires and demands in the form of published journals, questionnaires, and instructions as to what the traveller outside of Europe should consider relevant, how and what to see, to describe, to photograph, and to collect. As these instructions were merely suggestions, this study takes a closer look at the actual grass-roots practices at Mariannahill. A critical analysis of colonial photographic practices must therefore take into account the combined inspirations by such manuals with the ongoing mutual influences between painting, photography, their extended materialities, and the respective photographer’s actual perception and practice.

To achieve this, the study is divided into four parts, each focusing on one of the earlier-mentioned dimensions relating to media: images, spaces, objects, and subjects. At the same time, each of the four parts describes one of the above economies, which all had their own supply and demand systems, articulated by advice literature and publication organs. Within only a few years after 1897, Mariannahill’s photographer, Br. Aegidius Müller, firmly established himself within the networks of these economies (mission propaganda, tourism, the popular printing press, photographic technology, museum ethnology, as well as the local and international art world). In order to understand either one of these economies, this study argues, they all have to be studied in conjunction. For example, what is commonly described as “colonial photography” or “ethnographic photography” has so far hardly been studied regarding the relations to contemporary photographic and artistic aesthetics.

Each chapter therefore discusses the ways how the Missionaries of Mariannahill positioned mimetic capital in relation to other interpretive communities and their networks. These networks eventually overlapped and became hybrid networks. As a cumulation, Part Four (Chapters Seven and Eight) address how images eventually transformed and how some were empowered as a consequence in later stages of their biographies. According to these networks, the photographic oeuvre of Mariannahill depended on a multitude of actors, themes, and genres, which cannot be easily categorised. For example, many images overlap in terms of content, narrative, and aesthetic conventions, but are at the same time unique, despite their repetition. In order to survey the many actors, as well as their respective interactions, this study provides a preliminary prosopography of the involved communities, such as missionaries, ethnologists, and African

communities.

In the first Part<sup>1</sup> (Chapters One and Two) I discuss how producers and consumers established Mariannahill's photographs as allegedly truthful representations. In Chapter One I argue that particularly in the years just after 1900, the mission's photographer modelled a considerable part of his photographs after genre scenes from the popular press. These photographs employed an extended conception of "photographic resemblance", as well as *tableau vivant*-like performances. I discuss this in relation to the photographer's attempts to visualise religious faith and its antagonisms. In Chapter Two I provide multiple related examples for the propping up of different media against each other.

Part Two (Chapters Three and Four) shows that Mariannahill Monastery and several of its outstations were highly popular tourist destinations, at least since the mid-1880s. Therefore the missionaries developed particular modes of presenting their assets and constructed the mission space through textual description and the positioning of photographs and objects. Chapter Three establishes how the missionaries set up the monastery's interior and exterior, and how it was constituted in the experience of guided tours by and for visitors. At the end of the guided tour across the monastery compound was the photographic studio, an economic institution like the mission's many other workshops. However, the studio was crucial for the visual reproduction of all other aspects of the mission; it even constituted a stage, where the space exterior to the mission could be recreated. Chapter Four then focuses on the specific relationships of objects and photographs in "contact zones" (Pratt 1992), in particular on the objecthood of photographs in such situations, and eventually on the roles objects played in photographic spaces as theatrical props.

Part Three<sup>2</sup> (Chapters Five and Six) deals with the objects in Mariannahill's museum and the multiple social functions they served; more specifically the processes of their collection and curation, as well as the photographic representation of these processes. By curating photographs together with other objects in various kinds of exhibitionary spaces, Mariannahill Missionaries established social relationships with their allies. They positioned their institution not only within South African society, but also in relation to European society. I explore how the missionaries presented particular objects of local material culture, as well as mission-produced goods as specific products of the mission encounter, either in a negative or a positive sense. Like the photographic pose in the form of the *tableau vivant*, objects like head rings, as well as the exhibitions they featured in, may be equally considered as media of the mission encounter. Chapter Six then follows the circulation of Mariannahill's photographs to European ethnographic museums, eventually back to Mariannahill, and their changing functions and meanings in the process. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnologists created the "disappearing native", not least in order to motivate allies to collect objects and other data as soon as possible. In response, Mariannahill Missionaries sold their propaganda photographs to European museums, thereby trying to maximise their commercial potential as multi-purpose photographs. Scientific and other communities continuously re-certified the photographs as "ethnographic", which therefore constantly shifted between viewpoints of propaganda, ethnology, and entertainment.

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1 Sections of this Part have been published as Rippe 2014.

2 Sections of this Part have been published as Rippe 2016.

While Parts One to Three (Chapters One to Six) are in chronological order, as well as relatively coherent in space and time, I shift gears in Part Four. Unlike the previous chapters, Chapter Seven<sup>3</sup> is set at Mariannhill's filial station Centocow Mission, where the Black artistic painter Gerard Bhengu grew up between 1910 and 1931 while producing his early oeuvre. I show how this took place in close collaboration with his first patron, Dr. Max Kohler, partially in a mode that comes close to a "four-eyed-sight" (Daston and Galison 2007). This allows to delineate crucial developments in the South African history of image making, and the close epistemological interactions, commonalities, and differences to earlier and contemporary practices of photography and painting. Unlike in earlier chapters, this situation also allows to describe the production of images and the related creativity as a process and cooperation. As one of the very first successful Black South African figurative painters, Gerard Bhengu supposedly painted "from life". However, Bhengu and Kohler communally appropriated earlier popular imagery, such as Mariannhill's photographs. Only by relying on existing mimetic capital were they able to employ Bhengu's work as effective propaganda, scientific "working objects", as well as "art". Eventually they struggled to establish the full potential of Bhengu's work due to the restrictive racist social system. South African missionaries and educationalists constructed and controlled the ("modern") "creative native" against the ("traditional") "disappearing native". They both established and practised what might be called the "art of segregation".

Chapter Eight<sup>4</sup> shows how three particular image-object-body relationships developed over time, between the timeframe of their constitution and the research for this study. This involves three popular figures of the mission encounter, the "missionary", the "diviner", and the "chief". Contrary to the attempts to authenticate photographs as described in the previous chapters, this constellation allows to delineate consecutive photographic occasions in which social actors unleashed "mimetic excess" (Taussig 1993). They achieved this by compounding image-objects related to the three figures according to established principles, which even continued to function in a similar way during my own fieldwork. Photographic portraits in combination with historically charged objects related to the same depicted person, thus enabled people near Mariannhill to supply historical actors with a certain agency and thus to reconstitute their personhood (Gell 1998).

Only by studying historical and more recent constellations of media in a global setting, may we comprehend the ongoing claims put forward by social actors towards photographs and their extended materialities. Even if images became empowered one way or another, they became more entangled at the same time, and therefore less controllable. Comparing the perspectives of several image-object-subject constellations at very specific moments in space and time, eventually allows to perceive Mariannhill's oeuvre as a "distributed object" in time (Gell 1998). In so far, we not only better comprehend historical processes of creative image production, but also of the resulting impact, whether considered failure or success.

These interwoven material and immaterial, diachronic and synchronic clusters of images are never physically stable, but are continually rearranged and re-accumulated in particular moments of time and in relation to certain events. Nevertheless, often such constellations leave

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3 Sections of this Chapter will be published in a forthcoming edited volume on Bhengu.

4 Sections of this Chapter have been published as Rippe 2015.

traces, which allow to reassemble them in relation to preceding moments. This eventually complicates, but also explains the importance of photographs as valuable conduits for postcolonial reflections and emotions. Therefore photographs are much more than simply historical sources, rather they are relational image-objects.