



Ben Gurion University of the Negev  
Department of History  
Fall Semester 2022-23

**Knowledge and Power in Colonial Contexts**  
Prof. Ruth Ginio

2 credits BA Advanced Course  
Tuesdays 12:15-13:45

Office hours: Mondays 13:00-13:45 (please co-ordinate in advance)  
Building 74, room 306  
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Course presentation:

The course will interrogate the relationship between knowledge and power in colonial contexts. We will examine the ways in which European knowledge was created in African and Asian colonies, with emphasis on the early period of colonial rule. After an introductory discussion of the definitions of knowledge and of the European colonial idea, we will tackle the following questions: Which kinds of knowledge were needed for colonial rule? What is the relation between European perceptions of non-European regions and peoples and colonial knowledge that was formed in the colonies? Who was responsible for gathering knowledge about the colonies? What kinds of contributions did local populations make in the construction of colonial knowledge? In what way did the colonies served as laboratories for the evolution of European ideas, paradigms, ideologies, and theories? Is it possible to decolonize European knowledge? During the course we will focus on several areas of knowledge and will examine them through various case-studies from European-ruled colonies.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the course students will be acquainted with the different definitions of knowledge and the illusiveness of the concept. They will understand the relation between the basic assumptions, cultural ideas, and power of those who formed the knowledge and its contents. Students will also be aware of the importance of knowledge, its accumulation, and its construction to the colonial project and of the way in which the colonies shaped European knowledge. They will also be able to understand better the current debates around the decolonization of knowledge in the ex-colonies and in Europe.

Course Requirements and Grade Composition:

Attendance and participation in the study tour are obligatory (see course schedule for Jan. 10 below)

Written responses relating to four of the articles from the syllabus (from 8 November onward). Questions regarding the articles will be sent in advance to help students formulate their responses (each response about 400 words) – 40%

A critical analysis of a film about European Exploration of Africa (Mountains of the Moon – 1990)– 20%

Each student will choose an area of knowledge that will be discussed during the course. For the class related to the chosen topic, he or she will find an academic article that is related to the reading material of that same class. During the discussion, students will present examples from the article they have read. As a final assignment, students will be required to integrate the two articles, the discussion in class and the theoretical issues discussed in the course into a 1500-words paper. – 40% (10% article's presentation in class, 30% final paper)

#### Main Topics for Discussion:

1. Defining knowledge
2. The relationship between colonialism and the construction of knowledge
3. Racism and the construction of colonial knowledge
4. Exploring Africa – the case of David Livingstone
5. Geographical knowledge
6. Ethnographic knowledge
7. Medical knowledge
8. Psychiatric knowledge
9. Knowledge about witchcraft
10. Criminological knowledge
11. Forensic Science and its origins in the colonies
12. Colonial knowledge and African Art (A study tour to the Israel Museum)
13. Decolonization of knowledge

#### Class Schedule\*

\*Weekly Readings are subject to change

#### **25 October, 2022**

*Introduction to the course – What is knowledge and how is it related to power?*

#### **1 November, 2022**

*Knowledge and colonialism*

Bernard, Cohn. "Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India." *Princeton: Princeton UP* (1996), 3-15

### **8 November, 2022**

*Racist ideas and the formation of colonial knowledge*

Degérando, Joseph-Marie. *The observation of savage peoples*. Routledge, 2013.

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.bgu.ac.il/lib/bgu-ebooks/reader.action?docID=1543045>

### **15 November, 2022**

*Dr. Livingston, I Presume? Exploration as a prelude to colonial rule*

MacKenzie, John M. "David Livingstone—Prophet or Patron Saint of Imperialism in Africa: Myths and Misconceptions." *Scottish Geographical Journal* 129, no. 3-4 (2013): 277-291.

### **22 November, 2022**

*Colonial cartography and the institutionalization of Geography: Looking for the sources of the Nile*

David Finkelstein, "Unraveling Speke: The Unknown Revision of an African Exploration Classic", *History in Africa*, 30 (2003), 117-132.

### **29 November, 2022**

*Ethnographic knowledge and emergence of Social Anthropology*

Pels, Peter. "What has anthropology learned from the anthropology of colonialism?." *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 16, no. 3 (2008): 280-299.

### **6 December, 2022**

*Medical knowledge*

Helen Tilley, "Medicine, Empires, and Ethics in Colonial Africa", 18:7 (2016), 743-753

### **13 December, 2022**

*Psychiatric knowledge: Defining normal and abnormal in the colonial context*

S. Mahone, "Psychiatry in the East African Colonies: A Background to Confinement", *International Review of Psychiatry*, 18:4 (2006), 327-332.

**20 December, 2022***Knowledge about African Beliefs*

Engelke, Matthew. "The problem of belief: Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner on" the inner life." *Anthropology Today* 18.6 (2002): 3-8.

**27 December, 2022***Criminological knowledge*

Alexander Lyon Macfie, "Thuggee: an Orientalist Construction?" *Rethinking History*, 12:3 (2008), 383-397

**3 January, 2023***The Colonies as Forensic Laboratories*

Burney, Ian, and Christopher Hamlin, eds. *Global forensic cultures: making fact and justice in the modern era*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.  
Chapter 3 or chapter 7

**10 January, 2023**

Study Tour to the Israel Museum (Exact date to be announced)

**17 January, 2023**

## Undermining the Colonial Idea: The Decolonization of Knowledge

Suman Seth, "Putting Knowledge at Its Place: Science, Colonialism, and the Post-Colonial", 12:4 (2009), 373-388.