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On the Tropical Origins of the Alps

Science and the Colonial Imagination of Switzerland, 1700–1900

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A remarkable colonial encounter took place on 26 February 1896 on the south-eastern peninsula of Celebes – one of the many so-called outer islands in the far-flung Dutch Asian Empire. Two wealthy Swiss naturalists, Paul and Fritz Sarasin, the first Europeans to explore this large hitherto 'unknown' island, reached the summit of one of the mountains in the highlands. At 1000 metres above sea level they were rewarded with a surprising view. A large lake 'gleaming in magnificent blue' lay before them. 'Delighted by this discovery we hurried down to the lakeside where yet another surprise awaited us. A real, inhabited village with houses built on piles arose from the water, a village named *Matanna*.'[1] The Sarasins' excitement grew even further as they found out that the lake dwellers on Celebes 'practised a curious form of pottery with products reminding us of identical objects from Swiss lake dwellers'.[2] It is important to note the asymmetry of this comparison. The Sarasins were not referring to contemporary Swiss lake dwellers. In fact there were no people living in lakes in Switzerland around 1900. The reference was to prehistoric lake dwellers, whose poles and material remains Swiss archaeologists had started digging up from the mud of the lakeshores a few decades earlier. What the Sarasins thought they had discovered on the shores of Lake Matanna was thus a piece of living prehistory on a tropical island which, to them, in many ways resembled Switzerland. Enthused over the 'steep mountains made out of rock, green meadows, forests and a lovely climate' as well as several large lakes in the highlands, one of the cousins wrote to his mother in Basel: 'This is actually Celebes Switzerland.'[3] To their readers in Europe they declared the island to be a kind of 'Switzerland dislocated into the level of the tropical ocean'.[4] In private correspondence, the Sarasins predicted a promising future for the island. Once the Dutch had taken full control and 'civilized' its inhabitants, Celebes would indeed 'become a tropical Switzerland'.[5]

Comparing contemporary 'tropical' landscapes and peoples to European prehistory constitutes a particular form of colonial imagination for which the German-American anthropologist Johannes Fabian coined the concept

'denial of coevalness' some time ago. Fabian used this concept to highlight the paradoxical nature of anthropological fieldwork. The encounters between anthropologists and the people they observe must necessarily take place within the same timeframe – anthropologists and their objects of enquiry are thus 'coeval' in the field. In anthropological writing, however, the people studied by anthropologists become the 'other'. They are relegated to a different period from that of the observing anthropologist and his or her readers. While the former come to represent the static, the 'backward' or the 'primitive' anthropologists and their readers come to represent the present, the evolving, the modern and cultivated.[6] Fabian's insights are true not only for anthropology in a narrow sense of the term but, as this paper will illustrate, for natural history more broadly understood in the 18th and 19th centuries. Expanding Fabian's notion of 'denying coevalness' to natural history allows us to see the discovery of 'tropical Switzerland' in the Dutch East Indies described above as part of a much bigger story. It is a story of the entangled and co-evolutionary trajectories of the scientific 'discovery' of the Alps on the one hand and the scientific 'discovery' of the 'tropics' on the other hand within a shared framework of empire. The fact that connections between Alpine and tropical studies have been marginal in recent historical scholarship has to do with the separation of two fields of historical enquiry: the rich historiography on 'colonial knowledge' has existed thus far largely in isolation from the historiography on the 'discovery of the Alps'.

Historiography

The debate on 'colonial knowledge' has a complex genealogy. The most influential strand begins with Edward Said's seminal book on 'Orientalism'.[7] The long Western tradition of studying texts, languages and artifacts from the 'Orient', Said argued, was neither innocent nor innocuous. Instead, by construing images of the 'Orient' as the 'backward opposite' of an enlightened 'West', Orientalists benefited from, and ideologically sustained, the colonial conquest and exploitation by Western powers. According to Tony Ballantyne, Said's provocative book had a far-reaching impact on how historians came to imagine empire, 'reading it not simply as a set of economic and political structures of dominance but as a cultural project.'[8] 'Knowledge' came increasingly to be understood not as neutral representation of reality, but rather as both a product and a pillar of colonial power. The work of travellers and scientists in the colonies and on the colonies thus became the subject of critical scrutiny. This fast-growing body of scholarship has become quite differentiated in its research goals and theoretical underpinnings.[9] Intending to 'relocate' (Kapil Raj) and 'de-centre' the dominant narrative of the supposedly 'Western' origins of science, these sophisticated studies have thus far focused mainly on non-European sites

of knowledge-production as well as on cross-cultural exchanges within the context of empire. How scientific enquiries into non-European realities were a reflection of 'Europe' itself, affecting scientific research in and on the 'metropolitan' regions of the West, has been occasionally stated but rarely analysed empirically.

Historical research on the scientific discovery of the Alps, on the other hand, has, for the most part, remained Eurocentric and fragmented. Scholars from the Anglophone world have highlighted how Alpine mountaineering and Alpine research served British Victorian middle classes to construct masculine imperial cultures.[10] This strand of scholarship, however, rarely examines how these discourses affected the Swiss educated elites from the flatlands as well as the Alpine inhabitants themselves.[11] While there is growing awareness among Swiss historians of the global dimension of the history of Alpine studies,[12] scholarship for the most part still tends to focus on how Alpine science and tourism produced Switzerland's self-image as a nation of simple shepherds and farmers dwelling on high mountains on the 'top of Europe'.[13]

If we are to fully understand the meaning of the discovery of 'tropical Switzerland' in the Dutch East Indies, mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the histories of Alpine and tropical studies ought to be analysed within a common analytical frame. As Patricia Purtschert suggested recently,[14] postcolonial and Alpine historiography should be brought into closer dialogue with one another. A promising way of doing this is to adopt an analytical concept that has proved highly useful in postcolonial historiography and apply it to the history of Alpine studies: 'tropicality'. Similar to Said's concept of 'Orientalism', which brought to light colonial fantasies central to much of the literature produced in the humanities, David Arnold's concept of 'tropicality' focuses on how natural history and the natural sciences forged a European understanding as one that is 'moderate' and 'temperate' in contrast to the 'tropical'.[15] Following Arnold's notion, Felix Driver and Luciana Martins state: 'The contrast between the temperate and the tropical is one of the most enduring themes in the history of global imaginings. Whether represented positively (as in fantasies of the tropical sublime) or negatively (as a pathological space of degeneration), tropicality has frequently served as a foil to temperate nature, to all that is modest, civilized, cultivated.'[16]

As we shall see, the Alps and their inhabitants came to epitomize all that is temperate and modest, arguably more intensely than any other European region: not only in the Swiss imagination, but in a Western one more generally. How can this be explained?

My argument consists of two parts. First, I shall highlight some of the ways in which the context of European expansion into the 'tropics' shaped the very beginnings of Alpine research and imagination in the early 18th century. Second, I will discuss some of the 'tropical' origins of Alpine

imagination in terms of evolutionary discourse of the 19th century. In the closing section I will suggest a new reading of Swiss Alpine discourse in an imperial context.

'Zona torrida' and 'zona alpina'

Johann Jakob Scheuchzer's 'most moderate air on the entire globe'

Historians usually point to the Zurich physicist and naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733) as the founding pioneer of both Alpine science and national imaginary.[17] Scheuchzer, a fellow of the British Royal Society, applied methods similar to those of his British and Spanish counterparts for exploring their overseas colonies. In 1699 he drafted a questionnaire to informants in the Alps asking them for observations on climate, flora, fauna and the inhabitants.[18] In addition, he undertook several long research expeditions to the Alpine 'terra incognita',[19] as he phrased it, during which he collected natural specimens, measured temperature and air pressure and observed the manners and customs of Alpine dwellers, for whom he coined an influential racial category: 'homo alpinus'.[20] Popular compilations of his work appeared between 1716 and 1718 in three thick volumes entitled *Natur-Historie des Schweitzerlandes* ('Natural History of Switzerland'). In scholarly terms, the Zurich naturalist's main contribution was to transform theories of the biblical Flood. Whereas the Alps had previously been understood as reminders of this biblical catastrophe, Scheuchzer argued that the Flood had purified the Alps, creating a 'temperate' climate and 'healthy' Alpine nature affecting the mentality and lifestyles of Alpine dwellers: their honesty, modesty, diligence, strength and even-temperedness. Being a devout Protestant, Scheuchzer saw natural harmony and regularities, which could be uncovered by scientific research, as proof of the existence of God. Not surprisingly, he held the Swiss, who were living in this healthiest of all natural environments, to be a chosen people.[21]

Scheuchzer's patriotic theological and scientific portrayal of the Alps and the Swiss should not, however, be understood only as contributing to Swiss national identity. Scheuchzer was operating, in Mary Louise Pratt's terms, within a 'planetary consciousness'.[22] This means that he positioned the Alps and the Swiss within a Eurocentric mental map of the entire planet. He thus also positioned the Alps and the Swiss within a certain idea of 'Europe', which at the time was gradually emerging in contrast to nature and peoples from the 'very hottest belt of the planet suffering from heat and all sorts of vermin',[23] as Scheuchzer called it: the 'zona torrida', or the 'Tropici'. The first chapter of Scheuchzer's *Natur-Historie* serves as illustration. It is a lengthy reflection on the nature of the 'Swiss air' ('Von der Schweitzerischen Luft'), which he considered to be 'the purest air in all of Europe'.[24] How did he

arrive at this assessment? Scheuchzer was a follower of the Newtonian science of his time, believing first of all that the equator was more distant than the poles from the core of the globe. The globe, according to Scheuchzer's contemporaries, was squeezed at the north and south poles. However, since it was imagined as surrounded by a perfectly round sphere of air, the northern hemisphere was supposedly covered with a thicker layer of air than the equator area. Second, Scheuchzer drew on air-pressure measurements collected and compiled by the Royal Academy of Science in Paris for many parts of the world, including the South-East Asian Sultanate of Malacca,[25] which was ruled by the Dutch East India Company at the time. Scheuchzer compared these measurements with the data that he and his brother had collected using a barometer on a mountain expedition in 1710. This data showed a 'harmony between our Swiss mountainous lands and the hottest districts of the planet' ('Uebereinstimmung unserer Schweitzerischen bergischen Landen mit dem heissesten Gürtelstrich der Erden').[26] While both the 'Tropicis' and the Alps had constant low air pressure, Genoa, Paris or the Netherlands experienced much higher air pressure. The reason for this was, according to Scheuchzer, that Switzerland – although it belonged to the northern hemisphere – was situated as far from the earth's core as the tropics because it was elevated by high mountains. The 'zona alpina' was covered with an equally thin amount of air as the 'zona torrida'. Because Scheuchzer believed the hot sun in the equator region to be less healthy than moderate temperatures in Europe, but also that high air pressure in the European flatlands caused unhealthy evaporations, he was able to conclude 'that the Swiss air constitutes one of the purest, most moderate and healthiest kinds to be found on the entire globe'. This led him to fairly far-reaching conclusions:

> [D]ivine providence has positioned us in the middle between the equator and the poles, we thus needn't suffer the cold from the north nor the heat from the hottest districts. [...] This temperate nature of the air has no small influence on the temper of our nation, which is of an intermediate kind between the Italians, the French and the Germans [...]. The rarity of the plague and other dangerous illnesses, the people's healthiness, even in the oldest age, and the fertility of women are a reliable proof of the healthy Swiss air.[27]

Scheuchzer's reflections on the nature and effects of the Swiss air constitute just one of the 23 chapters in the first of his three-volume series on Switzerland's natural history. The other chapters follow a similar pattern. The example clearly shows Scheuchzer's 'planetary consciousness': he was not theorizing about Alpine nature and its inhabitants in a narrow and isolated central European frame of reference. Instead, he was using data gathered from all around the world in order to put into focus the particularity

of Alpine nature and temper. His invention of the exceptional quality of Alpine nature and the 'homo alpinus' was thus more than simply an act of scholarly patriotism. It was also about positioning Switzerland within the emerging Eurocentric system of global knowledge that followed and sustained the process of European expansion. According to Scheuchzer's logic, Switzerland was not merely part of the European temperate zone, but epitomized the best qualities of Europe more generally. The physicist thus laid the ground for a trope that would reappear throughout the 18th and 19th centuries: what made Switzerland unique, both within Europe and on a global scale, was that it shared positive traits with the 'tropics' (in this case air pressure) while lacking their negative characteristics, such as the prevalence of heat and vermin. Natural history in the early 18th century thus emerged as not merely 'a European discourse about non-European worlds' as Mary Louise Pratt stated more than 20 years ago, but indeed also as 'an urban discourse about non-urban worlds, and a lettered, bourgeois discourse about non-lettered, peasant worlds'. It was a deeply gendered discourse, as will become clear, 'projected within European borders as well as beyond them'.[28]

Albrecht von Haller's Alps and Peru

As I have argued elsewhere,[29] the thinking of the other great 18th-century Swiss polymath and naturalist, Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777), followed a similar pattern. In his seminal poem 'The Alps', Haller popularized Scheuchzer's portrayal of the happy 'homo alpinus' living in the best of natural worlds. What separated Haller's Alpine dwellers from their 'tropical' counterparts was their lack of laziness, 'goatishness', barbarism and – above all – their freedom from servitude and colonial exploitation.[30] Before Spanish colonization, the Incas in the South American Andes, Haller maintained, might have been blessed with gold while Alpine nature is 'spread with stones' and 'crackling ice alone'. Yet: 'Mines, which Peru with envy might behold! Where Freedom reigns ev'n labour is repose.'[31]

As mentioned before, neither Scheuchzer nor Haller should be mistaken for Swiss regional celebrities. Instead, they were two of the most influential figures in the 18th-century transnational 'Republic of Letters'. Analysing Scheuchzer's epistolary network that expanded to France, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, Simona Boscani Leoni characterizes him 'as a "great communicator" Europe-wide' with particularly 'close ties with Britain's scientific circles'.[32] Haller's correspondence network was similarly far-ranging.[33] Arguably, the majority of Haller's readers were non-Swiss. His poem 'The Alps', published in 1729 in German, saw 11 new editions and translations into French, English, Dutch, Italian, Swedish and Russian during his lifetime. As an editor of one of the most influential scholarly journals in Germany – the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* – he reached German readers all over Europe.[34]

While Scheuchzer and Haller were considered to be exceptionally erudite by their contemporaries, they were not that exceptional as members of the Swiss republics. The scholarship of both men was deeply rooted in Protestantism – devoted to proving the existence of God as primary cause of Nature's laws and ruler of the universe.[35] This particular form of scientific worship in the Protestant Swiss republics expressed itself in a vibrant culture of natural history evolving around botanical gardens, private collections, salons, universities and learned societies. Between 1600 and 1798 no fewer than 150 learned societies were established in a country that had a mere 1.3 million inhabitants around 1800.[36]

Networks

A growing awareness of this remarkable degree of erudition among the Swiss *hommes de lettres* began in the 19th century within the context of debates on evolution. The question at stake was why scholarly 'genius' emerged supposedly only among a small section of European society. Was this a matter of heredity and thus 'nature'? Or was it a matter of environment and thus 'nurture'? Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton (1822–1911) argued the case for 'nature' in his 1869 *Hereditary Genius*. One of the examples he used was the Geneva botanist Alphonse de Candolle (1806–1893), a distinguished member of the London Royal Society and the son of Augustin-Pyrame de Candolle (1778–1841), known mainly for his invention of a plant classification system and for the inspiration he gave to Charles Darwin.[37] As it turned out, however, De Candolle junior did not agree with Galton's analysis. In 1873 he published a book arguing for an environmentalist explanation of 'genius'. He did so by compiling a list of all foreign members of the Royal Academies of Science in Berlin, Paris and London since 1666. Awarding membership to foreigners in these prestigious academies was seen as a sign of recognizing great academic achievement and hence 'genius'. De Candolle's statistics brought to light that although Switzerland accommodated only around 1 per cent of the European population, it produced more than 10 per cent of appointed foreign members in all three academies.[38] De Candolle used this phenomenon to argue that 'genius' was not a naturally inherited quality but rather something that could be nurtured in ideal environments. The Protestant Swiss city republics, namely Basel and Geneva, exhibited a concentration of favourable causes for 'genius'. Among them were the absence of a dogmatic religious establishment suppressing scholarly search for truth; the global connectedness of the ruling Swiss merchant families who invested parts of their wealth into libraries, museums and universities; the smallness and political neutrality of the country, which caused ambitious men to pursue careers in science rather than in politics or in the army; and (echoing Scheuchzer) the mild climate.[39]

As Raymond E. Fancher pointed out, De Candolle's environmentalist explanation seemed to contradict Galton's hereditary explanation only

superficially, since – on a more fundamental level – the two men shared the same racial hereditary assumptions. De Candolle wrote:

> Obviously Europeans and their descendants are the only ones who play a role in the sciences. It is not necessary constantly to repeat this condition, but it surpasses the others in importance, since all European nations have more or less contributed to the advancement of science, while the Asian, African, and indigenous American races have rested [...] completely outside the scientific movement.[40]

As Fancher explains, the conflict between De Candolle and Galton was thus more a matter of degree than of principle. Adding to Fancher's analysis, it is important to highlight a further implicit consensus between the two men of science. They shared the assumption that also European women are biologically unqualified for science: 'The female mental development ends earlier than that of men', De Candolle wrote. 'Furthermore the female spirit is superficial.'[41] He echoed Galton, who had claimed: 'In many respects the character of scientific men is anti-feminine.'[42]

For our purposes, De Candolle's and Galton's nature–nurture controversy illustrates two points. First, De Candolle's statistics allow us to see Scheuchzer and Haller as members of a larger group of scholars from the Swiss city republics who, since the 17th century, had always been closely connected to the leading academic circles of their time. Their connections enabled a steady flow of ideas about 'tropical' and 'Alpine' nature between the Swiss and other European centres of science. Second, De Candolle's interpretation of this phenomenon is, in itself, an example of how powerful this trope was. In a summarizing passage he wrote:

> To cite the two extremes, Switzerland unites all favourable causes for science and thus stands at the top of the list [of leading nations in science] [...]. On the opposite pole we find Turkey in Europe and the tropical colonies who never possessed *any single* favourable condition but always possessed *all* unfavourable conditions [for science] ...[43]

While Scheuchzer had believed Switzerland to represent the best 'European moderate climate', De Candolle thus understood Switzerland as representing the best European 'genius' – as presented by the Protestant, lettered men from the small city republics.

Tropicalizing 'primeval Switzerland'

The material basis for De Candolle's and his contemporary Swiss naturalists' thinking in 19th-century Switzerland consisted of large collections of mammals, birds, reptiles, human skulls and other objects collected by Swiss travellers, missionaries and merchants overseas. These items were scrutinized in

laboratories and displayed in natural history museums, botanical gardens and university collections. Roughly two thirds of the 300 species of mammals and birds in the Basel natural history collection, for instance, were categorized as 'exotic' in 1838, while only one third were of 'European' origin. Four decades later, in 1878, an inventory of all amphibians, snakes, crocodiles and turtles in Basel revealed 641 species of 'exotic' and only 51 of 'European' origin.[44] Although the Swiss men of science concentrated their research on Alpine nature, the overwhelming presence of 'tropical' specimens in the Swiss university centres allowed them to interpret Alpine nature within the discourse of 'tropicality', as Figure 1.1 indicates. This illustrates how often the concepts 'Alps' and 'tropics' were mentioned in the *Verhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft der Schweiz* ('Proceedings of the Swiss Association for the Study of Nature'), which appeared irregularly at first and then annually from 1838 onwards. In the roughly 125 examined volumes of the proceedings the authors referred to the Alps about 4700 times in total. The 'tropics' seem to have constituted a constant background topic during this same period. The numbers of references to the concept in the proceedings range from 16 in the period 1841–50 to about 100 in 1901–10, amounting to a total of roughly 570 references in the entire period.

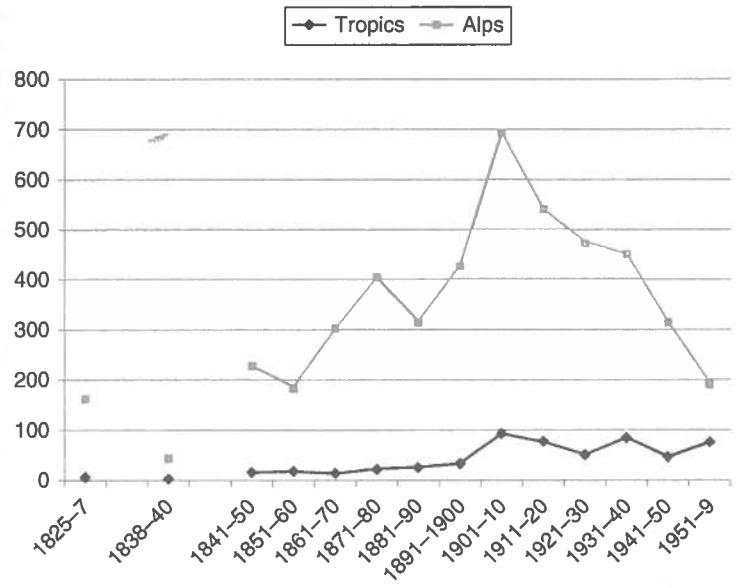

Figure 1.1 Frequency of references to the concepts 'tropics' and 'Alps' in the *Verhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft der Schweiz*, 1825–1959
Source: Digitalized copies of the *Verhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft der Schweiz* are available at retro.seals.ch. Using the online search engine, I looked for variants of the German and French terms 'Alpen', 'alpin' and 'Alpes', and 'Tropen', 'tropisch', 'tropical' and 'tropique'.

Characteristically, scholarly debates in the 19th century shifted their focus away from theories of climate and divine creation, which dominated many of the debates in the 18th-century Republic of Letters, to theories of evolution. Nature, to put it in simple terms, was no longer imagined as relatively static and young, but as constantly evolving and much older than the Bible proclaimed. How did Swiss scientists come to understand the natural history of the Alps and their inhabitants, the 'homines alpini' in this evolutionary framework? Answers can be found in the work of one of the most internationally renowned 19th-century Swiss naturalists.[45]

Oswald Heer and the Siamang of Sumatra

Oswald Heer (1809–1893) was Professor of Botany and Entomology at the University and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Director of the Zurich Botanical Garden and a leading member of the Swiss Association for the Study of Nature as well as an honorary member of both the Royal Society and the Geological Society in London.[46] His main work was published for the first time in 1865 in German and saw translations into French (1872) and English (1876). The English translation of Heer's 700-page book is entitled *The Primaeval World of Switzerland*. It offers a synopsis of Switzerland's geological and natural history synthesizing the vast amount of research that Heer, his contemporaries and his predecessors had conducted in the Alps. Heer's main narrative plot works as follows. 'Primeval Switzerland' was essentially a tropical world, inhabited by insects and plants in a hot and humid climate. As time advanced the climate became more and more 'temperate', allowing more highly developed creatures and plants to evolve: from corals, fish and dinosaurs, bamboos and great ferns to rodents, mammals and palm trees. 'Primeval Switzerland' came to an end with the ice age. After the glaciers retreated, reindeer, conifers and mammoths began to populate Switzerland. This was, as we shall see, the 'temperate' climate and wildlife that allowed the first primitive Swiss to settle on the shores of the great lakes left behind by the retreating glaciers.

How did Heer arrive at the theory of a tropical 'primeval Switzerland'? His main method was to compare fossilized remains of plants and wildlife retrieved from different geological strata in the Alps with specimens from the large natural history collections in Swiss museums mentioned above. Thus, he explained, bits and pieces of fern discovered in the oldest geological layers of the Alps 'remind us of the [...] arborescent ferns, which inhabit tropical regions'.[47] A fossilized 'crocodile [...] resembles the Egyptian species', while remains believed to come from a serpent were thought to 'belong to the family of boas [...] which now inhabit the forests of the East Indies'.[48] Still 'more interesting'[49] were fragments of bones and teeth belonging to mammals, such as 'the Indian tapir'.[50] Other remains were identified as belonging to a large ape 'most closely related to the Siamang of Sumatra',[51] a stuffed specimen of which is among the gems in the University of Zurich's zoological collection (see Figure 1.2).

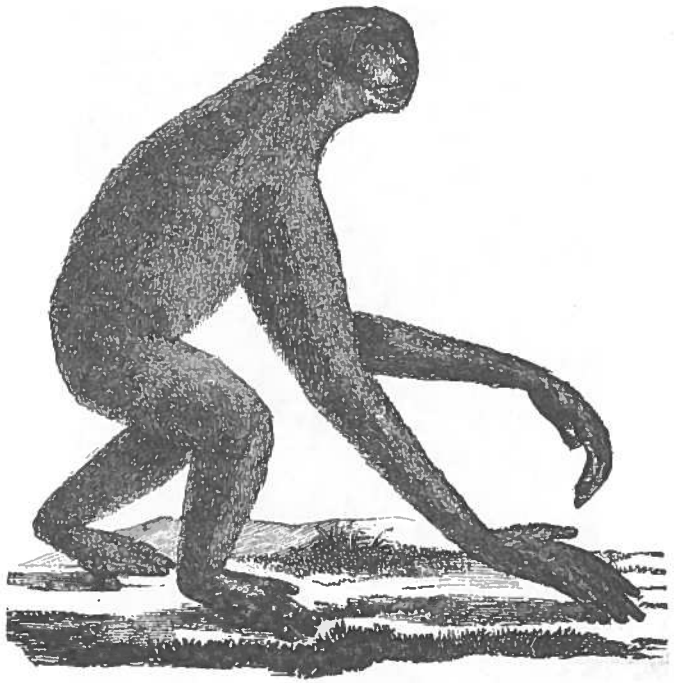

Figure 1.2 'Siamang (*Hylobates syndactylus*, Raffl., sp.) one eight nat. size. From a Sumatran specimen belonging to the Museum at Zurich' (illustration in Oswald Heer, *The Primaeval World of Switzerland*, 1876)

A plethora of similar examples could be cited to illustrate how Heer was producing a 'tropicalized' vision of Switzerland's deepest, 'primeval' past. To support his reader's imagination, he added a number of elaborate illustrations to his book (see Figure 1.3).

While comparisons to 'tropical' nature enabled Heer and his contemporaries to understand how 'Swiss' nature had evolved, they also constituted a colossal 'denial of coevalness' in Johannes Fabian's terms. After all, Heer's narrative implied that the contemporary 'tropics' had remained static and unchanged since the beginning of times.

Like Scheuchzer in the early 18th century and so many of his Swiss successors, Heer was a devout Protestant who looked for God in the study of nature. Although he corresponded with Darwin and shared the general idea of evolution – that animal species were not static but subject to constant change – he rejected the 'materialist' worldview implied by Darwinism. His book was meant to 'convince every unbiased reader that research into the natural causes of events is perfectly compatible with the fact that God created everything'.[52] On this globe created by God, Heer remarked elsewhere,

Figure 1.3 'Lausanne during the Miocene-Age' (illustration in Oswald Heer, *The Primaeval World of Switzerland*, 1876)

'we Swiss inhabit a district, as small as it may be, that contains the most important documents of its history'.[53] 'Documents' referred to fossils in the geological strata of the Alps. What Heer was thereby saying is that the Swiss landscape contained fossil records documenting the entire geological history of the planet – from the 'tropical' beginnings right through to the 'moderate' present. Again, it was Switzerland that represented the essence of (divine European) nature.

So where does the 'homo alpinus' enter the story? The appendix to Heer's book included a short article by Heer's colleague Ludwig Rütimeyer of Basel, who was also a Protestant and was equally renowned internationally. Rütimeyer was a professor of zoology and a founding member of the

German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory, which focused mainly on the anthropological study of skulls as well as prehistoric human and material remains.[54] These studies were part of the widespread enthusiasm for Swiss prehistory which started in the particularly dry winter of 1853–4. As the level of Lake Zurich dropped, remains of prehistoric lake dwellers emerged from the mud of the lakeshore. Excavations in other lakes led to similar discoveries. As Marc-Antoine Kaeser has shown, the idea of Swiss prehistoric lake dwellers became popular in Switzerland because it supported the politics of the liberal Protestant elites who established the modern Swiss nation state in 1848. Prehistoric people living on relatively sophisticated pile settlements on lakes were seen as 'pioneers of civilization' at a time when the liberal patriots of the 19th century sought to advance 'civilization' by building trains and tunnels through the Alps.[55]

Colonial imagination was central to the 'discovery' of the supposedly prehistoric ancestors of the modern Swiss. Thus, one the first iconographic drawings of prehistoric Swiss lake dwellers from the 1850s, circulating – as we shall see – internationally, was an adaptation of a similar picture found in a travel account by the French explorer Dumont d'Urville depicting a settlement in Papua New Guinea.[56] In a similar vein, naturalists like Rütimeyer and his contemporaries borrowed heavily from knowledge of contemporary societies and wildlife in the 'tropics' to depict the life and habits of prehistoric Swiss. Studying traces of human workmanship in wood and animal bones from lake dweller settlements, Rütimeyer was able to conclude that these first humans lived amid 'fauna indicating very different conditions from those of the present time', populated with 'elephants and rhinoceros hitherto believed to be foreign to the glacial period'.[57] Studying injuries on prehistoric 'Swiss' skulls, yet another internationally renowned Swiss naturalist proclaimed in 1894: 'We do not need to travel to the Dayaks in Borneo, or the cannibals in New Guinea, or the *Koppensneller* [head-hunters] in Timor or Ceram, or to the South American savages' to discover 'customs of keeping the heads of battered enemies as trophies'.[58] These customs could be found in Swiss prehistory.

Beyond the Swiss Imagination

In this paper I have focused mainly on representatives of the educated Swiss elites. Given the remarkable integration of these men of science into the scholarly networks of all of the major European intellectual milieus and the outstanding position that some of these thinkers had in the informal Republic of Letters of the Enlightenment era as well as institutionalized academia of the 19th century, it comes as no surprise that Alpine studies were not confined to the Swiss scientific community. To what extent the non-Swiss counterparts shared or disputed the Swiss national exceptionalism inherent in these discussions is an empirical question yet to be analysed. It is, however, safe to assume that a certain desire to imagine Switzerland and

the (Alpine) Swiss in exceptional terms was a feature of European thinking more generally. A few remarks ought to suffice to illustrate this.

During the transition period from the Republic of Letters of the 18th century to modern, state-founded academia in the 19th century, it was Alexander von Humboldt, 'the most influential figure, revered almost as a god among the naturalists of his day',[59] who shaped the way the Alps were perceived by his contemporaries. This may come as a surprise since he is most noted for giving 'a new scenic vision as well as scientific authority to the idea of a tropical world filled with vibrant nature'.[60] This vision, however, was rooted in an equally scientific and authoritative vision of the Alps. His method comprised, as he explained in his seminal 1807 paper on plant geography, 'comparing phenomena from tropical countries with those of the moderate districts'.[61] The paper opens with a scenic description of Alpine nature, which, to Humboldt and his contemporaries, epitomized the 'moderate districts' of the world. The opening scene, along with countless references to 'Alpine' plants, herbs and trees as well as Swiss mountain summits spread through his narrative, serves as the background against which 'tropical' nature appears all the more exotic, curious and grand.[62] As Jon Mathieu has recently pointed out, Humboldt was intimately familiar with the Alpine studies of his time and admired some of the scholars, such as Albrecht von Haller or his Geneva contemporary Horace Bénédict de Saussure, whose scientific methods he adopted during his exploration of the Andes.[63] Humboldt's invention of an exotic tropical world in the European mind was thus, at the same time, drawing and sustaining the equally powerful idea of the Alps as moderate nature.

In the realm of Alpine anthropology and prehistory it was the celebrated British geologist Charles Lyell, a close friend and promoter of Charles Darwin, who picked up on Swiss scholarship. As Patrick Kupper has pointed out,[64] Lyell dedicated almost an entire chapter of his 1863 *Geological Evidence on the Antiquity of Man* to Swiss lake dwellers. In fact he used the iconic drawing of the Swiss archaeologist Ferdinand Keller for the cover of his book, while favourably discussing not only Keller's research, but also that of other Swiss naturalists such as the above-mentioned Oswald Heer and Ludwig Rütimeyer.[65] As Kupper explains, Lyell's book laid the groundwork for a claim which was made only implicitly in Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* in 1859 and to which he would return in his 1871 *Descent of Man*, namely that the natural history of humanity goes much further back than is proclaimed in the Bible. The sophistication of the Swiss lake dweller settlements, supposedly consisting of up to 300 huts with up to 1000 inhabitants who used up to 40,000 piles to build their villages, appeared, in these debates, to be 'truly wonderful' and 'truly astonishing',[66] and to have been reached by no other people (see Figure 1.4). The comparatively simple remains found in Ireland, for instance, were supposedly 'well nigh without a parallel in Swiss waters'.[67]

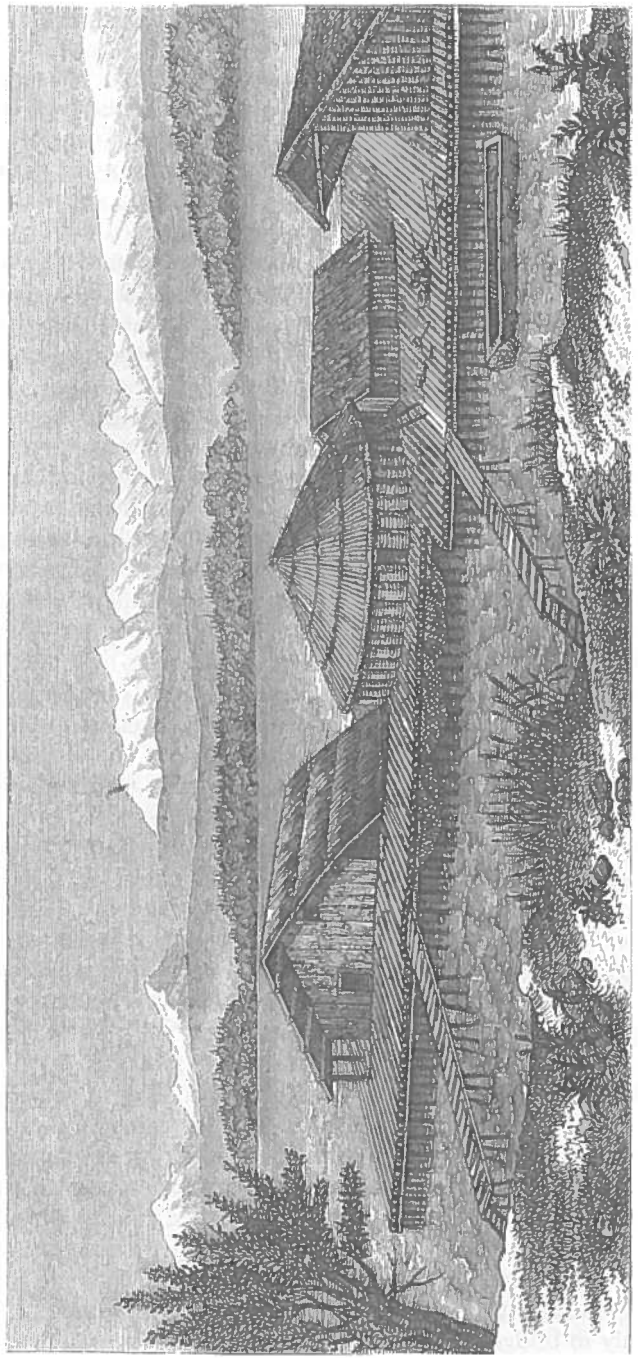

Figure 1.4 'A Village built on Piles in a Swiss Lake. Restored by Dr. F. Keller, partly from Dumont d'Urville's sketch of similar habitation in New Guinea' (illustration in Charles Lyell, *Geological Evidence on the Antiquity of Man*, 1863)

Conclusions

After this stroll through the history of Alpine studies, let us return to Paul and Fritz Sarasin, the two Swiss naturalists mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Their discovery of 'tropical Switzerland' in the Dutch East Indies in 1896 should now seem less random. Just as generations of naturalists before them had used knowledge of the 'tropics' to make sense of Alpine nature, the two Swiss naturalists used their knowledge of Alpine nature to make sense of tropical Celebes. Seeing lake dwellers in the mild highlands of Celebes, living among exotic plants, birds and mammals which had become extinct in Switzerland before the ice age, was not an isolated notion of two wealthy Swiss naturalists and adventurers. Rather, it was the expression of a discourse reaching back to the early 18th century.

Three broader claims may be drawn from this story. First, the fact that Swiss scholars were always highly integrated within the transnational scholarly networks of their time supports recent pleas to move beyond implicitly national understandings of the history of colonial knowledge. It was this cosmopolitan nature of science in the 18th and 19th centuries that allowed notions of the tropics and the Alps to circulate freely between Swiss and other European centres of science, transcending national and imperial boundaries.

Second, colonial knowledge should not be understood as a body of knowledge that was produced exclusively in the colonies or for the direct support of colonial rule. At least implicitly, colonial knowledge was also produced in the Alps, by Alpine scholars who had no direct relation to imperial rule overseas. However, they did not use knowledge of the tropics exclusively for an understanding of Alpine nature. They also – particularly from the mid-19th century onwards – used notions of the tropics to understand the beginnings of geological time and 'primeval' Alpine nature in particular. In doing so, they at least implicitly 'denied coevalness' not only to the people in the 'tropics', but also to their natural environments. They forged the idea that contemporary 'tropical' nature and people represented earlier, primitive stages of geological and cultural evolution.

Third, the Swiss case indicates how colonial knowledge, circulating widely among European men of science, was, nevertheless, adapted to suit local circumstances.[68] Swiss naturalists from the urban flatlands developed a sophisticated mental ethnography including not only 'primitive people' in the colonies, but also contemporary Alpine dwellers (the 'homines alpini') as well as prehistoric 'Swiss' lake dwellers. Depending on context and the exact period, all of these three categories could represent either the sublime or the barbarian-primitive. Further research will shed more light on how these categories were used and how they intersected with class and gender divisions in Swiss society. For the time being, however, it is safe to claim that Swiss national identity evolving around Alpine shepherds and farmers served not only to bridge religious divisions and suppress undesired social tensions within Switzerland, as Swiss historiography has repeatedly shown.

It also sent a message to the outside world: prehistoric Swiss lake dwellers supposedly emerged after the ice age had cooled down the former 'tropical' and 'primeval Switzerland'. The prehistoric Swiss thus inhabited a 'moderate' climate from the very beginning and therefore possessed a higher degree of 'civilization' than contemporary 'primitive people' in the tropics. While contemporary Alpine dwellers had evolved since prehistoric times, they were thought to have retained some of the best virtues of their lake-dwelling ancestors.[69] This was why Swiss nature and people supposedly represented the best of the European 'temperate', 'modest' and 'civilized' character.

This powerful idea, shaping not only the way in which the Swiss saw themselves but also how they were viewed from abroad, disguised the activities of the ruling classes in the urban flatlands. They were involved not only in building imperial worldviews, but also in economic exploitation overseas, including the transatlantic slave trade.[70]

Notes

1. Paul Sarasin (1898: 90). All quotations are translated from German by the author except where otherwise specified.
2. Paul Sarasin (1898: 91).
3. Fritz Sarasin to Rosalie Sarasin, Makassar, 17 August 1895, Basel, State Archives, Canton of Basel-Stadt (Staatsarchiv des Kantons Basel-Stadt, henceforth StaBS), PA212a, T2, vol. XLI, 60.
4. Paul Sarasin (1898: 29).
5. Fritz Sarasin to Rosalie Sarasin, Makassar, 7 November 1902, StaBS, PA212a, T2, vol. XLI, 80.
6. Johannes Fabian (1983).
7. Edward Said (1978).
8. Tony Ballantyne (2008: 177).
9. Good introductions to the English and German variations of this debate can be found in Jürgen Renn (2012), Gesa Mackenthun and Klaus Hock (2012) and Harald Fischer-Tiné (2013).
10. Peter H. Hansen (1996), Ann C. Colley (2010).
11. A notable exception is Patrick Harries (2007b).
12. Jon Mathieu (2012).
13. For the state of the art, see Jean-François Bergier and François Walter (2013), Jon Mathieu and Simona Boscani Leoni (2005) and Simona Boscani Leoni (2010). For an English introduction to the debate see Oliver Zimmer (1998). 'Top of Europe' is the nickname of the Jungfrau-Joch, the highest mountain in the world which can be reached by cable car: http://www.jungfrau.ch/en/tourism/ (accessed 14 January 2015).
14. Patricia Purtschert (2013).
15. David Arnold (2006).
16. Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (2005: 3).
17. Simona Boscani Leoni (2010), Michael Kempe (2003), Jon Mathieu and Simona Boscani Leoni (2005).
18. On the Spanish questionnaires, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (2005: 67). On Scheuchzer's, see Simona Boscani Leoni (2010).
19. Quoted in Simona Boscani Leoni (2010: 12).

20. Michael Kempe (2003: 275–311).
21. Michael Kempe (2003), Simona Boscani Leoni (2010).
22. Mary Louise Pratt (1992).
23. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1716: 6).
24. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1716: 11).
25. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1716: 29).
26. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1716: 31).
27. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1716: 32).
28. Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 34).
29. Bernhard C. Schär (2012).
30. 'Freedom' in the 18th-century context referred to the liberty of the Swiss republics from German and French rule since the 17th century. These republics ruled themselves. The right to rule, however, was confined to a small selection of patrician families, such as the von Hallers in Bern. The liberty of their subjects should not be mistaken for the civil liberties introduced in various Swiss constitutional reforms following the French Revolution. See Clive Church and Randolph Head (2013: 132–62).
31. Albrecht von Haller (1795). On Haller's ethnographic writings, see also Karl S. Guthke (2008).
32. Simona Boscani Leoni (2013: 514, 517, 531).
33. Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber (2010).
34. Karl S. Guthke (2008); Hubert Steinke and Martin Stuber (2010).
35. Claudia Honegger et al. (2007: 19–41).
36. André Holenstein et al. (2013: 10). On the Protestant roots of natural science in modern Switzerland, see Patrick Harries (2007a).
37. Raymond E. Fancher (1983).
38. Alphonse de Candolle (1873: 184–5, 188).
39. Alphonse de Candolle (1873: 92–157).
40. Quoted and translated by Raymond E. Fancher (1983: 345).
41. Alphonse de Candolle (1885: 71–2).
42. Francis Galton (1874: 207).
43. Alphonse de Candolle (1885: 189–90). 'Au contraire, la Turquie d'Europe et les colonies intertropicales, n'ayant jamais présenté *une seule* des conditions favorables et ayant eu toujours *l'ensemble* des défavorables, [...].' Italic in the original.
44. Bernhard C. Schär (2015); Andreas Zangger (2011: 348–98); Patrick Harries (2007a).
45. Peter J. Bowler (2009).
46. Conradin Burga (2013).
47. Oswald Heer (1876, vol. 1: 13).
48. Oswald Heer (1876, vol. 1: 274).
49. Oswald Heer (1876, vol. 1: 275).
50. Oswald Heer (1876, vol. 1: 276).
51. Oswald Heer (1876, vol. 2: 80).
52. Oswald Heer (1879: xi). '[...] jeden Unbefangenen überzeugen, dass die Erforschung der natürlichen Ursachen des Geschehens mit dem Begründetsein des Ganzen durch Gott vereinbar ist'.
53. Oswald Heer (1879: vii). '[...] von dieser Erde bewohnen wir Schweizer einen Theil, der, so klein er auch ist, doch die wichtigsten Dokumente für ihre Geschichte enthält'.
54. Dirk Backenköhler (2008).
55. Marc-Antoine Kaeser (2004); for a brief English introduction to the matter, see http://www.unspecial.org/UNS660/t61.html (accessed 14 January 2015).

56. Daniel Kauz (2000).
57. Rütimeyer presented these findings for the first time in 1875 in the German *Archiv für Anthropologie*; an English translation was added as Appendix I to Heer's *The Primaeval World of Switzerland*; Ludwig Rütimeyer (1876).
58. Theophil Studer and E. Bannwarth (1894: 14). Their casual use of the Dutch term *Koppensneller* indicates how familiar their German-speaking readers were with ethnographic accounts from the Dutch East Indies.
59. David Arnold (2006: 113).
60. David Arnold (2006: 113).
61. Alexander von Humboldt (1807: 39).
62. See, for example, Alexander von Humboldt (1807: 60, 61, 75, 177–81).
63. Jon Mathieu (2010).
64. Patrick Kupper (2012).
65. Charles Lyell (1863: 19–29).
66. Charles Lyell (1863: 20–1).
67. Charles Lyell (1863: 32), quoting a 'Mr. Wylie'.
68. Similar adaptions of colonial knowledge to local circumstances have been studied with regard to landscapes and minorities in Scandinavia and minorities on the peripheries of the Habsburg Empire, as well as minorities in France. See Günlog Fur and Pernille Ipsen (2009); Johannes Feichtinger, Ursula Prutsch and Moritz Csáky (2003); Eugen Weber (1976).
69. See particularly Leopold Rütimeyer (1924) on prehistoric 'traces' among Alpine dwellers.
70. Thomas David, Bouda Etemad and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl (2005).

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