

I. Introduction

Background

A gesture towards decolonisation

What will I discover if I search for the affects of colonization in the land of the colonisers? What do these effects look like? How have these effects manifested?

The word *landscape* comes from late the sixteenth century Middle Dutch word *lantscap* ‘denoting a picture of scenery’¹. Naturally I began examining the physical attributes that made up the Western European landscape. *Exotic* floras were brought over from distant continents and cultures for decorative purposes and the botanical gardens of Europe. Empires were built upon trade however “imperial transplantation was a two-way process” (Casid, 2005) and plants were introduced on both sides for agricultural exploits. How have *exotic* trees and flowers survived or thrived post-transplantation? What became of these plants?

In many cases these *exotic* floras have become entangled in their adopted soil. As a result, some have spread steadily over the centuries impacting ecosystems and eventually in an ironic juxtaposition become invasive plant species, the invaders in this landscape.

My thesis will examine the complicated relationship between botany and colonialism: the pursuit of knowledge at what cost? I will investigate the effects of colonialism with a focus on flora with examples from the Netherlands in particular. What is an ‘alien’ and what is considered ‘alien’? What is ‘non-native’? In the ruins of empire and through globalisation, can we not say that most things are now ‘non-native’? What is ‘invasive’ and how does invasion progress?

This thesis paper will incorporate the research I conduct for my graduation project and document my material experimentation process utilising the plants as both subject and form. It will report on my methodology, integrate multiple narratives, and explore recurring themes in my work such as the notion of landscape and the representation of nature, place and displacement. Although I have introduced a number of questions, there will be some topics that will be addressed more in depth than others.

¹ Oxford Learner’s Dictionary

For the final chapter, I will experiment with creative writing to produce a speculative fiction with three plants as characters: an invasive alien plant, a 'non-native' naturalised plant, and a 'native' plant. The short story is inspired by science fiction writers Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia E. Butler. The sci-fi genre has influenced my art practice and generated my interest in science.

Thesis Statement

Plants that were brought to Europe centuries ago through trade and migration have now become invasive to the landscape. Using these plants as evidence of colonial history I will investigate the effects of colonisation and how it has manifested on the ecological and social landscape.

II. Body

A. Flora and Capitalism

1. Empire expansion and colonialism

- Brief history of colonial empires and exploration voyages with a focus on the Dutch West India Company and the Dutch East India Company
- Plantations in the New Worlds
- Trade of exotic plants, spices and other raw resources
- Human migration through the trade of enslaved peoples and indentured labourers
- Cultural and historically significant exchanges

2. Brief history of early botany and horticulture

- Botanical gardens and decorative gardens
- Indigenous knowledge and medicinal healing
- Women botanist and naturalist
- A look at taxonomy in the sixteenth century in comparison to science today
- Phenomenology theory
- Growth of flower markets and present day Aalsmeer Flower Auction

B. Methodology

1. "The Other"

- What is an 'alien'? What is considered 'alien'?
- What is 'non-native'?
- What is 'invasive'?
- Exoticism, the Orient, and Xenophobia
- Japanese Knotweed in the Netherlands and the contrast to its 'native' Japan
- Examples of a few invasive plant species

2. Entanglement
 - What is 'native'?
 - What is natural?
 - Example of a plant that meet these credentials (I have not decided on this)
 - My selection process of plants

3. Naturalisation process
 - Tulips as national symbol and identity of the Netherlands
 - Carolus Clusius and his role in Tulip Mania and growth of the industry
 - Migration and repatriation today

C. *Ut translatio natura*² (nature as metaphor)

1. A short story
 - Dramatised in depth look at three plants as characters in a speculative fiction writing
 - The protagonist, Tulip (*Tulipa*)
 - The antagonist, Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*)
 - The Third Kind

2. Graduation Project
 - Overview of material experiments using plants
 - Process of project
 - Examples of work and report on project
 - Field notes, methods journal

III. Conclusion

To be determined.

How does one decolonize a landscape?

² The Museum of Jurassic Technology's motto

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