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Author: Julian zur Lage

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Freie Universität Berlin
Global Histories: A Student Journal
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut
Koserstraße 20
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website www.globalhistories.com or contact the editor at: admin@globalhistories.com.

An Armchair Scholar's World: Cornelius de Pauw and the Global Discourse of Historiography in the late Enlightenment

JULIAN ZUR LAGE

Julian zu Lage has both a BA (2013) and MA (2015) in history from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. This paper is based on his master's thesis on American historiography in the late 18th Century. He is currently a PhD student in Osnabrück, in the graduate program 'Wissensspeicher und Argumentationsarsenal. Funktionen der Bibliothek in den kulturellen Zentren der Frühen Neuzeit' which was created in cooperation with the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel. His thesis will focus on the role of libraries in regards to German 18th-Century compilations on the non-European world.

Cornelius de Pauw was one of the most controversial scholars of the 18th Century, sparking major disputes with his *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* and *Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*. Although none of his works covered the whole world, they all featured a concept of global thinking: De Pauw's main objectives were a Eurocentric critique of the developmental stage of non-European cultures and an anti-colonialist critique of European knowledge of global issues. This negative portrayal prompted replies, favorable and unfavorable, from Enlightenment philosophers like Denis Diderot and Voltaire as well as harsh opposition from all over the world. Jesuit Missionaries from China and the Spanish Empire, Caribbean planters, and Politicians from the United States such as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton were among those opposing de Pauw's style of critical compilation while claiming local authority against an author who had never left Europe.

Introduction: Global Historiography in 18th Century Europe

The decades following the Seven Years War, or French and Indian War in North America, can be described using terms like a “phase of accelerated globalization”¹ or “The first age of global imperialism”², coined by Ottmar Ette or C. A. Bayly, respectively. After the war, fought from Manila in the East to the Great Lakes in the West, European interest in the rest of the world rose rapidly. This increase was not only due to the war; other concurrent developments like the Atlantic revolutions, growing economic dependencies, and voyages in the Pacific Ocean played

1 Ottmar Ette, “Archeologies of Globalization. European Reflections on Two Phases of Accelerated Globalization in Cornelius de Pauw, Georg Forster, Guillaume-Thomas Raynal and Alexander von Humboldt”, *Culture & History Digital Journal* 1(2012), accessed August 31 2015, doi: 10.3989/chdj.2012.003.

2 Christopher Alan Bayly, “The first age of global imperialism, c. 1760–1830”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 26 (1998): 28–47, accessed August 31, 2015, doi: 10.1080/03086539808583023.

a significant role as well. All of these events inspired new additions to the already high number of texts on the non-European world. By the end of the century traveler's accounts were available for almost every part of the world and printed in large numbers.³

The combination of the growing interest in global topics and the availability of a vast number of texts on the non-European world laid the foundation for the emergence of European armchair scholars in the second half of the 18th Century. Works of authors who had never left Europe dominated the debates in a number of intertwined fields including history, natural history, philosophy and geography. French and British historians and philosophers tried to form a view of the world or mankind as a whole but sometimes, more specifically, focused on European Expansion and early globalization. The vast number of 18th Century works within this framework included publications of some of the best-known philosophers of the Enlightenment like Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Herder. The philosophical view usually emphasized a general concept of humanity, while other authors focused on colonialism and the non-European world from a historiographical perspective.⁴

The latter were usually closer to concepts of globalization: The most important work was probably the *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* by the Abbé Raynal and a number of other contributors including Denis Diderot.⁵ Further notable historiographical works with global perspectives, such as the *Modern Part* of the British *Universal History*, the *Histoire générale des voyages* collected by the Abbé Prévost, and lesser-known projects like the Abbé Roubaud's *Histoire générale de l'Asie, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique*, were published in the 1740s to 1770s as well.

Cornelius de Pauw⁶ does not fully fit into that group for a number of reasons. His oeuvre consists of several publications on different parts of the world, not a single publication with a global makeup. His debut *Recherches Philosophiques*

3 Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," *The American Historical Review* 117, (2012), 1009-1011.

4 Jennifer Pitts, "The Global in Enlightenment Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, edited by Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 187-191.

5 The first edition was published anonymously in 1770, two editions with major alterations in 1774 and 1780. Only the latter carried Raynal's name, although, ironically, the uncredited contributions of other authors were largely augmented in the later versions: [Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal], comp: *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1770).; Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, comp, *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 10 vols. (Geneva: Jean-Leonard Pellet, 1780).

6 De Pauw's name can be found in several different versions. His first name was rarely mentioned by his contemporaries, in modern works he is also referred to as 'Cornelis' or 'Cornelle'. For the last name, early responses often omitted the affix 'de' or the 'u', often addressing him as 'M. Paw'. His own publications after 1776 were printed under the name 'de Pauw', conforming with 'de P****' used in his older anonymous books. In accordance with

sur les Américains, ou Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Espèce humaine⁷ and some follow-ups⁸ covered the new world, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*⁹ added two more continents to his portfolio. His last surviving work, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Grecs*¹⁰, focused on ancient Athens, thus contributing less to his global concepts. Additionally, de Pauw's eccentricity has sometimes been considered as too much of an obstacle for an in-depth examination.¹¹ Despite growing interest in the past few decades, two essays from 1926 and 1936 still provide most of the biographical background.¹²

Still, de Pauw might be the most interesting armchair scholar for several reasons. First, he had very limited personal contact with inhabitants of other continents or even travelers, as he rarely left his monastery in Xanten. With the exception of two stays at the court of Frederick the Great, he only worked with books and letters and is therefore one of the best examples of scholarship without personal experience. Second, despite his low profile nowadays, de Pauw sparked some of the most intense debates of the 18th Century, as shown by Antonello Gerbi.¹³ His adversaries included some of the most renowned philosophers of his age, but also authors from geographical outskirts of the Republic of Letters. Lastly, de Pauw's deeply rooted eurocentrism combined with a profound critique of European knowledge of the non-European world is one of the most radical, yet remarkable concepts of a global world in the late Enlightenment.

many 20th and 21st-Century works written in English or German, 'Cornelius de Pauw' or 'de Pauw' will be used in this paper, without capitalization in the latter case.

7 [Cornelius de Pauw], *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains, ou Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Espèce humaine*, 2 vols. (Berlin: G. J. Decker, 1768/69).

8 Most importantly [Cornelius de Pauw], *Défense des Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, (Berlin: Antoine-Joseph Pernet, 1771). Cornelius de Pauw, "Amérique, (Hist. & Géographie)", in: *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers par une Société de gens de lettres*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Robinet, (Amsterdam, 1776), 343–354. De Pauw wrote other entries for the *Supplément* as well, for example on one of his favorite topics, the alleged Patagonian giants.

9 [Cornelius de Pauw], *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*, 2 vols. (Berlin: G. J. Decker, 1773).

10 Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Grecs*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1787).

11 For example Gilbert Chinard, "Eighteenth Century Theories on America as a Human Habitat," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 91 (1947), 35. See David Anthony Brading, *The First America. The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492-1867*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23 for a more recent and moderate assessment for de Pauw's obscurity.

12 Gisbert Beyerhaus, "Abbé de Pauw und Friedrich der Grosse, Eine Abrechnung mit Voltaire," *Historische Zeitschrift* 134 (1926), 465–469. Henry Ward Church, "Corneille De Pauw, and the Controversy over his Recherches Philosophiques Sur Les Américains," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 51 (1936), 178–180.

13 Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, rev. and enl. ed., (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

Cornelius de Pauw's Global Concepts

De Pauw's three major works – on America, Egypt and China, and ancient Greece – would hardly seem connected at first glance. The distances in time and space which separate these objects of study are remarkable, yet he considered each subsequent publication a logical follow-up:

Après avoir publié successivement des observations touchant des peuples sauvages et abrutis, tels que les Américains; et ensuite touchant des nations condamnées à une éternelle médiocrité, telles que les Egyptiens et les Chinois, nous tâcherons des compléter enfin cette longue suite de discussions relatives à l'Histoire naturelle de l'Homme, par des recherches entreprises sur les Grecs, qui portèrent à un tel degré la culture des arts et des sciences, que nos regards aiment toujours à se diriger vers ce point du globe qui fut nous la source de la lumière.¹⁴

This passage emphasizes two core elements of de Pauw's philosophy: The general notion of European superiority and especially the gradual assessment of cultures in the framework of the development of mankind. The latter is closely related to concepts of *stadial* or *conjectural* history as fathered by Scottish contemporaries of de Pauw. When the *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Grecs* were published in 1787, the most important Scottish works had been available for at least a decade, such as William Robertson's *History of America*, published in 1777.¹⁵ Yet, de Pauw had already formed the concept in his first work in 1768, preceding John Millar's *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771) as well as Lord Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774):

C'est l'agriculture qui a conduit les hommes par la main, de degrés en degrés, de la constitution agreste à la constitution politique.¹⁶

Considering the attention de Pauw's *Recherches* gained in just a few years, his concepts may have had more influence than has previously been considered. In combination with the quotation on the general outlines of his works, it becomes apparent that Europe was styled as the peak of human development. De Pauw built on the Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* when he outlined his version of the degeneracy thesis, claiming the inferiority of all inhabitants of the Americas

¹⁴ De Pauw: *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Grecs*, vol. 1, I. In order to reflect the importance of nuances in the original phrasing, French quotations were not translated in this paper.

¹⁵ William Robertson, *The History of America*. 2 vols (London: W. Strahan; T. Cadell, 1777). See Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment. Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132-136 for a detailed analysis.

¹⁶ De Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, vol. 1, 99.

due to climatic causes.¹⁷ Ancient Egypt and 18th Century China were described as more highly developed than the New World cultures, yet unable to reach the European level.

Both his contemporaries and modern authors have criticized de Pauw's overly negative picture of the non-European world. The first author to oppose the *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, Antoine-Joseph Pernety, considered the concepts to be directed only against America:

une hypothèse enfantée par une imagination un peu trop enivrée de tendresse pour notre Hémisphère & pour ses habitants.¹⁸

In the quoted paragraph, Pernety, a Benedictine librarian at the court of Frederick, accused de Pauw of partiality towards the Old World. Alexander Hamilton attacked de Pauw in a similar fashion in one of the Federalist Papers. For him, the *Recherches* were the prime example of a European text claiming authority on American topics without actual competence:

Facts have too long supported these arrogant pretensions of the Europeans. It belongs to us to vindicate the honor of the human race, and to teach that assuming brother, moderation.¹⁹

Remarkably, Hamilton called for a defense of humanity, not only of the population of the newly founded United States. Despite addressing an American audience on the unrelated topic of *commerce and a navy*, Hamilton unveiled the whole degree of de Pauw's eurocentrism in just a short paragraph. Most European adversaries, including Voltaire and the aforementioned Pernety, only pointed out de Pauw's flaws in regards to one part of the world.²⁰

Today's assessment of de Pauw puts additional emphasis on his eurocentrism to the degree of condemning the phrasing as too light.²¹ Although this evaluation seems ethically convincing, 'eurocentrism' is the best-fitting term for de Pauw's

17 An overview on the degeneracy thesis James W Ceaser, *Reconstructing America. The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press 1997), 19-22.

18 Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *Dissertation sur l'Amérique et les Américains, contre les Recherches Philosophiques de Mr. de P.*, (Berlin: Antoine-Joseph Pernety, 1770), 13. Pernety later also published [Antoine-Joseph Pernety], *Examen des Recherches Philosophiques sur l'Amérique et les Américains, et de la Défense de cet Ouvrage*. 2 vols. (Berlin: Antoine-Joseph Pernety, 1771).

19 [Alexander Hamilton], "The Federalist 11. The utility of the Union in respect to commerce and a navy," in: *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), 60.

20 For Voltaire, see [Voltaire]: *Lettres chinoises, indiennes et tartares: A Monsieur Paw, par un bénédictin. Avec plusieurs autres pieces intéressantes*, (London, 1776), 16.

21 Ottmar Ette, *Alexander von Humboldt und die Globalisierung: Das Mobile des Wissens* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2009), 60, instead describes de Pauw's concepts as dehumanizing („menschenverachtend“).

historiographical approach, as Roger Mercier has shown.²² De Pauw was one of the most ardent opponents of a romanticization of the ‘savages’, as adapted from the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Pernety and especially the anonymous ‘philosophe la Douceur’, another adversary publishing in Berlin around 1770, followed in Rousseau’s footsteps instead.²³

In light of the dominance of eurocentrism in his works, the historiographical value of de Pauw seems to be slim. However, his criticism did not spare the colonial powers and especially the European knowledge of the world. De Pauw is usually considered one of the strictest anti-colonialists of his period, as he not only criticized European atrocities abroad, but also challenged the general notion of European rule in foreign continents. His anti-colonialism advocates an isolationist policy in order to benefit both Europe and the non-European cultures, especially in regards to the newly discovered Pacific Islands.²⁴

Additionally, he attached utmost importance to the dispelling of myths on any of his topics. The *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois* were based on de Pauw’s attempt to disprove that China was originally an Egyptian colony. Popularized by one of the leading French orientalist, Joseph de Guignes, this theory had gained support throughout Europe. From his position in the royal Académie, de Guignes reinforced his older works after de Pauw’s publication.²⁵ The debate did not have a clear victor, but de Pauw had managed to bring de Guignes’ idea under scrutiny.

De Pauw’s skepticism was not limited to certain theories opposing his negative view of non-European cultures, as some of his adversaries presumed.²⁶ He systematically disputed all texts he used based on the older trope of the bad qual-

22 Roger Mercier, “Image de l’autre et image de soi-même dans le discours ethnologique au XVIIIe siècle,” in: *Facing Each Other: The World’s Perception of Europe and Europe’s Perception of the World*, ed. Anthony Pagden. 2 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), vol. 1, 223.

23 *De l’Amérique et des Américains: ou observations curieuses du philosophe La Douceur, qui a parcouru cet hémisphère pendant la dernière guerre, en faisant le noble métier de tuer des hommes sans les manger.* (Berlin, 1771), 68.

24 See Klaas van Berkel, “‘That Miserable Continent’: Cultural Pessimism and the Idea of ‘America’ in Cornelis de Pauw”, in: *Revolutionary Histories. Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism 1775-1815*, ed. Wilhelmus M Verhoeven (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 150f. Susanne M. Zantop, “Dialcetics and Colonialism: The Underside of the Enlightenment,” in: *Impure Reason. Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, eds. Daniel W. Wilson and Robert C. Holub (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1993), 315 on the other hand describes de Pauw as a supporter of a ‘better’ prussian colonialism.

25 Joseph de Guignes, *Réponse aux doutes proposés par M. Deshautesrayes, sur la Dissertation qui a pour titre: Mémoire dans lequel on prouve, que les Chinois sont une Colonie Egyptienne* (Paris: Lambert, 1759). Joseph de Guignes, “Observations sur quelques points concernant la Religion & la Philosophie des Égyptiens & des Chinois,” in: *Histoire de l’Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, avec Les Mémoires de Littérature tirés des Registres de cette Académie, depuis l’année M. DCCLXXIII, jusques & compris l’année M. DCCLXXV, & une partie de M. DCCLXXVI: Mémoires de Littérature, Tirés des Registres de l’Académie Royale des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Royale, 1780), 163–186.

26 De Pauw, *De l’Amérique et des Américains*, 10.

ity of traveler's accounts. Rousseau had authored the best-known version in his *Discours*, focusing on the professions of travelers:

Il n'y a guères que quatre sortes d'hommes qui fassent des voyages de long cours; les Marins, les Marchands, les Soldats, & les Missionaires; Or on ne doit guères s'attendre que les trois premières Classes fournissent de bons Observateurs, & quant à ceux de la quatrième ... [, ils] détourneraient des travaux plus importants auxquels ils se destinent.²⁷

While this negative portrayal of uneducated travelers might have sparked limited responses, the description of missionaries proved influential. De Pauw was one of the authors to adopt the concept; he generalized the allegations of incompetence and added an accusation of intent. In three steps, he turned the trope of the 'lying traveler' into a claim for his own competence as a distant viewer.

C'a toujours été le privilege, & peut-être aussi la récompense de ceux qui ont découvert des terres nouvelles & lointaines, d'en conter des prodiges qui ne devoient pas survivre à leur Auteurs, s'il n'étoit dans l'instinct du vulgaire de se passionner longtemps pour des absurdités venues de loin, & attestées par des aveugles ou par des fourbes.²⁸

In the first *Recherches*, de Pauw cast a general doubt on all kinds of written accounts and lamented the credulity of the European public. These allegations were less apologetic than Rousseau's, but had not been able to support the armchair scholar's claim for competence. The second step followed in *Defense*, originally directed against Pernety:

Au reste, on peut établir un regle générale, que sur 100 Voyageurs, il y en a 60 qui mentent sans intérêt, & comme par imbécillité, 30 qui mentent par intérêt, ou si l'on veut par malice.²⁹

This sentence sharpened the accusations again, claiming that 90 percent of traveler's accounts were fraudulent. With the presumed unreliability of the vast majority of texts, skepticism would have necessarily been the only possible way to write on the non-European world. Arguments for local experience were deflected in *Défense* as well:

27 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1755), 232.

28 De Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, vol. 1, 132.

29 De Pauw, *Defense*, 198-199.

Supposons pour un instant, que l'Auteur eût voyagé au nouveau Monde, alors le critique lui eût dit tout de même; mais vous ne viviez pas du temps de Christophe Colomb.³⁰

After negating any advantages of local experience, de Pauw consistently turned the trope into an advantage for the sedentary philosopher in the *Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*:

c'est un bonheur que les voyageurs se soient contredits eux-mêmes; sans quoi il ne seroit pas si aisé de les convaincre, qu'il nous en ont imposé.³¹

With this phrase, it is clear how the critique of travelers' accounts was the key to de Pauw's approach. All similar kinds of texts, whether written by settlers, officials or indigenous authors, received the same treatment: De Pauw weighed the inconsistencies and thereby established his own critique of sources, albeit in keeping with other developments of the Enlightenment. Pierre Bayle had already made steps in the same direction in the late 17th Century with his *Dictionnaire Critique* (1697), while Voltaire and others developed the method in the 18th Century.³² Nevertheless, de Pauw was a pioneer on non-European texts, in terms of the degree of skepticism applied and the focus on travelers' accounts. Later works with global concepts followed suit, most importantly the *Histoire des deux Indes*. In the third edition, one of the most ardent dismissals of travelers was coined.

L'homme contemplatif est sédentaire, & le voyageur est ignorant ou menteur. Celui qui a reçu le génie en partage, dédaigne les détails minutieux de l'expériences est presque toujours sans génie.³³

While this passage, presumably written by Diderot, did not reinforce the accusation of intentional misinformation, the critique of travelers herein reached its broadest form: Even the concept of the philosophical voyager, as it had been advocated by Rousseau, came under scrutiny.³⁴ De Pauw rarely gave credit to travelers, but had always left the door open for accepting their results – sometimes of course just for those authors who fit into his views.³⁵ Despite the more complex

30 De Pauw, *Défense*, 249-250.

31 De Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*, Vol. I, 4.

32 Phrased in Pierre Bayle, "Epicure", in *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 2 vols. ed. Pierre Bayle, (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1697), vol. 1, part 2, 1046. See also: Michèle Duchet: *Anthropologie et Histoire au siècle des lumières: Buffon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius, Diderot* (Paris: Maspero, 1971), 95-99.

33 Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes*, Vol. 6, 64.

34 Rousseau, *Discours*, 235-236. See Ottmar Ette, *Literature on the move. Space and Dynamics of Bordercrossing Writings in Europe and America*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 71.

35 For example: De Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, vol. 1, 300.

style of de Pauw's critique, his adversaries' accusations of partiality were not completely unfounded.

The Sedentary Philosopher and his Global Adversaries

While de Pauw's negative image of the non-European world was opposed by various European writers as well, his general approach as an armchair scholar found its toughest opposition on the American and Asian continent. Quite a few of the European scholars who disagreed with de Pauw had traveled the world, but it was authors living abroad that placed the strongest emphasis on local experience. Obviously, the language barrier limited the responses to writers with connections to Europe. Still, missionaries in Beijing, planters from the Caribbean, politicians from the United States, and exiled Jesuits from the Spanish Empire created an impressive map covering the majority of areas de Pauw had written on.³⁶

Writing on the non-European world produced responses from all over the world, though mainly using local arguments. Virtually all authors who had lived abroad used their experience to claim authority on these topics, thus usually writing on a much smaller area. Consequentially, the armchair scholars' competence was disputed in the same way. A basic example can be found in the *Discours Préliminaire* for the *Histoire générale de la Chine* (1777):

Tel est, en peu de mots, le résumé des assertions hardies que M. Paw, tranquillement assis dans son cabinet, à Berlin, prononce sur un peuple qu'il n'a jamais vu, & qui habite il six mille lieues de lui.³⁷

Jean Baptiste Grosier, a Jesuit working in Paris, phrased this defense not for his own work, but for an historiography which could claim local authority on two levels: firstly, because it was collected and translated by Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla, a missionary in Beijing, in the first half of the 18th Century.³⁸ Secondly, as mentioned in the title, De Mailla translated Chinese sources. Therefore, the *Histoire générale de la Chine* called upon voices of the criticized culture itself to challenge de Pauw, while Grosier and, to a lesser extent even de Mailla, were solely intermediaries, not the creators of the historiographies.

36 The Spanish responses have been a field of interest for some decades: Brading, *The fist America*; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2001). For that reason, I focus on other opponents of de Pauw.

37 Jean-Baptiste Grosier, "Discours Préliminaire", in *Histoire générale de la Chine, ou Annales de cet empire; traduites du Tong-Kien-Kang-Mou*, trans. Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla, eds. Jean-Baptiste Grosier and Michel-Ange-André Le Roux Deshauterayes (Paris: P. D. Pierres, 1777), XXXVII.

38 Grosier, "Discours Préliminaire", XXVII.

Other authors reacted to the critique of travelers' accounts as well. Joseph-Marie Amiot, another Jesuit at the court in Beijing, sent two letters refuting de Pauw to Europe. The second one, written in 1777, emphasized the importance and competence of missionaries:

Les Missionnaires, dira tout homme equitable, tout Philosophe même de la classe de l'Auteur des Recherches, les Missionnaires sont les seuls qui ont pu nous donner des notions sûres des pays lointains ... ils ont eu l'occasion & le loisir de les examiner.³⁹

Amiot defended his congregation, the most active missionaries, but also opposed the whole notion of the clergymen's incompetence brought forward by Rousseau. In the 1770s, the Jesuits were criticized by more philosophers than de Pauw alone, who is said to have had a special antipathy towards them due to his own years at a Jesuit's school.⁴⁰ Jesuits had also been expelled both from the Spanish Empire and China, Amiot being one of the few remaining in Beijing.⁴¹ Meanwhile Francesco Saverio Clavigero (or Francisco Javier Clavijero), an exiled Jesuit born in Mexico, was one of the most important authors from the New World. Despite their usually complicated situations, the Jesuits still contributed to these scholarly disputes.

Instead of opposing the trope of the 'lying traveler', the London-born Jamaican planter Bryan Edwards turned it against the European authors.

I conceive that, unless an author had had the benefit of actual experience and personal observation, neither genius nor industry can at all times enable him to guard against the mistakes and misinterpretations of prejudiced, ignorant, or interested men; to whose authority he submits.⁴²

As an anti-abolitionist lobbyist, the main focus in Edwards' historiographic works was the defense of slavery. At the same time, he opposed the degeneracy thesis and especially de Pauw's writing on America.⁴³ His *History of the British West*

39 Joseph-Marie Amiot, "Extrait d'une Lettre de M. Amiot, à M**** du 28 Septembre 1777. Observations sur un le Livre de M. P*** intitulé: Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens & les Chinois", in: *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les Sciences, les Arts, les Moers, les Usages &c. des Chinois: Par les Missionnaires de Pékin*, (Paris: Nyon, 1776-1814), vol. VI, 1779, 276.

40 Beyerhaus, *Abbé de Pauw*, 465-466.

41 Nicolas Standaert, "Jesuits in China," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, edited by Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 182-184.

42 Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*. 2 vols, (London: J. Stockdale, 1793), vol. 1, VII-VIII.

43 Edwards, *History of the British West Indies*, Vol. I, VIII-X. See as well: Olwyn M. Blouet, "Bryan Edwards, F.R.S., 1743-1800", in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 54 (2000), 215-219.

Indies (1793) was at that time the authoritative historiographical work on the Caribbean, although Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774) had paved the way.⁴⁴ Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, with his *Description topographique* (1797/98) one of the most important authors from the French Caribbean, took note of the debates as well.⁴⁵ All of the Caribbean works featured an emphasis on local experience and the importance of practical involvement, as the authors were not professional scholars or writers.⁴⁶ The opposition to de Pauw was thus inherent in their methodology.

On top of the general defense of local knowledge, De Pauw's concept of critique garnered particularly harsh rebuttals. Thomas Jefferson – who did not mention the *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* in his monograph on the debate, the *Notes on the State of Virginia*⁴⁷ – characterized de Pauw's work in a letter from 1785 as a compilation of lies:

Paw, the beginner of this charge, was a compiler from the works of others; and of the most unlucky description; for he seems to have read the writings of travellers only to collect and republish their lies.⁴⁸

To separate the two allegations: Jefferson negated an inherent value of de Pauw's works due to the lack of original content. Additionally, Jefferson considered the compiled information to be wrong, also using the trope of the lying traveler. Almost the same two points had been made by Clavigero in his *Storia Antica Del Messico*, which was only published in English in 1787.

we could add a long catalogue of French, English, Italian, Dutch, Flemish, and German writers ... [who] have either repeated what was already written by Spanish

44 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica. or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: ...*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774). See especially Vol. II, 351-355 for Long's plea for polygenesis, closely related to the degeneracy debate.

45 Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols., (Philadelphia, 1797-98), Vol. I, 15.

46 Elsa V. Goveia, *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies. To the End of the Nineteenth Century*, reprint (Washington D.C.: Howard Univ. Press 1980), 167.

47 Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. (London: J. Stockdale, 1787). Church, *Corneille de Pauw*, 190 remarks that Jefferson probably did not know the *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* in 1781, when he wrote his *Notes*; Lee Alan Dugatkin, *Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose. Natural History in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 101-102 considers the omission intentional. Jefferson's later letters hardly give an argument for the latter.

48 Thomas Jefferson to François-Jean de Chastellux, Paris, 7 June 1785, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* Volume 8 25 February to 31 October 1785, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton University Press, 1953), 184-186.

authors mentioned by us, or have altered facts, at their own discretion, to inveigh the more strongly against the Spaniards, as has lately been done by M. de Paw.⁴⁹

Clavigero added a pro-Spanish defense and directed the allegations against de Pauw himself. The traveler's trope was not invoked, possibly due to Clavigero's role as a Jesuit. His confreres' writing on China made similar points, adding another spin:

Quand on avance de pareilles propositions, il faudroit citer ses autorités.⁵⁰

pourrais extraire de son livre près de trois à quatre cens de ces assertions, avancées sans preuves, & qui n'ont d'autres garans que la science particulière & la bonne foi de M. Pau.⁵¹

Both Amiot and Grosier criticized the lack of consistent notes in the *Recherches philosophiques*. Compared to other works of the Enlightenment – such as the *Histoire des deux Indes*, which is lacking notes completely⁵² – de Pauw's annotations were numerous. Yet he did not offer the consistent use of citations that William Robertson could, whose work was nevertheless met with similar rejection by Clavigero.⁵³ If de Pauw's adversaries were to be believed, his works lacked new content and only consisted of information extracted from wrong accounts which were not even cited – in other words, it was considered the worst kind of compilation.

49 Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *Storia Antica Del Messico Cavata Da 'Migliori Storici Spagnuoli, E Da 'Manoscritti, E Dalle Pitture Antiche Degl'Indiani. Divisa In Dieci Libri, E Corredata Di Carte Geografiche, E Di Varie Figure: E Dissertazioni Sulla Terra, sugli Animali, e sugli abitatori del Messico*, 4 vols. (Cesena: G. Biasini, 1780-81). Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *The History of Mexico. Collected from Spanish and Mexican historians, from manuscripts, and ancient paintings of the Indians. Illustrated by charts, and other copper plates, to which are added critical dissertations on the land, the animals, and inhabitants of Mexico. Translated from the original Italian, by Charles Cullen, Esq.*, 2 vols (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), XXIV-XXV.

50 Joseph-Marie Amiot, "Remarques Sur un Ecrit de M. P**", intitulé: *Recherches sur les Egyptiens & les Chinois*, in: *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les Sciences, les Arts, les Moers, les Usages &c. des Chinois: Par les Missionnaires de Pékin*, (Paris: Nyon, 1776-1814), vol. 2, 1777, 370.

51 Grosier, "Discours Préliminaire", XXXVII.

52 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, rev. ed., 6 vols. (London: W. Strahan; T. Cadell, 1783), vol. 3, 277. Compare John G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume Four: Barbarians, Savages and Empires*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 229.

53 William Robertson, *The History of America*. 5th ed., rev. and enl. 3 vols. (London, 1788), Vol. I, XVI on the use of notes, XVIII-XIX for his reply to Clavigero. See also Silvia Sebastiani, "What Constituted Historical Evidence of the New World? Closeness and Distance in William Robertson and Francisco Javier Clavijero" *Modern Intellectual History* 11 (2014), 677–695.

Conclusion: Armchair Scholarship at its Peak

Towards the end of the 18th Century, the approval to de Pauw's approach diminished in Europe as well, as the characterization of the "ingenuity and the eccentricity of M. Pauw's speculations" in a contemporary review shows.⁵⁴ He was mainly considered an entertaining and controversial author who had initiated the degeneracy thesis and popularized a general concept of European superiority. Still, as mentioned above, some of the best-sellers of the 18th Century, such as the *Historie des deux Indes* or Robertson's *History of America*, used or adapted the ideas put forth in the *Recherches Philosophiques*. Even the vast number of refutations probably helped keep de Pauw's work relevant in the Republic of Letters. New translations in the 1790s followed the intense disputes of the late 1780s, when Clavigero's *History of Mexico* and Jefferson's *Notes* were first published in England.⁵⁵

As a result, the works of de Pauw remained relevant until his death in 1799. As Jürgen Osterhammel has noted in regards to the replies from China, de Pauw's adversaries rarely had problems with pointing out mistakes and misinterpretations.⁵⁶ But they did not reach a broader audience, which holds true for the suppressed Jesuits as well as for Caribbean or North American authors – especially in comparison to the works of Robertson and Raynal, who also wrote about the non-European world from their desks. De Pauw's *Recherches* had laid the foundation for the European dominance as basically all of his works were preparations for attacks from the non-European world: a degenerated American or an unreliable missionary in China were exactly the kind of authors he had made his target. The same is true for European travelers like Pernety. Without a consistent separation between local experience and the role of an eyewitness, de Pauw could claim the impartiality of the distant observer over biased locals.

It was not until the beginning of a new century that a traveler from Europe managed to break the armchair scholars' dominance in the European arena. After his voyage to the Americas from 1799 to 1804 (and years later to Central Asia as well), Alexander von Humboldt published several works on the New World. He disputed not only the negative image of the indigenous cultures of the Americas created by de Pauw and popularized by Robertson, but also the armchair historians' methodology.⁵⁷ The critique of sources implemented by European authors of

54 Review of: "Selections from M. Pauw, with Additions by Daniel Webb, Esq." *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal* XVII (1795): 130.

55 Daniel Webb, *Selections from Les recherches philosophiques sur les Americains of M. Pauw* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1795). Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical Dissertations on the Egyptians and Chinese*, transl. J. Thomson, 2 vol. London 1795. See Sebastiani, "Historical Evidence," 692-694.

56 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, (Beck: München 1998), 149.

57 See for example: Humboldt, Alexander von: *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*. 5 vols. (Paris: F. Schoell, 1811), Vol. I, 131-132; Humboldt, Alexander von: *Vues*

the Enlightenment initiated further developments, but, in general, Humboldt based his works on the claim of local experience. Consequentially, he used Clavigero as an authority on Mexico, and even met Thomas Jefferson, then President of the United States, at the end of his voyage.⁵⁸

The meeting took place almost forty years after the *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* had been published; forty years during which an armchair scholar writing in his monastery in Xanten had found strong supporters and especially harsh adversaries all over the globe. Despite the opposition, de Pauw had influenced historiographical approaches as well as European perceptions of the world.

des Cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique, 2 vols. (Paris: N. Maze, 1816), Vol. II, 98-99.
58 Dugatkin, *Jefferson*, 114-116.