

Research Project

Global Material Desires. Beaver Fur and the Creation of Markets in the 17th Century

Project funded by own resources

Project title Global Material Desires. Beaver Fur and the Creation of Markets in the 17th Century

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How did value emerge before the rise of capitalism? What was the impact of materiality on the creation of value? And how did longing change the demand and supply of commodities? Based on the methodological triangle of practices, materials and affects my project explores the relation between the longing for beaver fur and the creation of early modern markets from a global perspective. The various textures of beaver fur are suitable for the study of material desires and for the examination of practices, since every processing step created novel longings and shaped new markets.

In the 17th century, beaver fur was world-wide in high demand: as spoil in North America and Russia, as transatlantic commodity, as resource for luxury goods and as hunting apparel, as status symbol for merchants and as currency of trading companies. My case studies of the Dutch colony New Netherland (1609-1664) support the argument that supply and demand were not the only influential factors to early modern markets. Furrier knowledge and the effort to regulate markets and to stabilize social order were important to the creation of markets as well. The fashionable beaver hats embodied the promises of material wealth, the founding of colonies and the launch of trading companies.

Dutch fur trade records allow to explore *global material desires* and the *creation of early modern markets*. Based on New Netherland records (trading correspondences, court papers, regulations, orders, engravings, maps, travel reports, portraits) and on beaver fur hats from the 17th century my project is structured into four parts: Part 1 discusses the creation of global beaver fur markets while taking into account that globally demanded hats were manufactured with different materials from different places in the world. Part 2 studies the Dutch imaginations of New Netherland as a market of promises and emphasizes the contemporary economic practice of projecting. Part 3 takes the textures of exchanges into account and unfolds the organization of colonial beaver fur markets based on intercultural social relations, in particular between Europeans and Natives. Part 4 explores the creation of local, colonial fashion and textile markets in the settlements of New Netherland against the background of mercantile economic practices and protectionist legislation.

By connecting economic concepts with material culture, knowledge transfer, affects, trading practices and social dynamics, my project challenges established economic, cultural and social narratives of early modern markets. *Global Material Desires* explores the potential of an early modern economic history that incorporates material culture and global perspectives based on a praxeological approach.

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