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KNOWING AFRICA: ENTANGLEMENTS, COLONIALISM AND ITS LEGACIES

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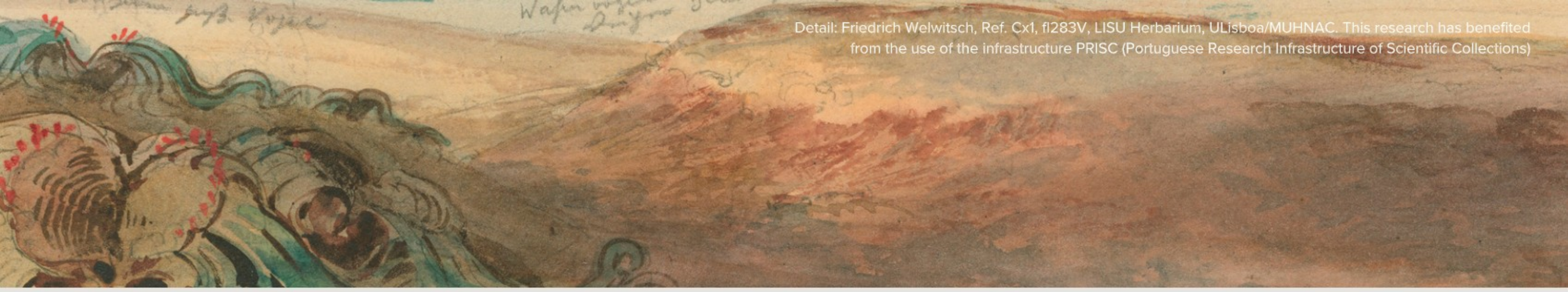

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KNOWING AFRICA: ENTANGLEMENTS, COLONIALISM AND ITS LEGACIES

This three-day international conference marks the culmination of the **KNOW.AFRICA Project** (https://doi.org/10.54499/2022.01599.PTDC) and will bring together scholars from the history of science, anthropology, museum studies, African studies, imperial and colonial history, biology, visual culture, and related fields to critically examine how cross-cultural encounters and local actors contributed to the production of knowledge about Africa.

Over the past two decades, circulation has become a key analytical framework in the history of science, challenging earlier models that portrayed knowledge as flowing unidirectionally from European centres to colonial peripheries. By focusing on processes of mobility, translation, adaptation, and appropriation, the concept of circulation has enabled more nuanced understandings of how knowledge is produced across diverse geographical and cultural settings. At the same time, scholars have increasingly recognised that movement is rarely seamless. Particularly in colonial contexts, circulation often involved rupture, displacement, erasure, and the severing of existing social and epistemic ties, alongside processes of exchange and connection.
Rather than conceiving circulation as the straightforward movement of people, objects, or ideas, this conference approaches it as a historically situated process marked by discontinuities, transformations, and contestations. Drawing on recent scholarship in the global history of science, we understand circulation as shaped by unequal power relations and sustained through negotiations, mediations, and reconfigurations that continually reshape both knowledge and material practices as they move across spaces, institutions, and communities.

Such an approach also invites renewed reflection on questions of visibility and omission in knowledge production. Who and what become visible within scientific accounts, and whose contributions are rendered invisible or systematically marginalised? What emerges when we shift our attention from routes to relationships, from individual explorers to the broader social networks that enabled their work, and from movement itself to the practices of mediation through which knowledge was produced and validated? Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the field was far from a neutral site of observation. Rather, it functioned as a space of sociability, dependence, negotiation, and cross-cultural interaction in which knowledge was collectively produced.

The perspective developed within the **KNOW.AFRICA** project seeks to move beyond protagonist-centred narratives and to foreground the collective processes through which knowledge was generated in the field. Our aim is not only to recover the histories of intermediaries, guides, porters, translators, and local experts who played crucial roles in scientific expeditions, but also to examine the social, institutional, and epistemic mechanisms through which the contributions of host communities were obscured, appropriated, or erased from the historical record.

We particularly welcome submissions that engage with, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Methodological approaches to archival research in colonial and formerly colonized contexts;
- Ethical challenges in field-based research within the social sciences and humanities, including community engagement, protocols for the collection and use of materials, and practices of acknowledgement and attribution;
- Invisibilities, silences, and untold histories, including those of local actors, collections, archives, and knowledge systems;
- Cross-cultural encounters, exchanges, and processes of knowledge production;
- Science communication and public engagement in schools, local communities, and citizen science initiatives.

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