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SIMON KARSTENS

FAILED PROJECTS OF COLONIZATION IN THE AMERICAS

Causes and Perceptions (ca. 1530–1615)

Looking at European colonial activities in the Americas around 1610, an Iberian predominance is obvious¹. A large Spanish empire extended over the Caribbean, Mexico, Peru, and Argentina; enclosed by these possessions laid the Portuguese-controlled Brazil. Both empires not only originated from the Iberian Peninsula, but in 1610 they were also ruled by one and the same person – King Phillip III.

Colonial possessions of other European powers in the Americas were rather small in comparison at the time. In 1610, a small band of traders held the French fort of Quebec, while in this very year the few surviving English settlers of Jamestown boarded a ship to leave America for good. Although ships from England, France and other countries crossed the Atlantic and searched for trade, fish or a chance to plunder in North and South America every year, hardly any permanent self-sufficient military outposts or settlements can be found.

Nonetheless, the lack of non-Iberian colonies is not due to a lack of effort. From a deserted stone house on a frozen island west of Greenland down to the ruins of a French fortress in the bay of Rio de Janeiro, more than 30 failed attempts to build transatlantic outposts shaped the history of the early modern Atlantic. They were planned, prepared and supported in the cities of Bristol, Plymouth, Rouen, London, Paris, St. Malo, Nürnberg and Augsburg. Some of them left traces on the American shore, some on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and others only on sheets of paper in European archives.

This essay presents an ongoing research project focused on these failed projects². To offer a brief overview, the following pages will address four subjects: I – defining

- 1 For a quick overview, compare: Urs BITTERLI, *Die Entdeckung Amerikas. Von Kolumbus bis Alexander von Humboldt*, München 1999 (Beck'sche Reihe, 1322); David BIRMINGHAM, *Trade and Empire in the Atlantic 1400–1600*, London 2000; Nicholas CANNY (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450–c. 1850*, Oxford 2011; Pierre CHAUNU, *L'expansion européenne du XIII^e au XV^e siècle*, Paris 1995; John Huxtable ELLIOTT, *The Old World and the New 1492–1650*, Cambridge 1970; ID., *Empires of the Atlantic World. Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830*, New Haven 2006; Charles André JULIEN, *Les voyages de découverte et les premiers établissements. XV^e–XVI^e siècles*, Reprint of the 1947 edition with a foreword from Pierre CHAUNU, Paris 2003; Wolfgang REINHARD, *Geschichte der europäischen Expansion. Die Neue Welt*, Stuttgart 1985 (*Geschichte der europäischen Expansion*, 2); Hermann WELLENREUTHER, *Niedergang und Aufstieg. Geschichte Nordamerikas vom Beginn der Besiedlung bis zum Ausgang des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Münster 2004 (*Geschichte Nordamerikas in atlantischer Perspektive von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 1).
- 2 This article is a modified version of presentations given in Regensburg, Essen, London, Basel, Trier, Halle, and Paris. Everywhere insightful feedback helped to improve the project. Further advice and comments are, of course, very welcome.

the object of inquiry; II – explaining the leading questions; III – presenting sources; and IV – describing methods and approach.

I.

What defines a »project of colonization«?

To understand the phenomenon in general, one needs a wide focus. Therefore, this study will deal with any plan brought before a European ruler to establish a non-temporary transatlantic presence under his or her protection. The projects examined here are not limited to those with a minimum number of settlers involved, those with a certain purpose of the establishment or those under the flag of one European monarchy³. This means that reasons for the inability to maintain a male-only military outpost of twenty people and giving up the plan for a civilian settlement with hundreds of families will be considered equally.

What does »failure« or »failed« mean?

Having failed is not an absolute or unquestionable category; rather, it is an assessment made by contemporaries or even later historians, which has always depended on their intentions and the information available to them. It will be shown that even a colonial project that had to be given up because of catastrophic events can subsequently be interpreted in different ways. These different interpretations and perceptions that could lead to the use of failure as a category of description are in the focus of this study.

The origin of these perceptions and interpretations was always an obvious and irrefutable difference between the (sometimes very ambitious) expectations and the sometimes very poor outcome of a project. All people involved had to deal with the fact that the planned permanent transatlantic establishment did not come to life and the promised wealth was not created. It is important to understand that this work does not aim to deny these facts or to rewrite the history of unsuccessful projects. It rather aims to include the different ways in which the people creating the sources presented and interpreted the events. A difference between expectation and outcome led to accusations, excuses, explanations, denial, analysis and admissions of guilt. Declaring a project as a failure is just one possible and a seldom unquestioned result of those acts of communication.

This constructivist approach has already been successfully applied to studies on historical failures; for example, on military defeats in the late middle ages⁴. Concerning the history of early colonial expansion, however, deconstructing the way in which people talked and thought about their experiences is a method used more of-

3 According to their different points of interest, many authors have used such limitations. Philip Boucher, for example, distinguishes between a »true colonization« (defined as including the settlers' families) and military projects: Philip P. BOUCHER, *Les Nouvelles Frances. France in America, 1500–1815. An Imperial Perspective*, Providence, R. I. 1989. For the use of other approaches, more focused on certain regions or European powers compare n. 13 and 17.

4 Martin CLAUSS, *Kriegsniederlagen im Mittelalter. Darstellung – Deutung – Bewältigung*, Paderborn 2010 (Krieg in der Geschichte, 54).

ten in literary studies than by historians in the narrow sense. The greater part of the historical works available uses the rather simple definition that all those colonial projects whose protagonists did not build a city that still exists today count as a failure⁵.

Which colonial projects will be studied in detail?

The history of futile efforts to colonize the Americas already began with the expeditions of Columbus⁶. But the experiences of the Iberian Powers are not the main interest of this study because they rather form the background for the projects that will be examined in detail.

This background emerged during the Spanish expansion into the Americas, which was quite different from the colonial activities of England, France and others who followed later. The so-called Spanish conquest of the Americas was based upon the Caribbean as a stepping stone and a fallback position, and in the early years the Spanish colonists knew no European rivals⁷. The administrative build-up and the economic possibilities of their colonies strongly differed from those of the later powers, especially since the Spanish brutally overthrew native empires, thus gaining an unrivaled logistical backbone. They also found the silver and gold that men like Jacques Cartier and Walter Raleigh later searched for in vain.

By contrast, the Portuguese already held several forts in Africa and were establishing profitable trade relations with India when they settled in Brazil⁸. It is widely known that these two powers recognized each other's claim to oversee conquest in treaties to partition the world in 1494 and 1529.

Therefore, in the 1530s, when the Aztec and Inka empires had collapsed and the Portuguese founded permanent outposts on the Brazilian coast, both Iberian powers had claimed their fields of interest. From here onwards, they mainly focused on the long process of establishing control and protecting their possessions, although some further expeditions were dispatched to search for gold. Despite all the setbacks that

5 For examples for the use of this pragmatic definition, compare: Nicolas FORNEROD, *La France équinoxiale du Maranhao. Enjeux et incidences d'un échec colonial*, in: Jean-Yves MÉRIAN (ed.), *Les aventures des Bretons au Brésil à l'époque coloniale*, Rennes 2007 (Collection Bretons à travers le monde), p. 103–125; Marcel TRUDEL, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France. Les vaines tentatives 1524–1603*, Montreal 1963 (*Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, 1); Margaret PICKETT and Dwayne PICKETT, *The European Struggle to Settle North America. Colonizing Attempts by England, France and Spain 1521–1608*, Jefferson 2011. David Beers QUINN, *Colonies in the Beginning. Examples from North America*, in: ID. (ed.), *Explorers and Colonies. America 1500–1625*. London 1990, p. 127–150.

6 Kathleen DEAGAN, José María CRUXENT, *Columbus's Outpost Among the Taínos. Spain and America at La Isabela 1493–1498*, New Haven 2002.

7 John Huxtable ELLIOTT, *Empires of the Atlantic world. Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830*, New Haven 2006; Henry KAMEN, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492–1763*, New York 2003.

8 Francisco BETHENCOURT and Diogo Ramada CURTO, *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion 1400–1800*, Cambridge 2007; Charles Ralph BOXER, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415–1825*, reprint London 1977; Bailey Wallis DIFFIE and George Davison WINIUS (ed.), *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415–1580*, Minneapolis 1977 (*Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion*, 1); Anthony DISNEY, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire. From Beginnings to 1807*, Cambridge 2009.

they encountered, both powers never came close to abandoning the Americas. Their colonial expansion had shaped a so-called »Iberian Atlantic«, which set the framework for others who dared to challenge their claim⁹.

This study focuses on those other powers, which the Spaniards and Portuguese treated as perpetrators. They did not have a profitable colonial empire during the 1530s, which meant that they had to expand across the ocean without a safe haven to re-group or re-supply nearby. They had to build supply lines across thousands of miles and gain experience without making a quick profit like the Iberian empires did¹⁰.

In the 1530s, these new powers had sent scouting expeditions to the Americas, established irregular trade relations and started to learn from published reports and maps about the new continent. It soon became well known that there was a fortune to be made across the ocean and that the Iberian powers had no chance to enforce their monopoly over such a vast territory.

It is most common to look at France and England as the new players in the Americas during the sixteenth century. This study follows their path, while also including colonial projects attempted by international players who found a way to act within the Iberian Empires but could be turned from tolerated partners into expelled strangers with the stroke of a pen. This especially concerns the German financiers of the house of Welser, who undertook an attempt to found a colony in Venezuela¹¹. Their project was authorized by Charles V. and was financed, planned and led by people who came out of German imperial cities. However, things changed between 1610 and 1615: some colonies established by the French and English had survived for several years and found ways to make profit even without finding a passage to the Pacific or an empire of gold, which meant new points of reference for thinking and debating about colonial politics in England and France¹². Furthermore, the Dutch

- 9 For information on the political history of the Atlantic in this period, compare: John C. APPLEBY, War, Politics and Colonization 1558–1625, in: Nicholas P. CANNY und William Roger LOUIS (ed.), *The Origins of Empire. British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford 1998, p. 55–78; BIRMINGHAM, Trade and empire (as in n. 1); Philip P. BOUCHER, Revisioning the »French Atlantic« or How to Think About the French Presence in the Atlantic 1550–1625, in: Peter C. MANCALL (ed.), *The Atlantic World and Virginia 1550–1624*, Chapel Hill 2007, p. 274–306; John Huxtable ELLIOTT, The Iberian Atlantic and Virginia, in: MANCALL, *The Atlantic World and Virginia*, p. 541–557.
- 10 Thomas E. DAVIDSON, Roanoke and Jamestown: Supplying England's First American Colonies, in: Shields THOMSON und Charles EWEN (ed.), *Searching for the Roanoke Colonies: An Interdisciplinary Collection*, Raleigh 2003, p. 106–118.
- 11 Jörg DENZER, Die Konquista der Augsburger Welser-Gesellschaft in Südamerika (1528–1556). Historische Rekonstruktion, Historiografie und lokale Erinnerungskultur in Kolumbien und Venezuela, München 2005 (Schriftenreihe zur Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte, 15); For a broader introduction into the activities of the upper German financiers, see: Mark HÄBERLEIN, Augsburger Handelshäuser und die Neue Welt. Interessen und Initiativen im atlantischen Raum (16. bis 18. Jahrhundert), in: Philipp GASSERT (ed.), *Augsburg und Amerika. Aneignungen und globale Verflechtungen in einer Stadt*. Augsburg 2013 (Documenta Augustana, 24), p. 19–37.
- 12 Richard Hakluyt and Marc Lescarbot published their most influential works »The principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation« (?1598–1600) and »Histoire de Nouvelle France« (1609) at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Both Authors tried to promote further colonial activities but had to cope with the fact that – despite several attempts – no permanent French or English settlement existed in the Americas so far. For an overview of their

appeared on the scene and were followed by Sweden, Denmark, Kurland and others. Having always been under a rather nominal control of Spain or Portugal, the Atlantic became – more than ever – a multilateral arena. Finally, the year 1613 marked the first time that a non-Iberian power destroyed another non-Iberian colony in the Americas. In a way, the attacks on the French Port Royal and Saint-Sauveur colony by an English ship laid the foundation for the long French and English rivalry on American soil in the centuries to come. These developments justify bringing the study to an end around 1615 and drawing conclusions.

II.

The critical approach towards the category »failure« – as it has been described beforehand – leads to a two-way approach. The first, rather basic step is to combine the results of the vast and impressive research that has been conducted thus far to answer the following questions: What reasons are given in the sources for not establishing a planned transatlantic outpost? Are certain reasons given repeatedly? Do certain problems usually co-occur or do some exclude others? Did French, German and English colonists provide the same or different reasons for their failures and how did they interpret the failures of others? To understand the presented research project, it is important to clarify that this study will not focus on telling the story of each colonization attempt. Its goal is to determine how the argumentations and perceptions were created that still inspire and influence stories told today.

Therefore, the second, more analytical step is to go beyond a reconstruction of events and comparatively analyze the ways in which people in France, Germany and England communicated about their experiences. One question should be: Were there alternative, perhaps rivaling, ways of describing and perceiving the events, e.g. were they really seen as failures or as rather valuable experiences and stepping stones to a future success? It is obvious that to answer this question this study has to focus on the people behind the sources. Were they accusing or defending someone? Were they making a case for giving up colonial expansion or for doubling the efforts? What types of media were they using? What were their categories to determine failure and success and did those change when they described a rival power's endeavors? Put simply, this means shifting the focus from a story of given failures to a story of failure as a descriptive as well as analytical category.

context and their different approaches towards promoting colonization, compare: Francisco J. BORGE, *A new World for a new Nation. The promotion of America in early modern England*, Oxford 2007; Frank LESTRINGANT, *Champlain, Lescarbot et la »Conférence« des Histoires*, in: Normand DOIRON (ed.), *Scritti sulla Nouvelle-France nel seicento*, Bari 1984, p. 69–88; Anthony PAGDEN, *Lords of all the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800*, New Haven 1995; John PARKER, *Books to Build an Empire. A bibliographical history of English overseas interests to 1620*, Amsterdam 1965; David Harris SACKS, *Discourses of Western Planting. Richard Hakluyt and the Making of the Atlantic World*, in: Mancall (ed.), *The Atlantic World and Virginia (as in n. 9)*, p. 410–453; Éric THIERRY, *Marc Lescarbot (vers 1570–1641). Un homme de plume au service de la Nouvelle-France*, Paris 2001 (*Les géographies du monde*, 4).

III.

Trying to provide a complete overview of the state of international research on this topic in a few pages is obviously a futile effort. Therefore, this paragraph will restrict itself to explaining tendencies and offering examples of the most important points of reference. Many other works and authors than could be mentioned here have influenced and surely will continue to influence the ongoing project. In fact, thousands of works have been written on the early colonial expansion of England and France as well as, to a much lesser extent, Germany. Combined with the contemporary works of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, they can easily fill up specialized libraries.

Academic professionals and popular writers from England, the US, Canada, Ireland, France and Germany have analyzed examples of failed colonies, each adding their unique perspective. Most of the authors used impressive skills to reconstruct historical events, thus creating a foundation for this study¹³. Their works usually focused on one or more examples from a canon of three to five French and English projects, each of which has an extensive research history dating back to the nineteenth century. This tradition led to an impressive level of knowledge about a few selected projects. In some cases, like the Roanoke adventures, there are a dozens of works telling the tale of one failed colony¹⁴. Due to the limited sources, these tales often turn out to be quite similar. Accordingly only a small part of the vast number of works available are studies whose authors based their arguments upon a comprehensible foundation of sources, undertook original research in the archives and subsequently included new archaeological findings.

However, this is in no way meant to diminish the impressive original scientific work undertaken thus far. It simply explains why the overwhelming number of books available can be reduced to a selection that one single researcher can handle. Especially the last twenty years have brought impressive advancements, partly ow-

13 On the English projects of colonization, see: Kenneth R. ANDREWS, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement. Maritime enterprise and the genesis of the British Empire 1480–1630*, Cambridge 1984; Peter T. BRADLEY, *British maritime enterprise in the New World. From the late fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century*, Lewiston 1999 (*Studies in British History*, 57); David Beers QUINN, *Set Fair for Roanoke. Voyages and colonies 1584–1606*, Chapel Hill 1985; ID., *England and the discovery of America, 1481–1620. From the Bristol voyages of the fifteenth century to the Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth. The exploration, exploitation, and trial-and-error colonization of North America by the English*, London 1974; for an overview of the French activities, see: Carmen BERNAND, Serge GRUZINSKI, *Histoire du Nouveau Monde II. Les métissages 1550–1640*, Paris 1993; Philippe BONNICHON, *Des cannibales aux castors. Les découvertes françaises de l'Amérique 1503–1788*, Paris 1994; TRUDEL, *Les vaines tentatives* (as in n. 5); ID., *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France. Le comptoir 1604–1627*, Montreal 1963 (*Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, 2); Compare also the works cited in note 17.

14 The Library of Congress lists more than 100 Books on this attempted colony alone. For an introduction, see the works of Karen Ordahl KUPPERMAN and David Beers QUINN: Karen Ordahl KUPPERMAN, *Roanoke. The Abandoned Colony*, Totowa 1984; ID., *The Jamestown Project*, Cambridge 2007; David Beers QUINN, *The Failure of Raleigh's American Colonies*, in: H. A. CRONNE, T. W. MOODY and David Beers QUINN (ed.), *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of J. E. Todd*, London 1949, p. 61–85; ID., *The Lost Colonists. Their fortune and probable fate, Raleigh 1984*.

ing to the many 400th anniversaries that inspired conferences, exhibitions and new publications¹⁵.

In short, studying and comparing several failed projects of colonization is not a new approach. But most of those comparisons used certain established limits. One such limit is comparing different unsuccessful colonies of one monarchy, like France or England, as a part of that country's specific colonial history without including the failure of others¹⁶. Another limit is focusing only on colonial projects within modern political boundaries, like failed attempts in the future territory of the United States or in America north of Mexico¹⁷.

In these works, two strategies of narration are commonly used and sometimes combined. Both deeply influenced the way people thought about European failures in the 19th and 20th century. In a synchronic comparison, the failures of the French or English were often paralleled with the success of the Iberian colonization. This approach tends to neglect the trial-and-error factor of Iberian projects and to depreciate the importance of the non-Iberian influence in the Americas before the second decade of the sixteenth century. The second strategy was a diachronic comparison between the early failures and the successful projects undertaken by a single European monarchy. This meant using a »learning-from-failure« narrative that can easily be stipulated – and already has been by Richard Hakluyt and Marc Lescarbot as part of their colonial propaganda – but is difficult to prove. It often neglects the differences between the individual projects and diminishes learning and communicating about failure as an international process by focusing on just one country.

Considering the impressive number of works published, the ongoing research has to focus on the comparison itself and not on narrating events that have been described before. A broad international comparison of failure as an element of early European colonization in North and South America including England, France and

15 For Example: Éric THIERRY, *La France de Henri IV en Amérique du Nord. De la création de l'Acadie à la fondation de Québec*, Paris 2008 (*Les géographies du monde*, 9); Kim SLOAN (ed.), *A New World. England's First View of America*, Chapel Hill 2007; KUPPERMAN, *The Jamestown Project* (as in n. 14).

16 See n. 13.

17 Most remarkable is the very common separation of North and South American colonial history. Most of the studies on attempted colonies focus on the modern-day territory of Canada and the United States, e. g. William John ECCLES, *The French in North America 1500–1783*, East Lansing 1998; Pickett, *The European Struggle to Settle* (as in n. 5); David Beers QUINN, *North America From Earliest Discovery to First Settlements. The Norse Voyages to 1612*, New York 1977; ID., *Colonies in the Beginning* (as in n. 5); Tabitha RENAUD, *Finding Worth in the Wilderness. The Abandonment of France and England's Earliest North American Colonies 1534–1590*, University of Ottawa Thesis (Canada), Online Edition ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2010. MR74142. On the other hand, a wide range of works focuses on colonial projects in a specific region in either North or South America. The following examples offer also a broader insight into the causes and perceptions of failed attempts: Frank LESTRINGANT, *Les stratégies coloniales de la France au Brésil au XVI^e siècle et leur échec*, in: Michel BALARD (ed.), *État et colonisation au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, Lyon 1989, p. 463–476; Gillian T. Cell, *English enterprise in Newfoundland 1577–1660*, Toronto 1969; ID. (ed.), *Newfoundland Discovered. English Attempts at colonization 1610–1630*, London 1982 (*Hakluyt Society, Second Series*, 160); John T. McGRATH, *The French in early Florida. In the eye of the hurricane*, Gainesville 2000; Mickaël AUGERON, *Floride, un rêve français (1562–1565)*, La Rochelle 2012.

Germany will offer a perspective that differs from the dominating narratives, especially if the category »failure« itself is critically analyzed.

Of course, deconstructing the narrations of failed colonial projects has been done before – mostly in the intersection between the fields of literature studies and history. Researchers like Mary C. Fuller, Frank Lestringant and others have conducted impressive work on the English respectively French literature of the sixteenth century which dealt with projects of colonization¹⁸. They analyzed arguments, forms of presentation and contemporary narratives. Their findings – primarily based upon printed literature – are guiding lights of the highest importance. As Susanna Burghartz has pointed out, they prove that failure in general is an important element of early modern colonial history¹⁹.

Concerning the sources, it is obvious that every researcher owes very much to the authors of both old and new editions and sourcebooks²⁰. Those works as well as the ever-progressing digitalization of manuscripts and early modern prints are the foundation of this study. In fact, only the digital humanities have made this project possible, because even if they do not make travels and archival work unnecessary, they considerably limit their amount²¹.

- 18 See for example: Andrew FITZMAURICE, *Humanism and America. An intellectual history of English colonization 1500–1625*, Cambridge 2004 (Ideas in context, 67); Andrew HADFIELD, *Literature, travel, and colonial writing in the English Renaissance 1545–1625*, Oxford 2007; Mary C. FULLER, *Voyages in Print. English travel to America 1576–1624*, Cambridge 1995; ID., *Remembering the Early Modern Voyage. English narratives in the age of European expansion*, New York 2008; Frank LESTRINGANT, *Le huguenot et le sauvage. L'Amérique et la controverse coloniale, en France, au temps des guerres de religion (1555–1589)*, Geneva 2004; ID., *ChAMPLAIN, Lescarbot et la »Conférence« des Histoires (as in n. 12)*; ID., *Calvinistes et Cannibales. Les écrits protestants sur le Brésil français (1555–1560)*, in: ID. (ed.), *L'expérience huguenote au nouveau monde. (XVI^e siècle)*. Geneva 1996 (*Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 300), p. 77–119; Michael G. MORAN, *Inventing Virginia. Sir Walter Raleigh and the rhetoric of colonization 1584–1590*, New York 2007 (*Early American Literature and Culture Through the American Renaissance*, 7); Wolfgang NEUBER, *Fremde Welt im europäischen Horizont. Zur Topik der deutschen Amerika-Reiseberichte der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 1991 (*Philologische Studien und Quellen*, 121); Thomas Scanlan, *Colonial writing and the New World 1583–1671. Allegories of Desire*, Cambridge 1999.
- 19 Susanna BURGHARTZ, *Erfolg durch Scheitern? Zur Konstruktion von Überlegenheit im kolonialen Diskurs um 1600*, in: Renate DÜRR (ed.), *Expansionen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 2005, p. 307–324.
- 20 Out of the wide range of source collections available, see the following examples: H. P. BIGGAR (ed.), *Précurseurs de Jacques Cartier 1497–1534. Collection de documents relatifs à l'histoire primitive du Canada*. Ottawa 1911; Lucien Campeau (ed.), *La Première Mission d'Acadie (1602–1616)*, Rom 1967 (*Monumenta Novae Francia*, 1); ID., *La première mission des Jésuites en Nouvelle-France (1611–1613)*, Montreal 1972 (*Cahiers d'histoire des Jésuites*, 1); Edward Wright HAILE (ed.), *Jamestown Narratives. Eyewitness accounts of the Virginia Colony. The First Decade 1607–1617, Champlain 1998*; Suzanne Lussagnet (ed.), *Les Français en Amérique pendant la deuxième moitié du XVI^e siècle. Les Français en Floride. Textes de Jean Ribault, René de Laudonnière, Nicolas Le Challeux et Dominique de Gourgues*, Paris 1958; David Beers QUINN (ed.), *New American world. A documentary history of North America to 1612*, 5 vol., London 1979. Nowadays, the greater part of the contemporary publications is available online. The most important collections are Gallica [<http://gallica.bnf.fr>] and Early English Books Online [<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>].
- 21 So far, research has been conducted in London, Paris and Washington DC. The author would like to thank the respective German Historical Institutes for their hospitality.

Thus far, a broad variety of sources can be combined, although the traces left by the individual colonialization projects differ significantly in quantity and quality. Some were accompanied and followed by a printing campaign that survived through the centuries, whereas for others there is nothing left but fragmentary evidence and archeological remnants. All things considered, the available sources include: applications to monarchs and their councils concerning possible projects and their resolutions and considerations; letters patent and instructions given to the leaders and/or financial backers; advice in the form of letters or printed tracts; contracts with suppliers, colonists or ship owners; reports in both official and unofficial manuscripts, the first presented to the monarch and its council or investors and the second written in the form of journals or letters; documents of espionage and diplomacy; works of propaganda, mostly written to influence possible financiers and, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, more and more to recruit potential colonists; printed travel narratives, which served the same purpose but also offered a profit for their authors; reactions to all the sources mentioned so far in the form of comments, resolutions or replies, some of them available as manuscripts some in print; and finally, contemporary collections of all these sources edited with the intention to present a history of travel and discovery and to make an argument for future projects of colonization. Due to the comparative view of this study, it will be important to look at translations and reprints of those sources in other countries to understand which information was considered sufficiently important or interesting to be told and sold abroad²².

IV.

Mirroring the two leading questions, this study will comprise two steps. The first, basic step is to structure and analyze all the reasons for a lack of success given in the sources mentioned above. To compare all failed colonies, a model of concentric circles has been used during the ongoing research, offering both a temporal and spatial structure to organize the reasons mentioned. This includes four categories: European (the supporting motherland), Atlantic (the transfer), environmental (ecological and social conditions in the Americas) and colonial (reasons that occur within the colony itself).

The first category includes the political situation of the European monarchy, which is asked to protect and support a project, the available resources, the networks and influence of people supporting or opposing the project and diplomatic or economic factors that obstructed possible support. All of these factors could prevent a project from even setting sail.

Once a project had reached the Atlantic, several further factors could put an end to a colonization attempt. Storms and attacks by pirates or by ships under the flag of a rivaling monarch first spring to mind. However, it was much more important that

22 See for example: Maria HEGNER, *Die frühen Übersetzungen aus dem Englischen ins Französische am Beispiel der Nordamerikalliteratur (1572–1700)*, Berlin 2013.

sailors, colonists and investors could regard plunder as an opportunity²³. The hope of capturing Spanish ships and thus making a fortune in a single day influenced sailing routes, caused fatal delays, stirred up conflicts on board the ships and led to the foundation of colonies in places that could not support a population.

If the ships made the crossing and the people started to build their colony, its social and ecological environment obviously had a considerable influence on the outcome. In several cases, native populations put an early end to projects, either through violence or simply by denying contact and thus the exchange of goods and vital information about natural resources or dangers. This underlines the strong influence that the Native Americans had on the outcome of these early colonial projects²⁴.

Finally, even if no external factor hindered the foundation of a colony, the colonists themselves could turn things for the worse. Contemporaries wrote about mutinies, internal conflicts that led to open violence between factions or uncontrolled trade that endangered the colony's survival. More than once, no one involved cared about farming, because people expected to be supported from the motherland. Faced with hardships and with no empire of gold and riches in sight, they sometimes changed their minds and returned home.

Even if all these obstacles did not deter the colonists from building an outpost and establishing relations with the Native Americans, the moment of truth usually came in the following spring, when supplies were running low and a new harvest was far away. Obstacles could reappear in any of the four categories and prove fatal for the budding colony.

In Europe, a new war, an economic crisis or an internal religious conflict could shift priorities and earlier backers could leave the colony without support. Furthermore, the simple chance for a new lucrative investment could change people's minds and make them regard the colony as a losing business. On the ocean, the supply fleets were facing the same dangers and temptations mentioned above. Critical environmental factors on the shore like a seasonal lack of fresh water, a lack of firewood, limited soil fertility, the harshness of North American winters or the effect of a tropical climate on man and material often only came to light as time passed. Furthermore, the relationship with the Native Americans often changed during the first winter. Sometimes they moved away, leaving the Europeans without trading partners. If they stayed, the ever-growing demands of the chronically undersupplied col-

23 The influence sailors and navigators had on the outcome of a project has been rather neglected so far. See Jan GLETE, *Warfare at Sea 1500–1650. Maritime conflicts and the transformation of Europe*, London 2001, p. 46–60.

24 Intercultural encounters and interactions have proven to be a very productive field of research in the last two decades. Therefore, this study can build on an impressive amount of works that have proven the importance of the Native American people. See for example: Louise A. BREEN (ed.), *Converging Worlds. Communities and cultures in colonial America*, New York 2012; Colin Gordon CALLOWAY, *New worlds for all. Indians, Europeans and the Remaking of Early America*, Baltimore 1997; Frederic W. GLEACH, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia. A conflict of cultures*, Lincoln 1997; Karen Ordahl KUPPERMAN, *Indians and English. Facing off in Early America*, Ithaca 2000; Seth W. MALLIOS, *Exchange and Violence at Ajacan, Roanoke and Jamestown*, in: Dennis B. BLANTON und Julia A. KING (ed.), *Indian and European Contact in Context. The Mid-Atlantic Region*, Gainesville 2005, p. 126–148; Helen C. ROUNTREE (ed.), *Powhatan. Foreign relations 1500–1722*, Charlottesville 1993.

onists often resulted in rising tensions. Within the outpost itself, both the long distance from home and the awareness of being an isolated minority provoked a certain fear and aggressiveness that could lead to conflict between the colonists. Even if no fighting or mutiny occurred, the growing tension and the fear to be abandoned could rise up to a level when the colonists constructed boats or asked visitors to take them home.

When working with these categories, it is generally important to emphasize that in most cases the reasons for a failure occurred in combination and were mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, since these reasons are not simply considered to be facts but will be analyzed as arguments in a communication about the events, it is inevitable to look closely for contradictions and differing interpretations.

This leads to the second and most important part of the analysis: identifying typical forms of presenting and interpreting the reasons categorized beforehand. During the research, five basic strategies for discussing unsuccessful projects of colonization have been distinguished. Although they hardly occur in a pure form, they allow comparing and analyzing similarities and differences since the chains of reasoning in the English, French and German sources can each be pinpointed to be a certain combination of these basic strategies.

It has already become obvious that all of them have one thing in common: the persons using them are trying to deliver a message to the reader that is meant to influence further colonial activities. Most of them hoped to improve following projects by either emphasizing negative aspects to be avoided or by underlining positive ones to set examples. On the other hand, only few argued for abandoning further colonial activities.

The first kind of argumentation is a religious interpretation that includes a certain element of transcendence. Here, failure is presented as God's will. It can be understood as a punishment for moral weakness as well as a test of endurance and a chance to »buy« future success with appropriate behavior²⁵. This perspective is one that may clearly label the premature end of a colonization project a failure, while focusing on just one basic cause for it. In this line of thought, future colonists simply have to show more devotion to God and his commandments. There is no need to worry about better supplies or a more diplomatic approach towards the Native Americans, because only God can grant success. This argument could also be used when reflecting upon the failures of other nations. In such cases, the other nations' lack of success was presented as proof of God's will to reserve the new country for the writer's own people. Finding out whether the own or foreign colonists died of hunger, a lack of clean water, an attack or an unknown illness seemed rather irrelevant compared to the lesson about virtuousness which people felt the need to teach their readers.

The second strategy focuses on European conflicts and rivalries. Here, the outcome is openly described as negative and brought about by a European, Christian enemy²⁶. Writings that use this technique are often embedded in a broader, mostly

25 An example of this line of argumentation is offered in FULLER, *Voyages* in print (as in n. 18), p. 17–38.

26 The most prominent example is the destruction of the French Colony in Florida. There are many works on this topic; see for example: Frank LESTRINGANT, *Une Saint-Barthélemy Amér-*

anti-Spanish propaganda campaign and aim to boost morale and establish stereotypes. Therefore, existing propaganda can influence the way in which the events are described. Since the outcome is presented as a military defeat or even a massacre, the authors often demand an act of retaliation and further military activities while neglecting other obstacles and difficulties that the colony had to face before its destruction.

The third perspective, the accusation, is similar to the second. However, in this line of thought the writers describe the results as negative and use this to blame someone involved – either a person, like the commanding officer, or a group, like colonists who are members of a minority – as being responsible for the disappointing results. Accusations often provoked justifications that either emerged as attempts to shift the blame to others or questioned the negativity of the outcome in general. Therefore, accusations could often provoke new accusations as well as a reinterpretation of the events as an opportunity (the fourth strategy), as long as those responsible would be excluded in the next attempt.

The fourth strategy is to downplay potentially negative experiences or deny that the project was a failure, focusing rather on the experiences made and the new chances that they offer. In a broader sense, this mostly leads to diminishing the importance of the colonization effort itself while emphasizing the importance of the discovery of land and resources or relations established with native allies. Seen in this light, an unsuccessful settlement becomes a minor setback and is described as a mere »attempt« undertaken while conducting a successful expedition. Since this line of argument is mostly found as part of a promotional campaign, even if an author clearly names problems and offers advice for further attempts he usually still idealizes the country and its inhabitants and describes everything as being perfect for a future colonization.

The fifth and final strategy of describing and presenting unsuccessful colonies is the hero's tale²⁷. This seems to match the interests of an audience with a taste for strange lands and male European heroes who accepted the challenge of dangers and hardships in the wilderness. The heroic figure could be a single person, sometimes the author himself, or a certain group whose virtues in times of distress are praised. On the one hand, these stories offered – often in dramatic detail – an insight into the obstacles and problems a project of colonization had to face, while on the other hand they presented a rather simple way out of all trouble, namely the example of the heroic figure. Accordingly, the hero himself served as a role model that was sometimes

icaine: *L'agonie de la Floride Huguenote (Septembre–Octobre 1565)*. D'après les sources Espagnoles et Françaises, in: *ID.*, *L'expérience Huguenote* (as in n. 18); *McGRATH: The French in early Florida* (as in n. 17).

27 In comparison it seems that the hero's tale has had the greatest influence on later generations, especially through its depiction in popular culture and media. This has been examined closely in the case of Jacques Cartier. See: Alan GORDON, *The hero and the Historians. Historiography and the uses of Jacques Cartier. Vancouver 2010*; Jacques ROBERT, *L'invention d'un héros*, in: Fernand BRAUDEL (ed.), *Le monde de Jacques Cartier 1984. L'aventure au XVI^e siècle*. Paris 1984, p. 295–307. The contemporary focus on the single male heroic figure can still influence modern historians and their view on early colonial history. See for example: PICKETT, *The European Struggle to Settle* (as in n. 5), p. 225–231. Here the authors draw the conclusion that the fate of a colonial project mostly depended on the strength and bravery of its leaders.

adapted from ancient literature and sometimes – in the case of heroic groups – even used to construct positive proto-national stereotypes.

Although these five categories are artificial, they can be used to analyze similarities and differences. Examining whether they are combined or pitched against each other will open a window into the mental horizon of their time. Through synchronic and diachronic comparison, this study will be able to show whether these ways of determining potential failures and talking about them changed in time or differed between countries. Therefore, ultimately this study is meant to be a small step towards a broader understanding of what seems to have been failures in the history of early colonization and maybe even of »failure« as a category of thought in early modern Europe in general.

Summary

Between 1530 and 1615 would-be-colonizers from England, France and Germany undertook more than thirty attempts to establish permanent outposts in the Americas. These projects could and sometimes have been, due to their outcome, interpreted as failures. Through synchronic and diachronic comparison this ongoing research project aims to analyze to what extent contemporary presentations and perceptions of these projects changed in time or differed between countries. Key to this is a critical, deconstructivist approach towards the category »failure« itself.

Hitherto I have identified four spaces of action in which contemporaries located the reasons for a lack of success: European (the supporting monarchy), Atlantic (the transfer), environmental (ecological and social conditions in the Americas), and colonial (reasons that occur within the colony itself).

In a second step the focus shifts to the contemporary argumentative strategies used by the early modern authors and their connection to major discourses of the period. Five different categories will be examined: religious interpretations; connections with European political conflicts; the focus on the positive social and ecological environment of the attempted colony; internal accusations, and the presentation of a hero's tale.

The comparative analysis of these basic lines of presentation and argumentation will offer a new perspective on the history of seemingly unsuccessful projects in the history of early colonization.