Second ENIUGH-Congress: Session „Global Governance“

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In the following you find a report on the session „Global Governance“ of the Second European Congress on World and Global History. The general aim and structure of the congress are described at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=2309>

Session: Global Governance
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Empires produce hegemonic orders on a global scale. But what is an empire? What are the driving forces behind its establishment? What is the logic of its reproduction? How does an imperially ordered world function? And how can different empires best be compared? These are some of the questions the section „Global Governance“ addressed. It united papers on imperial enterprises from the 16th to the 21st century and scrutinized the erection, maintenance and defiance of imperial hierarchies.

The first panel („Empires“) analyzed both colonial and economic empires, looking beyond the state as the principal agent of power imposition. Instead, papers targeted individual and private actors and reassessed relationships between different agents of hegemonic enterprise. Personal relations shaped the Atlantic World of the 18th century, as members of trade networks navigated between family ties and employment rapports, between informal and state institutions (ALBANE FORESTIER, London,). Networks of a different kind were created by the technology of information transmission: both telegraphy in the late 19th and the internet of the 21st century possessed material centers and thus gave/give London and the U.S. respectively a certain power position, albeit fragmented and not centrally controlled (ROLAND WENZL-HUEMER, Berlin). Imperial metropoles fostered influential elites, whose worldviews preceded, sustained and challenged enterprises of expansion. Thus, 17th century Amsterdam saw both demands for and criticism of imperial domination, as expressed in the fine arts (ULRICH UFER, Friedrichshafen). Likewise, historians in 20th century Great Britain supported imperial visions of territoriality, while French historiography was more critical of officially propagated territorial hierarchy (ANNE FRIEDRICH, Leipzig). This panel thus pointed to the necessity of closely examining internal power relations in imperial undertakings. It suggested focusing on individual and private agency, on contingency, and on images that created and sustained patterns of imperial domination.

The second panel (part I of the panel series „Global Governance in an Age of Empires“) shifted attention to a much larger scale, both temporally and spatially. The contributors challenged established assumptions and theories about the functioning of imperial systems, addressing the following questions: 1) Did imperialism really facilitate the emergence of a world economy? PATRICK O’BRIEN (London) asserted that it did not, for trade was by and large limited to exchange within one empire. Openness to trade with outside territories was therefore rather impeded than enhanced. 2) Are the U.S. really an empire? ANTHONY HOPKINS (Austin) maintained that, despite widespread use of the term in contemporary writing on U.S. foreign policy, it is inappropriate. U.S. influence today is predominantly informal and without territorial basis, in contrast to the historical empires frequently used for comparison. 3) Was High Imperialism really war-prone? JOHN DARWIN (Oxford) pointed out that the phase epitomized by the Scramble for Africa saw very little actual fighting among European powers. Contrary to scholarship’s near-dogmatic belief, the inter-European state system was characterized by peaceful cooperation. The panel as a whole thus highlighted a need for careful examination of basic assumptions about empire. Participants called for thorough definitions, especially in cross-territorial and cross-temporal comparisons of imperial structures.

The third panel („Global Governance in an Age of Empires II“) laid an emphasis on conflicts over imperial governance in both metropolitan and colonial arenas, stressing the importance of individuals and interpersonal relations. In the aftermath of the 1930s economic crisis, access to raw materials was disputed between European powers. Financial experts played a major role in League of Nations negotiations and thus in the nexus of international relations, economic and geopolitical strategies (GEROLD KROZEWSKI, Sheffield). Negotiations and interpersonal relations of a different
kind are central to economic markets. In colonial West Africa, local brokers and producers retained a certain autonomy from European merchants, despite efforts to limit competition between the latter; to traders in London, on the other hand, speculative gains were much more important than the actual output of colonial mining (GARETH AUSTIN, London and IAN PHIMISTER, Sheffield). The nature of information available, a central element in the functioning of markets, can also be crucial in a violent pre-independence situation. Rumors and witchcraft accusations in late colonial Northern Rhodesia hence contributed to an atmosphere of fright, a fierce nationalism and conflict escalation (JAN-BART GEWALD, Leiden). This panel’s emphasis on antagonism in imperial situations thus called for a focus on the conflicting nature of imperial endeavors, be it in economic competition, between colonial powers or on the spot, in differing interpretations or diverging political aims.

Panel IV („Global Governance in an Age of Empires III“) had an explicitly economic focus: it looked at the way imperial economic systems worked. The Spanish Empire, unlike the British or Dutch Empires, did not extract wealth from the periphery, but redistributed imperial gains within the colonies. It was thus run in an inexpensive way, as little money was spent on expansion or defence (REGINA GRAFE, Chicago / ALEJANDRA IRIGOIN, Ewing, NJ). Economic relations between Great Britain, India and Japan in the first half of the 20th century were beneficial to all three – with India specializing in the growing of raw cotton, Japan in the production of textiles and Britain in the provision of financial services. Both India’s and Japan’s development were enhanced (SHIGE-RU AKITA, Osaka). The influential „Reversal of Fortune“ thesis holds that the poorest world regions today were the wealthiest 500 years ago. For Africa however, this reckoning is based on unreliable data: Africa might have been wealthy in 1500, but we cannot know for sure (GARETH AUSTIN, London). Overall, the panel pointed to a longue durée perspective of imperial economics: What were the longterm economic effects of European expansion? Were imperial systems always extractive or could they have been beneficial to the periphery? Ultimately, it cautioned against generalizations and backward projections.

To examine imperial governance on a global scale, it seems safe to conclude, this section suggests we reassess our basic assumptions about empires. Such a reassessment seems necessary in three main areas: in the internal structuring of empires and the relationships that enabled their existence; in the economic functioning of individual empires and their longue durée outcomes; and in the inter-European conflicts and cooperation that shaped the system of global imperial governance. Networks of relationships, power structures on an individual or an imperial level, availability of information or the way imperial rule was institutionalized will be useful angles of analysis in this endeavor – or so the section indicates.

Program of the Session:

Panel: Empires, chair: Eike Karin Ohlendorf, Universität Leipzig, DE
Albane Forestier: „Mercantilism in practice: the role of private enterprise in shaping the eighteenth-century „Atlantic World“
Roland Wenzlhuemer: „Global Communication Networks as Structural Representations: From the British to the American World“
Ulrich Ufer: „Promises of Empire and Discontents with Empire during the Dutch Golden Age“
Anne Friedricks: „Imperial World Orders between Continuity and Change: The Historiographies of Britain and France in the Age of Decolonisation“

Panel: Global Governance in an Age of Empires I, chair: Regina Grafe, Northwestern University Chicago, US
Patrick O’Brien: „Two Empires and Global Governance: The Pax Britannica as a Prelude for American Hegemony“
Antony G. Hopkins: „Comparing British and American „Empires“

Panel: Global Governance in an Age of Empires II, chair: John Darwin, University of Oxford, UK
Gerold Krozewski: „Raw materials, colonies, and global governance in interwar Europe“
Gareth Austin and Ian Phimister: „Making and Re-making Markets: Colonialism and Imperialism in West Africa, c.1884-1914“

Panel: Global Governance in an Age of Empires III, chair: Ian Phimister, University of Sheffield,
UK
Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin: „The Political Economy of Spanish Imperial Rule Revisited“
Shigeru Akita: „The British Empire and Industrialization-based International Order of Asia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century“