

Trajectories of Decolonization: Elites and the Transformation from the Colonial to the Postcolonial

Veranstalter: Jost Dülffer (University of Cologne) und Marc Frey (Jacobs University, Bremen)

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The field of decolonization studies has undergone significant changes in recent years. As new approaches have proliferated and research interests have expanded, it has become one of the most vibrant fields of historical inquiry - always in flux, yet constantly yielding new perspectives and surprising insights.

The conference added its own distinctive note to the large body of scholarship: by bringing together historians working on such different issues as political imagination, modernization, identity, intelligence gathering or education, it not only mapped the diversity of current approaches, but also offered an alternative framework for understanding a process that was marked by paramount complexity.

Indeed, decolonization involved more than a transfer of political power, JOST DÜLFFER (University of Cologne) and MARC FREY (Jacobs University, Bremen) pointed out in their introduction. Rather, it was a „multilayered process“ of social, economic and cultural transformation which took place on a wide geographic scale, unfolded with varying speeds, and peaked around 1960. Key for the transition from colonial to postcolonial times was the formation and transformation of elites, conceptualized as social groups who command over certain resources (political support, economic power, symbolic resources such as communication or knowledge). Noting that these groups had not yet found the attention they deserved, the organizers proposed to examine their trajectories on three distinct levels: by looking at indigenous elites, metropolitan elites, and the international context which often brought third-party interventions.

Accordingly, the conference first addressed the question of indigenous elites in Asia and the Middle East. Taking Ronald Robinson's „theory of collaboration“ as a point of departure, PAUL KRATOSKA (National University of Singapore) identified four major allies of the colonial powers in Southeast Asia - royalty and aristocracies, trading minorities, ethnic minorities, and the civil service

- and showed how World War II opened up opportunities for new nationalist elites. ESTHER MÖLLER (Jacobs University Bremen) explained how French schools in Lebanon on the one hand became ambivalent spaces of nationalist activity, yet at the same time remained traditional institutions of exclusive elite education - well illustrated by the fact that almost all Lebanese Presidents were educated there. JUDITH BROWN (University of Oxford) focused on the „international superstar“ (Andreas Eckert) of decolonization - British-educated Jawaharlal Nehru. Brown outlined Nehru's personal and institutional „dilemmas of a colonial inheritance“ which severely limited his influence and eventually led to a life-time of struggle with divergent local Indian groups at great personal cost. Three important findings followed from the general discussion, two of them further highlighting Nehru's special role by putting it in comparative perspective. In contrast to the Lebanese elite, that strove to conserve social structures, Nehru appeared as a fierce advocate of social and economic change. And while neighbouring Pakistan soon hit the road to military dictatorship, conference participants largely agreed that it was Nehru's passionate belief in parliamentarism which prevented Indian democracy from a similar fate. The discussion also settled the question whether the concept of „elites“ would primarily be a horizontal or a vertical concept, with most participants agreeing that it necessarily has to include both axes.

The second panel turned to metropolitan elites. In comparing the experiences, problems, and shifting identities encountered by the returning „middle-class aristocracies“ of former European colonials, ELIZABETH BUETTNER (York University) shed light on the long and complicated adjustments of European nations to the postcolonial era. MARC FREY (Jacobs University Bremen) examined the motivations and modes of behaviour of Dutch political, business, and functional elites during and after the decolonization process, concluding that the Dutch „police action“ was as much a result of „consensus democracy“ as of social pillarization. Also, the question of continuity loomed large again, when Frey pointed out that functional elites such as colonial administrators often returned to the former colonies in new clothing, for example as development experts. Next, DANIEL MOLLENHAUER (University of Munich) described how French core beliefs in „grandeur“ and the civilizing mission translated into contra-

dictory ad-hoc measures against the decolonization drive, comprising repression, economic development projects, democratization, and federalization.

The first day of fruitful discussions ended with FREDERICK COOPER's (New York University) spirited keynote speech on the political imagination of elites in French West Africa, 1945-1960. Taking aim at Benedict Anderson's dichotomy between empire and nation-state, Cooper underscored that the territorial nation-state was far from being the only grand design for postcolonial times. Nor was nationalism necessarily formed in opposition to empire. Instead, visions of an African-French community built on federal institutions and „inter-citizenship“ remained important political alternatives, as African leaders strove to reconcile African particularities with social and economic security.

HUGUES TERTRAIS (Université de Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne) and CHRISTOPH MARX (University of Duisburg-Essen) examined French and South African elites. Tertrais disentangled the conflicting interests of French political, economic, and military officials in Indochina. Initially caught between colonial nostalgia and cost-calculations, French leaders nevertheless ultimately decided to withdraw from Indochina, Tertrais showed. Christoph Marx, on the other hand, illustrated how the Verwoerdian homeland policy became a rallying point for Apartheid's Broederbond and new collaborative elites in the Transkei and Lesotho - among them Chief Kaiser Matanzima and Chief Leabua Jonathan - who entered a political partnership with the Apartheid regime built on campaign funds and organizational support provided by the Broederbond.

Military elites were covered by MANJEET S. PARDESI (University of Indiana) who compared India and Pakistan. Parsedi concluded that the dominant role of the military in Pakistan was borne out of early structural deficiencies, in particular the absence of a viable political center and loose party structures. MARTIN THOMAS (University of Exeter) introduced elites of a special kind - colonial intelligence providers. Although formally not part of the higher colonial service class, intelligence providers nevertheless occupied a crucial place in the colonial state, as they furnished information about indigenous societies, managed the flow of knowledge, controlled political participation, and cracked down on uprisings, if with diminishing success in the 1950s. One of the big-

gest colonial wars, Algeria, took center stage in STEPHAN MALINOWSKI's (University of Freiburg) paper on „military-civilian elite units and the search for 'modern men'“. Characterizing the Algerian war as a „war of modernization“, Malinowski argued that Western attempts to transform and dominate Algerian society in order to control the direction of the modernization process created a „Frankenstein's nightmare“, a paradox ensemble of development initiatives coupled with massive colonial violence that closely reflected intra-European developments of the 1950s. Among other things, the ensuing discussion revolved also around the ideology of consumption - another potential area of research.

MICHAEL BOLLIG (University of Cologne) and OUSSEYNOU FAYE (Université C.A. Diop, Dakar) highlighted two different kinds of elite activism in changing African environments. Bollig reviewed the strategies of North-Western Namibian chiefs employed in the long process of decolonization. In place since the 1920s, the chiefs for example masterfully managed to defend their powerful position in the 1960s by embracing the South African homeland policy, while they later preserved their authority vis-à-vis the Namibian government by referring to the international norm of decentralization. In addition, Ousseynou Faye examined how Senegalese teachers became active within and beyond the realm of education by launching symbolic steps of resistance against the signs of colonial domination, expanding literary production, and forming powerful academic unions. Generally it was agreed in the discussion that the concept of local governance could be useful in understanding decolonization at local and grass-roots levels. Also, some participants raised the question whether decolonization in fact consolidated a Western European male-dominated gender order. While the discussion did not settle those issues, it nevertheless marked further important avenues for future research.

The following panel centred on Sekou Touré and Julius Nyerere. MAIRI MacDONALD (University of Toronto) described Touré's harsh uses of power against competing Guinean elites, which ranged from the elimination of traditional chiefdoms in 1957 and the attacks on intellectuals in 1961 to the „fifth column“ purges against alleged Portuguese invaders in 1971. Likewise, ANDREAS ECKERT (Humboldt-University, Berlin) demonstrated the value of biographical approaches

by tracing the political career of Julius Nyerere. Eckert found striking continuities: a „product of the colonial state“, Nyerere engaged in a continuous effort to combine elements of European modernity with African traditions, most famously on display when Nyerere’s project of African socialism turned into a paternalistic and coercive civilizing mission with grave social consequences.

Other important players were economic elites. In this section, THOMAS LINDBLAD’s paper (University of Leiden) dealt with emerging business elites in newly independent Indonesia. While older scholarship painted a grim picture of the Indonesian economy, Lindblad stressed the new élan of the business world after independence which elevated indigenous and Chinese businesses to leadership status. For Liverpool shipping companies, though, the decolonization of markets had largely negative effects. In this context, NICHOLAS J. WHITE (Liverpool John Moores University) illustrated how the rise of new competitors, flag discriminations, and cargo reservations coming along with new nation-states confronted Liverpool companies with rapidly changing business conditions and ultimately led to their decline. Last, DANIEL MAUL (University of Giessen) discussed the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its impact on new elites. Those influences were manifold, Maul pointed out: at the same time actor and forum, the ILO functioned as much as a place of representation for new elites as it was a starting point for domestic careers or a transmitter of Western expert knowledge.

The concepts of „knowledge“ and „education“ also got prominent play in the following section, which explored the juncture of decolonization and the Cold War. First, URBAN VAHSEN (University of Cologne) gave a survey of the broadening contact zones between the European Economic Community (EEC) and its African associates. Greeted with much scepticism at the beginning, Vahsen argued, the EEC eventually succeeded in turning initial African resentment toward partnership into acceptance by sending experts or pamphlets and organizing information tours or symposia. At the same time, the Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller foundations entered the Cold War educational competition with powerful force. Well-funded elite institutions with close ties to the U.S. government, those foundations soon became fore-runners of Western development aid and African elite formation, as CORINNA UNGER (GHI Washington

D.C.) observed. In an effort to create pro-Western societies, all three foundations invested heavily in African education by funding entire schools, universities, and teacher education projects, before they abandoned the top-down approach of elite-focused knowledge transfers and turned to bottom-up concepts on a wider social scale in the 1970s. In addition, ANDREAS HILGER’s (University of Hamburg) paper described the Soviet educational offensive toward India - a prime example of systemic Soviet limitations. Marked by high ambitions and ringing rhetoric, the offensive in fact never got off the ground: by 1956 Soviet officials counted „three to four“ Indian students enrolled in Soviet universities.

The conference concluded with a roundtable discussion led by JOST DÜLFFER and DIETMAR ROTHERMUND (University of Heidelberg). In terms of ground left uncovered, Dülffer noted that the „symbolic imagery“ of decolonization had been neglected as had been the Cold War and modernization theory. Yet he also found that the concept of elites as social groups had proven useful, since it captured well the dynamics of social ascent and descent. With regard to the trajectories of decolonization Dülffer argued that there may be no clear answer, since elites followed different patterns of behaviour as they occupied different strategic positions after independence.

Indeed, one might add, it were precisely the comparative perspectives taken by contributors which made the differing trajectories of elite formation and transformation visible - an important accomplishment in itself. Besides, the conference marked out several possible routes future researchers may take. Clearly, decolonization’s symbolic dimension and its intersections with the Cold War may be areas worth of further in-depth studies. But so may be life-stories, consumption, changing concepts of home, governance, gender issues, modernity, knowledge transfers, and education, to name a few. The „multilayered process“ of decolonization still leaves historians enough challenges to grapple with.

Conference Program:

THURSDAY, October 9

Jost Dülffer, University of Cologne/Marc Frey, Jacobs University, Bremen:

Introduction

PANEL I: Indigenous Elites in Asia and the Midd-

le East – Old and New, Chair: Dietmar Rothermund, University of Heidelberg

Paul Kratoska, National University of Singapore: Southeast Asian Elites and the Construction of the 'Nation'

Esther Möller, Jacobs University Bremen: Negotiating Decolonization in the Classroom: Franco-Lebanese Interaction in the 1940s

Judith Brown, University of Oxford: Nehru - the dilemmas of a colonial inheritance

PANEL II: Metropolitan Elites and the End of Empire, Chair: Jost Dülffer, University of Cologne

Elizabeth Buettner, York University: It was not displeasing to be thus assured that I, too, was decolonizable: European Colonialists and the End of Empire in Comparative Context

Marc Frey, Jacobs University Bremen: Dutch Elites and the End of Empire

Daniel Mollenhauer, Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich: French Elites and the wave of decolonization around 1960

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Frederick Cooper, New York University: Alternatives to Nationalism: The Political Imagination of Elites in French West Africa, 1945-1960

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

PANEL III: Metropolitan, Settler and Transnational Elites and the End of Empire, Chair: Corinna Unger, German Historical Institute, Washington

Hugues Tertrais, Université de Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne: French Elites and the Decolonization of Indochina

Christoph Marx, University of Duisburg-Essen: Verwoerdian Apartheid and African political elites in South Africa, 1950-1968

PANEL IV: Military-Administrative Elites, Chair: Benedikt Stuchtey, German Historical Institute, London

Manjeet S Pardesi, University of Indiana, Bloomington: South Asian Military Elites in Comparison: Pakistan and India

Martin Thomas, University of Exeter: Intelligence Providers and the Fabric of the Late

Colonial State

Stephan Malinowski, University of Freiburg: Drivers of Change: Military-civilian elite units and the search for 'modern men' in the context of colonial wars during the 1950s

PANEL V a: Indigenous Elites in Africa – Old and New, Chair: Jost Dülffer, University of Cologne

Michael Bollig, University of Cologne: Chieftaincies and chiefs in northern Namibia: Intermediaries of Power between Traditionalism, Modernisation and Democratisation

Ousseynou Faye, Université C.A Diop, Dakar: Parcours de l'instituteur sénégalais de la post-colonie: vers une sortie de l'élite ?

PANEL V b: Indigenous Elites in Africa – Old and New, Chair: Marc Frey, Jacobs University, Bremen

Mairi S. MacDonald, University of Toronto: Sekou Touré and the Management of Elites in Guinea

Andreas Eckert, Humboldt University Berlin: Julius Nyerere and the Project of African Socialism

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11

PANEL VI: Economic elites: Renegotiating the market space from the local to the global, Chair: Jakob Vogel, University of Cologne

Nicholas White, Liverpool John Moores University: Liverpool business elites and the end of empire

J. Thomas Lindblad, University of Leiden: Emerging business elites in newly independent Indonesia

Daniel Maul, University of Giessen: International Organizations and their impact on new elites during the period of independence

PANEL VII: The Cold War and Elites of the Third World, Chair: Anja Kruke, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bonn

Urban Vahsen, University of Cologne: The Formation of African elites vis-à-vis the EEC-process in Francophone Africa

Corinna Unger, German Historical Institute Washington, DC:

United States, decolonization and the education of Third World elites

Andreas Hilger, University of Hamburg:
The Soviet Union and the Socialist camp: Elite formation for the Third World

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Commentators:
Jost Dülffer, University of Cologne
Dietmar Rothermund, University of Heidelberg

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