Making Europe: The Global Origins of the Old World

Veranstalter: Sven Beckert, Harvard University, USA; Dominic Sachsenmaier, Duke University, USA; Julia Seibert,Universität Trier, Germany
Datum, Ort: 28.05.2010-29.05.2010,
Bericht von: Christof Dejung, Department of History and Sociology, University of Konstanz

One of the most fascinating intellectual challenges of the day is the question how to write European history in the age of globalization and under the defiance of postcolonial theory. Sure enough, there is no lack of books about European history. In search of a common history of the now unified continent, several scholars have begun exploring the potential parameters of a new European history, which would no longer be written as an interaction between distinct national states. In contrast, they are aiming to identify the European past as an amalgam of a common cultural foundation, or as the manifestation of historically rooted ideas of „Europe". While the resulting studies are quite different from one another, they all have one thing in common: The rest of the world does not play much of a role. These works all advocate a view of Europe that explains Europe largely out of itself. In contrast, postcolonial theorists and global historians have investigated the history of the European continent within its global context for several years, claiming that European history cannot be understood without its entanglement with the extra-European world.

For this reason, the conference organizers saw the time ripe to challenge the way European history has been written until now and to test a new approach to the history of the continent. As SVEN BECKERT (Cambridge, USA) explained in his introductory remarks, the long-term objective of this endeavor was a cosmopolitan European history that was aware of global connections and dependencies as well as of regional particularities within the European continent. He particularly emphasised the fact that this might be the first conference on European history where most of the participants came from extra-European countries, and pointed out that the approach to European history might be quite different when done from Lumbashi, Seoul or Buenos Aires than from Paris, London or Freiburg. JÖRN LEONHARD (Freiburg, Germany) emphasised in his welcome address the significance of the conference for the Freiburg Research Institute for Advanced Studies School of History which hosted the venue in order to scrutinize the relevance of historical containers such as the nation state, Europe or „the West".

The first section investigated the role of global connections for economic and scientific developments. ADITYA MUKHERJEE (New Delhi, India) challenged in his talk the notion that colonialism led to a modernization of India by pointing out that the subcontinent had been a global economic power for many centuries, which exported cotton textiles all over the world before coming under colonial rule. The only thing Europe had to offer at that time had been gold robbed from Latin America. Colonialism, in his view, was motivated by the Europeans' craving for land, labour, capital and knowledge, a notion he illustrated by alluding that India delivered between 5 to 10 per cent of its annual GPD to Britain for close to two centuries and therewith financed the emergence of the British Empire as a hegemonic power in the 19th century.

MARCEL NGANDU MUTOMBO (Lumbashi, DR Congo) illustrated the colonial world order by referring to the interdependence between Belgium and its colony Congo. Not only was Congo compelled to ship all its exports to Belgium, but it also had to purchase all imports from Belgium after 1908 and was financing the war efforts of Belgium during World War Two. In addition, Belgian scholars were able to study the effects of certain African plants against illnesses such as Malaria, which is why Mutombu argued that the colonial relation supported processes of modernisation in the Belgian motherland.

A global perspective on European industrialization was also provided by KENNETH POMERANZ (Irvine, USA). He pointed out that until the end of the 18th century, the economic development of China was quite similar to that of Europe and productivity in the Yangzi Delta was even higher than anywhere in Europe. Why did this change by the end

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

of the 19th century? Pomeranz recited the findings of his by now classic book „Great Divergence“: First, Europe could outplay the rest of the world economically by the use of coal as energy source. Second, imports of raw materials and foodstuffs allowed population growth and cheaper production in the Old World.

Also PRATIK CHAKRABARTI (Kent, UK) alluded to the non-Western origins of many European scientific discoveries by referring to both, the fact that many materials brought to Europe in the course of European expeditions promoted the development of Occidental science and to the intellectual re-orientation that took place in the West after the discoveries of non-European inventories of knowledge.

In his comment, MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN (Amsterdam, Netherlands) challenged the notion that colonialism had only had the objective of economic gain by pointing out that many colonies, particularly French and German ones, had not been profitable. He argued that colonialism promoted to some extent the modernization of colonial possessions, a notion to which Mukherjee contradicted vehemently. Pomeranz suggested not to limit investigations on British imperialism to the relation between colony and metropole. He pointed out that the real beneficiaries of colonial rule in India had been Germany and the US, since the British surplus in the trade with the subcontinent allowed them in turn to augment their exports to the UK.

Whereas the effect of global relations on the development of Europe was evident in the sphere of the economy, things seemed less clear with the topic of the second panel, which embraced state formation. JEREMY ADELMAN (Princeton, USA) investigated the extra-European origins of European revolutions by combining the argument of Charles Tilly that the rivalries between European states led to a centralization of state power with that of Immanuel Wallerstein that states have to be understood as parts of the capitalist world system.

The presentation of ERIC D. WEITZ (Minneapolis, USA) explored the role of the right of self-determination for the shaping of the modern European state system. He showed that the concept, originally a Western innovation, backed the political demands of non-European populations in the colonial period and influenced Western politics through the movement of decolonisation after 1945.

JIE-HYUN LIM (Seoul, South Korea) asked about the influence of colonialism on mass dictatorship. He argued that modernity was not something that evolved in the Western metropole to spread out to the periphery but was the result of transnational exchange. In his eyes the vision of ethnic purity, with which National Socialism was obsessed, had its analogy in the racist underpinnings of the colonial world view.

In the discussion, several participants criticized that the equalization of colonialism and fascism, as made by Lim, was not really convincing. Furthermore, they complained that in Adelman's presentation the role of resources from colonial possessions for the European powers' ability to wage war had not been pursued adequately.

In the evening's key note address, ENRIQUE DUSSEL (Mexico City, Mexico) advocated a non-Eurocentric approach to the role of Europe in world history. He brought forward that traditional patterns of interpretation neglected the influences of non-European regions for the development of Europe, for instance the relations between ancient Greece and Mesopotamia, Egypt and Phoenica for the design of ancient philosophy or the role of Chinese or Arabian knowledge for the deployment of European Enlightenment.

The third panel examined ideas and political cultures. SELÇUK ESENBEL (Boğazici, Turkey) presented global dimensions of European Nationhood. She illustrated this by mentioning the way Europeans were beginning to compare themselves to Asian civilisations in the Age of Exploration and the long-standing struggles between Christianity and Islam. By referring to the diplomatic relations between Western Europe and Russia or the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, she pointed out that the boundaries of Europe were often less than clear and that economic exchange and political relations often transcended the continent's borders.

The relations between the Papacy and Africa were the topic of LAMIN SANNEH's (New Haven, USA) talk. He showed that relations between the Catholic Church and Africa we-

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

re often initiated by Africans. African Catholics for instance sent letters of inquiry to Rome about how to bring their traditional customs in accordance with Christian instructions or they complained about the discrepancy between religious orders and the behaviour of Christian slave holders. In the colonial age, missionaries were an integral part of European expansion. As a result, the number of converts to Christianity was rising after the mid-19th century, therewith challenging the status of Islam as the most important religion on the African continent.

GAURI VISWANATHAN (Columbia, USA) illustrated the role of colonialism in European mass-education programs by referring to the fact that the British literary canon had been defined first in colonial India before being introduced to the educational system in the UK. The *Bildungsroman* was a literary form to furnish individuals with social norms in order to integrate them into modern nation states. However convincing this insight, the extent to which one can really identify the colonies as social laboratories for modernity in this regard became not quite clear. Also in other European states, a literary canon was installed in the 19th century in order to establish a common national culture without educational bureaucracies having made a detour to colonial possessions. As in other presentations of the second and third panel, it was not always evident how far developments in Europe could be attributed to global connections and not to internal processes. Generally, one could not help feeling that in the field of state formation and political ideology the role of global entanglements for European history still needed further research.

In the fourth and final panel, which was about society and culture, MARCEL VAN DER LINDEN (Amsterdam, Netherlands) asked how work and management regimes on colonial plantations influenced labor relations in European factories. He argued for close interrelations by pointing out that throughout the 19th century, pamphlets on the management of plantation work circulated among European executives and European officials travelled to the Caribbean or Asian countries to investigate the organisation of work on the plantations.

JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (Konstanz, Germany) investigated the extent to which European composers between the 17th and the early 20th century had been influenced by music traditions from other parts of the world. His findings suggested that although exotic motives were used in some operas and Claude Debussy was deeply impressed by extra-European musicians he heard at the 1899 world exhibition in Paris, European classical music was not fundamentally altered by these influences but largely based on European traditions alone.

NAOMI DAVIDSON (Ottawa, Canada) revealed how the presence of Muslim immigrants from former colonies challenged the cultural identity of countries such as France or Great Britain. In her opinion, the Muslim immigrants were not aiming to adapt to the Christian majority but to unify the diverse Muslim groups that had found themselves brought together in their new home countries. She compared this strategy to that of the Jewish minority in former centuries as a way to reclaim an adequate position within the national community.

The influences of extra-European architectural styles to modern architecture were portrayed by JORGE LIERNUR (Buenos Aires, Argentina). He showed how the Nazis criticized this architectural style as non-European, Arabic, or Jewish. Liernur pointed out that the Nazis were not entirely wrong in making this assumption, since architects as Mies van der Rohe had deliberately adopted the Mediterranean flat roof style in order to realize cubistic abstractions of houses in actual construction.

In her comment, GAURI VISWANATHAN (New York, USA) expounded the problems of the term „origin" that was used in the subtitle of the conference. In her opinion, it made not much sense to search for the extra-European origins of a cultural artefact such as flat roof constructions, since they were used quite differently in Europe than in the Mediterranean. In the discussion, several participants challenged the modernity of the colonial plantation system and its impact on industrial work by referring to the fact that similar labor regimes had been known in ancient Egypt or China.

As an introduction to the concluding discussion, DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

(Durham, USA) recapitulated the aim of the organizers to challenge the notion of Europe as a monolithic entity and to investigate interactions with the rest of the world. While there seemed to be a general agreement that global entanglements were important in the field of economic exchange, topics such as state formation or social and cultural developments are until now mostly described from an internalist perspective. However, as Sachsenmaier pointed out, it would be worthwhile to investigate also these topics within their international and imperial context.

In the following discussion, several participants confirmed that it would be worthwhile to continue the debate. However, as ANDREAS ECKERT (Berlin, Germany) pointed out, it would be crucial to invite scholars from the field of European history who were critical towards the approaches that were presented at this conference and would thus compel the advocates of entangled history to sharpen their arguments. One obvious flaw of many presentations was that they claimed global causalities without really depicting the cause-and-effect chain, as JÖRN LEONHARD (Freiburg, Germany) pointed out. As a consequence, it was often not clear if a certain global connection really *made* Europe or if there was merely an unrelated coexistence of European and non-European concepts.

Nevertheless, the conference was evidence to the fact that a global perspective on European history could bring new insights into the development of the continent. How the results of global and postcolonial history have to be included into the approaches of classical European social and political history and the extent to which they will urge European historians to revise their findings is still an open question. However, one of considerable heuristic value.

Conference Overview:

Sven Beckert (Cambridge, USA): Introductory remarks

Jörn Leonhart (Freiburg, Germany): Welcome address

Section I: Economic Development; Science
Chair: Ibrahima Thioub (Dakar, Senegal)

Aditya Mukherjee (New Delhi, India): Colonial India in the World Economy and the Shaping of the Modern British Economy

Marcel Ngandu Mutombo (Lubumbashi, DR of Congo): La Dépendance de la Belgique du Congo

Ken Pomeranz (Irvine, USA): A New World of Growth: European Industrialization in Global Context

Pratik Chakrabarty (Kent, UK): Globalization, Science and the History of Conquest: The Non-West and the making of Western Science

Comment: Marcel Van der Linden (Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Section II: State Formation
Chair: Andreas Eckert (Berlin, Germany)

Jeremy Adelman (Princeton, USA): The Extra-European Origins of European Revolutions

Eric D. Weitz (Minneapolis, USA): Imperial Governance and the Shaping of the Modern European State System

Lim Jie-Hyun (Seoul, South Korea): The Impact of Colonialism on European Forms of Mass Dictatorship

Comment: Mridula Mukherjee (New Delhi, India)

Keynote Address

Introduction: Julia Seibert (Trier, Germany):

Enrique Dussel (Mexico City, Mexico): Modern Europe in World History: A Non-Eurocentric Interpretation

Section III: Ideas and Political Cultures
Chair: Mridula Mukherjee (New Delhi, India)

Selçuk Esenbel (Boğazici, Turkey): The Global Dimensions of European Nationhood

Lamin Sanneh (New Haven, USA): The Papacy and Lessons from Africa: Gray's Anatomy of Christianity

Gauri Viswanathan (New York, USA): Making Subjects: The Role of Colonialism in European Mass-Education Programs

Comment: David Simo (Yaoundé, Cameroon)

Section IV: Society and Culture

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

Chair: David Simo (Yaoundé, Cameroon)

Marcel van der Linden (Amsterdam, Netherlands): Outside In: How Colonial Managers and Workers Shaped European Labor Relations

Jürgen Osterhammel (Konstanz, Germany): Global Horizons of European Music-Making, 17th to Early 20th Century

Naomi Davidson (Ottawa, Canada): Colonial Islams, Metropolitan Islams: Secularism and the Nation in France and Britain?

Jorge Liernur (Buenos Aires, Argentina): The Extra-European Origins of European Modernism

Comment: Gauri Viswanathan (New York, USA)

Concluding Discussion

Concluding remarks: Dominic Sachsenmaier (Durham, USA)

Tagungsbericht *Making Europe: The Global Origins of the Old World*. 28.05.2010-29.05.2010, , in: H-Soz-Kult 27.07.2010.

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.