The City, the Nation and the World around 1900 – Imperial Intersections and Colonial Connections

Veranstalter: Sasha Disko / Tim Opitz, Berlin Datum, Ort: 10.06.2010-12.06.2010, Berlin Bericht von: Nathanael Kuck, Universität Leipzig; Patrick Hege, Fordham University, New York City

The recent surge in inquiries into the historical origins of global connections has so far brought some promising results but often lacked a sense of specific locality. A workshop at the Center for Metropolitan Studies of the Technische Universität Berlin on June 10-12 aimed at addressing this issue and placing "the urban [...] as the central site of intersection of globalizing processes and nation-state formation".¹ The meeting centered around the concept of 'imperial cities' and was organized by Sasha Disko (Berlin) and Tim Opitz (Berlin), both fellows at the Transatlantic Graduate Program New York – Berlin.

The keynote speech was delivered by DAVID GILBERT (London) who in 1999 published with Felix Driver the influential volume "Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity".2 Starting at the end of the 19th century and concluding with the present, Gilbert chose London's Hungerford Bridge as an urban artefact in which aesthetic conceptions, imperial ambitions and social contradictions intersected. The functional iron railway bridge was built in 1864 and brought the commuters from South London to Charing Cross station. Several painters, including Claude Monet and Oscar Kokoschka, represented the bridge as an example of London's specific industrial modernity. At the same time urban-developers saw it as an unsightly intrusion that betrayed the city's imperial ambitions. Though plans to demolish it were never executed, Hungerford Bridge became a symbol for social division in public debates, while many homeless occupied the physical as well as imagined spaces in and around the bridge. In recent years the bridge has undergone a significant architectural transformation. Gilbert argued that the redesigned bridge - with its new walkways and surveillance system – fits anew into London as a global city dominated by consumerism and spectacle. In his presentation, Gilbert also demonstrated the fruitfulness of choosing a specific locality for historical research, making visible social contradictions and developments. Similar approaches were well represented among the contributors at the workshop.

Following the case of London, over half of the workshop contributions dealt with 'traditional' imperial cities: Vienna, Brussels and SABRINA K. RAHMAN (Berkley, California) analyzed the celebration of Franz Joseph's Diamond Jubilee in Vienna in 1908. The procession was intended to represent both the imperial legacy of the House of Habsburg and, in the form of a "parade of nations", the multiethnic composition of the empire. Rahman focused on the objects of applied arts that the central government commissioned for the Jubilee. The outcome of the procession, Rahman argued, had a dual and contradictory effect. On the one hand they represented the overarching imperial ambitions of the House of Habsburg, and on the other, they were signifiers of the rising national consciousness of the empire's subcomponents.

Moving away from the focus on material objects, DAVID PELEMAN (Ghent) examined the urban planning of Brussels around 1900 in the often contradictory contexts of different local, national and imperial ambitions. He emphasized the discrepancy between – but also the mutual constitution of – the discourses around urban planning and the modern city as a stage for political or social movements. Comparing the urban ambitions of Leopold II, the Movement for Public Art and engineers from the municipality and the Ministry of Public Works, Peleman disentangled differing approaches to urban planning that were inscribed in Brussels.

¹Sasha Disko / Tim Opitz: The City, the Nation and the World around 1900 – Imperial Intersections and Colonial Connections, (04.10.2010).

² Felix Driver / David Gilbert (Hrsg.), Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity, Manchester 1999.

With the workshop taking place at the Technische Universität Berlin, it should come as no surprise that several contributions were dedicated to the imperial past of the German capital. Starting with the erection of a national monument for emperor Wilhelm I between 1893 and 1896, MIRIAM PAESLACK (Buffalo, New York) focused on its various photographic representations and the role they played in the construction of historical memory, which she argued, illuminated both national and imperial interests. According to Paeslack, these images revealed the wideranging desires to strengthen a German national identity that was inextricable from an imperial past. The emphasis here was not so much on the monument as a material object, but more specifically on the way various depictions were selectively deployed in the (re)negotiation of identity.

JAKE SHORT (Athens, Georgia) also addressed the representations of empire in turnof-the-century Berlin. Rather than studying the overlapping developments of urbanization, nationalization, or globalization through the representations of one specific material object, Short explored several manifestations of colonialism in general. He argued that it was a whole "machinery of reality production", such as reportage, colonial spectacles, and panoramas, which ultimately led to a "dematerialization" of empire in Berlin and beyond. In addition to traveling carnivals, it was the ubiquity of colonial representation and reportage that undermined Berlin as the "priviledged site of encounter with the imperial exotic". Despite efforts by intellectuals to 'enlighten' or display a sober colonial reality, the deluge of mass cultural reproduction was responsible for de-centering Berlin and the empire within German imaginaries, and robbed colonial realities of any coherent meaning. But if such an elusive multiplicity of colonial representations was slipping into the provinces by the turn-of-the-century – in a classic case of das Gleitende – Tim Opitz suggested that this was certainly not always the case.

Returning to the object as the vantage point for analysis, TIM OPITZ (Berlin) examined the erection and reception of the Siegessäule in Berlin in 1873. Among all of the workshop participants, Tim Opitz addressed the theoretical implications of the 'imperial cities' concept most directly. He traced the multifaceted connections of the new monument with the process of nationalization, which, in his view, manifested strong imperial characteristics at its very core. Cities, Opitz argued, can be a privileged location for the analysis of the development from nationalism to imperialism. After making a case to consider Berlin as an imperial city as early as 1873, Opitz concluded with a plea for a spatial and temporal expansion of the concept of 'imperial cities', allowing for a closer look at the imperial aspects of the urban not only during the Age of Empire, but also beyond the geographic confines

Tim Opitz was not the only scholar to suggest a spatial and temporal expansion of the 'imperial city' concept. Given its official as well as its self-proclaimed identity as the Empire City, it is quite surprising that only one contributor included New York into the conversation on empire and imperial cities. Approaching economic history within the overlapping scales of the urban, national, and global, ATIBA PERTILLA (New York City) argued that Wall Street bankers and financiers sought to dominate global finance by way of a "peaceful invasion of overseas markets". Following the suggestions of Opitz, Pertilla made a strong case to broaden the theoretical scope of imperialism. He argued that if we expand our definition to one of power relations, specifically in terms of 'imperial authority', we may bypass traditional debates and binary conceptions of imperial rule, such as 'formal' and 'informal' practices of domination. Pertilla argued that New York's big banking elite practiced such an imperial power, as "dollar diplomacy" became official policy in financial and political matters. Pertilla's approach confirmed that the rise of New York City as an imperial city was both a material as well as cultural realization. National and international marketing campaigns, in the form of political parades, public exhibitions, as well as the founding of new institutions (Bureau of Municipal Research) were essential to the actualization of the Empire City, and to New Yorkled empire building projects.

Several other workshop contributors have

also suggested that port cities like New York are fruitful sites to investigate global connections around 1900. LARS AMENDA (Hamburg) has shifted his geographic focus of analysis away from the capital city, and demonstrated that both global and imperial encounters are perhaps best explored at their first point of contact: through shipping and international trade encountered at the "World Port". In line with Atiba Pertilla's approach to trade and cultural production through city marketing and public relations campaigns, Lars Amenda also looked at the port city with a similar interest in trade and the various meanings this carried with it. Hamburg's self-identity as the "Gateway to the World", Amenda argued, was a "cosmopolitan myth" of liberalism and toleration which has eluded the historical realities for much of the 20th century. City elites, shipping companies, and city officials manufactured this image of the "World Port" with the intention of promoting trade and cultivating a local identity, which was intended simultaneously to attract international attention as Germany's centre of trade and to reconcile social divisions and colonial hierarchies. Amenda argued that Hamburg was in fact a stronghold of Anti-Semitism, and a central field of private (Hamburg-America Line) and public (city administration / police) action in several mutual efforts to limit immigration and to prevent encounters between Germans and non-European migrants and sailors. Though city marketers did help to create a sense of local pride, Amenda concluded that globalization was no panacea for Hamburg's numerous social tensions and colonial hierarchies.

MANUELA BAUCHE (Leipzig) also investigated the port city as a site in which social and racial hierarchies crystallized into biopolitical discourses and practices of urban planning. Bauche, however, was the only contributor who explored global connections across the metropole-colony divide, and in two separate locations. Comparing the urbanization projects of city planning in Emden (East Frisia) and Douala (colonial Cameroon), she examined the colonial encounters and the discursive connections between these two settings. State-led modernization projects, Bauche argued, were informed by medical

discourse on hygiene and malaria prevention that originated in the metropole. In her first case study she demonstrated that the construction of workers colonies-barracks in Emden did not remedy the perception of lower classes as the source of disease and bad hygiene. In Douala, this desire to relocate the 'unsanitary classes' to the urban periphery, and medical discourse on malaria prevention proved influential in colonial city planning, and the eventual creation of a cordone sanitaire. In both settings, urban forms and social arrangements were largely shaped by stateled modernization projects and metropolitan knowledge. While plans to move workers to the periphery of the city of Emden were informed primarily by conceptions of class, Bauche definitively concluded that the fate of the African urban was shaped by race.

Global connections and intersections in imperial cities shed a considerable amount of light on both realities and changing perceptions of the urban landscape, the nation, and their many 'others'. The contributions to this workshop have demonstrated the impact of the global and colonial experiences on the build environs of the urban whether inscribed in monuments, city architecture, or in the re-organization of social spaces. As historians increasingly investigate the historical origins of globalization, cities prove to be dynamic agents or geographic fields in which global players participated in transnational processes of nation and empire building. In addition, this workshop has reinforced the notion that capital cities, such as Berlin and London, are not the exclusive forces or sites of the urban, national, and imperial encounter. As demonstrated above, port cities and colonial cities provide another fruitful site for investigating global connections and intersections. These cities, and more specifically, non-European cities remain to be explored, as urban forms, identities, and global trade were also shaped within, and by global dynamics and connections with non-European cities. For this reason, Tim Optiz and Sasha Disko hope to address this 'geographical unevenness' in a second workshop on "The City, Nation, and the World around 1900" at Fordham University in New York City, on December 2-4th. Workshop participants will expand on these spatial and methodological approaches to explore such encounters and reciprocities between imperial cities of Europe and those urban settings in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Conference overview:

David Gilbert (London): A short history of modern London in wrought iron: Art, empire and social exclusion on Hungerford Bridge

Lars Amenda (Osnabrück): 'Gateway to the World': Global Connections and Local Identity in Hamburg

Manuela Bauche (Leipzig): The Modern City and Its Others: Aliens, Africans and Workers in Malaria Campaigns in German Colonies and Metropole, c. 1900-1914

Jake Short (Athens, Georgia): On the Dematerialization of the Empire in the Metropolis: The Case of Fin-de-Siecle Berlin

Tim Opitz (Berlin): Standing on Victoria's Shoulders. Imperial City Berlin 1873: Reflections on a Concept

Miriam Paeslack (Buffalo, NY): The Imperial Metropolis in Flux: A Photogrammetric Image Seies and its Implications for Berlin's and Germany's Identity Quest around 1900

Atiba Pertilla (New York): Investing in American Masculinity: The Reputation of Wall Street and the Federal Response to Industrialization 1893-1915

Sabrina Rahman (Berkeley, California): Vienna 1908: Imperial Design and National Crafts in Franz Joseph's Diamond Jubilee

David Peleman (Ghent): Building the Bewildering Metropolis; The projects for Brussels (1890-1914) and the birth of the 'urban' myth

Tagungsbericht *The City, the Nation and the World around 1900 – Imperial Intersections and Colonial Connections.* 10.06.2010-12.06.2010, Berlin, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 16.11.2010.