

Co-operation and Empire

Veranstalter: Tanja Bühler, University of Bern / Oxford Centre for Global History / German Historical Institute London; Flavio Eichmann, University of Bern / German Historical Institute London; Stig Förster, University of Bern; Benedikt Stuchtey, German Historical Institute London; Dierk Walter, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung

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The study of imperialism has, in many respects, become somewhat discredited and highly contested. However, hardly any historian today would dispute that indigenous cooperation was a formative and continuous factor of empire. This notion was first expressed by Ronald Robinson in the 1970s. Imperial History became increasingly outdated and by the 1990s seemed to have lost its relevance. This was also due to the rise of new theories and approaches, such as Postcolonial Studies. Nevertheless, many studies conducted today focus on interactions between „coloniser“ and „colonised“. These studies often display many of the factors which Robinson had outlined in this theory on imperialism and collaboration. Robinson's ideas are therefore anything but irrelevant for the study of empires. Nevertheless, the aim of the conference was not to dig out Robinson's concept of collaboration and adapt it to the 21st Century, but to instead complement his ideas with approaches and aspects of Global, Transnational and Postcolonial History. It will be of particular interest to consider Postcolonial concepts such as „otherness“, „mimicry“, and „hybridity“. These concepts consider that lines between „colonisers“, „colonised“, and „collaborators“ were often blurred and that there were various degrees of cooperation, which were often not as obvious and easily recognised as it was implied by earlier approaches and theories.

The first panel of the conference explored issues of imperial politics and cultural adaptation. WOLFGANG GABBERT (Hanover) and UTE SCHÜREN (Bern) both looked at cooperation in the Latin American context. They

came to the conclusion that many of the indigenous elites cooperated with colonial powers, often to protect their own privileges and status and to pursue their own interests. In TANJA BÜHRER's (Bern/Oxford/London) presentation, it was the westerners which found themselves in a weak position vis-à-vis the local ruler. At the time of the early British residents at the Court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, a common ground for cooperation first had to be established. However, the Nizam did not consider the British East India Company a partner worth cooperating with. As the British Residents at the time were only functioning on the margins of imperial bureaucratic structure and often had no real power, they were the ones who had to adapt to local culture. Next, MYRIAM YAK-OUBI (Paris) also presented an example in which things did not go according to British plans: the development of the relationship between the British and Faisal I of Iraq. Even though Faisal had never set foot in Iraq, he was made king of the country as he seemed, from the British viewpoint, the best candidate who would promote their interests. The relationship between Faisal and the British Colonial Office soon turned sour though. Faisal did not turn out to be the puppet the British thought they had installed on the Iraqi throne, but instead pursued his own interests and demanded independence for „his“ country. In the discussion following the first panel, many questions referring to individual presentations were addressed. Self-interest, networks of cooperation, and saving costs were highlighted as some of the most important factors playing on the mind of „colonisers“ and „colonised“ when they considered cooperation.

The second panel explored notions of economics and social foundations of cooperation. AMÉLIA POLÓNIA (Porto) argued that in the early modern Portuguese case, the European expansion was not so much directed from the centre of Portuguese politics or Crown, but was often started on the initiative of individual agents and maritime communities. Cooperation between these individuals and the state were crucial for the process of empire-building. TODD CLEVELAND (Minnesota) also presented a case in which the influence

of a colonial state was largely missing. He looked at the Diamond Company of Angola (Diamang) and its relationship with its workers. Cleveland called Diamang „a state within a state“ and it was therefore often untouched by colonial legislation. He argued that due to various factors, Diamang looked after their workers comparably well. In JONATHAN E. ROBINS' (Michigan) study, it was initially not a colonial power or Western company which dictated local industry, but Alake Gbadebo I of Abekouta, a local ruler. The Alake cooperated with the British Cotton Growing Association in order to modernise the cotton industry in his country. Robins then contrasted this with the example of Buganda, where the same company used coercion to make local farmers grow cotton. Nevertheless, the British company required the cooperation of local elites in both of the studied cases. HAYDON L. CHERRY (North Carolina), looking at social foundations of empire, then argued that social relationships played a crucial role in Vietnamese society during the time of French colonial rule. They were critical for the maintenance of social order in Vietnam. Contrary to the idea of many scholars that French colonialism broke up Vietnamese society and freed individuals from social bonds and other ties, Cherry argued that this was not the case. These various bonds persisted, even though they were often adapted and changed. Cherry argued that it was the gradual changes of existing relationships which produced notions of a Vietnamese nation. In the subsequent discussion, it was in particular Todd Cleveland's presentation which led to some controversy. Many participants doubted whether the treatment of local people at Diamang was in fact as positive as described by Cleveland. It can be difficult to understand why there was no resistance by the workers and it does not quite correspond with many of the notions about colonialism we have today. It also shows, as JAN GEORG DEUTSCH (Oxford) pointed out, that there is a big scale of different ways of cooperation, ranging from enforcement to voluntary.

The third panel of the conference was dedicated to issues of science, intellectuals and cultural translation. DEEPAK KUMAR (New Delhi) considered the role of cooperation in

matters of science in early colonial India. Most colonial scientists were very dismissive of local knowledge and believed their epistemology to be superior. Nevertheless, there was some knowledge transfer between colonial scientists and locals. Early colonial medical men for example collected medicinal plants and discussed their use with locals, and local artists painted plants for colonial botanists. In publications, however, these locals remained unnamed. In the Filipino case looked at by FRAUKE SCHEFFLER (Cologne), it was the „colonised“ who initiated research on infant health and programmes for its improvement. The Filipinos claimed to have superior knowledge on infant health. These local efforts, however, were increasingly centralised and integrated into the medical system which had been established under US rule. Scheffler demonstrated how Filipinos cooperated and negotiated with US colonial administrators during this process. CHARLES V. REED (Elizabeth City) also analysed a negotiation process between „colonisers“ and „colonised“. He looked at the way in which British imperial subjects in the South African context articulated their political grievances against the rule of white settlers in a language of Britishness and imperial citizenship. Reed argued that these ideas informed the political and intellectual origins of African nationalism in South Africa. Many of the coloured participants in colonial politics expressed ideas of imperial citizenship, of belonging to the British Empire, rather than ideas of anti-colonialism or pan-Africanism. In the following discussion, the interesting observation was made that in the examples presented by Scheffler and Reed, it was the „colonised“ who instructed the Empire on its policies and what it should be about.

The fourth panel took a closer look at the role of agents of colonial governance. RALPH AUSTEN (Chicago) compared the tax collection systems of colonial India and Africa. Austen came to the conclusion that in the case of India, the British had inherited an effective tax system they could build upon from the Mughal Empire and its successor states, whereas in Africa, there were no such structures. This was one of the reasons why tax collection in India, with the help of local ad-

ministrators, was more efficient than it was in Africa. The French colonial administration of New Caledonia in ADRIAN MUCKLE's (Wellington) example also relied on locals in order to run their colony. Likewise, locals played an important role in the examples presented by ALEXANDER KEESE (Berlin). Many of the military operations on the African continent would not have been possible had the Europeans not been helped by African allies. These allies often remained in the areas after they had been „conquered“ and there were many tensions and difficulties integrating them into the colonial administration as „native guards“. In the discussion following this panel, it became clear how difficult it can be to find out more about the local co-operators and what motivated them as in many cases, there is not enough information on them. This, however, is a crucial issue which needs to be considered in order to gain a more complete understanding regarding co-operation and empire.

The fifth panel of the conference was devoted to settlers, alliances and imperial wars. DIERK WALTER (Hamburg/Bern) challenged many widely-accepted notions of imperial conquest and control. He argued that colonial empires could only be conquered and established militarily due to local military cooperation. Indigenous allies, however, have largely disappeared from historical records. After a colonial power had established itself, these allies were often downgraded to mere auxiliaries, and later integrated and regulated, also in order to control them, into colonial troops. VINCENT O'MALLEY (New Zealand) looked at some of the consequences which cooperation in colonial wars could entail for the „indigenous allies“ by looking at the term „Kupapa“, which in New Zealand is a negative term used to describe Maoris who are considered collaborators. Originally, this term had a positive connotation. Today, all those who did not fight against the Crown are regarded as traitors. O'Malley contested this use of the term, arguing that it is ahistorical. There was no united Maori nation at the time. Maoris who collaborated with the Crown did not do so because they identified with its cause, but because it enabled them to pursue their own strategic

objectives. The perseverance of one's own goals also played a crucial role in FLAVIO EICHMANN's (Bern/London) presentation, which focused on local cooperation in Martinique from 1802-1809. He showed that the French colonial administrators often had no choice but to formulate their policies according to the demands of rich local planters, who would then support their colonial careers in return. There was therefore a network of co-operation between colonial and army officials and rich white settlers in Martinique that undermined metropolitan policies. In the following discussion, the issue of agency was raised. Whilst it was seen as positive to finally give local co-operators some recognition, it is important that in doing so, we do not create a new myth regarding local allies. It is always important to consider that those cooperating had agency.

The final panel addressed ideas of chiefs, kings and rulers. DANIEL OLISA IWEZE (Nsukka) looked at the British colonial conquest of Western Igboland and the role of indigenous collaborators. He argued that locals cooperating with the imperial power, and not British superior arms, made the difference in this conflict and allowed for a British victory. In the German colony of Cameroon, ULRIKE SCHAPER (Berlin) argued, it was also cooperation with local chiefs which contributed decisively to the establishment of a German colonial administration. Initially, this was less of a political strategy and more of a necessity as there was a general lack of resources and not much knowledge about the prevalent political conditions. It was not just the case, however, that the „colonisers“ exploited the „colonised“, but they were instead mutually dependent on each other. ÉRIC ALLINA (Ottawa), also looking at chiefs in the African context, examined how they, in the Mozambican case, exercised their authority as indigenous rulers over their people while at the same time, they also operated in the system of colonial governance. Rather than examining whether they collaborated or resisted, Allina demonstrated that by pursuing their own agenda, chiefs had to operate in both of these overlapping spheres. Next, TIMOTHY BURKE (Philadelphia) presented his analysis of imperial administration in South-

ern Rhodesia. Burke argued that the establishment of colonial Africa was not just due to a number of random events, but were driven by prior social and economic structures, and the contingent agency of individuals and groups. An important topic of discussion following the last panel was whether the cases presented were individual cases and random, or whether they were part of a bigger issue, which could be explained with the help of models and theories. Whilst it was agreed that theories can be helpful, some also warned of the danger of applying theories as things which do not fit these are often left out. Whilst it is certainly important to differentiate as a historian, if there is no common ground and theory it will make comparison and analysis difficult if not impossible, and the history of cooperation and empire would become mere individual stories.

The conference was concluded with a round table discussion. During this discussion, it became clear that there was still an issue with terminology regarding cooperation and empire. JAMES BELICH (Oxford) argued that in the colonial context, „collaboration“ had a negative connotation. Belich raised the question whether the use of the term „cooperation“ laundered imperialism into something benign. To avoid this, he believed that the term and concept of collaboration needed to be refined so that historians all have the same understanding of it. Belich argued that applying subcategories could be a possible solution to this problem. STIG FÖRSTER (Bern) also referred to historiographical issues with the description of cooperation. Despite historians' best efforts to differentiate in their analysis between various factors, this is often complicated by political correctness. The wider public still thinks of imperialism in terms of black and white and there are clear perpetrators and victims. Förster argued this notion needed to be overcome and suggested to use, as an explanation for cooperation, the idea of „people who somehow have a stake in imperial expansion“. Jan Georg Deutsch pointed out that Ronald Robinson's ideas were situated in the context of the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, historiography was dominated by nationalist history. While Robinson was modern at his time, he is less so today. Like the or-

ganisers of the conference, Deutsch believed it is important to use Robinson's ideas together with newly emerged theories and ideas.

The conference considered a large spectrum and various notions of cooperation. Unfortunately, discussions during the conference often only referred to specific issues and cases and, apart from the round table discussion, the bigger issues have been somewhat neglected. It has, however, become clear that existing theories are not sufficient to explain the politically sensitive issue of imperial cooperation. The lines between colonisers and colonised often remained unclear and despite efforts to include Postcolonial aspects, the voices of the „co-operators“ often remained unheard, in many cases also due to the unavailability of such sources. Despite this, it would have been desirable if some more recent theoretical approaches had been considered in more depth. However, the conference has illustrated the various forms and settings in which cooperation took place in empires and has made it clear how difficult it can be to gain an understanding of cooperation in an imperial context.

Conference Overview:

First Panel: Imperial Politics and Cultural Adaption

Wolfgang Gabbert (Hanover): „God Save the King of the Mosquito Nation!“ — Indigenous Leaders on the Fringe of the Spanish Empire in Central America

Ute Schüren (Bern): Caciques: Indigenous Brokers and Colonial Rule in Latin America

Tanja Bühner (Bern/Oxford/London): British Residents at the Court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, c. 1779-1800

Myriam Yakoubi (Paris): The Co-operation Between the British and Faisal I of Iraq: Evolution of a Romance

Second Panel: Economics and Social Foundations of Co-operation

Amélia Polónia (Porto): Co-operation in Informal Self-Organised Networks. The Portuguese Empire Case Study

Jonathan E. Robins (Michigan): Invested in Empire: Political Elites and Imperial Business

in Nigeria and Uganda, c. 1895-1920

Haydon L. Cherry (North Carolina): Mutualities and Obligations: Collaboration and Conflict in Colonial Vietnam

Todd Cleveland (Minnesota): Facilitating Empire: Corporate Paternalism and African Professionalism on the Mines of Colonial Angola, 1917-75

Third Panel: Science, Intellectuals, and Cultural Translation

Deepak Kumar (New Delhi): From Imposition to Co-operation. Situating Botanical Knowledge in Colonial India

Iris Seri-Hersch (Aix-Marseille, paper only): Collaborating on Unequal Terms: Cross-Cultural Co-operation and Educational Work in Colonial Sudan

Frauke Scheffler (Cologne): „We can not move a step without having everybody’s enthusiastic cooperation“: Colonial Elites, Infant Health, and State-Building in the Philippines, 1900-1920s

Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City): Loyalty, Respectability, and Imperial Citizenship in British South Africa, 1860-1923

Fourth Panel: Agents of Colonial Governance

Adrian Muckle (Wellington): „Cogs“ of Colonial Rule: the Gendarme and the Administrative Chief in New Caledonia, c. 1880-1960

Alexander Keese (Berlin): Key Alliance? ‘Native guards’ and European Administrators in Sub-Saharan Africa from a Comparative Perspective (1918-1959)

Ralph Austen (Chicago): Indigenous Agents of Colonial Rule in Africa and India

Fifth Panel: Settlers, Alliances, and Imperial Wars

Dierk Walter (Hamburg/Bern): The Perpetual Motion Machine of Imperial Conquest and Control. Indigenous Military Cooperation and Modern Empires

Vincent O’Malley (New Zealand): Uncle Toms and Kupapas: ‘Collaboration’ versus Alliance in a New Zealand Context

Flavio Eichmann (Bern/London): Local Co-

operation in a Subversive Colony: Martinique 1802-1809

Matthias Häussler (Siegen, paper only): Settlers in German South West Africa between Colonial State and Indigenous Peoples: A Two-Front Struggle

Sixth Panel: Chiefs, Kings, and Rulers

Daniel Olisa Iweze (Nsukka): British Colonial Conquest of Western Igboland and the Role of Indigenous Collaborators: Ekwumeku Resistance Movement Reconsidered

Ulrike Schaper (Berlin): Chieftaincy as a Political Resource in the German Colony of Cameroon

Timothy Burke (Philadelphia): ‘Wiri’ Edwards, Chief Mangwende and Murewa District: Imperial Administration in Southern Rhodesia as an Emergent Phenomenon

Éric Allina (Ottawa): Enforcing Orders ‘Given by the Whites’: Chiefly Interests and Colonial Power in Central Mozambique, c. 1890-1935

Round Table Discussion

Participants: Ralph Austen (Chicago), James Belich (Oxford), Jan-Georg Deutsch (Oxford), Stig Förster (Bern), Wolfgang Reinhard (Freiburg i. Br.) and Benedikt Stuchtey (London)

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