

Global Diasporas in the Age of High Imperialism

Veranstalter: Ulrike Kirchberger, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Universität Kassel

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Bericht von: Ulrike Kirchberger, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Universität Kassel

The two-day conference „Global Diasporas in the Age of High Imperialism“ took place on the 10th and 11th of September 2014 at the University of Kassel in Germany and was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The conference aimed to compare different global migrants' communities and their relations to colonial expansion in innovative ways. It was intended, firstly, to analyse the role emigration played in the context of the imperial politics of powers such as Japan, Italy, Germany and Great Britain. The diasporas which developed against the background of the colonial aspirations of their countries of origin were then to be contextualised with communities of migrants whose motherlands had no colonies of their own. Chinese and South Asian diasporas, for example, formed large and influential minorities in the colonies of different imperial powers. A third diasporic type, which was to be dealt with at the conference, was that of the so-called „victims' diaspora“ or „diaspora without homeland“, such as the Jewish, Armenian or African diasporas.

These different diasporic formations are often treated separately in current research. The conference, therefore, aimed to investigate in how far different global migration systems can be related to each other as „global diasporas“ in an age which was characterised by a high degree of long-distance mobility and cosmopolitanism and, at the same time, by nationalism and a growing interest to define ethnic and racial identities on a global scale. Applying the results of new diaspora studies, the term „diaspora“ was defined broadly as a community which existed outside of its area of origin but shared a certain emotional attachment to a homeland which could be real or imagined. To establish global coherence,

feelings of solidarity between migrants of the same ethnic origin in different countries and continents had to exist. However, global diasporas were also characterised by complex processes of assimilation and exchange between migrants and host country.

These issues which were outlined by ULRIKE KIRCHBERGER (Kassel) at the beginning of the conference, were subsequently addressed by speakers from all over the world and from different disciplines. They introduced a wide range of perspectives and approaches to the topic.

The first panel compared global migrants' communities which originated from countries defining themselves as imperial powers. In Italy, Germany and Japan, expansionist aims developed since the 1870s, and politicians began to discuss about how to integrate the country's emigrants into their colonial empires. MARK I. CHOATE (Provo, UT) analysed the political discussions in Italy where nationalists and liberals argued about whether to direct Italy's „surplus population“ to settlers' colonies in Africa or to create a „Greater Italy“ by strengthening the cultural and economic ties between the Italian emigrants in the Americas and the motherland. STEFAN MANZ (Birmingham) showed how, after 1871, the German emigrants who were scattered all over the world, invented themselves as a coherent global community. They defined themselves as outposts of a „Greater German Empire“ whose links to the homeland had to be preserved for their own and the empire's benefit. WOLFRAM MANZENREITER (Vienna) analysed the initiatives of the Japanese government to integrate Japanese emigrants in Hawaii, the West Coast of North America, Mexico, Peru and Brazil into a „Greater Empire“.

The second panel concentrated on diasporas which are classified as „victims' diasporas“ in Robin Cohen's typology. BHASWATI BHATTACHARYA (Amsterdam/Göttingen) dealt with the Armenian minority in India. She showed different ways of Armenian self-perception by analysing the texts of three Armenian writers who defined Armenian identities in relation to the ruling elites of India. DAVID KILLINGRAY (London) then turned to the African diaspora and examined the first

pan-African initiatives in the decades before the First World War. He highlighted the significance of African-European collaborations for the formation of pan-African associations and explored the impact Christian ideas had in the context of these transnational networks.

The third panel was dedicated to typological issues. TANJA BUELTSMANN (Newcastle upon Tyne) reflected on the question of how to define a diaspora. In line with the concept of the conference, she suggested to conceive a diaspora as a globally dispersed community of people with a heightened sense of common identity. She challenged the categorisation of „voluntary white emigration“ on the one hand and „non-European victims‘ diaspora“ on the other. Against this background, she examined the inner coherences and social structures of the English and Scottish populations in the world. Her thesis that the English formed a diaspora within the British Empire stimulated a controversial discussion about which kinds of migrants‘ communities within a colonial empire can be classified as a „diaspora“. STEVEN IVINGS‘ (London/Heidelberg) paper then dealt with Karafuto which was established as a formal colony by Japan in 1905. He raised the question in how far it was appropriate to label Karafuto as a „settler colony“ given that it was firmly integrated into Japan’s migratory labour market. Both papers contributed to the wider question of the conference in how far classifications such as „diaspora“, „colony“, „minority“, „ethnic neighbourhood“ and „exile“ are helpful tools to analyse different migratory situations.

The next panel explored the role religion and class/caste played in diaspora formation. IQBAL AKHTAR (Miami, FL) examined the religious and social life of the Khōjā, a South Asian merchant community whose members lived in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa, but also in North America and other parts of the world. By reaching out far beyond the „age of high imperialism“, he showed how complex the religious identities of the Khōjā were and how they were constantly redefined at different times and under different local circumstances. Furthermore, his contribution raised the question in how far the so-called „age of high imperialism“ formed a decisive

cut in the histories of individual diasporas. In Akhtar’s thought-provoking paper, the expulsion by Idi Amin in the early 1970s constituted a chronological break in the history of the Khōjā in East Africa which was far more significant than the year 1884 which is so important for European colonial historians.

The conference then proceeded to a panel which examined the transcontinental connections of migrants groups of the same ethnicity. ISABELLE RISPLER (Arlington, TX/Paris) compared the German presences in Buenos Aires and German South West Africa with each other. IDA CHINGMAN YIP (Hong Kong) presented a paper on the Chinese minorities in Australia and in Germany. She explained that, although the Chinese communities in Germany and Australia were very different from each other in social composition, numbers and permanence of residence, they actively supported reforms and participated in homeland politics from the mid-nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War.

The papers in the next panel dealt with transcontinental family networks and aimed to overcome one-dimensional core-periphery concepts which often dominate migration and colonial history. REINHARD WENDT (Hagen) examined a group of Germans who settled in Vava’u which is part of the archipelago of Tonga in the South Sea. Over the generations, these Germans developed into a transcultural diaspora. They were situated between and across different cultures and empires. In their memorial culture, they had changeable „imaginary homelands“ in Pyritz/Germany and in Auckland/New Zealand. They preserved a German identity, and, at the same time, were actors in processes of transculturalisation when they, for example, married Polynesian women or turned to Auckland to pursue their economic and cultural interest. MICHAEL WILLIAMS (Sydney) examined the Chinese and Italian migration to the United States and Australia. He focused on return migration which was, in both diasporas, organised in the context of comparable patterns of communication and ethnic association which linked families over the continents.

The last panel approached the conference

topic from a microhistorical perspective. It explored interactions and transfers between ethnic minorities and their host countries. KLAUS DITTRICH (Luxembourg/Seoul) examined the Euro-American community in Korean Seoul. He showed how American and European missionaries, diplomats, merchants and their families interacted with each other, and he analysed their reactions to Japanese expansionism. VICTORYA ROMANOVA (Moscow) dealt with another translocal microcosm. The Russian Jews in Manchurian Harbin played an important role in the economic and social life of the city. They established Jewish schools, a hospital, synagogues and other institutions. The cosmopolitan intellectual Abraham Kaufmann connected them to the larger Jewish diaspora and brought them into contact with Zionism. They developed a rich cultural and religious life whereas other Jewish communities in Palestine or in the Russian empire had to bear discriminations and pogroms.

The discussions at the end of the conference addressed different issues dealing with the comparative approach of the conference. Some participants were critical about relating African and Asian migration with global communities of European descent thus equating those who had experienced expulsion and genocide with the imperialists who were responsible for their suffering. Other participants, however, found the term „diaspora“ useful as an analytical tool for comparing different global migrants' communities in a specific time frame. The conference showed that imperial powers instrumentalised their emigrants for their expansionist politics in similar ways. At the same time, diasporic nationalism fuelled or created ideas of global expansion and worldwide coherence in different ethnic contexts. Ideologies of a „greater empire“, so the papers confirmed, did not always originate in the mother countries of colonial powers. Visions of global communities could also be constructed in overseas diasporas and then transferred back to the homeland. The discussants further agreed that not only European migrants invented themselves as global communities. In the Jewish, Asian and African diasporas, ideologies such as pan-Africanism, pan-Asianism or

Zionism also aimed to create global identities at the time. In how far European and non-European diasporic nationalisms can be contextualized with each other needs closer examination. The papers showed, however, that there were not only parallels but also transnational overlappings and interconnections between different ethnicities on many levels.

Furthermore, the comparative approach contributed to a more differentiated picture of victimhood, home- und statelessness. The question of the homeland and of the emigrant as a victim was discussed in all global migrants' communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, not all members of the Armenian or Jewish diaspora would perceive themselves as victims at all times and places. Armenian merchants and intellectuals in India, for example, could define their own identity in self-confident ways in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries even if their people were victims of mass murder and deportation in the early twentieth century. Victimhood in the context of migration and colonialism was shaped by many different aspects and cannot be reduced to one diasporic type. In this way, the conference moved beyond established categories and opened new perspectives on how to relate transcontinental migration to imperialism in the decades of globalisation before the First World War.

Conference Overview:

Ulrike Kirchberger (Kassel), Welcome and Introduction

Panel 1: Diasporas and Colonial Politics

Mark I. Choate (Provo, UT), Italy's emigrant colonialism at the apex of mass migration and imperialism

Stefan Manz (Birmingham), Germans Abroad and the 'Greater German Empire', 1871-1914

Wolfram Manzenreiter (Vienna), Late developmentalism and imperial aspirations behind the emergence of the Japanese emigration state

Panel 2: The „Victims' Diaspora“ Revisited

Bhaswati Bhattacharya (Amsterdam/Göttingen), The Armenian „Other:“

Minority Politics in Colonial India

David Killingray (London), *The Demand for Rights: Pan-Africanism in the Black Atlantic World, 1890-1913*

Panel 3: Typologies and Terminologies

Tanja Bueltmann (Newcastle upon Tyne), *What makes a diaspora? A comparative exploration of the Scottish, English and German diasporas, c. 1730 to 1914*

Steven Ivings (London/Heidelberg), *Settler Colony or Labour Destination: Karafuto as a Japanese Colony 1905-1914*

Panel 4: Religion and Class in Diaspora Formation

Iqbal Akhtar (Miami, FL), *Exploring the Ethno-Linguistic Evolution of Religious Identities among the Khōjā of Dar es Salaam*

Panel 5: Same Ethnicities in Different Continents

Isabelle Rispler (Arlington, TX/Paris), *The German Colony of Buenos Aires and German South West Africa: Contemporary Comparison and Entanglement in the South Atlantic*

Ida Chingman Yip (Hong Kong), *Chinese diasporas in Germany and Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

Panel 6: Beyond the Binary: Transcontinental Linkages between Families and Homelands

Reinhard Wendt (Hagen), *From bipolar migration to transcontinental diaspora formation: Germans in the Pacific world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

Michael Williams (Sydney), *Return Migration: Chinese and Italian migration to the US and Australia - a comparative historical view*

Panel 7: Contact Zones

Klaus Dittrich (Luxembourg/Seoul), *Attraction and Rejection within a Translocal Community: Europeans and Americans in Korea, 1882-1910*

Victorya Romanova (Moscow), *The Russian Jews of Harbin*

Round Table

David Killingray/Bhaswati Bhat-

tacharya/Mark I. Choate/Wolfram Manzenreiter

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Global Diasporas in the Age of High Imperialism*. 10.09.2014–11.09.2014, Kassel, in: H-Soz-Kult 30.04.2015.