

The Production of Imperial Space. Empire and Circulations (18th-20th Centuries)

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In their introduction, the organizers, CAMILLE BUAT (Göttingen), AUDE-CÉCILE MONNOT (Paris), and ALEXANDER VAN WICKEREN (Cologne) stressed the empires' specific relation to space as well as their dual production of imperial space, both administrative and informal. They emphasized the need to pay attention to the multiplicity of actors, connections, and networks at play in this production, and called for links and decompartmentalization between four emergent fields of research: Mental, cartographic, and textual mapping of space, borderlands, fringes and fragmented imperial spaces, the production of imperial space by technological infrastructure, and the trans-imperial spaces and circulations among an „imperial cloud“ (Kamissek/Kreienbaum). They offered their thanks to the contributing organizations as well as the scientific committee for their generous help and advice.

KATHERINE PARKER (London) opened the first panel on the imaginations of space by looking at the mapping of the Pacific Ocean in the 18th century. Studying the competition and negotiations between the Spanish and British empires around a potential British expedition following the publication of Anson's voyage in 1740-1744, she highlighted the tension between the empires' attempts to tightly control access to knowledge of the Pacific, and the fact that the rapid circulation of this knowledge was key to the exploration and mapping of this ocean.

DELPHINE FROMENT (Paris) then spoke about the imperial rivalries around the Kilimanjaro surrounding the parallel British and German expeditions between 1882 and 1884, focusing on the voyages of Joseph Thomson and Henry H. Johnston. She empha-

sized the important role these explorers had alongside the Foreign Office in the invention of imperial space, however imaginary this space remained, by showing how their calls for colonisation defined the Kilimanjaro's repelling and welcoming slopes, based on the fertility of the land and hostility of the „natives“.

MARTA GRZECHNIK (Gdąnsk) brought attention to the aspirations of the Polish Maritime and Colonial League (LMIK) which emerged in the interwar period. By examining the LMIK's publications and claims, she analysed its discourse and showed how these projects, which remained only a potential empire, were aimed at constructing and asserting Poland's place among imperialist nations, whether through claims on former German colonies, or cooperation with, and emulation of „hungry“ nations like Italy or Japan.

The discussant JAKOB VOGEL (Paris), looking back at the three presentations' focus on imagined space, proposed to carefully study the process of solidification of this spatial knowledge, from an invented space to, potentially, a political one.

The second panel opened with LIMIN TEH (Leiden), who spoke about the imperial space of the SMR coal mining and railway company in Japanese-occupied Southern Manchuria in the 1920s. She showed how this space was characterized by dislocation and hierarchies of movement. As the SMR's coal pits expanded and threatened old towns, the movement of coal took preference over the movement of people as the company moved to dislodge residents from these towns to a planned „modern“ company town, built to hierarchize movement. However, circulation could also be disrupted, for instance when old town residents refused to leave.

FLORA LOSCH (Paris) spoke about the circulation of audio-visual knowledge and technology in the de/re-composition of an imperial space in West Africa. Rather than seeing the introduction of these technologies in West Africa as a story of Western progress, Losch argued for a „contact zone“ approach. Her focus, however, was then mostly on the role of French government agencies in this process, agencies set up from the 1950s to provide for a „decolonised“ radio while at the same time

attempting to secure a French presence in the region. The agencies managed to generate a flow of trainers and trainees between France and Africa as well as a large export of French programs. Technological goods also moved in this space, and the introduction of different colour television formats occurred against the backdrop of the Cold War and the former imperial frontiers.

Following up on this, the discussant VIDHYA RAVEENDRANATHAN (Göttingen) argued for a situational history of technology from „the local“, combined with a stronger emphasis on consumption; both might serve to indicate the limits of the state in the expansion of technological devices.

The third panel, on ordering mobilities within imperial spaces, started with HUW J. DAVIES (London) presenting the British networks of military knowledge in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Through a range of military literature, from doctrine manuals to private journals, he demonstrated how military officers revisited battlefields, learned of their allies and their enemies, and shared these experiences when brought together to new fields of operation. He identified Waterloo as a turning point after which they unsuccessfully attempted to shut down these knowledge networks in the fear that they would be used against them.

ZHANNA POPOVA (Amsterdam) subsequently discussed the policies of exile to Siberia in the last decades of the Russian Empire, moving away from the existing historiography by looking at these labour camps from a regional, and not a central perspective, which allowed her to see how local administrators played on the persistent social inequalities in the geographical dislocation of the convicts. She also showed the close relation between the evolution of Siberia's position in the empire, from a borderland to a more integrated territory, and the changes of penal policies which increasingly restricted exile to political convicts.

TOM MENGER (Cologne) spoke about the trajectories of junior colonial officers in German East Africa as both pawns and producers of imperial space. Wishing to move away from elite inter-imperial networks that received scholarly attention, he studied these

junior officers' more diffuse circulations and space production, through their mobilities between colonies as well as, more routinely, within the individual colonies. He did not neglect their impact on the „real“ space, whether through scorched earth tactics, population re-settlements or attempts at steering caravan routes.

Discussing these papers, SABINE DULLIN (Paris) insisted on the fact that far from being homogeneous, imperial space was deeply fragmented, offering nodes, focal points and turning points. She also went over the type of sources that allow such decentralised studies, emphasising unofficial sources and egodocuments.

Day two opened with a panel on imperial economic spaces. ADITYA RAMESH (London) looked at the circulation of rice in the Bay of Bengal from 1900 to 1947. While the greater economic-agricultural developments and the Bengal Famine in this region are well known, Ramesh looked specifically at the Madras Delta. He focused on the Second World War and argued that the Delta region witnessed a very specific development: without centralised efforts, a major shift in land possession took place over the war, and „the farm“ acquired a new degree of sovereignty, laying the foundations for the rise of a large communist movement by 1947.

Staying in India, VARSHA PATEL (Kassel) presented an empirical study of the routes of salt trade and smuggling in Maritime Saurāshtra, Western India, 1910-1932. She emphasized the difficulties of the authorities in controlling the circulation on the borders between the Princely State of Saurāshtra and British India in this „frontier zone“, and concluded with a plea to view these zones as productive and ambivalent, impacting the materiality of the circulating products as well as their carriers.

JÉBUS BOHORQUEZ BARRERA (Lisbon) then took the audience to the Iberian empires in South America around 1750-1800. Still often regarded as closed-off polities, Bohorquez showed in contrast how the Spanish and Portuguese empires were often entangled and followed similar temporalities. While the flow of Spanish silver from Potosí to Manila is well known, Bohorquez pointed to the con-

siderable export of this silver via Brazil, from whence it was taken (often smuggled) on Portuguese vessels to Lisbon, the West African slave ports, and finally through to the Bay of Bengal. These often-underestimated flows and their impact on the Portuguese imperial economy meant that the economies of both empires were strongly entangled. By better integrating economic trends into our research, Bohorquez argued, local cross-border circulation, such as the flow of Potosí silver into Brazil, acquires new historical urgency.

The discussant CLAUDE MARKOVITS (Paris) consequently pointed out how the Brazil-East Asia silver flows show us the need for a history of the South American empires that includes the Atlantic as well as the Indian Ocean. He also reflected on Patel's paper, noting how salt often seemed implicated in the production of political spaces, such as in „Ancien Régime“ France and during Gandhi's salt march.

In the next panel, „Empire's multi-layered spaces“, METIN ATMACA (Ankara) elaborated on the Sufi Khalidiyya network on the Ottoman-Iranian frontier in the nineteenth century. While the mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman modernisation drive emphasized Sunni Islam in „making“ the border with Iran, the Khalidiyya network actually expanded on both sides of the border. It became a trans-sectarian, trans-tribal and transnational network, and easily took up the idea of citizenship later propagated by Ottoman modernization.

ANDREI DAN SORESCU (London) followed up with his project presentation on peddlers of Orthodox icons offering Russian Czar portraits to peasants in fin-de-siècle Romania. Romanian national elites viewed this practice as dangerous, but Sorescu argued that we know little about the role these icons played for the peasants and that further research on such objects could contribute to bring to the fore stories of belonging suppressed in national narratives, and possibly reframe, starting „from the margins“, the history of nation-building and the Russian empire.

In his comment, DAVID DO PAÇO (Paris) highlighted that both papers touched upon an important aspect of the social history of em-

pires: the question of bonding and belonging between the population and their (monarchical) rulers.

In the last panel, JUSTINE COUSIN (Paris) spoke on British steamships as trans-imperial spaces between 1850 and 1950. With increasing recruitment of „coloured labourers“ after 1850, steamships constituted very ethnically diverse spaces. While this circulation was desired by the shipping companies, it was also controlled. Ship departments were often ethnically segregated, while for instance West Africans could only serve along the West African coast. After interwar Britain saw several race riots against colonial sailors, further exclusionary measures were taken against them. Nevertheless, the demand for cheap labour and the options of desertion or naturalisation meant that the coloured seamen always preserved agency in determining their circulations.

FLORIAN WAGNER (Erfurt) closed off the panel session with his presentation on fin-de-siècle colonial scientific internationalism. He presented the Institut Colonial International (ICI), and the agronomic institute at Buitenzorg (Dutch East Indies) as two organizations that claimed to create a new trans-imperial space of „South-South“ knowledge transfers, thus bypassing the imperial metropolises. The organisations also claimed to empower indigenous populations, but the contrary was the case: both the ICI's compilation and comparison of several systems of indigenous law as well as the 'South-South' transfers in tropical agriculture destroyed local traditions and enabled colonial rulers to expand control.

The use of the term „South-South“ was criticised by ULRIKE LINDNER (Cologne) in her following comment, as the term „Global South“ originally refers to a totally different context. Wagner admitted that the term itself was not used in this age, but that the concept was very much part of the legitimization and self-perception of these organizations trying to claim autonomy for the colonial space.

The conference was concluded by a general discussion which allowed the participants to ask themselves what was specifically imperial about these circulations, wondering what defines an imperial space, whether it is the circulation of the agents of empire, of its subjects,

or its goods. This led the speakers to inquire how much this imperial space was ruled and produced by the imperial archives, acknowledging the biases they have reproduced regarding gendered space or local knowledge. From the discussion also emerged the regret that the papers did not sufficiently tackle the physical geography and the materiality of the circulations, pondering whether a focus on territoriality could have helped them shed light on the processes of space production. One of the key contributions of the spatial turn was actually pluridisciplinarity; the importance of looking at the materiality of space through archaeological and environmental research was pointed out. Finally, the reviewers felt that some predominantly empirical papers could have profited from more theoretical framing. Nevertheless, the conference as well as the pleasant evening dinner and concert, allowed for many enriching exchanges on a variety of imperial spaces and circulations and showed the fruitfulness of discussing both phenomena together.

Conference Overview:

Introduction:

Camille Buat (Göttingen), Aude-Cécile Monnot (Paris) and Alexander van Wickeren (Cologne / Paris)

Panel 1: Imaginations of Spaces: Explorations and Discourses in an Imperial Setting

Discussant: Jakob Vogel (Paris)

Katherine Parker (London): Putting Space to Paper. The Production of the Pacific in the Eighteenth Century

Delphine Froment (Paris): A Scramble for Kilimanjaro? Imperial Rivalries and Production of Space in East Africa at the end of the 19th century

Marta Grzechnik (Gdąnsk): Aspirations of an Imperial Space. The Colonial Discourse of the Maritime and Colonial League in Interwar Poland

Panel 2: From Railway to Television: Imperial Space and Infrastructure

Discussant: Vidhya Raveendranathan (Göttingen)

Matthew Scott (Newcastle): Visions of Circu-

lation. Continental Imperial Expansion and the Construction of Transcontinental Railway Systems, c. 1850-1930 (cancelled)

Limin Teh (Leiden): The Company Town as Imperial Space

Flora Losch (Paris): Broadcast and Rule: The Circulation of Audiovisual Knowledge and Technologies and the De/Re-composition of the Imperial Space in West Africa

Panel 3: Ordering mobilities within imperial spaces

Discussant: Sabine Dullin (Paris)

Huw J. Davies (London): Networks of Knowledge Exchange and Information Circulations in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Military Imperialism

Zhanna Popova (Amsterdam): Exile to Siberia as Imperial Practice, 1870s-1900s

Tom Menger (Cologne): Ordinary' Colonial Officers in German East Africa as Pawns and Producers of Imperial Space and Imperial Circulations, ca. 1890-1914

Panel 4: Flows of commodities and currencies: Imperial Economic Spaces

Discussant: Claude Markovits (Paris)

Jésus Bohorquez Barrera (Lisbon): Entangled Geographies of the Iberian Empires in South America (1750-1800)

Varsha Patel (Kassel): Reconfiguring Routes of Salt along the British Indian Frontier of Maritime Saurāshtra, Western India 1910-1932

Aditya Ramesh (London): Circulating Commodities, Shifting Sovereignties: Rice across the Bay of Bengal c. 1900-1947

Panel 5: Trajectories and experiences of circulating people: Empire's multilayered space

Discussant: David Do Paço (Paris)

Metin Atmaca (Ankara): An Imperial Social Space with Many Layers. Reconfiguration of the Ottoman-Iranian Frontier by Khalididiya Sufi Network

Martin Schaller (St. Andrews): Travellers Habsburg Empire – One Imperial Space or Different Spaces? Ca. 1815-1860s (cancelled)

Andrei Dan Sorescu (London): The Peddler,

the Peasant and the Portrait of the Czar. Spatial Layers of Empire in fin-de-siècle Romania

Panel 6: Transimperial spaces: places on the move and nodes of circulation

Discussant: Ulrike Lindner (Cologne)

Justine Cousin (Paris): Colonial Seafarers creating a Trans-imperial Space. British Empire and Steamship Labour Circulations (1850-1950)

Florian Wagner (Erfurt): The International Colonial Institute and the Creation of a Transimperial Space of Colonial Science (1890s-1920s)

Final Roundtable

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