

**Trans-imperial Cooperation and Transfers in the Age of Colonial Globalization: Towards a Triangular History of Colonialism?**

**Veranstalter:** Florian Wagner / Christian Methfessel, Historisches Seminar, Universität Erfurt

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The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed dramatic reorganisations of international power dynamics in which the global and imperial were frequently blurred and re-configured. From the break-up of old regimes and the development of mass globalization to the calamitous events of world wars, the period referred to by organizers FLORIAN WAGNER (Erfurt) and CHRISTIAN METHFESSEL (Erfurt) as „the Age of Colonial Globalization“ cannot be simplified to an age of linear transition. Departing from familiar Eurocentric accounts offered by imperial and nationally-defined histories, the workshop sought to explore the diversity of (trans-) imperial relationships in Africa, Asia, and South America.

The organizers focused specifically on non-European perspectives and questioned, firstly, the extent to which non-Europeans envisioned imperial rule as a binary relationship between them and their colonial rulers, highlighting trans-imperial cooperation and transfer not only between European officials, but also between non-Europeans and anti-colonialists. Secondly, they asked whether or not twentieth-century colonialism could be construed as a trans-imperial and/or global project, and, if so, to expose the role trans-imperial cooperation played in the establishment of major international institutions, including the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the European Union. Seen as having the potential to highlight indigenous agency, speakers were invited explicitly to address issues of scale, trans-imperial histories from below, and non-European cooperation by adding a „third variable“. By employing the concept of „triangulation“<sup>1</sup>, participants

countered dichotomous arguments involving colonized and colonizer, instead identifying the centrality of trans- and inter-imperial actors, who operated within, across, and outside of (anti-)imperial boundaries; in short, global agents.

The event, spread over three days and the same number of locations, included speakers from Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Tanzania arranged in five panels and two keynote lectures.<sup>2</sup> The international workshop was supported by funding from the Forum for the Study of the Global Condition and the Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung.<sup>3</sup> Day one was dedicated to exploring sources for trans-imperial history. Appropriately, SVEN BALLENTHIN (Gotha) and IRIS SCHRÖDER (Erfurt/Gotha) opened proceedings by locating the global in Gotha. In an introduction to the collections of the Perthes Forum<sup>4</sup>, they explained the trans-imperial networks of Gotha's cartographers through their maps and correspondence. Moving up the hill to the Forschungszentrum Gotha<sup>5</sup>, Panel 1 continued the theme, providing examples of scientific colonialism through the development of geographic knowledge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. RAINER PRASS (Erfurt/Gotha) discussed some of the letters and diaries sent by (mostly) German-speaking geographers and explorers to cartographers at Perthes in order to preserve and transmit their findings. In doing so, he also revealed the roles Perthes had not only as a node of imperial knowledge gathering, but also as editors and censors, through their selective and partial publication of letters in their journal

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<sup>1</sup> Triangulation was conceived of as „reciprocity between more than two parties: two (or more) different colonizers and the colonized. Using the concept of triangulation implies that trans-imperial cooperation between colonizers was responsive to the agency of the colonized populations“ (Florian Wagner and Christian Methfessel).

<sup>2</sup> Corey Ross (Birmingham), who was billed to give the first keynote lecture, was unable to attend.

<sup>3</sup> Forum for the Study of the Global Condition, <http://www.forum-global-condition.de> (23.04.2018), Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung, <http://www.ernst-abbe-stiftung.de/home.htm> (23.04.2018).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/sammlung-perthes> (23.08.2018).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/forschungszentrum-gotha> (23.08.2018).

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„Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen“. The institutionalisation of public geographical knowledge, especially about the German colonies, was further developed through the history of the Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, which over the course of the twentieth century developed from Alphons Stübel's volcanic collections at the Museum für vergleichende Länderkunde (1896). BRUNO SCHELHAAS (Leipzig) drew together the potential for the study of text-image relationships with respect to the colonisation of Africa by highlighting not only the collections of colonial geographers, such as Hans Meyer, but also the Institute's holdings of visual culture, including the digitized paintings of Ernst Vollbehrr. In keeping with the panel's focus on archives and sources, the papers showcased the relevance of collections in Gotha and Leipzig to the study of trans-imperial history, offering participants an „invitation to explore“ the repositories further.<sup>6</sup>

The second day, held at the Augustinerkloster zu Erfurt, began with the organizers setting the methodological agenda for the rest of the event, before the first keynote lecture was delivered by VÉRONIQUE DIMIER (Brussels). Revisiting her doctoral research in preparation for the publication of a revised edition in English<sup>7</sup>, Dimier pulled apart the paradigmatic and opposing models of colonialism defined by French direct rule and British indirect rule. Comparing the development of a „science“ of colonial administration and the transfer of ideas between them, she focused on the practicalities of implementing governance „on the ground“ in Africa, arguing that in order to speak about transfer, one must study the people who are „transferring“. Criticising the reduction of transfer-processes to the scale of networks and discourse, Dimier insisted that the interactions of „real individuals“ and „specific people“ needed to be considered. Exposing the limits of historical reconstruction, it was concluded that, rather than opposing modes of colonial administration, there was little evidence to prove that the interactions between colonial officials and local chiefs were different, whether officials were British or French, and, ultimately, that the practices of colonial governance were not so opposed or distinguishable as has been tra-

ditionally maintained.

The papers of Panel 2 continued both the theme of colonial governance and the location of Africa. NICOLA CAMILLERI (Berlin) expounded upon the contrasting policies governing citizenship exacted in German and Italian colonies, arguing that colonial citizenship can only be understood with reference to the policies enforced in the respective metropolises. Noting that while the legal status of indigenous populations remained fixed, the legal status of other non-European foreigners was equally enmeshed within an imposed racial hierarchy that culminated in a 1930s ban on Italian-colonial marriages in order to maintain „Italian racial prestige“. In contrast, ANGELO MATTEO CAGLIOTI (Florence) returned the focus to „on the ground“, demonstrating how the natural resources of Ethiopia provided local tribes with the potential to play colonial powers against each other for their advantage. Explicitly addressing indigenous agency, he demonstrated how the building of a French railroad and British need for the water supply that ran from Ethiopia into Sudan and Egypt allowed the local brokerage and trans-imperial negotiation necessary for Mussolini's occupation in 1935. For Caglioti, triangulation provided a way of thinking about a situation that involved multiple, rather than three, stakeholders.

East Africa remained in focus in Panel 3. GEERT CASTRYCK (Leipzig), perhaps more than all other speakers, took up the idea of triangulation, exploring the multiple meanings of the word: not only did he follow the organizers' intentions of introducing a third (or more) party, but he also considered the geographical process of triangulation, which, among other uses, was employed in determining colonial borders. In particular, he concentrated on a section of the border running between the Congo Free State and the German Colony of Tanganyika that followed the Ruzizi River, except where it was interrupted by Lake Kivu and its islands. While pre-existing African territorialities were viewed as irrele-

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Bruno Schelhaas.

<sup>7</sup> Originally published in French as „Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britannique“ (Brussels, 2004).

vant by colonial officials, the contested border cut one chief's territory into two. It was his support that would play the crucial role in determining the future realisation of the border in the early twentieth century. After World War I, German East Africa (Tanganyika) fell under British Mandate, which was the subject of REGINALD ELIAS KIREY (Dar es Salaam/Hamburg). Uniquely in this workshop, he provided an example of a „colonized“ European population: Germans already living in the territory and the reactions of their British colonial masters. The German settlers employed cheap African labourers in their plantations, producing cash-crops for a lucrative home market. With the growing presence of National Socialism, the autonomy and exclusivity of the German population troubled the British administration until the outbreak of World War II.

Panel 4 marked geographical relocations to South East Asia and Latin America. ANDREAS WEIß (Braunschweig) argued that the regional cooperation realized in ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, founded in 1967) was not a product of Western (especially USA) WWII-era geo-political organization, but that it grew out of shared experiences of anti-colonialist struggle against Western (and Japanese) imperialism, WWII, and decolonization. Shifting scale, SEBASTIAN DORSCH (Erfurt) returned to the problems of maps and borders in a situation that defies easy categorisations of „colonizer“ and „colonized“. Taking Henri A. Coudreau's „La France Équinoxiale“ (1888) as his starting point, a book used by the French for justifying their Guayanan border claim with Brazil, Dorsch described the brokerage of local interests provided by Emil Göldi, who denounced Coudreau's maps in the „Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen“ and successfully defended Brazil's boarder claim. Through Göldi, a settled „Brazilian“, Dorsch questioned definitions of „indigenous“ and „European“, and asked whether imperialism always needed to be overseas.

The final day started with a keynote lecture delivered by MARIA FRAMKE (Rostock) who took up the subject of pan-Asianism. By focusing specifically on anti-colonial cooperation between India and China in the 1930s

and 1940s, she charted the development of a regionally-based counter-internationalism. Not limited to cultural interactions, such as Rabindranath Tagore ensuring Chinese Studies was taught at his university in Bengal, Framke demonstrated how Indian (anti-British) nationalists garnered reciprocal anti-imperialist support through demonstrations of solidarity with China; from building political relationships at the Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism (1927) to the Indian Medical Mission to China, solidarity days held across Indian cities (1937/8) in support of China's struggle against Japanese imperialist aggression (though it was not actually a colony), and the boycott of Japanese imported goods. Rather than merely forming in response to Western powers, Pan-Asianism, Framke argued, should be seen in light of the broader struggle against all forms of imperialist aggression, in which humanitarian cooperation played a significant role.

The ultimate panel comprised three papers that considered the trans-imperial more explicitly in terms of international history. The panel began with a call from DANIEL HEDINGER (Rome) for a trans-imperial history of WWII that encompasses the globality of the conflict. Specifically citing Winston Churchill's British-centric publications<sup>8</sup>, he argued that European histories of WWII have globalized an image of the war in which the role of empires and imperialism are minimized. He chose to demonstrate the global nature of the war though the multiple trans-imperial geographies experienced by German, Italian and Japanese airmen in around the world flights in the 1930s and early 1940s. ROEL FRACKING (Leiden) opted to discuss the Indonesian fight for independence and the Netherlands' struggle to hold on to their colonies in the aftermath of WWII. Defining indigenous agency as „the capacity to resist domination“, he revealed how Indonesia became a site of global imperial struggle involving a Japanese-encouraged nationalist movement, British peace-brokerage, and multiple European and Asian consular missions. The last paper of the workshop contin-

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<sup>8</sup>Winston Churchill published his six-volume „The Second World War“ between 1948 and 1953.

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ued the chronological progression to the Cold War and the final years of the Portuguese Colonial Empire. NIELS SCHLIEHE (Hamburg) explored how Portugal exploited the geographical location of its scattered colonies in order to promote itself on the European and global political scene. Whether it was the use of the Azores by USA military, access to Mozambique's ports by the British in Rhodesia, or reciprocal support with South African allies, Portugal clung on to its colonies longer than most European powers through trans-imperial cooperation.

It was clear that the principal aim of the organizers was to start a conversation addressing an apparent lack of attention paid to trans-imperial interactions in preference to linear imperial or national histories. While simultaneously highlighting indigenous agency, they proposed „triangulation“ as a way of including multiple perspectives and players. The regional, predominately African and Asian, bias of papers reflects the undoubted relevance of these areas to understanding global twentieth-century history and countering long-established Eurocentric narratives, however, it would be interesting to see if there is a place for Russia/ USSR (as raised in a comment by Katja Naumann), the Middle East, or colonized people *within* Europe in this conversation. Nevertheless, from Dimier's refusal to adhere to long-standing models that pit one mode of colonial administration against another to Hedinger's insistence on the need to recognize the global and trans-imperial dimensions of WWII, each speaker engaged with „triangulation“ and the workshop's core theme of trans-imperial cooperation and transfer. Along the way, Dimier and Schröder stressed the importance of investigating the social backgrounds and motivations of actors in triangular constellations, which in turn would add a more critical element to investigations of apparent reciprocity. Rejecting binary relationships, many papers went beyond notions of static three-node models, considering triangulation as a heuristic tool with which the colonial archive may be approached (Castrycck and Caglioti). While Castrycck and Wagner emphasised triangulation's applicability to microhistories, discussions also highlighted the problematic

nature of introducing multiplicity through a concept with a name inherently associated with a specific number: tri-angulation (three). Whether a specific concept such as „triangulation“ will continue to be useful, or even necessary, in order to explore the complicated processes of trans-imperial transfer and cooperation in last 150 years will no doubt be decided as the conversation continues in the form of a trans-imperial history network, the starting point of which this workshop formed.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Guided Tour*

Sven Ballenthin (Gotha); Iris Schröder (Erfurt/Gotha): The Perthes Forum

##### *Panel 1: Archives of Trans-imperial History?*

Reiner Prass (Erfurt/Gotha): Letters from Africa in the Perthes Collection

Bruno Schelhaas (Leipzig): The Archives of the Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde

##### *Keynote*

Véronique Dimier (Brussels): The Internationalisation of the Colonial Debate: Colonial Science, the Politics of Comparisons, and the Limits of Transfer

##### *Panel 2: Colonial Governmentality and Trans-imperial Cooperation*

Nicola Camilleri (Berlin): Citizenship Policy in the German and Italian Colonies: Beyond a Comparison (1880s-1920s)

Angelo Matteo Caglioti (Florence): Ethiopia 1935: The Failure of Trans-imperial Cooperation

Comment: Katja Naumann (Leipzig)

##### *Panel 3: African Agency Between and Within the Empires*

Geert Castrycck (Leipzig): The 'Triangulation' of Territoriality in Berlin's Africa: Juggling between European Knowledge Orders, Imperial Rivalries, and African Agency

Catherine Atlan (Aix-en-Provence): Between Africa, Germany, and France: Trans-imperial

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<sup>9</sup> Florian Wagner and Christian Methfessel invite anyone interested in joining the network to email them (florian.wagner@uni-erfurt.de and christian.methfessel@uni-erfurt.de).

Itineraries of African Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century (ca. 1910–1960)

Reginald Elias Kirey (Dar es Salaam/Hamburg): Racial Divisions and Alliances in Mandate Tanganyika: 1919–1945

Comment: Maximilian Georg (Leipzig)

*Panel 4: Asia and America: Between Cooperation and Resistance*

Andreas Weiß (Braunschweig): From Anti-colonial Resistance to Regional Cooperation: The European Powers and Southeast Asia

Sebastian Dorsch (Erfurt): Imperial Mappings and the Argument of Local Agency: Transatlantic Forms of Cooperation and Colonial Techniques in the Guayana-Conflicts (1870s–1920s)

Comment: Maximilian Georg (Leipzig)

*Keynote*

Maria Framke (Rostock): 'We Fight for the Liberation of Humanity': Exploring the Entangled Web of Indian Anti-colonialism, (Humanitarian) Internationalism and Pan-Asian Solidarity in the 1930s and 1940s

*Panel 5: Trans-imperial Cooperation and the International History of the 20th Century*

Daniel Hedinger (Rome): Trans-imperial History and the Global 1930s

Roel Frakking (Leiden): Dumb, Stubborn and on the Way to Senility: Trans-national Meddling and the End of Empire in Indonesia

Niels Schliehe (Hamburg): Decolonization in Times of the Cold War. The Late Portuguese Colonial Empire and Its International Allies

Comment: Christian Methfessel (Erfurt)

*Final Discussion*

Tagungsbericht *Trans-imperial Cooperation and Transfers in the Age of Colonial Globalization: Towards a Triangular History of Colonialism?* 22.03.2018–24.03.2018, Gotha / Erfurt, in: H-Soz-Kult 03.05.2018.