

From Colonization to Globalization: Why We Should Rethink Swiss History

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Switzerland is one of the foremost global commodity trading hubs, the world's leading international wealth management center, and almost every second citizen has a migration background. Yet, despite being one of the most globalized countries in the world, the notion of Switzerland as an innocent bystander to colonialism, colonial and post-colonial exploitation has persisted to a remarkable degree. Building on a growing body of research on colonial and global entanglements of Switzerland, the conference „From Colonization to Globalization“ asked why and how Swiss history needs to be rethought along the lines of race, class, gender, post-colonial theory, and imperial formation. This two-day conference brought together academics, civil society actors, and representatives from political parties. It sought to initiate a broad debate about how Swiss history needs to be rethought, rewritten and re-taught.

Keynote speaker ANN LAURA STOLER (The New School for Social Research New York) suggested the use of the analytical concept, diagnostic, and dispositif of „interior frontiers“ to redraw a colonial map of Swiss connectivity. The current anti-democratic and anti-intellectual global populist moment, Stoler warned, is not an eruption but rather the outcome of tectonic shifts not readily visible. Interior frontiers bridge what is separately treated in political theory: political emotions and rationality, the public and the private, individual and collective rationalities. They are complex forms of the „cultivation of the self“ (Foucault) and „symbolic differences“ (Balibar) that demarcate the space that is called „home“ and define the people that are called „we“. Interior frontiers are not to be understood as lines but are in real-

ity constantly crossed. Thus, even when migrants traverse the physical borders of a country, they are again faced with innumerable internal frontiers defined by moral and social conventions and the state's racialized apparatuses. These internalized routines dating back to the colonial era constantly produce and reproduce differentiation and define who merits European equality or who is branded as an undesirable subject.

The first panel „De l'esclavage, des multinationales et de la condition noire en Suisse“ highlighted the manifold and forgotten connections of Switzerland with the transatlantic slave trade and the role of black people in Switzerland. THOMAS DAVID (University of Lausanne and ETH Lausanne) reminded us of the colonial amnesia that still pervaded the official circles until very recently. Alluding to his book *La Suisse et l'esclavage des noirs* (2005), Thomas David identified three major ways in which Swiss actors were intimately connected to the transatlantic slave trade. First, Swiss merchants were involved in the trading of colonial commodities and specialized in insuring slave ships. Secondly, Swiss (as a result of Huguenot immigration) were leading in the production and exchange of the highly ornamented printed or painted textiles (indiennes) that came to be a quasi-currency in the exchange of colonial products such as indigo, rice, sugar, and coffee. Thirdly, Swiss entrepreneurs owned plantations and Swiss soldiers were regularly employed in military campaigns in slave colonies. Interestingly, there were interconnections between the fortunes of Swiss entrepreneurs and the emergence of modern philanthropy in Switzerland. Against the backdrop of the rising number of racially motivated assaults in Switzerland in recent years, Thomas David urged for a more informed curriculum at schools and universities. NOËMI MICHEL (University of Geneva) illustrated in her paper how black people and their history are constantly and almost exclusively reduced to slavery. Looking at the Haitian revolution as a world event of global significance in which democracy, human rights, and equality were formulated and lived much more radically than in France, she showed how the Haitian revolution was belittled and trivialized by contemporaries.

Such „silencing the past“ (Trouillot) led to the Haitian revolution being a non-event (non-événement) in European history and the histories of democracy and human rights. The traditional model of diffusion characterizing European and Western modernity systematically omitted outer-European contributions to the values of democracy, equality, and human rights. The politics of omission create racism and contribute to the difficult situation of diasporic communities in Switzerland. Noémi Michel pleaded for a politics of amplification that makes the gaps in the history and the contribution of black women and men in European and Swiss history visible. IZABEL BARROS (Cooperaxion) discussed how the NGO Cooperaxion bases its operation on the triangle of trade and the old slave trade routes. The ensuing discussion stressed the multiple forms and levels of silencing concerning slavery and the role of black people in Switzerland that pervade public debates. It also highlighted how modern forms of philanthropy emerged precisely at the same time as Swiss entrepreneurs were amassing fortunes from the slave trade.

The theme of the second panel „Migration und die Geschichte der nicht-weissen Schweiz“ was the histories of migration and non-white Switzerland. FRANCESCA FALK (University of Fribourg) illustrated how migration decisively shaped modern Switzerland. Rather than reinforcing traditional gender divisions, migration was an important engine of emancipation and innovation. It was, for instance, due to working migrant women – 75% of working women were immigrants – that the infrastructure for day nurseries rapidly expanded in Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s. After the oil crises and changing patterns of employment, Swiss women were able to use this existing infrastructure. A comparable dynamic marked the inclusion of women in higher education. The celebrated Swiss female scientist Marie Heim-Vögtlin was inspired by the Russian Nadezhda Suslowa, the first woman to obtain a doctorate at the University of Zurich in 1867, to pursue her studies at university. Similarly, the first association for gender equality in Switzerland was founded by Marie Goegg-Pouchoulin after she had traveled to London and met with

like-minded suffragettes and women's rights advocates. Francesca Falk employed a broad concept of migration that included temporary migrations abroad and micro-migrations within the territory of a state. Rather than a new history of migration, she argued for a migrantization (Migrantisierung) of history. JOVITA DOS SANTOS PINTO (University of Bern) traced the forgotten history of Pauline Buisson and her son. Pauline Buisson was brought as a slave from Saint-Domingue to Switzerland in 1776 by the Swiss businessman David-Philippe de Treytorrens. Pauline Buisson gave birth to a son, Samuel Hippolyte, in 1790. A year later the sister and wife of the deceased de Treytorrens applied for Swiss citizenship for Samuel. Analysing the court documents of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Jovita dos Santos Pinto showed how the local authorities not only argued with the skin color of Samuel Buisson to reject the application but also employed sexual imagery of Pauline Buisson as a black woman unable to control her sexual urges. Pauline Buisson was accused of having damaged local society by giving birth to an illegitimate son. The „controlling images“ (Hill Collins) mixed race, class, and gender and created the view of Pauline Buisson as threatening the white reproductive order. The court case only closed after Samuel Buisson's death. Far from being the only case, Pauline Buisson and her son stand for an often-forgotten Swiss black history (histoire noir Suisse) that needs to be recovered and retraced. STEFAN EGLI (Foraus) and HALUA PINTO DE MAGALHÃES (INES) pointed out how Swiss citizenship still revolves around the figure of the white male citizen. Migrantization, they argued, has to go well beyond a migrantization of history but also has to include Swiss citizenship.

The third panel „Entwicklungshilfe und Hilfe zur Steuerflucht?“ was looking at development aid and how Swiss authorities were helping, through a mix of occlusion and inactivity, to establish Switzerland as a global tax haven. JAKOB TANNER (University of Zurich) charted how Switzerland evolved as one the leading global hubs of tax evasion after the Second World War. The „dormant accounts“ (nachrichtenlose Vermögen) of Jew-

ish victims of the Holocaust drew international criticism in the early 1960s. At the same time, the bank secrecy came under sustained attack from abroad. Harold Wilson, leader of the British Labour Party, for instance, branded the Swiss banks as „little gnomes“ in Zurich. The international criticism triggered tentative attempts by the Swiss authorities to tackle the problem. Influenced by the powerful banking lobby, however, these initiatives faltered. In the period between the late 1960s and the abolition of the bank secrecy in 2017, the bank secrecy was depicted as a „Swiss institution“ that mirrored specific Swiss characteristics in public discourses. The bank secrecy, Tanner concluded, resulted in a drain of assets away from the Third World and a transfer of money to corrupt elites and the West. It contributed to corruption and tax evasion on a large scale. A „cartel of silence“ (Schweigekartell) characterized the stance of the Swiss authorities. Criticism of the bank secrecy by the increasingly vocal left from the 1970s was decried as treasonous by the Swiss political elite. DANIEL SPEICH-CHASSÉ (University of Luzern) attempted to deconstruct the „humanitarian tradition“ Switzerland and Swiss people are so proud of. The three elements of the humanitarian tradition (1) the liberal admission of refugees in Switzerland, (2) the good services of Swiss diplomacy after the Second World War, and (3) development aid implode if inspected closely. The admission of the Bourbaki army on Swiss territory and the humanitarian aid to its soldiers in the 1870s was certainly as much a civil society initiative and the doing of local authorities than that of the newly formed and weak Swiss central state. Swiss development aid after the Second World War was constructed as technical and served to reinforce the notion of neutral Swiss aid. Swiss development was furthermore always strongest in states that allegedly shared cultural values with Switzerland: small countries without access to the sea and with mountains. The good services of Swiss diplomacy were often a means to gain economic access to certain countries. The humanitarian tradition, according to Speich-Chassé, is rather an „invented tradition“ (Hobsbawm and Ranger) than a historical fact. DOMINIK GROSS (Alliance Sud) stressed the problematic of sepa-

rating home and foreign policy. He insisted that many of the global problems ought to be rethought in terms of a „global home policy“ (Weltinnenpolitik). AIMO BRUNETTI (Center for Regional Economic Development) reminded the audience that Switzerland started on a higher economic level in the 1950s than most countries and that the Swiss economic growth was not just based on asset management. He was adamant that free trade is important. The ensuing discussion showed how ideologies of free trade still heavily influence the perceptions of actors and raised the question of what sort of trade relations are desirable.

A roundtable consisting of academics, journalists and politicians concluded the conference. CHRISTOPH KELLER (Swiss Radio and Television, SRF), IRENE HERMANN (University of Geneva), ELISABETH JORIS (Zurich), ELISIO MACAMO (University of Basel), TOBIAS STRAUMANN (University of Zurich), BARBARA LÜTHI (University of Cologne), REGULA RYTZ (Green Party of Switzerland), CÉDRIC WERMUTH (Swiss Socialist Party) discussed the history of Swiss colonial entanglement and the persistence of unequal relationships in institutions such as the bank secrecy. There was a consensus that there is a general sense of global connections in the Swiss population but its specifics or histories remain often unknown and occluded. Post-colonial values, Wermuth maintained, have to be defended and fought for in academia, in society, and in everyday life.

In conclusion, this conference has illustrated the need to fundamentally rethink Swiss history and to retrace the colonial and global entanglements of Switzerland. Indeed, this conference has shown that the global nature of Switzerland today is incomprehensible without taking into account its manifold histories of colonial entanglements and global connectivity. Switzerland is, then, - to borrow an idea of Sujit Sivasundaram - in a peculiar way „islanded“. Too small to be acknowledged in world history, the sense of isolation and exceptionalism, persisted longer in public discourses than elsewhere. Yet, as with conventional islands, Switzerland and the Swiss people were connected to the world and crucially contributed to both colonialism

and globalization in ways that have to be further explored. The sense of Switzerland as an island unconnected to colonialism has also obfuscated our understanding of how the categories of race, class, and gender were informed by the colonial situation and how these legacies continue to produce inequality and discrimination in modern Swiss society.

Programm

First Day, 19 April 2018

Welcome and Introduction: Prof. Dr. Harald Fischer-Tiné (ETH Zurich)

Keynote: „Interior Frontiers“. Dangerous Concepts in Our times
Ann Laura Stoler (The New School for Social Research New York)

Second Day, 20 April 2018

Welcome and Introduction: Prof. Dr. Patricia Purtschert & Prof. Dr. Christof Dejung (University of Bern)

Introductory remarks: Nach der Mythologiekritik – Eine Geschichte der globalen Schweiz?

Dr. Bernhard Schär (ETH Zurich)

Panel 1 – De l’esclavage, des multinationales et de la condition noire en Suisse

Chair: Prof. Dr. Brigitte Studer (University of Bern)

Prof. Dr. Thomas David (University of Lausanne and ETH Lausanne): La Suisse et l’esclavage des Noirs

Dr. Noémi Michel (University of Geneva): L’histoire des sujets réduits à l’esclavage. Un enjeu pour la citoyenneté démocratique Suisse

Comments: Cooperaxion (Izabel Barros)

Panel 2 – Migration und die Geschichte der nicht-weissen Schweiz

Chair: Prof. Dr. Patricia Purtschert (University of Bern)

Dr. Francesca Falk (University of Fribourg): Ohne Migration keine moderne Schweiz. Ausführungen aus einer Geschlechterperspektive

Lic. phil. Jovita dos Santos Pinto (University of Bern): Besitzen, (S)Exotisieren und

Vergessen: das politische Subjekt der Schweiz

Comments: Stefan Egli (Foraus) und Halua Pinto de Magalhães (INES)

Panel 3 – Entwicklungshilfe und Hilfe zur Steuerflucht?

Chair: Prof. Dr. Christof Dejung (University of Bern)

Prof. em. Dr. Jakob Tanner (University of Zurich): Die Globalisierung des Finanzplatzes Schweiz und die „Dritte Welt“ aus postkolonialer Perspektive

Prof. Dr. Daniel Speich-Chassé (University of Luzern): Humanitäre Tradition und koloniale Situation – Verstrickungen der Schweizer Entwicklungshilfe

Comments: Lic. phil. Dominik Gross (Alliance Sud) und Prof. Dr. Aymo Brunetti (Center for Regional Economic Development)

Roundtable – Wessen Schweizer Geschichte für wen?

Host: Christoph Keller (Swiss Radio and Television, SRF)

Prof. Dr. Irene Hermann (University of Geneva), Dr. Elisabeth Joris (Zurich), Prof. Dr. Elisio Macamo (University of Basel), Prof. Dr. Tobias Straumann (University of Zürich), Prof. Dr. Barbara Lüthi (University of Cologne), Regula Rytz (Historian, Green Party of Switzerland, member of National Council), Cédric Wermuth (Political scientist, Social Democratic Party of Switzerland, member of National Council)

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