

## Empires: Towards a Global History

**Veranstalter:** Department of History, University of Delhi; Weatherhead Initiative on Global History, Harvard University, Cambridge

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From antiquity to the recent past, empires exercised indelible and undeniable power and influence on global history. Empires have assumed diverse forms, exhibiting and incorporating different behaviors, politics, economic systems, and cultures. Indeed, while scholars disagree on how best to describe or define 'empire', a uniting feature of empires across time and space has been the project of managing diverse peoples and relationships interacting within and across their presumed territorial boundaries. Heterogeneity engendered connections, circulations, and conflicts, often with other empires, and, eventually, with nation-states and nationalisms. This conference was organized with the objective of examining such interactions within the framework of the shared global systemic architecture of hegemony and dominance from which empires drew their strength, and highlighting ways in which imperial interactions served to reinforce empires within their global scaffolding.

Last year, members of The Global History Network convened for this conference, which brought together scholars from around the world. The conference theme, proposed by Charles Maier of Harvard University, produced a wide-ranging collection of papers that explored ways in which imperial interactions facilitated ideological, cultural, and commercial connectivity among diverse societies. The research presented at the conference illustrated heterogeneous historical manifestations of empires not as discrete containers, but as porous, interactive, and evolving entities operating within an ever-changing global system. The conference was made possible by the generous funding provided by the University of Delhi and the Volkswagen Foundation.

This is the second meeting of this character to have taken place to date. First convened

in March 2016 at the University of São Paulo, meetings of the Global History Network bring together graduate, postgraduate, and faculty participants from universities and institutes from every continent to discuss global history, and to forge an agenda for future research and teaching in the field. The conference in Delhi expanded upon discussions initiated in 2016 about the role of theory, approaches to teaching, and about the importance of venues such as this conference to the practice of a truly global history, one that generates dialogue among diverse perspectives and that brings a wide variety of intellectual traditions into a common discussion.

Attended by more than 75 people per panel, the event opened with remarks from SUNIL KUMAR (University of Delhi), SVEN BECKERT (Harvard University, Cambridge), and PRABHU MOHAPATRA (University of Delhi). Their introductory comments posed broad questions about the temporal, spatial, and political priorities of global history as a subfield of historical study. Kumar noted the overwhelming representation of modern empires among the conference papers, and suggested that theorizations of the historical formation and functioning of empires would benefit from greater consideration of pre- and early-modern empires. Beckert highlighted the revelation of connections and shared experiences across political borders as particular strengths of the field and as important scholarly projects in the contemporary moment. Mohapatra also identified the question of how to manage difference while also putting everyone in some way on the same page as a central problem that global historians struggle with. He proposed that expanding existing categories (such as that of labor history), and connecting different temporalities are two ways for historians to address that question.

The first two panels of the conference were dedicated to the importance of commodities within and between imperial systems. The first of these panels, chaired by Sven Beckert, opened with a presentation by JODY BENJAMIN (University of California, Riverside) on the use of Indian cotton textiles within western African polities to build alliances among African, European, and Arab mer-

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chants within and between empires. MARTA MACEDO (Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon) considered the transatlantic circulation of cocoa and coffee plantation systems as part of European colonial repertoires. RITESH JAISWAL (University of Delhi / WIGH Research Fellow, Cambridge) turned attention to labor migration within the Indian Ocean world in an examination of the Kangany and Maistry systems of labor recruitment within the context of global and regional upheavals of the 1930s and 40s.

The second panel, chaired by KARIN HOFMEESTER (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam) continued to explore the importance of commodities to imperial projects. SHARMILA SHRIVASTAVA (University of Delhi) assessed global factors affecting production and consumption of coffee in Mysore and Coorg. RACHEL STEELY (Harvard University, Cambridge) discussed the ways in which conflicts between empires propelled the expansion of soy from a regional to a global commodity in the late nineteenth century. SONAL SINGH (University of Delhi) shed light on British use of commodified art – specifically the panorama – to depict India to a mass market in England.

The third panel, chaired by FARHAT HASAN (University of Delhi), turned the audience's attention to the technologies of empire, and opened with a talk given by ANDREA GIUNTINI (University of Modena) and REGGIO EMILIA on the transformations wrought by the laying of global submarine telegraphic cables. ROS COSTELO (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas-Universidad Complutense, Madrid) presented Spanish engineers as purveyors of ideas and technologies that were combined with local knowledge in the Spanish colonial Philippines and exchanged with experts representing other imperial powers. BLESSY ABRAHAM (University of Delhi) offered a reassessment of Indian protectionist tariffs during the interwar period.

The final panel of the day, chaired by RADHIKA SINGHA (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi), considered ideational and spatial definitional projects involved in the building and maintenance of imperial power, and featured presentations by JOÃO PAULO

PIMENTA (University of São Paulo) and MARK LINCICOME (Columbia University, New York City). Pimenta reflected on the asymmetrical connections between Brazil and other parts of the world during the early nineteenth century as Brazil transitioned from seat of the Portuguese Empire to sovereign national state. Lincicome considered the ways in which racial ideologies and geographical and cultural framings relative to „Asia“ were mobilized in Australia and Japan, as each society embarked on nation- and empire-building projects.

Day two of the conference opened with a panel on ways in which ideas have been mobilized to both buttress and undermine imperial power. RAZIUDDIN AQUIL (University of Delhi) served as the panel chair. MATHEUS CARDOSO DA SILVA gave a paper on the role of the Left Book Club in forming a transnational network that circulated socialist ideas between the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe during the interwar period. KAUSTUBH MANI SENGUPTA (Bankura University) presented on the transformative impact of new fort architecture introduced in eighteenth-century Calcutta by the East India Company, and the role of the fort in ordering urban space. AKASH BHATTACHARYA (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) discussed how British imperial agents implemented the Bell-Lancaster Method in school education in sites across the British Empire. MADHWI (University of Delhi) concluded the panel with a discussion of the technologies developed and implemented by British imperial agents to facilitate the transport of indentured laborers.

The next session was chaired by Professor BHAIRABI PRASAD SAHU (University of Delhi), and examined some of the ways in which imperial powers shaped the form and politics of urban spaces. MIKE DESAI and MADHAVI DESAI (CEPT University, Ahmedabad) gave a presentation on the global forces impacting the architecture, function, and meaning of the bungalow, which evolved from a dwelling designed by British military engineers in Bengal to a popular private abode. ZHU MING (East China Normal University, Shanghai) examined connections between Milan, Madrid, and Mexico

City as urban spaces that underwent significant change under Spanish rule, but that also transmitted ideas about form and function of urban space back to Europe. SHUBHANKITA OJHA (WIGH postdoctoral fellow, Cambridge) discussed ways in which dock workers challenged imperial power by exploiting their unique position in port cities.

After lunch, conference participants had the great pleasure of visiting historical sites around the city that represent historical empires in Delhi from the ancient, early modern, and modern periods. Guests visiting India from countries around the world set off into the exhilarating tangle of Delhi street traffic, and were taken first to an Ashokan stone pillar edict dating from the third century BCE. At the Mutiny Memorial, participants paused to observe the monument, and to consider the layers of historical interpretation sedimented at that site. The tour concluded at the beautiful Lodi Gardens, where visitors appreciated the profusion of greenery and the impressive architecture of the mosque and tombs.

Capping off the evening was the conference keynote address, an engaging lecture titled „Between Empire and Nations: Changing Meaning of Sovereignty and Borders,“ delivered by SUGATA BOSE (Harvard University, Cambridge). MADHAVAN PALAT (New Delhi) served as the chair.

The third and final day of the conference began with a panel on „Empire and Anti-Colonialism,“ chaired by VIBHA MAURYA (University of Delhi). SUNNY KUMAR (University of Delhi) traced the evolution of law against sedition from England, to British India, to the modern Indian nation-state in order to interrogate ideas about democracy, sovereignty, and state violence. DANIEL GORMAN (University of Waterloo) discussed collaboration between the London-based Movement for Colonial Freedom and African colonial nationalist and trade union leaders in the formation of a transnational anti-Apartheid movement, showing how ideas were shared between diverse colonial cultures to mount challenges against global empires.

The next panel, chaired by BABACAR FALL (Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar), considered the movement peoples in the pe-

ripheries of empires, and between imperial centers. ANA CAROLINA HOSNE (National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina, Buenos Aires) presented on ways in which early modern Iberian Empires, colonial Spanish America, and Ming and Qing China developed the category of the ‘barbarian’ to signify peoples at the geographical and cultural limits of ‘civilization’. LUCIA RODRIGUEZ ARRILLAGA (Universidad de la República, Montevideo) discussed the process of territorialization in the contested region of Rio de la Plata as Iberian officials produced ways of knowing territory in this region that were later mobilized in other contexts. RAHUL MARKOVITS (École Normale Supérieure, Paris) gave the final paper of the conference, which examined the resources and networks that eighteenth-century Indian princes used to traverse Eurasia, and the ways they understood their identities as they crossed imperial boundaries.

The final panel featured Sven Beckert, MAMADOU FALL (Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar), and MATHIAS VAN ROSSUM (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam), each of whom offered broad reflections on global history generated by their own research and by the conference proceedings. Questions and important issues raised by the speakers and by the audience during the Q&A pertained to the enduring importance of nation-states and empires in shaping global connections, the position of the local within global history, and the enduring need to write against Eurocentric metanarratives.

The concluding discussion of the conference considered pedagogical approaches and challenges to teaching global history. Some challenges are enduring, such as the issue of language. While participants appreciated having a language in common to use in our exchange of ideas, the problem of language remains in terms of the readings available to assign to students. Institutions also constrain how global history can be taught. Curricular requirements and standardized syllabi, for example, can limit opportunities to implement truly global approaches in the classroom.

In final comments, faculty and students observed the common interest in flows reflected in the papers discussed over the previous

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three days – ways in which commodities, ideas, knowledge, educational and labor systems, architectural forms, and social movements flowed between colonies and imperial centers and across political boundaries. Some pointed to further work that needs to be done to explain the forces producing not only those mobilities, but immobilities as well. Others agreed, suggesting that the strength of global history in identifying entanglement and connectivity between distant places and diverse societies can also be harnessed to shed light on the structures, technologies, and kinds of relationships that produce both flows and blockages. As we continue our work of dismantling metanarratives that privilege the perspectives on ‘empire’, it was argued that in the present moment of rising nationalism, divisive attitudes, and great fear of differences, scholars of global history should also develop a new master narrative that insists that we have more in common than what sets us apart.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Inaugural Session*

Chair: Sunil Kumar (Delhi)

Speakers: Sven Becket (Cambridge, MA), Prabhupada P. Mohapatra (Delhi)

##### *Panel I: Commodities and Empire I*

Chair: Sven Beckert (Cambridge, MA)

Jody Benjamin (Riverside): Global Cotton and Local Initiatives: A View from the West African Savannah, 1740-1780

Marta Macedo (Lisbon): Standard Cocoa: Trans-Imperial Plantations and the Making of the Global World

Ritesh Jaiswal (Cambridge, MA): Migration, Commodity Production and the Maistry System in Colonial Burma c. 1880-1940

##### *Panel II: Commodities and Empire II*

Chair: Karin Hofmeester (Amsterdam)

Sharmila Shrivastava (Delhi): Mysore and Coorg Coffee in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Rachel Stealy (Cambridge, MA): Oiling the Extractive Machine: The Rise of Soy as a Tool of Imperialism in East Asia

Sonal (Delhi): Art as Commodity in the Em-

pire: British Envisioning of India

##### *Panel III: Technologies of Empire*

Chair: Farhat Hasan (Delhi)

Andrea Giuntini (Modena): The Global Power of Cables. Imperialism and Submarine Telegraphy (1866-1902)

Ros A. Costelo (Madrid): Network of Knowledge and Technology: Colonial Civil Engineers in the Philippines in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Blessy Abraham (Delhi): Analyzing the Impact of Indian Tariff Policies on the British Empire's Trade and Commercial Relations with India During the Interwar Period (1918-1940)

##### *Panel IV: Peripheries, Frontiers, Crossings*

Chair: Radhika Singha (Delhi)

João Paulo Pimenta (São Paulo): Brazil and its Worlds: An Analytical Inventory of Brazil's Position and Global Connections within the World Arena of the Early Nineteenth Century

Mark Lincicome (New York City): Straddling Nation and Empire: Australia and Japan on the Asian Periphery

##### *Panel V: Ideas in Movement*

Chair: Raziuddin Aquil (Delhi)

Matheus Cardoso da Silva (São Paulo): The Left Book Club and its Associates: Towards a Global History of the Book Trade as a Path of Circulation of Socialist Ideas During the Interwar Period

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta (Bankura): Vauban in the Colony: The New Fort William in Eighteenth-Century Calcutta

Akash Bhattacharya (Delhi): Schooling the Empire: Towards a Global History of the Bell-Lancaster Method

Madhwi (Delhi): Circulation: Knowledge, Practices and Objects of Science in the Colonial Plantation c. 1834-1910

##### *Panel VI: Dwelling in the Imperial City*

Chair: B. P. Sahu (Delhi)

Miki Desai / Madhavi Desai (Gujarat): The Bungalow in 20th Century India: The Legacy of the Empire in Colonial and Post-Colonial

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Zhu Ming (Shanghai): Milan-Madrid-Mexico: Global Urban Network and Cities in Spanish Empire

Shubhankita Ojha (Cambridge, MA): Reclaiming Urban Space: Solidarity and Resistance at the 'Nexus of Empires'

*Keynote*

Chair: Madhavan K. Palat (New Delhi)

Sugata Bose (Cambridge, MA): Between Empire and Nations: Changing Meaning of Sovereignty and Borders

*Panel VII: Empire and Anti-Colonialism*

Chair: Vibha Maurya (Delhi)

Sunny Kumar (Delhi): From Punjab to America and Back: Ghadar Movement and the Integration of Global and Indian Anti-Colonialism

Daniel Gorman (Waterloo): The Globalization of Anti-Colonialism: The Movement for Colonial Freedom and African Nationalism

*Panel VIII: Travel and the Margins of Empire*

Chair: Babacar Fall (Dakar)

Ana Carolina Hosne (Buenos Aires): On the Circulating Notion of „Barbarian“ Across Ming / Qing China and the Early Iberian Empires (16-18th Centuries)

Lucía Rodríguez Arrillaga (Montevideo/São Paulo): Territorialization Processes in Open Inter-Imperial Frontiers: the Río de la Plata in the Crossing of the Iberian Empires (XVIII-XIX centuries)

Rahul Markovitz (Paris): The Three Princes of Broach: Indian Travelers on the Move Between Bombay, Istanbul and London (ca. 1790)

*Panel IX: Reflections on Global History*

Chair: Rana Bahl (Delhi)

Participants: Sven Beckert (Cambridge, MA), Mamadou Fall (Dakar), Mathias von Rossum (Amsterdam)

*Panel X: Teaching Global History*

Chair: Upinder Singh (Delhi)

Tagungsbericht *Empires: Towards a Global His-*