

### **The London Moment. Exile Governments, Academics, and Activists in the Capital of Free Europe, 1940–1945**

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On 23rd March 2019, the BBC reported an enormous crowd of one million people protesting the government's handling of Britain's exit from the European Union. Coincidentally, two days before, a workshop in Berlin discussed a wholly different time, when London was the de-facto capital of free Europe.<sup>1</sup>

During the Second World War, London became the seat of European exiled governments who fled to England after the German Reich had occupied their countries. The exiled governments set up a close cooperation between themselves and the British authorities. The conference „The London Moment. Exile Governments, Academics, and Activists in the Capital of Free Europe, 1940–1945“ set out to explore this moment of close collaboration – and sometimes conflict – when London became the capital of free Europe with a dialogue between specialists in legal history as well as political, cultural and social historians.<sup>2</sup>

In her opening remarks JULIA EICHENBERG (Berlin) suggested to take the London microcosm to show the interplay of national interests and transnational European cooperation beyond East/West divides. The inclusion of small nations and informal communication displays opportunities of agency that might be overshadowed by the narrative of the „Big Allies“ (United States, United Kingdom and Soviet Russia) and by a Cold-War-biased historiography. Instead, the aim is to create a new narrative: one of collaboration, of a window of opportunity opened up by a set of particular actors at a specific space and time. For the London Moment, this meant European governments in exile, forced to work together to defeat the Axis powers, within

the temporal and geographical boundaries of wartime London. The workshop programme thus focused on legal collaboration, Eastern and Western experiences of exile, and anti-imperial debates in imperial capitals.

The first panel investigated the role of „Exiled Law“. GERHARD DANNEMANN's (Berlin) paper dealt with the biography of the German lawyer Francis Mann who fled from Germany to Britain as early as 1933. His case study pointed out the challenges faced by many exiles: their continental (here: German) university education did not provide them with what the British labour market required; therefore they had to find niches to generate income. Mann filled a gap in British academia with his publications on monetary law. Like him, many exiles went on to work in academia, specialising in topics that were more developed on the continent, contributing to and shaping the British academic landscape. ANNETTE WEINKE (Jena) added that in particular the field of international law provided a similar niche since knowledge of non-UK law enabled emigrés to productively contribute to it. The work of legal NGOs should receive further attention, Weinke pointed out, as they were pushing the development of international law in the global context of humanitarian rights talks since the First World War and allow to challenge cold-war historiography that largely ignores non-state actors. GUILLAUME MOURALIS (Berlin/Paris) examined the problematics of internal politics of the Allies in prosecuting the Nazi regime for crimes on racial grounds. Despite the fact that punishing Nazi war crimes was one of the Allies' main war aims, the U.S. vetoed the use of the term due to their own segregation policy back home. Their reluctance played into the hands of France and the UK, for whom the term would have had impli-

<sup>1</sup>British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC): „Brexit March: Million joined Brexit protest, organisers say“, 23.03.2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-47678763> (08.04.2019).

<sup>2</sup>The term „London Moment“ refers to the special and close cooperation between the European governments in exile and the British authorities during the war years; see Julia Eichenberg, *Macht auf der Flucht. Europäische Regierungen in London (1940–1944)*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 15 (2018, 3), pp. 452–473, <https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2018/id=5614> (08.04.2019).

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cations for their colonial law system. This opened a larger point of the inherently difficult process of finding workable solutions in the international community. International solutions were only possible when they did not touch the sovereignty of states.

„Legal trajectories“ was the topic of the second panel. The chair SARA WEYDNER (Berlin) opened with a comment on transnational collaboration of emigré jurists on internationalising criminal law during the London Moment. By analysing how lawyers from different backgrounds competed over the interpretation of international criminal and humanitarian law, she argued that in the moment of collaboration, conflict and confrontation were also present and need to be taken into account when examining the London Moment. Using the female-led legal NGO „Howard League for penal reform“ as an object of inquiry, ANNE LOGAN (Kent) examined women’s historical influence on legal development. Led by Margery Fry, the Howard League pioneered work on crime prevention policies and criminology research in the UK from 1886 until after the Second World War. However, Fry’s work to facilitate the setting up of criminology as a field at British universities went largely unnoticed by historiography, unlike that of her male colleagues. This goes to show how the examination of traditional primary sources with new questions can expand the traditional historical consensus, Logan argued. By analysing the Belgian planning for post-war trials, PIETER LAGROU (Brussels) and MARIE-ANNE WEISERS (Brussels) shed light on legal planning for the post-war future during the exile. Most studies, Lagrou argued, ignore the significance of national law cases for the development of international law. To counter this, his research group digitalises Belgian case law to make it accessible and to facilitate further research. Weisers addressed the issue of trials of crimes committed against Jews in occupied Belgium during the Second World War, placing them in a historical context dating back to the First World War, which served as bedrock for war crimes trials. Contrary to popular arguments in historiography, Weisers indicated, Belgian judicial authorities were very sensitive to crimes against the Jews, as the case

of Otto Siegburg, a German police officer stationed in Belgium, shows. Siegburg was prosecuted not for war crimes, but for crimes against humanity. Overall, however, Lagrou and Weisers argue that the Belgian judicial system was not given the adequate tools to deal with war crimes.

The first day concluded with a roundtable discussion between MARTIN CONWAY (Oxford), GABRIEL GORODETSKY (Oxford) and CLAUDIA WEBER (Frankfurt/Oder). Conway described the post-war order discussed in London as a Northwest European transnational order. He advocated for further research on other cities of exile during the war, e.g. Cairo, Beirut or Moscow. Gorodetsky then introduced the diaries of Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to Britain in the Second World War, as an important source for the history of the exiled community in London. Maisky, he argued, was in touch with people from nearly every political group and documented the personal conversations with them in his diaries. According to Gorodetsky, Russia’s role in the victory of the Second World War is still not fully recognised, stemming from a deep distrust towards nowadays Russia from historians, a shadow looming from the Cold War into the present, which continues to bias historians writing on the Second World War. Historians, Gorodetsky claims, must explore Russia’s role in the Second World War more closely to render its history more factual. CLAUDIA WEBER examined the London Moment as an opportunity to write an entangled history of Eastern and Western Europe during the Second World War that, in her view, would offer the perspective to unite the very separate historiographies of Eastern and Western Europe. By bringing these two historiographies together, she claims, it would be possible to show how mental maps were and borders are constructed, and, subsequently, deconstruct them and offer new narratives, since these constructed borders of Eastern and Western Europe blurred during the war when governments from all over Europe resided and interacted with each other in London.

The third panel focused on „Eastern and Western Europe in London“. VIT SMETANA (Praha) focused on Czechoslovakian foreign

policy directed towards a cooperation with Poland and their considerations of a Polish-Czechoslovakian federation. At the same time, both governments had a very different attitude towards the Soviet Union, since Czechoslovakia was leaning towards the Soviet Union for security guarantees; there was a „loyal obedience“ (Smetana) towards the Soviet Union. According to Smetana, historians should therefore be wary to compare different governments in exile too easily: although there are similarities between the cases of Poland and Czechoslovakia, their direct comparison is not entirely possible since geopolitical conflicts and issues of identity played out differently for each of them. In her paper about the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), LAURE HUMBERT (Manchester) underlined the importance of international organisations for the French government to establish itself on the diplomatic stage after the Vichy-regime had broken many ties to other nations. The French role in it, however, Humbert claimed, had been overlooked, as they unsuccessfully tried to get more involved in UNRRA. According to Humbert, this lays bare how far the French representatives in London regarded membership in international organisations as a symbol of recognition of France as an equal partner in the post-war order. PETER ROMIJN (Amsterdam) explored the Dutch government-in-exile's role, arguing their politics were influenced by dissonance and infighting rather than transnational collaboration. He sees this inward-looking perspective rooted in a Dutch political tradition of refraining from conflict and seeing themselves as a beacon of peaceful conflict resolution, coined with distrust towards the outside world. The exile, he argues, was therefore rather seen as a window of opportunity for restauration – including resuming control over their colonial territories in Southeast Asia – than one for reform and innovation of the Dutch position in international order.

The papers presented in the fourth panel „Anti-/Imperial Aspects“ highlighted the role of European metropolises as capitals of their colonies. In her paper on West African and Caribbean journalists in London, LESLIE JAMES (London) argued that flour-

ishing ideas of Pan-Africanism in the 1930s and 1940s press died away by the 1950s, as the press became a site for performing the ability of self-government and democratic competencies. Political experimentation was overshadowed by this new pragmatism. The British administration tried to „educate“ colonial journalists with the goal to training a „mimicked British press“ in the colonies. However, differences became evident when the Caribbean and West-African Journalists in London, during their press delegation trip to report on the war on the home front, came to experience the Colour Bar, which raised issues of racialised imperialism in the colonial press. SIMEON MARTY (Berlin) traced black activism for social progress, most outspoken in Britain of the 1960s, back to the interwar years. During the war, the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939 prohibited public critique of the British government and its colonialism, as well as public demonstrations. This, however, did not stop black activism – the activists just had to change their ways of political work and find new strategies. Political rallies, a regular feature during the interwar years, were no longer possible and so the African diaspora became less visible as a political actor in the London public. However, activists from the interwar years did not simply cease to exist. Pan-African activists were more acutely aware of the fact that Africa and the African diaspora were being asked to fight against fascism and for freedom at a time when the colonial world was not free, but subject to severe repression. While for white governments in exile from mainland Europe the London Moment was a moment of cooperation and peace drafting, for Pan-African activists it was a moment when their political work was complicated by repression. MICHAEL GOEBEL (Geneva) talked about similar debates, focusing on migrants from the French colonies in interwar Paris. Goebel argued that the social experience of migration fuelled an engine of anticolonialism that was further nourished by cross-community transfers between migrant groups from different colonies unveiling different legal status of national communities that were organised in networks. The politicisation of these networks then led to a devel-

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opment of anti-colonial political attitudes for most of the French colonial subjects in Paris, like the Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh or Algerian anti-colonialists, but also West-Africans.

In her concluding remarks, JULIA EICHENBERG (Berlin) summarised central aspects of the London Moment that had been brought up: firstly, the agency of legal experts in exile who sometimes out of necessity went into academia where they contributed to the establishment or consolidation of new academic fields, secondly, the interplay of nationalism and internationalism. Further post-war planning was brought up by international activists through cross-community-activism of anticolonialists. Turning to possible avenues for further research, the workshop in Eichenberg's opinion showed the socio-historic grounding of histories of ideas (age, gender, generation) as well as culture (identity, rituals, symbols, emotions, visuals). However, economics and finances warrant closer examination in the role of governments in exile. Analysis of their financial situation might bring forward monetary struggles of governments without countries or colonies and might disclose further insight into their practices and attitudes. This had long-term trajectories, in which the gender aspect should always be present, and one should be conscious about the selection bias of primary sources.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Opening remarks*

Julia Eichenberg (Berlin): The London Moment. Law, Politics, Exile

##### *Panel 1: Exiled Law*

Chair: Sabine Freitag (Bamberg)

Gerhard Dannemann (Berlin): Francis Mann's Legal Work in Exile

Annette Weinke (Jena): International Humanitarian Law in the Making. The Role of Emigrant Jurists in the 1940s

Guillaume Mouralis (Berlin/Paris): New York – Washington – London. Murray Bernays, Nazi „Crimes on Racial Grounds“ and the „Minority Problem“ in the U.S.

##### *Panel 2: Legal Trajectories*

Chair: Sara Weydner (Berlin)

Anne Logan (Kent): Aspects of the International Work of the Howard League for Penal Reform c. 1935–1945

Pieter Lagrou and Marie-Anne Weisers (Brussels): The Forgotten Precedent. Belgian Planning for Post-War Trials and the Lacking Legacy of the Trials of the 1920s

##### *Roundtable: East West City – European Networks in London and Beyond*

Chair: Julia Eichenberg (Berlin)

Debaters: Martin Conway (Oxford), Gabriel Gorodetsky (Oxford/Tel Aviv), Claudia Weber (Frankfurt/Oder)

##### *Panel 3: Eastern and Western Europe in London*

Chair: Martin Schulze Wessel (Munich)

Vít Smetana (Praha): Czechoslovakia and Poland in Exile and on the Chessboard of the Great Powers. A Comparison and its Limits

Laure Humbert (Manchester): The French in Exile and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)

Peter Romijn (Amsterdam): In Exile with Blinkers On: Dutch Concepts in a Changing World

##### *Panel 4: Anti-/Imperial Aspects*

Chair: Róisín Healy (Galway)

Leslie James (London): Exporting Fleet Street: West African and Caribbean Journalists in London

Simeon Marty (Berlin): Thinking Black in the Blitz: Pan-African Anti-Colonial Movements During the London Moment 1940–1945

Michael Goebel (Geneva): Exiles and Shadow Diplomacy: Anti-Imperialism in Interwar Paris

##### *Closing Remarks*

Julia Eichenberg (Berlin)

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