



Encounters of Empires: Interimperial Transfers and Imperial Manifestations (1870—1950). Volker Barth / Roland Cvetkovski, University of Cologne; Dietrich Boschung / Larissa Förster, Internationales Kolleg Morphomata, 17.01.2013-18.02.2013.

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While “new imperial history” has taken hold in regard to specific European empires, the idea of empire as container has not yet been challenged as profoundly as that of its twin, the nation. With a global and interdisciplinary approach in mind, Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (both Cologne) organized this international conference to close this gap, with support by the Internationales Kolleg Morphomata, its director Dietrich Boschung and Morphomata research associate fellow Larissa Förster.

In his introduction, VOLKER BARTH (Cologne) pointed out the phenomenon of interaction in a considerable number of fields during the period of “high imperialism”, and its consequences for tools of imperialism as well as narratives of empires. He identified ideal types, fields of rule, and changes in terms and concepts as the major problems and called for research into specific contact zones and analytical differentiation. ROLAND CVETKOVSKI (Cologne) highlighted the problem of white male elites in metropole and periphery, their skill sets, and the role of access to information. He stressed the complexity of interconnections and the preliminary finding that actors shaped spaces in shifting terrains, therefore asking speakers and audience to discuss the affinities and differences within transfer procedures. Instead of an artificial isolation of highly related fields, he called for specific, problem-oriented, time-bound analysis of the techniques of power to broaden the historiographical perspective and probe the paradigm of transnationality as well as its distinction from globalization and

shared histories.

The first presentations appropriately discussed the issue of “connecting colonialisms”. ULRIKE LINDNER (Bielefeld) showcased the Institut Colonial International (ICI) which was founded in Brussels in 1894. On the basis of changing and growing forms of knowledge exchange, especially science and communication, new groups of colonial experts had come into being by the end of the 19th century. While the ICI’s founders had comparative studies in scientific organization in mind, the institute was mainly concerned with issues of colonial policy. On the one hand it was part of the movement towards internationalization around 1900, on the other hand its body of knowledge served to legitimate and justify imperial actions. FLORIAN WAGNER (Florence) showed how European colonial associations in Spain, France, Germany and Belgium conceptualized empires. He argued that this colonial movement from below was crucial in producing a pro-colonial discourse and establishing an internal civilizing mission. At the same time, the associations were open to beneficial cooperation and smaller nations referred to a European collective realm to expand their space of action. They required rules and legal adjustments, and their colonialist internationalism was institutionalized in the League of Nation’s Mandate system after World War I.

Speakers in the second panel referred to the specific contact zone of labor policies. MINU HASCHEMI YEKANI (Florence) presented a case study of transnational circuits of labor. In 1892, indentured laborers

left Singapore for German East Africa. Despite discussions of “the Yellow Peril” in Germany itself, shortage of workers on the privately owned plantations in German East Africa had prompted contracts with Chinese workers as an interim solution. In the context of “educating the Negroes to work”, indigenous workers had been treated extraordinarily bad, which from today’s historiographical perspective raises questions about the physical integrity and agency of the indentured laborers which could travel to East Africa only with the diplomatic goodwill of British officials in Singapore. A government edict in German East Africa promised to monitor the laborers’ health status and the rights of the contractors. When most of the workers returned to Singapore in 1894, 50 pressed charges against the German East Africa Company. British authorities recorded flogging as well as pressure to stay for two more years in a second report in 1896. The German government stayed loyal to the company and underlined a supposed mutiny, but their campaign was not successful, so they returned to local “labor material”. Starting from the communal discussion of labor issues among agents of empire, ERIC ALLINA (Ottawa) decentered Portuguese labor policy and “native administration” in Mozambique and focused on the men on the spot who had to reconcile policy and orders within the changing economic environment of the inter-war years. The question of how Africans should work and live had first been answered by the labor code of 1899, which left them vulnerable to both public and private forced labor service. Physical abuse and no payment had led to the death of individuals, impoverishment of communities and migration in border regions. While the government in Lisbon “stonewalled” at first, the “Commission for the Defense of the Native” achieved an overhaul of the labor code in 1928. In a more general debate about Native Affairs in the 1930s, imperial self-interest was set against the Africans’ well-being. In 1932, an order to “villageization” aimed at more density, proper regulation, and welfare. To implement “the best colonizing principles”, officials looked at British India and the Belgian Congo for example. Allina interpreted the inter-war years as watershed with experimentation and reform that eventually led to independence. After World War II, the dictatorship put Portuguese colonialism on the different trajectory regarding imperial discussions and governance.

With the third panel, the discussion moved from labor to conflicts about material resources. DAVID SCHORR (Tel Aviv) presented three cases studies on transfers of water law within the British Empire as exam-

ples for the connection between rationalized state practices, empire and modernity. First, he described the mid-19th century import of French “repairing rights” to Anglo-Saxon law via the United States as institutional import mechanism and via Quebec as result of conquest. Second, he analyzed the new water regime in the American West around 1900 and how it was transferred to Palestine – because of geographic affinities, the prestige of the exporting empire, and expert networks. Third, he referred to a court case in mandate Palestine in 1925/26 when the resident of an Arab village near Bethlehem sued the government. Water had been short because it had been redirected to Jerusalem. In court, two streams of thought originating in the USA competed with each other, namely an ideological collective argument – tied among others to the Zionist movement – with privatization for local reasons. Switching to Northern Europe’s perceived “timber frontier”, CHRISTIAN LOTZ (Marburg) deconstructed interrelations between economic growth, scientific concepts, and the political dimensions of international congresses. Around 1800, timber shortage was a common topic in forest management and in propaganda on scarce resources in Europe. Forests were constructed as sites of production only. With an international conference in 1873 in Vienna, forest science aimed at compiling statistics for reliable and comparable information. After an ongoing disagreement on standards and aggregation, experts shifted to national and imperial politics. Especially Great Britain and France sent specialists to Northern Europe.

JOHN M. MACKENZIE (Lancaster), veteran of imperial studies, picked up different strands of the conference in his keynote lecture and connected an imperial history of ideas around 1800 with imperial practices around 1900. He stressed the importance of including a worldwide view of the victims of empire and the destructive and genocidal basis of modern globalization. MacKenzie considered intellectual developments in the late 18th century as a considerable rupture, when Protestants struggled religiously with Catholic empires in the Caribbean for example and the enlightenment prompted cultural (rather than economic or technical) changes. The stadium theory that was then popularized – from barbarism to civilization – was constantly taught to imperialists around 1900. Their sets of binaries were borne out of the enlightenment. Social Darwinism, scientific racism, commerce and free trade as markers of superior civilizations – these phenomena of late 19th century imperialism had common intellectual origins. While fantasies of world taxonomies were shared in archival and

administrative orders across empires, inter-imperial relations were nevertheless conflictual. Principal sources of such friction were industrial techniques and the race for raw materials. Settling conflicts by treaty, for example during the Berlin conference, opened opportunities for areas of co-operation such as game reservations. In 1900 the first international conference on African wildlife took place in London with the objective of regulating and controlling Africans. Because of the weakness of applied sciences in Britain at the time, transfer processes set in from Germany, from forestry to veterinary medicine and microbiology. The “great feel of internationalism” before 1914 disappeared in the interwar period. MacKenzie borrowed Jürgen Habermas’ phrase of the development of a bourgeois public sphere to describe the middle class that established itself in the colonial cities around empires and called for research of indigenous bourgeois spheres. Finally, he pointed to missionaries as agents of inter-imperial encounters. As ethnographers and anthropologists they were interested in the role of women in society and in medicine, and in the manner indigenous people were being influenced and ruled. In the end, MacKenzie called for their inclusion and for consideration of the international state of capitalism in the period of high imperialism.

Broadening perspectives by introducing war as a contact zone, ALEXANDER MORRISON (Liverpool) turned to the frontier of Central Asia which was characterized by exchange and violence and by settled cultivation on the Russian side in the 1830s. The so-called winter campaign and the Russian expedition to Khiva in Turkestan were a reaction to perceived instability, shifting sovereignty, and changed geographical and self-perceptions. Anxiety materialized in fortresses, but absolute claims to territorial sovereignty did not have a parallel in a grand strategy of conquest. Even though it was piecemeal, it set the pattern for latter expansion. While Russian historiography concentrated on the fall of Tashkent and Soviet economic framing related events to cotton production and civil war in the US, Morrison analyzed the contemporaries’ sense of entitlement in a global contest. Military actors questioned common standards with Britain and France, but in hindsight there was a common military and institutional mindset of Europeans in Asia. The formula of “die großen Mächte” was popularized, and certain patterns of behavior expected to maintain imperial prestige. Khiva was compared with the French defeat in Algiers and to British fail in Afghanistan. For the colonial wars around 1900, JONAS KREIENBAUM (Rostock) researched concentra-

tion camps and zones in Cuba, South Africa, the Philippines and German West Africa as a solution for military problems. He found no evidence for processes of learning and explicit adaptation of an allegedly successful model, instead structurally similar situations with guerrilla movements. In the case of South Africa, while he came across a “Cuban connection” in contemporary press reports and a book, he argued that management procedures point to a shared Victorian medical culture and also personal transfers from India. In Southwest Africa, after the media event of the Boer Wars, the “vague idea of a population considered hostile in guarded camps” again points to a shared mindset. Structural factors such as the acute need for workers account for similarities, as well as basic colonial assumptions.

Turning to modes of co-operation and hegemony between the Qing and Meiji empires, TORSTEN WEBER (Freiburg) closed the circle with a discussion of inter-imperial discourse after the first Sino-Japanese War in 1884/85. Drawing on mainstream public political discourse, Weber discussed horizontal solidarity and rivaling conceptions in East Asia. While Takeuchi Yoshimi contrasted the ideal of solidarity with the reality of invasion in 1963, Prasenjit Duara in 2010 stressed regional imperialism and cultural anti-imperialism. In 1895 Chinese intellectual Li Hongzhang wrote of “same script same race” in a letter to his Japanese counterpart Ito Hirobumi, who imagined Japan as the modern and westernized state versus a backwards and Oriental China. In 1897 Taoka Reinu wrote of Japan’s heavenly mission to lead East Asia against white imperialism, and in 1898 Kubota Yoshiro defined Asianism as a policy to recollect the power of Genghis Khan. These ideas were hijacked by Japanese militarists in the 1930s and contained the formula for imperial expansion and colonial collaboration. With their container function, borrowing and modeling Western doctrines the encounter of empires could be imagined as solidarity as well as hegemony.

In the final discussion, the organizers raised the problem of periodization and called for further research into the interwar period. Methodologically, they suggested to establish the term trans-imperial to better differentiate between imperial and national environments. While there is a well-established and often cited corpus of concepts (Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler come to mind), the canon of imperial transfer studies needs to be expanded geographically by including the US as empire and by further case studies on specific south-south transfers, for example schemes of indentured labor in the Caribbean.

Conference Overview

Welcome and Introduction

Dietrich Boschung (Director Institute of Advanced Studies Morphomata)

Volker Barth / Roland Cvetkovski (University of Cologne)

Connecting Colonialisms

Ulrike Lindner (Bielefeld): European Colonial Experts, New Forms of Knowledge Exchange and the Development of Expert Institutions at the End of the 19th Century

Florian Wagner (Florence): Conceptualizing Empires: European Colonial Associations between Theory and Practice of Colonialism (1870-1914)

Labor Policies

Minu Haschemi Yekani (Florence): (Transnational) Circuits of Labor: Asian indentured laborers and Interimperial recruitment practices in German East Africa (1885-1914)

Eric Allina (Ottawa): The “Best Colonizing Principles”: Labor Policy and “Native Administration” in Colonial Mozambique

Exploiting Resources

David Schorr (Tel Aviv): The British Empire and Interimperial Transfers of Water Law, 1870-1950

Christian Lotz (Marburg): Facing a Timber-Frontier? Imperial Governments, International Conferences and the Problem of Calculating Future Prospects of Timber Supply in Northern Europe, 1850-1914

Keynote

John M. MacKenzie (Lancaster): European Imperialism: a Zone of Co-operation rather than Competition?

Claiming Authority

Alexander Morrison (Liverpool): Competitive Emulation in the Russian conquest of Central Asia

Military and Violence

Jonas Kreienbaum (Rostock): Deadly Learning? Concentration Camps and Zones in Colonial Wars around 1900

Adaptation and Counterbalance

Torsten Weber (Freiburg): “Asia” as Empire: Modes of Cooperation and Hegemony in Interimperial Discourse after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894/95)

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