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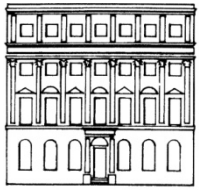

BULLETIN

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Tamara Braun:
Cooperation and Empire
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CONFERENCE REPORTS

Cooperation and Empire. Conference organized jointly by the University of Berne, Oxford Centre for Global History, German Historical Institute London, and Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung and held in Berne, 27–29 June 2013. Conveners: Tanja Bührer (University of Berne/Oxford Centre for Global History/GHIL), Flavio Eichmann (University of Berne), Stig Förster (University of Berne), Benedikt Stuchtey (GHIL), and Dierk Walter (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung).

The study of imperialism has, in many respects, become somewhat discredited and highly contested. However, few historians today would dispute that indigenous cooperation was a formative and continuous factor of empire. This was first expressed by Ronald Robinson in the 1970s. Imperial history then became increasingly outdated and by the 1990s seemed to have lost its relevance. This was also due to the rise of new theories and approaches, such as postcolonial studies. Nevertheless, many studies conducted today focus on interactions between 'colonizer' and 'colonized'. These studies often display many of the factors which Robinson had outlined in his theory of imperialism and collaboration. Robinson's ideas are therefore anything but irrelevant for the study of empires. The aim of the conference, however, was not to dig out Robinson's concept of collaboration and adapt it to the twenty-first century, but to complement his ideas with approaches and aspects from global, transnational and postcolonial history. It will be of particular interest to consider postcolonial concepts such as 'otherness', 'mimicry', and 'hybridity'. These consider that lines between 'colonizers', 'colonized', and 'collaborators' were often blurred and that there were various degrees of cooperation, which were often not as obvious and easily recognized as earlier approaches and theories implied.

The first panel of the conference explored issues of imperial politics and cultural adaption. Wolfgang Gabbert (Hanover) and Ute Schüren (Berne) both looked at cooperation in the Latin American

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

context. They came to the conclusion that many of the indigenous elites cooperated with colonial powers, often to protect their privileges and status and to pursue their own interests. In Tanja Bührer's presentation, it was the Westerners who found themselves in a weak position vis-à-vis the local ruler. At the time of the early British Residents at the Court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, common ground for cooperation first had to be established. The Nizam, however, did not consider the British East India Company a partner worth cooperating with. As the British Residents at the time were only functioning on the margins of imperial bureaucratic structures and often had no real power, they were the ones who had to adapt to local culture. Next, Myriam Yakoubi (Paris) also presented an example in which things did not go according to British plans: the development of the relationship between the British and Faisal I of Iraq. Even though Faisal had never set foot in Iraq, he was made king of the country as, from the British viewpoint, he seemed the best candidate who would promote their interests. But the relationship between Faisal and the British Colonial Office soon turned sour. Faisal turned out not to be the puppet the British thought they had installed on the Iraqi throne. Instead, he pursued his own interests and demanded independence for 'his' country. In the discussion following the first panel, many questions referring to individual presentations were addressed. Self-interest, networks of cooperation, and reducing costs were highlighted as some of the most important factors playing on the minds of 'colonizers' and 'colonized' when they considered cooperation.

The second panel explored the economics and social foundations of cooperation. Amélia Polónia (Porto) argued that in the case of early modern Portugal, the European expansion was not so much directed from the centre of Portuguese politics or by the Crown, but often began on the initiative of individual agents and maritime communities. Cooperation between these individuals and the state was crucial for the process of empire-building. Todd Cleveland (Minnesota) also presented a case in which the influence of a colonial state was largely missing. He looked at the Diamond Company of Angola (Diamang) and its relationship with its workers. Cleveland called Diamang 'a state within a state', which was therefore often untouched by colonial legislation. He argued that for a variety of reasons, Diamang looked after its workers comparatively well. In Jonathan E. Robins's (Michigan) study, it was initially not a colonial

power or Western company that dictated local industry, but Alake Gbadebo I of Abekouta, a local ruler. The Alake cooperated with the British Cotton Growing Association in order to modernize his country's cotton industry. Robins then contrasted this with the example of Buganda, where the same company coerced local farmers into growing cotton. Nevertheless, the British company required the cooperation of local elites in both of the studied cases. Haydon L. Cherry (North Carolina), looking at the social foundations of empire, then argued that social relationships played a crucial role in Vietnamese society during French colonial rule. They were critical for the maintenance of social order in Vietnam. Contrary to the idea of many scholars that French colonialism broke up Vietnamese society and freed individuals from social bonds and other ties, Cherry argued that this was not the case. These various bonds persisted, although they were often adapted and altered. Cherry argued that it was the gradual change in existing relationships that produced notions of a Vietnamese nation. In the subsequent discussion, Todd Cleveland's presentation in particular led to some controversy. Many participants doubted whether the treatment of local people at Diamang was in fact as positive as suggested by Cleveland. It can be difficult to understand why there was no resistance by the workers, which does not quite correspond to many of the notions of colonialism we have today. It also shows, as Jan Georg Deutsch (Oxford) pointed out, that there is a large scale of different types of cooperation, ranging from enforced to voluntary.

The third panel of the conference looked at science, intellectuals, and cultural translation. Deepak Kumar (New Delhi) considered the role of cooperation in science in early colonial India. Most colonial scientists were dismissive of local knowledge and believed their own epistemology to be superior. Nevertheless, there was some knowledge transfer between colonial scientists and locals. Early colonial medical men, for example, collected medicinal plants and discussed their use with locals, and local artists painted plants for colonial botanists. In publications, however, these locals remained unnamed. In the Filipino case looked at by Frauke Scheffler (Cologne), it was the 'colonized' who initiated research on infant health and programmes for improving it. The Filipinos claimed to have superior knowledge of infant health. These local efforts, however, were increasingly centralized and integrated into the medical system

which had been established under US rule. Scheffler showed how Filipinos cooperated and negotiated with US colonial administrators during this process. Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City) also analysed a process of negotiation between 'colonizers' and 'colonized'. He looked at how British imperial subjects in the South African context articulated their political grievances against the rule of white settlers. Reed argued that the ideas of imperial citizenship and Britishness informed the political and intellectual origins of African nationalism in South Africa. Many coloured participants in colonial politics expressed these ideas rather than ideas of anti-colonialism or pan-Africanism. In the following discussion, the interesting observation was made that in the examples presented by Scheffler and Reed, the 'colonized' instructed 'their Empire' on its policies and what it should be about.

The fourth panel took a closer look at the role of agents of colonial governance. Ralph Austen (Chicago) compared the tax collection systems of colonial India and Africa. He came to the conclusion that in the case of India, the British had inherited an effective tax system which they could build on from the Mughal Empire and its successor states, whereas there were no such structures in Africa. This was one reason why tax collection in India, with the help of local administrators, was more efficient than it was in Africa. The French colonial administration of New Caledonia in Adrian Muckle's (Wellington) example also relied on locals to run their colony. Similarly, locals played an important part in the examples presented by Alexander Keese (Berlin). Many military operations on the African continent would not have been possible if the Europeans had not been helped by African allies. These often remained in the area after they had been 'conquered', and many tensions and difficulties were encountered when integrating them into the colonial administration as 'native guards'. In the discussion following this panel, it became clear how difficult it can be to find out more about local cooperators and what motivated them, as in many cases there is not enough information about them. This is a crucial issue which needs to be considered further in order to achieve a more complete understanding of cooperation and empire.

The fifth panel of the conference looked at settlers, alliances, and imperial wars. Dierk Walter (Hamburg/Berne) challenged many widely accepted notions of imperial conquest and control. He argued

that colonial empires could only be established with local military cooperation. Indigenous allies, however, have largely disappeared from historical records. After a colonial power had established itself, these allies were often downgraded to mere auxiliaries, and later integrated and regulated, also in order to control them, into colonial troops. Vincent O'Malley (Wellington, New Zealand) looked at some of the consequences which cooperation in colonial wars could entail for 'indigenous allies' by looking at the term 'Kupapa', which in New Zealand is a negative term used to describe Maoris who are considered collaborators. Originally, this term had had positive connotations. Today, all those who did not fight against the Crown are regarded as traitors. O'Malley contested this use of the term, arguing that it is ahistorical. There was no united Maori nation at the time. Maoris who collaborated with the Crown did not do so because they identified with its cause, but because it enabled them to pursue their own strategic objectives. The perseverance of one's own goals also played a crucial role in Flavio Eichmann's (Berne) presentation, which focused on local cooperation in Martinique from 1802 to 1809. He showed that the French colonial administrators often had no choice but to frame their policies according to the demands of rich local planters, who would then support their colonial careers in return. There was, therefore, a network of cooperation between colonial and army officials and rich white settlers in Martinique that undermined metropolitan policies. In the following discussion, the issue of agency was raised. While finally giving local cooperators some recognition is seen as positive, it is important that in doing so we do not create a new myth about local allies. It is always important to consider that those cooperating had agency.

The final panel looked at chiefs, kings, and rulers. Daniel Olisa Iweze (Nsukka) looked at the British colonial conquest of Western Igboland and the role of indigenous collaborators. He argued that locals cooperating with the imperial power, and not British superior arms, made the difference in this conflict and allowed a British victory. In the German colony of Cameroon, Ulrike Schaper (Berlin) argued, cooperation with local chiefs also contributed decisively to the establishment of a German colonial administration. Initially, this was less a political strategy than a necessity as there was a general lack of resources and knowledge about the prevalent political conditions. It was not just the case, however, that the 'colonizers' exploit-

ed the 'colonized'; rather, they were mutually dependent on each other. Éric Allina (Ottawa), also looking at chiefs in the African context, examined how, in the case of Mozambique, they exercised authority over their people as indigenous rulers while also operating in the system of colonial governance. Instead of examining whether they collaborated or resisted, Allina demonstrated that by pursuing their own agenda, chiefs had to operate in both of these overlapping spheres. Finally, Timothy Burke (Philadelphia) presented his analysis of imperial administration in Southern Rhodesia. Burke argued that the establishment of colonial Africa was not just the result of a number of random events, but was driven by prior social and economic structures, and the contingent agency of individuals and groups. An important topic of discussion following the last panel was whether the cases presented were individual and random, or part of a bigger issue which could be explained with the help of models and theories. While it was agreed that using theories can be helpful, some also warned of their dangers, as things which do not fit are often left out. While it is certainly important to differentiate as a historian, if there is no common ground and theory, comparison and analysis are difficult if not impossible, and the history of cooperation and empire becomes no more than individual stories.

The conference concluded with a round table discussion, during which it became clear that there was still an issue with the terminology of cooperation and empire. James Belich (Oxford) argued that in the colonial context, the term 'collaboration' had negative connotations. He asked whether using the term 'cooperation' laundered imperialism into something benign. To avoid this, he suggested that the term and concept of 'collaboration' needed to be refined so that historians all have the same understanding of it. Belich argued that applying subcategories could be a possible solution to this problem. Stig Förster (Berne) also referred to historiographical issues with the description of cooperation. Despite historians' best efforts to differentiate between various factors in their analysis, this is often complicated by political correctness. The wider public still thinks of imperialism in terms of black and white with clear perpetrators and victims. Förster argued that this notion needs to be overcome and suggested using the idea of 'people who somehow have a stake in imperial expansion' as an explanation for cooperation. Jan Georg Deutsch pointed out that Ronald Robinson's ideas were situated in the context

of the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, historiography was dominated by nationalist history. While Robinson was modern in his time, he is less so today. Like the organizers of the conference, Deutsch believed that it is important to use Robinson's ideas along with newer theories and ideas.

The conference considered a wide spectrum and various notions of cooperation. Unfortunately, during the conference discussions often referred only to specific issues and cases and, apart from the round table discussion, the bigger issues were somewhat neglected. It did, however, become clear that existing theories are not sufficient to explain the politically sensitive issue of imperial cooperation. The lines between colonizers and colonized were often indistinct and despite efforts to include postcolonial aspects, the voices of the 'co-operators' often remained unheard, in many cases also because of the unavailability of relevant sources. Nonetheless, it would have been desirable for more recent theoretical approaches to have been considered in greater depth. In all, the conference illustrated the various forms and settings in which cooperation took place in empires, and showed how difficult it can be to gain an understanding of cooperation in an imperial context.

TAMARA BRAUN (University of Berne)