



*US-Foundations and the Power Policies of Knowledge Circulation in the Global Arena (20th century)*. Freiburg: Helke Rausch, FRIAS, Freiburg; Marc Frey, Jacobs University Bremen, 01.07.2010-02.07.2010.

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## **US-Foundations and the Power Policies of Knowledge Circulation in the Global Arena (20th century)**

The Conference “US-Foundations and the Power Policies of Knowledge Circulation in the Global Arena (20th century)” held at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Freiburg (FRIAS) and introduced by conveners Helke Rausch and Marc Frey threw light on an area that is just beginning to be explored in the historical literature – the power policies of knowledge circulation. As a methodological tool, the conference focused on the rise and international expansion of American large-scale foundations since the early 20th century seeking to enrich the history of science funding and scientific knowledge transfer.

Among the key themes was the impact of the activities of foundations on transatlantic, transpacific, and Inter-American constellations and the politics of scientific encounters and knowledge crossing; potential ways of qualifying and categorizing American philanthropists; the multiple dynamics of foundation funding policies; and how knowledge was translated and adapted in a multi-actor perspective that impacted science in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Papers set out to trace the shift from the progressive optimism in the early 20th century, firmly rooted in the 17th century Enlightenment idea of the perfectibility of man through the application of reason, to the complex geopolitics of the Cold War and the increasing questioning of the idea of progress, as well as the need to address global governance problems, such as population growth that inspired the missions of the foundations. The time frame of the papers ranged from the early 20th century to the present, with a particular

stress on the interwar period. Key issues were the role of knowledge as an actor in issues ranging from public health, the construction of modernism, foundations and philanthropy as an actor in the Cold War, and population growth policies. Geographically, the conference covered Europe (especially in the interwar period), Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The key thrust of the conference was an exploration of two areas of historical literature that are quite unexplored – definitions and impacts of knowledge transfer, and foundations as an actor in political discourse.

While the idea that there is only one path to modernization – the western mode of development through technology – remains strong (Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America’s Civilizing Mission* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) and *Machines as the Measure of Men : Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) ), the conference explored how this idea was not automatically institutionalized through the policies of foundations such as the Rockefeller (RF) and Ford Foundations (FF). Several papers explored how such definitions changed across time and space, and how the idea of a rational and scientific mode of development was itself subject to debate and prevailing intellectual currents.

For the interwar period, PAUL WEINDLING (Oxford) looked at how the development of welfare policies in metropolitan Europe was closely tied with the creation

of national identities and saw a dramatic shift in health care provisions from within the borders of the nation state to assistance at the point of disease epicenters and social deprivation. He also explored how relief efforts and structural solutions to poverty and disease went in tune with transformative socio-political agendas that led to US philanthropic policy as a tool of strategic intervention to counter the feared resurgence of German imperial power, Soviet communism, and communism in Germany, the new Austria, and Hungary. This interaction of foundation aid with the broader political, economic and social trends is by no means a thing of the past: ANNE-EMANUELLE BIRNÄS (Toronto) paper looked at how contemporary international foundations, especially the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, play an active role in the generation of international/global health knowledge, organization, and strategies that reflect a particular understanding of rational and scientific health policies.

An important feature of the intellectual landscape was how knowledge transfer was not a simple but a complex and dynamic process that flowed with differing definitions and differing conceptions of science in the pre and the post war period. The constant negotiation and transference that the process of knowledge transfer entailed, as well as the local challenges and traditions that modified and interacted with the new knowledge, are fascinating areas that have yet to be explored. Illustrating this in a paper that deals with scientific interaction between the United States and France in the interwar period, LUDOVIC TOURNÄS (Paris) argued that instead of the imposition of an American model of hegemony on French scientific expertise, what happened was an co-production *in situ* of a scientific policy in which the RF acted as a partner in cooperation with French actors such as the Caisse Nationale des Sciences. He moved away from the nation state paradigm to focus on organizations as actors, and emphasized the role of local actors in the process of knowledge transfer. Equally focused on the interwar period, HELKE RAUSCHÄS (FRIAS/Leipzig) paper discussed how the RockefellersÄ Anglo-American funding in anthropology during the 1920s and 30s appeared not so much as a simply bilateral project but was rather a more complicated matter of changing *multi-layered constellations*. In this, she underscored a key theme of the conference Ä that aid from foundations was multi-dimensional and was transformed and translated on site, as incongruous traditions of scientific practice, disciplines, institutional settings and complex actor constellations in each case. Thus both Rausch and TournÄs pointed to how the RF contributed to the institutional-

ization of knowledge through the funding of institutional infrastructure, and how it tried to contribute to the emergence of new fields of research in the at times cramped confines of different local settings.

Offering a very concise input for conference discussions, JOHN KRIGE (Atlanta) pointed out in his inspiring evening keynote that historians have to closely explore how the foundations, scientific establishments in Europe, and the US foreign policy establishment were key actors who had to negotiate the overlapping spaces of their interests. For the foundations and scientific establishments in Europe, demonstrating their independence had to be balanced with the foreign policy interests of the United States at the height of the Cold War. The implicit role of the Soviet Union as an actor in foundation policy making was a topic that the commentators touched upon often.

While there is a burgeoning interest in the Cold War, one surprising area of neglect has been how foundations and philanthropy played an important role in pursuing the policies of the United States, especially in the face of technological and scientific progress in the Soviet Union, that made external aid a key part of its foreign policy. This feature of what is now termed *track 2 diplomacy* has been obscured by official accounts or works that focus on government to government interactions between nation states.

To explore US philanthropy in the Cold War period, GILES SCOTT-SMITH (Middelburg/Leiden) explored how the FF impacted higher education programs in international law in the Netherlands, specifically the establishment of the Leiden-Columbia Summer Program in American Law in 1963 and the support given to The Hague Academy of International Law in the 1950s and 1960s. In these two different cases Ä a transatlantic circuit (Leiden-Columbia) and a post-imperial global circuit (Hague Academy) Ä US legal thinking and practices as well as educational and jurisprudential norms were diffused through the activities of the Foundation. In such cases, US hegemony was buttressed by the belief in a modern, superior, scientific and rational form of knowledge that could be applied universally. With a different accent on Cold War philanthropy in Europe, the paper that GIULIANA GEMELLI (Bologna) (who was unable to attend the meeting) contributed to the Conference Reader re-examined how the rather broad historical consensus that officials of the Marshall Plan in the post war period in Italy had moved from a positive commitment to change from the end of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1950s, to a mere preserving of the status quo. She

instead argued that Italian social reformers and scientific entrepreneurs of the 1950s and 60s, despite the disillusion of their attempts to generate changes in Italian democracy, made a relevant contribution to the configuration of Italian society as a modern industrial democracy.

TIM B. MÄLLER (Hamburg) located the RF in the broader intellectual and policy making climate in the post war period, which saw "modernization" along western lines as the key element of economic progress. Rather than an active actor in the cold war, the RF was more accurately an agent of "American" modernization both in the way its officials subscribed to a Western-American liberal modernity and scholarly-scientific progress went together. MÄller drew attention to how such an interpretation was closely tied to the Cold War conflict where two models of modernization, both of them technocratic, one of them marked by consumer capitalism, welfare democracy, and socially committed markets "in short, the New Deal model, the liberal social-democratic model" and the Soviet one marked by central planning, competed and how the need to stabilize economies and raising living standards. This, he argued was a key battle and ideological driver of the Cold War, in Europe, and increasingly in Asia. In a way, NICOLE SACKLEY's (Richmond, VA) paper elaborated further on this by examining the role that the FF played in implementing India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of modernization that was deeply western. Her paper demonstrated the enormous influence that the FF, whose New Delhi office administered approximately \$102 million in grants between 1951 and 1970, had on the Indian development project. In both papers, one key element that emerges is the role that foundations played in the implementation of a specifically modern and western concept of knowledge and modernization and the emergence of influential networks of intellectuals who would back up their funding strategies on a broader political and cultural level. Moreover PAUL B. TRESCOTT (Carbondale, IL), who was employed by the RF in its University Development Program from 1965-67, examined the role of the RF in the training of economists in early 20th century China. He explained how modern western conceptions of economics were transplanted into China, the role of the Rockefellers in a relatively wide intellectual landscape of foundations, and how western economic ideas were translated in the process, creating economists in China who were firmly rooted in their own traditions and culture.

A key area that several papers dealt with was how an idea of "modern knowledge" interacted with extant ideas in the underdeveloped world, most prominently in

the fields of social sciences, population and agricultural research, public health and medicine, all of which became forerunners of the "modernization programs" that played a key role in the later 20th century. For instance, MANKEL BRINKMAN's (Frankfurt an der Oder) paper (not present due to illness) addressed the RF's Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) initiated in 1943 as one of the first organized efforts in the development of scientific agriculture, which laid the prototype of the "Green Revolution," that was extremely successful in the post war period in Asia and Latin America. Finally, MARC FREY's (Bremen) paper illustrated how global governance concerns such as population growth were another powerful factor that influenced population policy. Focusing on the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, he explored the activities of the RF and FF against the backdrop of the US and European concern about global population growth as a "problem" of global governance and the subject of a global mass movement. Frey showed how a certain construction of knowledge, a "Western, Western-educated or Western-influenced, elite-centered transnational biopolitical discourse, fuelled by a variety of initially divergent assumptions, ideas, and interests, crystallized in the early-1950s to produce a powerful "epistemic community".

The creation of knowledge paradigms and how knowledge is shaped by actors was a topic that often emerged from the plenary discussion and the four larger comments around the various papers: MADELEINE HERREN (Heidelberg), MATTHIAS MIDDELL (Leipzig) and DANIEL SPEICH (Zürich), in their solid comments on the various panels, brought up the key point of whether the activities of foundations formed the unilateral imposition of US scientific paradigms or "Atlantic" values to the world. The general consensus was that it was not, and that the process had many more dimensions. Comments and discussion at the conference, with broader historiographical relevance included the issue of how supposedly "objective" scientific knowledge was shaped by ideological and policy considerations, and how foundations, scientific establishments, and US state interests were overlapping or competing when pursuing their differing aims. HANNES SIEGRIST (Leipzig) especially highlighted how policy considerations have a role in the shaping of knowledge and the nature of knowledge, though knowledge is usually seen as objective and neutral. KIRAN KLAUS PATEL (Florence) stressed that the field of interaction between European policy making, civil society and the foundations was one of the areas in contemporary history that had not been explored, and to

which the papers had made original contributions. He also suggested that there was a need to look at the question from the American as well as the non-American perspective.

In his comprehensive concluding address, MATTHIAS MIDDELL vividly pointed out the need to locate the activities of the foundation against the broader politics, and to see the foundations as another actor in the processes of global transfer of knowledge that marked the post war period. Both his address and the discussions that it sparked brought up the main aspects of the history of scientific funding that remain relatively unexplored – how closely were foundations aligned with the state in the United States, whether a similar history could be written about Soviet support for science in Eastern Europe, the relative role of the foundations in the broader context of international support for education, the role that transnational organizations that were modeled on American institutions played, the internal dynamics and conflicts among foundations, and how the concept could be incorporated into broader Area Studies, among others.

In summary, the conference broadly located trends in US philanthropy in the larger historical context, marking a first step in the integration of issues of science (funding), scientific knowledge and knowledge transfer into a transnational history of the 20th century, exploring ideas of the knowledge society not as universally applicable and universally transferable, but as a product of both time and space. The papers targeted numerous examples of how knowledge politics and policies of transference were impacted by political developments and by the processes of negotiation and transfer, while they also explored how European, Asian and Latin American traditions impacted processes of knowledge transfer. How extant structural and cognitive patterns or political practices in specific local and institutional circumstances impacted patterns of knowledge transfer will certainly remain on the current research agenda far beyond the field of US global philanthropy.

#### Conference overview:

Introduction: Marc Frey (Bremen), Helke Rausch (Leipzig/FRIAS)

*Panel I: Public Health Regulation: between Welfare Agendas and Interventionism*

Paul Weindling (Oxford): International Health in Central Eastern Europe during the 20th century

Ludovic Tournès (Paris): The RF and the origins of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France (1918-1939): a connected history of biomedical research policy

Anne-Emanuelle Birn (Toronto): Philanthropists' Prerogative?: The RF, the Gates Foundation and the Settings of the International Health Agenda

Comment: Madeleine Herren (Heidelberg) - Discussion

#### *Evening Keynote*

John Krige (Atlanta): U.S. Foundations and the Transnational Circulation of Knowledge in the Global Cold War

*Panel II: Coping with Modernities? Creating Expert Coalitions in Theory and Practice*

Paul B. Trescott (Carbondale, IL): Rockefeller Philanthropy and the Development of Economics in China before 1949

Helke Rausch (FRIAS/Leipzig): Interest coalitions and social engineering knowledge: the RF in Britain

Nicole Sackley (Richmond, VA): The FF and Development Expertise in India (during the 1950s)

Comment: Hannes Siegrist (Leipzig) - Discussion

#### *Panel III: Enforcing Atlanticism – granting Loyalty?*

Giles Scott-Smith (Middelburg/Leiden): Expanding the Diffusion of US Jurisprudence: The Netherlands as a beachhead for US Foundations in the 1960s

Tim B. Møller (Hamburg): The RF and the Cold War

Comment: Kiran Klaus Patel (Florence) - Discussion

*Panel IV: Channeling Growth, Exploiting Space, Generating Value?*

Marc Frey (Bremen): US Foundations and Global Population Growth

Comment: Daniel Speich (Zürich)

Conclusion: Matthias Middell (Leipzig) and Final Discussion.

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