



Imperial Port Cities in the Age of Steam. Towards a Comparative History of Entanglements. Lasse Heerten (FU Berlin) and Daniel Tödt (Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin), 14.07.2016—17.07.2016.

Reviewed by felix fuhg

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (October, 2016)

Imperial Port Cities in the Age of Steam. Towards a Comparative History of Entanglements

The workshop “Imperial Port Cities in the Age of Steam. Towards a Comparative History of Entanglements” (14-16 July 2016), organized by LASSE HEERTEN (FU Berlin) and DANIEL TÄDT (TU Berlin, CMS), invited an international group of historians to Berlin to discuss the relationship between port cities and imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Departing from the current state of research in global history, the workshop highlighted port cities as a highly promising research object for the analysis of the reciprocal relationships between urban and global developments in the age of steam. Thus, the contributions addressed the various relations between the metropolis and the colonies under imperialism. They reconstructed the exchange between the global and the local by analyzing the dialectic relationship between centers and peripheries, visible within and produced through port cities.

As JOHN DARWIN (Oxford University) pointed out in his keynote address, historians have recently developed great interest in port cities. Port cities are particularly interesting for global historians, as they enable the reconstruction of entanglements and connections. Port cities played an essential role in the circulation of commodities, human resources, and ideas across time and space. The cultural diversity of port cities showed that, contradictory to the classical narrative of globalization, the world did not become flat and equal. Rather, the world was shaped by an ongoing unevenness. In their comments to Darwin’s keynote, FREDERICK COOPER (New York University) focused on the power of actors and

the confrontation of different interests in the system of port cities, while MICHAEL GOEBEL (FU Berlin) questioned the relationship between urban history and port cities by asking whether specific urban forms contributed to or were a product of developments in port cities.

The workshop was divided into five panels: “Port Cities in Non-Western Empires”, “Entangled Histories of Ports in a (Post-) Colonial World”, “Port Ecologies in a Global Age”, “Port Cities as Imperial Gateways”, and “Labour in Imperial Port Cities”. Each panel consisted of two presentations (with pre-circulated papers), one joint comment, and an extensive discussion. The workshop paid special attention to the concept of imperial port cities and investigated it as a category and a typology in port cities research. The following report is structured along five central themes identified by the authors during the talks, comments, and debates: Cosmopolitanism in port cities (1), driving forces and actors in port cities (2), the role of (urban) space(s) and infrastructure (3), reconstructing commodity chains and trade relationships (4), and analyzing the images and the representation of port cities (5).

Cosmopolitanism in Port Cities

Focusing on the cosmopolitan nature of a port cities’ population, ROBERT BICKERS (University of Bristol) reconstructed how Shanghai’s underworld was dominated by international families. In his project, Bickers focuses on men from Britain who arrived in Shanghai to work as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers, met Chinese women

and started international families. The underworld of port cities provided an excellent opportunity to earn money for unskilled unemployed men. Bickers examined in his diachronic analysis the living environments of British working class people who migrated to the south-eastern parts of the British Empire.

NORA LAFI (FU Berlin/ZMO) presented a diachronic study of the concept of cosmopolitanism in which she highlighted the political dimension of participation in the Ottoman notion. LAFI retraced the development and the valuation of this notion throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire. She argued that this concept represented a metaphor for diversity and a method for governing diversity at the same time. Cosmopolitanism stood for the correlation between both approaches. LAFI argued for an early form of cosmopolitanism before cosmopolitanism featuring positive notions of social, cultural, and ethnic togetherness and acceptance.

Driving Forces and Actors in Port Cities

Critically, ULRIKE FREITAG (FU Berlin/ZMO) pointed out in her comment to Robert Bickers that some groups and actors are more represented than others in the literature on port cities. While research often focuses on the group of merchant families BICKERS's contribution made clear that in terms of numbers, international lower working class families played a considerable role in the everyday life of port cities and for their development.

In his introductory remarks, TÅDT analyzed the role of another important group of actors: African dock workers and seafarers in Marseille and Antwerp. He showed that diverse mechanisms of interaction produced, maintained, and disrupted relations between the metropolis and the colonies. In his comment on DARWIN, COOPER referred to African colonial labor history and highlighted the role, power, function, and social status of dock workers. In port cities, different forms of labor came together and led to different forms of political, social and cultural participation as well as different living conditions. Trade unions could stop commercial trade. At the same time, workers in port cities were involved in the powerful key task of transferring commodities from one transport system to another. Linked to their power and influence on trade, political actors were actively involved in the decasualization of labor in port cities.

Moreover, economic and social life in port cities was also determined by environmental conditions. THADDEUS SUNSERI's contribution showed how dangerous environmental challenges were for port cities. The German Empire aimed at developing Dar es Salam into a

major port against established regional competitors like Zanzibar. Furthermore, geographically Dar es Salam also functioned as Germany's central gateway to its East African colonies. As its function as a gateway the history of Dar es Salam shows that the era of steam ships did not just accelerate the transport of commodities but also of diseases. Control policies were set up to prevent the spread of diseases, like the cattle pest, into German territories.

The case of the cattle pest also highlighted the circulation of knowledge in port cities. In her comment, NADINE HEE (FU Berlin) referred to the linkages between disease prevention policies and the circulation of medical knowledge. Port cities in the age of steam were already characterized by a global knowledge system in which scientists and policy makers were mobile and active in transnational discourses. In China for example, as ROBERT BICKERS pointed out, national quarantine projects were directed by the Chinese professionals who were trained in European or American medical schools.

JONATHAN HYSLOP's (Colgate University) paper examined the relationships between the Union Castle Line's (UCL) home port in Southampton and Durban, the company's most important overseas port. He argued for a specific analysis of mechanisms of closure and exclusion in globalization processes. Questioning the common notion of a cosmopolitanism of the merchant class, he focused on power dynamics of European racism and the decisive role of local elites. He focused on a maritime capital field, on the one hand, and a maritime labor field on the other hand: two analytical categories which he called "old-fashioned but effective". Regarding the latter, he underlined the danger of examining exclusively the action of local elites while attempting to write the history of a city. Considering the former, he emphasized the local embeddedness and the social stability of the UCL labor force, which contradicts the general assumption of a through-and-through globalized industry.

Urban Space(s) and Infrastructures

Engaging with a space-oriented perspective, CATHERINE L. PHIPPS (University of Memphis) addressed the challenge of finding traces of Empire in the physical realm of the port of Osaka. She proposed that Osaka failed as a global treaty port in comparison with its counterpart Kobe, but nevertheless succeeded as a port, as it operated within a fruitful niche of the national Japanese network. The commentator SEBASTIAN CONRAD (FU Berlin) proposed the synthesizing notion of an Indirect Port City, adding to the typologization of these

urban spaces. The workshop participants further debated the relationship of regional trade and integrated world markets, asking whether regions should be considered "leftovers of older structures" in the context of globalization, or rather "responses to new global challenges".

ISABELLA JACKSON (Trinity College Dublin) proposed another perspective on infrastructures in her paper on Shanghai. She developed the concept of a transnational colonialism, showing that, although Britain dominated the local territories, imperialism was performed by many different nations. She explored the motif and the material manifestation of gateways as integrative measures "enabling access into the city or the hinterland, or rather as exclusive means, forming a defense and closed door."

Linking the discussions on material environment and urban societies, KERSTIN STUBENVOLL (HU Berlin) gave a paper on French Cameroon's Douala port. She investigated the connectedness of labor and politics as well as the social and economic dynamics behind the structuring of political places. In Douala, the strong colonial lobby and specific forms of unionism trigger particular anticolonial movements. Commenting on her contribution, GOPALAN BALACHANDRAN (Graduate Institute Geneva) pointed to the multiple entanglements at stake in port city research (connections across waters, between the port and the hinterland, as well as the competition between ports) and the historians' task to find out how to unpack them.

Commodity Chains and Trade Relationships

Investigating cocaine's worldwide trajectories, ALISON FRANK JOHNSON (Harvard University) retraced routes of commodity trade within and through the Austrian Empire. In doing so, she focused on commercial networks between Trieste, Bombay, and Calcutta. Her paper reflected on the extent to which the trajectory of certain commodities traces and shapes port cities and specific urban spaces. As FREITAG emphasized in her comment, Johnson's paper also outlined the at times seamless transition between smuggling and trade.

In line with this approach, ANTONIO CARBONE's (FU Berlin) paper highlighted Buenos Aires's function as a connecting hub between the Pampas and transatlantic trade, focusing on the cattle industry and the meat market as driving forces in the reciprocal relationship between the capital city and the hinterland. Historically, these international commodity chains were also an impetus to war. Regarding the function of the port city, Carbone pleads for the examination of bi- and collateral

influences and impacts on the port city and its hinterland.

Image and Representations of Port Cities

Approaching "Mediterranean as global history", MANUEL BORUTTA (Ruhr-Universität Bochum/Zentrum für Mittelmeerstudien) discussed Marseille's role as an "imperial interface" during Algeria's colonization, which contributed to "turning the Mediterranean into a French sea". He called the worldwide expansion of trade networks by empowered local businessmen a process of the "globalization" of Marseille. In his comment, ANDREAS ECKERT (HU Berlin) pointed to the multifaceted challenges and possibilities of a global history approach to port cities. Indeed, it enhanced both their heterogeneous influences on the outside world, and the complexity of their internal structures.

In his introductory remarks on the German Empire and the making of the global port of Hamburg, LASSE HEERTEN (FU Berlin) underlined the importance of "the national" and "the imperial" as a framework for the expansion of specific ports. Drawing on the port expansion of Hamburg, he argued that imperial projections of global power shaped these developments and self-representation processes extensively.

Concluding Remarks and Outlook

HEERTEN and TÄDT ended the workshop with concluding remarks and a large closing discussion. The question of mobility revealed itself as a central theme and a conditional premise for research on entanglements. At the same time, issues of spatial, racial, and gendered restrictions within global networks were discussed. In fact, considering that current research concerns originate from Western liberal imaginaries and are the result of people who are mobile, the discussion proposed to widen these horizons and investigate mobility as well as confinement. Overall, the theme of Imperial Port Cities allowed entangled investigations and discussions of global connectivity, urban typology, and historical contextualization.

As an incentive for further research, a critical questioning of the city as a fixed spatial entity, as well as the engagement with the specifically urban dimensions of the investigated topics, could provide additional interesting perspectives. Overall, the workshop offered a significant contribution to port cities research: Theoretically, by coining the concept of imperial port cities, and empirically, by laying out a great variety of connections, intersections, and relations based on international expertise, case discussions, and comparisons.

Conference Overview

Keynote: John Darwin (Oxford): "Unlocking the World? Port Cities and Globalisation, 1830-1930"

Welcome Note: Daniel TÄ¶dt (TU Berlin, CMS) and Lasse Heerten (FU Berlin)

Moderator: Paul Nolte (FU Berlin)

Comments 1: Fred Cooper (New York University)

Comments 2: Michael Goebel (FU Berlin)

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Lasse Heerten (FU Berlin) and Daniel TÄ¶dt (TU Berlin, CMS)

Panel 1 Port Cities in Non-Western Empires

Catherine L. Phipps (University of Memphis): "Siting Empire in the Port of Osaka, 1895-1945"

Nora Lafi (FU Berlin/ZMO): "Cosmopolitanism under Pressure: Governing Ottoman Port-Cities in an Age of Steam (1850-1912)"

Comments: Sebastian Conrad (FU Berlin)

Panel 2 Entangled Histories of Ports in a (Post-) Colonial World

Alison Frank Johnson (Harvard): "Trieste Traffic: German Chemists, Austrian Smugglers, and the Cocaine Epidemic in India (1900-1914)"

Robert Bickers (University of Bristol): "Treaty Porters: Antigua to Amoy; Hong Kong to Hackney"

Comments: Ulrike Freitag (FU Berlin/ZMO)

Panel 3 Port Ecologies in a Global Age

Thaddeus Sunseri (Colorado State University): "Dar es Salaam as Gateway to the Global Cattle Frontier, 1900-1914"

Antonio Carbone (FU Berlin): "Port of the Atlantic and Capital of the Pampas: The Epidemic Crisis in Buenos Aires (1867-1874)"

Comments: Nadin HeÄ© (FU Berlin)

Panel 4 Port Cities as Imperial Gateways

Isabella Jackson (Trinity College Dublin): "Imperial Expansion in Shanghai: Transnational Colonialism and Entangled Conflicts"

Manuel Borutta (Ruhr-Universität Bochum/Zentrum für Mittelmeerstudien): "From 'Metropole of the Mediterranean' to 'Capital of the Empire': Marseille in the Age of Steam, 1828-1935"

Comments: Andreas Eckert (HU Berlin)

Panel 5 Labour in Imperial Port Cities

Kerstin Stubenvoll (HU Berlin): "Public (Ab)Uses, Union Politics and Workers' Self-Assertions: Contesting French Cameroon's Port Enlargement Projects, 1940s-1950s"

Jonathan Hyslop (Colgate University): "Southampton, Durban and the Union Castle Line c.1900-1939: Imperial Capital, Urban Politics and Maritime Labour Forces"

Comments: Gopalan Balachandran (Graduate Institute Geneva)

Final Discussion and Concluding Remarks

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: felix fuhg. Review of , *Imperial Port Cities in the Age of Steam. Towards a Comparative History of Entanglements*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. October, 2016.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=48301>

Copyright © 2016 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.