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Introduction: Writing European History in 2022

The present issue of the European History Yearbook showcases research initially presented at the annual Mainz-Oxford graduate workshop “European History Across Boundaries from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century” over the past few years. Albeit broad, the chronological limits are clear. And so is our approach. This workshop is a forum for doctoral candidates and early career researchers to present work that sheds the straightjacket of national history and crosses boundaries and borders. We do so by discussing the transcultural, transnational, and transimperial scopes of their research. Methodologically speaking, the European history that workshop participants have been researching and writing draws on comparative history, the study of transfer processes and entanglements, and the *histoire croisée*, among others.

What about the geographical scope? What Europe do the workshop participants imagine? How do they conceive of European history? A glance at the table of contents will suffice. Both participants and organisers are not only interested in writing European history across boundaries but also in decentring Europe. Individual papers deal with Central America, East Africa, the Middle East, and Oceania. They take the readers thousands of kilometres away from the imperial metropolises of Berlin, Madrid, or London – and yet still tell a story about these European imperial centres and societies.

Getting away from nationalistic history writing has been the programmatic and political aim of a range of books, starting with *Histoire mondiale de la France* in 2017, followed by a flurry of global histories of Catalonia, Flanders, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Sicily. Great Britain is the only Western European country missing in this new history writing exercise.¹ These works seek to ex-

¹ Patrick Boucheron et al. (eds.), *Histoire mondiale de la France*, Paris, 2017, translated as *France in the World: A New Global History*, New York 2019); Andrea Giardina and Emmanuel Betta (eds.), *Storia mondiale dell'Italia*, Bari 2017; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas (ed.), *Historia mundial de España*, Barcelona 2018; Giuseppe Barone (ed.), *Storia mondiale della Sicilia*, Bari 2018; Borja de Riquer, Joaquim Albareda i Salvadó, and Josep M. Salrach i Marés (eds.), *Història mundial de Catalunya*, Barcelona 2018; Marnix Beyen (ed.), *Wereldgeschiedenis van Vlaanderen*, Kalmthout 2018, translated into French as *Histoire mondiale de la Flandre*, Waterloo 2020; Andreas Fahrmeir (ed.), *Deutschland: Globalgeschichte einer Nation*, Munich 2020; C. Fiolhais, José Eduardo Franco, and José Pedro Paiva (eds.), *História global de Portugal*, Lisbon 2020, translated into English as *The Global History of Portugal: From Pre-History to the Modern World*, Brighton 2022; Quentin

plore the past from a perspective and within an analytical framework that go beyond the geographical unit in question, be it a state or a region. While they were editorial successes among non-academic audiences, one can wonder how successful they were in decentring national history. As others have pointed out, by taking a given state or region as a starting point, one runs the risk of writing a history of its influence on the world or reinforcing artificial distinctions between this geographical unit and the rest of the world.²

The novelty of this historiographical approach is also questionable. Historians of empire are used to thinking globally: they have long been deconstructing the colonial gaze and investigating how imperial expansion impacted metropolitan societies.³ The contributions in this issue of the *European History Yearbook* are yet another proof that, for an emerging generation of historians, it is inconceivable to write European history without thinking about empire or to separate the history of Europe from its global and imperial dimensions.⁴ Animated by a desire to look at European history from the viewpoint of its overseas empires, the authors in this issue share several interests. In what follows, we briefly outline the most salient threads that run through their articles.

Knowledge, Information Control and Archives

Although separated by three centuries and one ocean, Richard Herzog and Riley Linebaugh's pieces resonate with one another. They explore a central feature of colonial rule – that of knowledge and information control. Both papers tell us about archives, their ownership, and history writing in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Whether in the case of twentieth-century British-controlled

Deluermoz (ed.), *D'ici et d'ailleurs: histoires globales de la France contemporaine (XVIIIe–XXe siècle)*, Paris 2021.

² For critical takes on this new trend, see Arthur Asseraf, 'Le monde comme adjectif: retour sur l'*Histoire mondiale de la France*', in: *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 68, no. 1 (2021), 151–162 and Pol Dalmau and Jorge Luengo, 'Historia global e historia nacional: ¿una relación insalvable?', in: *Ayer* 120, no. 4 (2020), 311–324.

³ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in: Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley 1997, 1–53; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*, Oxford 2002. For a more recent example, see and Sathnam Sanghera, *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*, London 2021.

⁴ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, Chicago 2005. For a recent general history of Europe, see Johannes Paulmann, *Globale Vorherrschaft und Fortschrittsglaube: Europa 1850–1915*, Munich 2019.

Kenya or early-seventeenth-century Spanish Mexico, the colonial power forcibly moved archives concerning the colony to the metropole. As Herzog reminds us, archives are knowledge repositories. Shaping their content and making them inaccessible to colonised populations was a crucial component of colonial rule. It continued to form the backbone of former colonial powers' attempts to control their legacy following decolonisation. Thus, the chronicles of noble indigenous Nahuatl scholars from the early seventeenth century that Herzog discusses were published only several centuries later. In a similar vein, Great Britain declassified the records concerning the Kenya Emergency of the 1950s that Linebaugh draws on in her research only in the early 2010s. Writing about the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto during the Second World War, Samuel Kassow poignantly described archive making as an act of resistance in front of annihilation. The question he chose for his book title, "Who will write our history?," applies to many other historical contexts.⁵ The question of the agency of the native, marginalised, and subaltern in writing their history and how to excavate their voices in archives created by those marginalising and oppressing them is indeed a prominent one – in the field of colonial history perhaps more than in any other field.⁶

Agency in Colonial Contexts

Richard Herzog's paper explores native agency in most depth. His analysis of writings by native scholars who belonged to local elites, who sometimes wrote in the coloniser's language and incorporated elements of its religion, stresses the importance of class when dealing with questions of agency under colonial rule. It also charts strategies of adaptation and compromise – which Homi Bhabha famously described as hybridity – that often characterise situations of unequal intercultural contact.⁷ Although focusing on different topics, the contributions by Riley Linebaugh and Sara Müller also point to strategies of local resistance to colonial rule and seek to write locals back into the story they are telling us. Müller's paper demonstrates that current debates over the restitution of spoliated artefacts and works of art often fail to examine the role of local colonised people in acquisition processes – from passive cooperation in the

5 Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto*, London 2009.

6 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton 2009.

7 Homi K. Bhabha, 'Culture's In-Between', in: Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London 1996, 53–60.

form of forced labour to resistance to it. As Linebaugh points out, the British Colonial Government's obsession with information control was an indication of the precarity of colonial rule, a situation that informants from the ranks of the colonised population could use to advance their own interests.

Transimperial Translations and Cooperation

Another theme that cuts across most papers is the translation of information between imperial dominions and centres. Sara Müller's analysis of the collection process of a shield from the Göttingen ethnological collections tackles this question. How was information on the exact origin and acquisition process lost between the moment the shield was collected in German New Guinea and today? What role did scientific and lay members of expeditions to this colony play in shaping the information available to twenty-first-century researchers? As Müller stresses, acquisition stories are not simple ones. Indeed, she tells us a gripping and unexpected tale of a ship captain who perhaps intentionally let rats wreck the scientists' cataloguing efforts to alter the commercial value of collected artefacts. Tom Menger and Samuel B. Keeley show that information and knowledge did not circulate only between empire and metropole but also between empires. Information routes sometimes went via Europe and sometimes bypassed the continent. Keeley's study of German-speaking church leaders points to another aspect of transimperial cooperation. What we label transimperialism can also be seen from the perspective of language and analysed as, in this specific case, Germanophone imperialism.

The contributions by Keeley, Menger and Müller all underscore the heterogeneity characterising and sometimes hampering European imperialism. Stances on how colonial expansion should be carried out and colonial rule exercised were highly varied. Dissensions between Europeans on the ground – military personnel, commercial, and scientific actors – and state authorities back in Europe are a recurrent feature of imperialism. How should colonial expansion proceed? How should colonial rule be exercised? Who should be in charge in the colonies – civil or military authorities? Such questions were often bones of contention between different actors who depicted themselves as imperial pioneers to gain legitimacy and saw the empire as an opportunity to expand their power at the expense of others.

As Menger reminds us, examining transimperial cooperation and knowledge transfer is essential if one wants to deexceptionalise and decentre individual empires. The history of Europe and the idea of Europe are often written from the perspective of present-day European integration. The creation of the European

Community in the 1950s encouraged a search for common heritage.⁸ The vast literature on the topic often constructs a genealogy that places the European Union into a longer tradition of liberal visions. As a result, overviews of the European idea in the nineteenth century mainly focus on liberal pan-European projects. This tendency discards anti-liberal visions that contradict contemporary conceptions of European integration as a project based on political and economic freedom.⁹ Studies such as Menger and Keeley's, focusing on cooperation across imperial lines between different European states, are an important reminder that imperial expansion and colonial domination were also shared European projects.¹⁰

Heterogeneity and Dissonance in Imperial Pursuits

Importantly, by looking at transimperial cooperation, these two authors put on the map countries that feature only too rarely in studies of European colonialism: nineteenth-century Prussia and Switzerland (along with Great Britain) in the case of Keeley's research and twentieth-century Germany and the Netherlands (again, along with Great Britain) in Menger's work. In doing so, they underline the diversity of imperial actors, whose lives crisscrossed states, empires, continents, languages, and sometimes confessions. For instance, Samuel B. Keeley follows the steps of a priest born in a French-speaking family in Switzerland, who converted from Calvinism to Anglicanism, and worked as a missionary in Egypt and Abyssinia for some years before becoming a bishop in Palestine. This biographical approach – present to varying degrees in all the contributions in this issue – allows him to bring individual agency back into history. By priori-

8 Gavin Murray-Miller, 'Civilization, Modernity and Europe: The Making and Unmaking of a Conceptual Unity', in: *History* 103, no. 356 (2018), 418–433, here 418.

9 Dieter Gosewinkel (ed.), *Anti-Liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization*, New York 2015.

10 Hartmut Kaelble, 'Representations of Europe as a Political Resource in the Early and Late Twentieth Century', in: *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 22, no. 6 (2012), 11–20, here 11; Hayden White, 'The Discourse of Europe and the Search for a European Identity', in: Bo Stråth (ed.), *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, Bern 2000, 67–86. For an attempt to reintegrate colonialism as a constitutive element of European integration in the twentieth century, see Fabian Klose, 'Europe as a Colonial Project: A Critique of Its Anti-Liberalism', in: Gosewinkel (ed.), *Anti-Liberal Europe*, 47–71 and Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture*, Cambridge 2016.

tising people over institutions or discourse and focusing on collective rather than individual biographies, the authors in this issue can zoom in on the role of experience in fashioning ideas and chart paths not taken.¹¹ In other words, their fine-grained approach restores the complexity and diversity of imperial rule.

Taken together, the contributions of this issue illustrate the broad spectrum of types of imperial rule and imperial rule formation. Müller's paper shows that scientific expeditions consolidated territorial control in an already existing colony, while Herzog's piece highlights how Catholicism helped strengthen Spanish colonial rule in Mexico. Keeley's work focuses on informal imperialism and uses the example of the Jerusalem bishopric to explore the role of religious institutions in advancing claims in a city where virtually every European power sought to have a foothold – most often through religious or caritative institutions.¹² Menger and Linebaugh both underscore the centrality of extreme violence in expanding and maintaining colonial power.

Finally, while the contributions dealing with twentieth-century history in this issue say little about the role of religion in imperial expansion, readers interested in this topic will find ample food for thought in the two articles dealing with earlier periods. Richard Herzog's work discusses how Christian and indigenous conceptions of time differed but also impacted one another. Both his and Samuel B. Keeley's examination of how Protestant imperialism sought to counter and become as global as Catholic imperialism offer a close reading of the ways in

11 I am here indebted to Lyndal Roper's concluding comments at the 2021 Mainz-Oxford graduate workshop. A biographical approach, whether individual or collective, has proved extremely fruitful in the last few years. Among others, it made it possible to chart the exclusion of women from professional politics in modern times. See Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon*, Princeton 2021. Through a collective biography of émigré communities, Faith Hillis foregrounded the importance of encounter, practice, and intimacy in the making and unmaking of emancipatory politics in modern European history. Faith Hillis, *Utopia's Discontents: Russian Émigrés and the Quest for Freedom, 1830s-1930s*, New York 2021. Other scholars have similarly brought collective biography to bear on intellectual history, thereby underscoring the multiple affiliations of nineteenth-century national actors. See, for instance, Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice*, Stanford 2012 and Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation*, Oxford 2018. Recent studies adopting a biographical approach to tease out the transnational and transimperial dimensions of North African history include M'hamed Oualdi, *A Slave between Empires: A Transimperial History of North Africa*, New York 2020 and Jessica M. Marglin, *The Shamama Affair: Contesting Citizenship across the Mediterranean*, Princeton 2022.

12 For a recent study of informal imperialism, see David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton 2021.

which missionary activities contributed to imperial expansion and functioned on a day-to-day basis.

As all contributions printed below show, writing European history calls for the crossing of boundaries and borders. As a dynamic space of communication and transfer, “Europe” clearly transcends states, empires, and nations within the continent and in a global world. In recent years, historical research has taken up this challenge and has increasingly paid more attention to such transcultural and transnational dynamics, bringing forward a reflexive understanding of historical processes. This research has also demonstrated the significance of imperial dimensions in the construction and imagination of Europe and, thereby, of asymmetries and hierarchies built into European affairs. This is the focus of the work showcased here. Crossing borders results in new boundaries within and between entangled societies. The control of information and historical knowledge has been affected by this as well as by the agency of colonised and colonisers. By decentring our perspective, the authors bring out transimperial translation and cooperation while considering the heterogeneity and dissonance in imperial pursuits. Above all, the essays demonstrate that we cannot juxtapose Europe or one of its nations and the world. The history of Europe cannot be separated from its imperial dimension – indeed, neither can its present be understood without its imperial past.

