

EMPIRES ^{GRK2571}

Dynamic Transformation
Temporality and
Postimperial Orders

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Main research topic

The empire is back' – and the imperial turn not only affects strictly academic debate, but also socio-political discourse, the search for reliable models of social order in an increasingly confusing world. This explains why the subject has appealed so consistently over the years (Andrade/Reger 2012; Assad 2015; Buchenau i.a. 2015; Colás 2007; Darwin 2007; Elliott 2006; Geppert 2019; Gromelski i.a. 2016; Harris 2014; Hausteiner/Huhnholz 2019; Kirby 2001; Osterhammel 2006; Parsons 2010; Wendehorst 2015b).

What are the reasons behind these developments? One key moment from a western perspective was the end of the Cold War confrontation in 1989/91; the collapse of the Soviet Empire simultaneously raised questions of the future world order, the conditions of political stability and the temporary role of the USA as the world's only superpower. This major turning point was experienced in combination with an accelerated process of globalisation, which could not (or no longer) be comprehended with traditional models of social order and national temporal rhythms. China's return to a position of global influence, with imperial ambitions for the future, has given rise to a new inter-imperial (Subrahmanyam 2007) conflict constellation. At the same time, the re-emergence of religiously legitimised or ethnic violence in the territories of former empires (e.g. Ukraine/Russia in the former Soviet Union, Syria and Iraq in the former Ottoman Empire) has increased interest in political and economic structures that could bridge regional differences and would, it is hoped, bring about more security and stability. The formation of the EU also raises questions of the potential for political integration and new forms of governance (Hyden i.a. 2004; see the results of CRC 597 'Transformations of the State', Schuppert 2014) beyond the nation state. The fact that the 'empire' category is now more frequently applied to the EU, both critically (Patel 2018; Streeck 2019) and in the sense of a 'soft' or 'benign empire' (Münkler 2005b; Posener 2007; Zielonka 2007)

further highlights the relevance of the subject matter. On the other hand, post-colonial approaches in the humanities and social sciences and the associated reversal of perspective from the colonisers to the colonised and their specific agency have also directed attention to Europe as a (post-)colonial and (post-)imperial space (e.g. Böröcz 2009; Borg Barthet 2009; Hansen/Jonsson 2014). All of these factors have drawn particular attention to the concept of empire as an evocative reference point for a form of social order characterised by heterogeneity. They illustrate the fact that empires are not simply static organisational structures of the past, a closed chapter of history. Empires form a globally present legacy and represent a key frame of reference for managing political, legal, ethnic and religious diversity, because they have developed over a long period of time and because, through transference and translation between claim to power and lasting influence, they remain present, even in post-imperial contexts. This presence can be observed in a wide variety of forms, in a repertoire of symbolic languages; for example, in Russia adopting the melody of the Soviet anthem for its national anthem, or in a targeted politics of memory such as that which was temporarily developed around the AK Party in Turkey with the key term 'Neo-Ottomanism' (Malik 2015).

In recent studies, individual researchers have examined current global developments against the background of historical empires (Ferguson 2003: British Empire; Münkler 2005a: Rome). In doing so, these researchers continue a tradition of casting light on their own present by presenting a diachronic comparison with past empires and drawing direct or implicit analogies, as Edward Gibbon did to the 18th-century British Empire in his explanation of the fall of the Imperium Romanum. These approaches of negotiating current developments with reference to the memories or aftermath of past empires demonstrate that imperial transformations and their particular temporality, the experience of imperial temporality through the direct comparison of what existed before, what no longer exists and newly developed visions of the future, as well as

the reflections initiated by this comparison, represent an essential key to understanding imperial dynamics (on this concept of temporality, see Alex-Ruf 2016; Auderset i.a. 2016; Jansen/Osterhammel 2017a, 172f.; Orthmann 2013; Qian 2016; Üründü 2013; in order to access these specific aspects of imperial temporality, the RTG will work with the interdisciplinary concepts and terminology detailed below).

What is striking about the approaches specified in the preceding paragraph are the implicit or explicit references to empires from different historical periods; they reflect allusions to continuities and anachronisms in contemporary discourse of earlier forms of empire. However, there are far more similarities between the study of imperial transformation and the continued influence of empires on the present and research on earlier stages of empire. In recent years, many sub-disciplines of history with a particular focus on earlier eras, as well as historical sociology, have focused increasingly on the transformation of empires, the revival and continuation of imperial traditions and the reactions of observers and those affected (e.g. see Cameron 2014; Canepa 2018; Doyle 2014a and 2014b; Eich 2015; Haldon 2016; Heather 2013; Kaldellis 2007; Mairs 2014; Oliver 2007; Runciman 2011; Schneidmüller/Weinfurter 2006; Strootman/Versluys 2017; Wickham 2004). However, these debates on earlier historical periods usually proceed without any explicit reference to, distinction from or methodologically sound comparison with the aforementioned analyses of the change and continued existence of empires in the present. Finally, the field of literary and cultural studies has not only focused on the impact of imperial regimes – it has also recast and reinterpreted the subject of temporality, plural temporal orders and varying interpretations of time (e.g. Burges/Elias 2016; Schneider 2018; Sharma 2014). These discussions are often rooted in experiences of globalisation or positioned in the broad movement of postcolonial studies, focusing on the 20th and 21st centuries. Occasionally, however, these discussions also take into account changing experiences of time across different historical periods (Frömmer 2015 and 2018c; West-Pavlov 2013; see Kablitz 1999; Stierle 2001 and also the DFG Priority Programme 'Ästhetische Eigenzeiten: Zeit und Darstellung in einer polychronen Moderne' ['Aesthetic temporalities and representation in a polychronic modernity']). In this form, like historical sociology, these discussions provide possible strategies for linking the debates on imperial temporality outlined above.

The fact that these debates cover such a wide range of historical periods and subjects highlights the potential of a research programme that spans different epochs and disciplines, with

imperial temporality as its key focus. The question of imperial temporality is therefore innovative, provided that the long-term perspective is maintained and, at the same time, other conceptions and experiences of time in different spaces and epochs are taken into account. The RTG will examine different disciplinary perspectives of dynamic change (i.e. change experienced in its temporality) in empires up to the emergence of post-imperial orders, as well as reflections by contemporaries or retrospective commentaries by later generations, and transfer them into a clearly outlined research programme.

One particular factor that makes the RTG unique, is its collaboration with partner institutions that specialise in excellent empire-focused research: the offices of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens, Istanbul, Madrid and Rome, the German Historical Institutes in London, Moscow, Paris and the Oriental Institute Istanbul, as well as the Merian Centres in Accra, Guadalajara, New Delhi and São Paulo. Research stays in these locations, lasting up to six months, would not only enable research trainees to contact the researchers working there and access important archives, but also to work in or near the centres of former empires or colonies, allowing them to gain key insights from international empire-focused research and use these to drive forward their own research.

Areas and lines of research

The research programme aims to apply the central idea, in a structured manner, to those fields of research in which the collaboration of history, sociology, literary/cultural studies and political science would be especially productive. In contrast to conventional definitions of empires, its main focus will be imperial temporality. On the one hand, the RTG will examine identifiable change in empires from a long-term perspective. On the other hand, it will focus on how imperial change is described by both internal and external observers, i.e. the reflective discussion of actual or merely diagnosed crises and phases of dissolution and post-imperial reconstitution in journalism, political theory or historiography, as well as in cultural production, novels, film, television or digital media. This dual interest in political, social and cultural change is the reason for the interdisciplinary nature of the RTG. The historical disciplines will provide the long-term perspective on the subject. The political sciences and sociology will also work diachronically but, in particular, will enable the analysis of the recent impact of imperial influences and traditions. The disciplines of literary and cultural studies will provide essential expertise in the analysis of the medialisation of imperial temporality and reflections on it. Adopting the dual perspective of diachronicity

and synchronicity in this collaborative research programme will therefore provide innovative insights and, combined, could overcome obsolete limitations with regard to historical period (early/recent empires) or subject matter (land-based/maritime empires).

The research programme will also eliminate the tension between universal syntheses on one side and microanalyses on the other by assigning the research lines to a meso level of analysis. The dissertations will examine, in clearly outlined fields of research, reasonably defined topics that are open to wider interpretation and, at the same time, allow for methodologically sound academic exchange. To this end, three lines of research have been derived from the definitions, which will be approached with the chosen perspective on imperial temporality:

a) *Imperial spaces*: the construction, legitimation, imagination or representation of imperial spaces in their temporal variability. Looking at the temporal structure of imperial spaces and how it is represented and made into a subject of discourse is central to understanding dynamic change up to the emergence of post-imperial orders.

b) *Imperial economies*: the impact of dynamic change, transition and collapse of empires on local, regional and formerly imperial economies and their interconnectedness, as well as reflections on changes by contemporaries and later observers in writing and material culture. Particular emphasis will be placed on the detailed analysis of the conditions of institutional development processes and their specific formation through negotiation processes, motivational contexts and the resulting options for action.

c) *Institutions and normative structures*: the nature and intensity of the interaction of imperial, regional and local institutions and normative structures in times of dynamic change up to transitions between empires and post-imperial orders, as well as the negotiation and criticism of innovations, transgressions, adjustments and the potential for persistence. Particular attention will be paid to the temporal development of discrepancies between the discursive negotiation of normative structures and the aims of institutions, as well as the practices and results that can be identified in centres or peripheries.

Due to the wide range of methodologies and disciplines involved, it is crucial to define common modes of access in order to ensure interdisciplinary discussion in the RTG. This is the only way to ensure that the different strategies for the outlined approaches to the temporality of empires, their diachronic change and/or their synchronic diversity are focused and can reference one another in interdisciplinary collaboration. The purpose of these modes is to link and con-

solidate the different disciplinary perspectives on imperial temporality, while maintaining the focus on the action at human level. It could therefore be considered beneficial for the advancement of the research programme, taking into account all disciplines represented in the RTG, to focus the individual postdoctoral projects on these modes of access, although there will by no means be any kind of hierarchical interrelationship between the lines of research and the modes listed below. As such, each conference of the planned RTG will focus on evaluating the modes. In addition to the conference, the workshops, summer schools and explicitly comparative postdoctoral project will also serve to synthesise and optimise the research programme. The following modes have been selected:

a) *Medialisation*: with respect to historical and contemporary materials, the media negotiation, representation, criticism and the self- and external perception of imperial time structures, imperial decline and post-imperial orders are a key source of potential insights for the variety of subjects covered by the RTG. The PIs will work with a concept that defines 'the media' broadly as 'die Gesamtheit der Kommunikationsmittel' ['all means of communication'] (Schanze 2002, 199). A particularly important factor in the approach of the RTG will be the specific dynamics of medialisation (Fohrmann/Schüttpelz 2004) in the constitution of knowledge, the initiation of changes and the stimulation of reflection. A wide range of media types may be examined. For the most part, however, the individual studies will focus on different types of text (fictional literature, journalism, political theory, historiography) as well as film and television, or more recent forms of digital media. The studies may also examine physical relics, perhaps in collaboration with another discipline.

b) *Negotiation*: this mode of access is presented as an alternative to older ideas which interpreted changes primarily as the result of top-down decision-making processes. In a departure from such one-dimensional models, the research of the RTG will focus on negotiation within the framework of a dynamic concept of centres and peripheries, such as bargaining and brokering processes, in specific power structures or the agency of local elites or indigenous parties. The RTG will examine how, in times of dynamic change, access is negotiated to institutions or markets (i.e. what principles are followed and what opportunities for participation are present?) as well as how centrality is constructed in general, with a particular focus on the observation of, and reflection on, changes.

c) *Experience*: The complex relationship between time and experience is examined in a range of disciplines, such as

philosophy, physics and the cognitive sciences (Förster-Beuthan 2012; Deußner/Nebelin 2009). The dissertations of the planned RTG will, with reference to these debates, focus primarily on concrete experiences as they are represented in different forms of media. In line with Breyer/Creutz 2010, this will primarily include 'narrated experiences', 'everyday life experiences', 'inherited experiences' as well as 'experiences of crisis and identity-forming experiences'. This mode of individual or collective experiences will enable the RTG to analyse specific cultures of remembrance, examine changes to imperial spheres of experience (Koselleck 1979), reconstruct imperial biographies or (in recent history) test the applicability of the concept of generationality (Jureit 2017; Reulecke i.a. 2003).

The following interdisciplinary topics related to the modes are currently under consideration and can be discussed extensively in the three conferences of the RTG: the transformation of imperial centrality; biographical experience; negotiation processes in economic border and contact zones in phases of imperial upheaval; empire plots between promises of eternity and 'decline and fall' metaphors.

Change and temporality: definitions and applications

The central focus of the research programme is the analysis of dynamic change in empires up to the emergence of post-imperial orders, as well as the resulting reflections on imperial temporality by contemporaries and later observers. In the context of this research programme, dynamic change is defined as a new or noticeably accelerated, profound change in imperial orders, as opposed to evolutionary or adaptive forms of change, for example (Dwyer/Minnegal 2019, specifically 633).

The RTG will make productive use of the category of temporality through various concepts and models. The following factors are based on established theses in history, sociology and literary studies (Reinhart Koselleck; overview by Jung 2010/11; Jörn Rüsen, Karl Schlögel, François Hartog, Michail Bachtin and Paul Ricoeur; an overview of recent debates is provided by Esposito 2017). The following approaches present highly promising starting points for research on imperial temporality:

(1) *Duration*: the long duration of empires promised permanence as a counterbalance to the dynamics of spatial-territorial changes and the constant need for imperial power structures to adapt to perpetually changing conditions. The continuity of an empire concept, a dynasty, prophetic or utopian forms of legitimation, a

facet of political order such as the Roman Senate, legalised maxims of rule or a civilising mission served, in this respect, as a particular source of legitimacy to forestall any potential upheaval. At the same time, the *longue durée* of empires meant that various institutions, routines of rule and impulses for reform developed in different phases and settled over the course of history.

(2) *Upheaval*: empires may undergo dynamic change, which is experienced and reflected on by contemporaries, as a result of external stimuli such as defeats or losses of territory, but also due to primarily internal processes of re-conceptualisation or interactions between different regions. The upheaval category is applied in various disciplines, usually in the description or analysis of changes in the post-1800 period (Diamond 2019; Kämper i.a. 2014; Lahusen 2010; Mao 2018; Reitemeyer 2007). However, in accordance with the understanding of temporality above, which defines it first and foremost as time that can be experienced, upheaval will refer here to accelerated political or social changes or to the experience of clear differences between a 'before and after' (Bendix 1979, 179) in sub-sectors of societies, without any restrictions with regard to space or historical period. In this sense, the term is also used in research on earlier empires (Cunningham/Driessen 2017; Czock/Rathmann-Lutz 2016; Freund i.a. 2015).

(3) *Uniqueness and reproducibility*: historically, the end of empires is often connected with issues such as the adoption and continuation of concepts of civilisation, postulated achievements and complex conversions – for instance, in the transitions from the Imperium Romanum to the Holy Roman Empire, the British Empire to the Imperium Americanum, the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union. In this context, the concept of *translatio imperii*, borrowed from the biblical view on imperial temporality, refers to the significant impact of the cultivation of heritage through transhistorical connections and historical-political bridge-building. On the one hand, the end of empires illustrates their irreversibility; on the other hand, empires formed a model that would be imitated by future regimes. In order to develop new imperial orders, the idea of a virtually timeless continuity of empires as universal structures of order had to be maintained, although it repeatedly came under pressure from rival empires and the 'many emperors problem'.

(4) *Time modes*: certain rhythms and economic trends, ritual renewal, alleged restoration of ideal conditions (Ambos 2013; Bérenger/Perrin-Saminadayar 2009; Giorelli i.a. 2015) and, more recently, experiences of acceleration all play a major role with regard to the workings of empires, but take different forms depending

on the specific culture and space (Sharma 2014). The stabilisation of imperial orders or economies required a certain degree of predictability and an anticipated future (Spittler 1981).

(5) *Simultaneity and culturally specific temporalities*: In various forms, empires connected heterogeneous spaces that had previously been shaped by their own time structures. As a result, time could remain a resource for diversity management, particularly before ‘world time’ was established at the end of the 19th century (Ogle 2015). Was there any kind of attempt to establish a unified imperial time as a means of integration? And if so, did any tensions arise, for instance, between world history and salvation history (Markus 1990; Meier 2004) or between different imperial regions, in conflicting conceptions of time? Recent literary research in particular has also introduced the concept of culturally specific temporalities in postcolonial contexts (e.g. West-Pavlov 2013), which will be tested in the context of the research programme.

(6) *Interpretation of time*: specific patterns and models of self-interpretation are some of the key features of empires (e.g. MacDonald 1994). These are characterised by narrative structures, metaphors and leitmotifs, ranging from the link between world history and salvation history, to the renewal of a past, however precisely remembered or invented (e.g. by Manganaro 2018a and 2018b), to the decline and fall metaphor (Mason 2018). For a long time, this also included various myths of Rome (D’Amico 2012; Fried 2006), which, for their part, refer to the self-interpretation of the permanence of imperial rule (Huerta Cabrera 2010; Rowland 2013).

