

Roads to Exclusion: Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Mobility Infrastructures since 1800

Conference at the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), September 8-10, 2022. Co-sponsored by the GHI Washington and the Käte Hamburger Kolleg global dis:connect Munich. Conveners: Andreas Greiner (GHI Washington), Carolin Liebisch-Gümüş (GHI Washington), Mario Peters (GHI Washington), Roland Wenzlhuemer (University of Munich). Participants: Maria Adamopoulou (European University Institute), Adesoji Adedipe (University of KwaZulu-Natal Durban), Friedrich Ammermann (European University Institute), Paul Blickle (University of Munich), Andrew Denning (University of Kansas), Charles Bégué Fawell (University of Chicago), Agnes Gehbald (University of Bern), Jennifer Hart (Wayne State University), Martin Kalb (Bridgewater College), Jana Keck (GHI Washington), Lars Kury (University of Basel), Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Barbara Lüthi (University of Leipzig), Megan Maruschke (University of Duisburg-Essen/University of Leipzig), Khanyile Mlotshwa (University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg), Aparajita Mukhopadhyay (University of Kent), Peter Norton (University of Virginia), Anke Ortlepp (University of Cologne), David Pretel (Universidad Pompeu Fabra Barcelona), Avishek Ray (National Institute of Technology Silchar), Claudia Roesch (GHI Washington), Peter Soppelsa (University of Oklahoma), Cristiana Strava (Leiden University), Olusegun Stephen Titus (Obafemi Awolowo University), Heidi Tworek (University of British Columbia Vancouver), Desiree Valadares (University of British Columbia Vancouver), William Walters (Carleton University).

In public discourse, mobility infrastructure – such as railroads, steamships, highways, or airplanes – are often described as

facilitators of cultural and regional integration, economic globalization, and global unity. Yet despite the promise of connecting people and places, constructing and operating such transport networks also left certain places and people out and unconnected – often on purpose. The conference, jointly organized by the GHI Washington and the Käte Hamburger Kolleg global dis:connect Munich, brought together researchers from around the world to explore the intended or unintended dynamics of inclusion and exclusion entailed in mobility infrastructures, ranging from the nineteenth century to the present. The conveners and participants of the conference understood exclusion in both a social and spatial sense. They see exclusion and inclusion not as mutually exclusive modes, but as shifting and dynamic: The participants debated the exclusionary effects in infrastructure planning and practice, its effects on marginalized groups as well as the resilience and resistance of these groups and strategies of access.

Charles Bégué Fawell opened the conference's first panel, titled "Oceanic Dis/Connections," by studying the French ocean liners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as spaces of segregation. The real experience of month-long voyages subverted the promise of reinforcing imperial hierarchies pertaining to class and race. By highlighting contacts between passengers and workers in the engine room or on deck, he emphasized the fragility and permeability of boundaries. Paul Blicke analyzed the infrastructure of ship's ballast in the nineteenth century by focusing on two cases, Hamburg and Brake, ports that have not been successful in achieving their goal to establish a monopoly on ballasting. Examining the tin trade across the Malacca Straits, Lars Kury outlined the region's dialectic development regarding aspects of connection and disconnection: At first benefiting from tin deposits in its hinterlands, Malacca then became disconnected from the global tin market in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Singapore rose to an exclusive center due to what he described as its "natural infrastructures." In his comment,

Roland Wenzlhuemer recapitulated that the presented papers elaborated on global shipping from different perspectives. Its history is often told as a narrative of “connection” and therefore integration through technical progress in the form of steam- and faster ships. But as the panelists demonstrated and as Wenzlhuemer summed up, one person’s connections can be another person’s disconnection.

The second panel, titled “Making Space, Materializing Inequality,” explored the ways in which land-based infrastructure expanded and focused on the inequality resulting from it. The first panelist, David Pretel, examined the history of infrastructure in the Yucatan Peninsula, arguing that the indigenous Mayan communities were not simply passive victims of railway expansion on their territory, but rather proactive individuals who both resisted and appropriated the new train connection. The second presentation by Adesoji Adedipe focused on the post-colonial legacies of colonial transportation in Africa. Adedipe concluded that the insufficient public transport system in Lagos and Durban cements the inequality within urban areas established by colonialism. Finally, Cristiana Strava, in her online presentation, examined transport inequality in Morocco’s railway system, comparing the country’s “two speeds”: the dangerous and slow trains on which commuters rely versus the more expensive high-speed trains that connect economic centers and passengers that can afford them. The panel closed with discussant Heidi Tworek noting that all three panelists addressed the ramifications of colonialism and resistance by marginalized communities. She also steered the discussion toward environmental factors, with all participants agreeing that they deserve a central role in historical research on infrastructure given the current climate crisis and debates about mobility and sustainability.

Examining cultural testimony in the form of articles, songs and movies, Maria Adamopoulou, the first contributor of the

third panel, "Transit Gateways as Border Spaces," depicted train stations in West Germany as both real and imaginary spaces for Greek "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) in the years from 1960 to 1989. Train stations became symbols and places of remembrance for their journeys as well as for their experiences of alienation, discrimination, and (im)mobility. Khanyile Mlotshwa presented a paper on the differing treatment of contemporary border crossers entering South Africa by land or by air. Arriving by airplane, he argued, confers the status of legality, acceptability and desirability whereas people who cross borders in cars or mini buses are considered to be suspect by the border authorities. Researching the significance of international boundaries, mobility control, and refugees during the Age of Revolutions, Megan Maruschke focused on local practices of exclusion and control of migrants and travelers in Philadelphia. Building on these three papers, commentator Anke Ortlepp underlined the need to analyze practices of exclusion from an intersectional perspective and to reach beyond the categories of class, race, and gender to also include the role of personal status and age.

The fourth panel, titled "The Power of Infrastructure: Dreams and Realities," opened with Andrew Denning, whose research focuses on France uprooting pre-colonial West Africa to serve its needs. Denning stated that the French used violence and coercion to colonize Africans and their environment through road construction. Next, Desiree Valadares presented her research which used a single highway route, the scenic Hope-Princeton Highway in British Columbia in Canada, to show the historical erasure of certain communities being forced to construct it, in particular Japanese detainees during the Second World War. Rounding out the presentations was Martin Kalb, who applied Emmanuel Kreike's concept of "environmental infrastructure" to analyze the Mole pier in Swakopmund, German South West Africa. Utilizing this framework, Kalb concluded that both human and non-human elements shape infrastructure, identifying

German planning, African labor, as well as the influence of a woodworm as defining elements of the Mole pier's trajectories. Commentator Jennifer Hart emphasized the centrality of humans, both builders and users, for infrastructure, as well as their connection to the environment. The presenters also discussed the role failure plays in infrastructure and how it ties back into the colonial narrative of progress.

The second conference day ended at the Goethe Institute Washington with a film screening of the documentary "Driving While Black: Race, Space and Mobility in America" (PBS, 2020), which traces the opportunities and freedom offered to African Americans through the advent of automobility while also painfully exposing the discrimination, fear, and violence connected to the experience of driving while Black in the United States.

Opening the fifth panel, titled "Contested Politics of Mobility," Avishek Ray reflected on reverse migration by migrant workers from the cities to the Indian countryside during the nation-wide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In his paper he pointed to the subversive potential of migrant workers walking on the highway and out of the cities. In contrast to most studies concerning European migration during the "age of mass migration" (1815-1939), Agnes Gehbald studied political and legal government measures to prevent return migration by European migrants in the Americas around 1900. Considering that up to 50 per cent of those migrants wanted to return home, she highlighted, the states of North and South America saw the need to make the migrants stay as they were dependent on agricultural and manufacturing laborers. The last contribution of the fifth panel concentrated on deportation infrastructure and resistance in Switzerland. By looking at a number of police raids and deportations in 1985, called "Aktion Schwarzer Herbst" (Operation Black Autumn), Barbara Lüthi and William Walters showed how focusing on deportation infrastructure delivers

new insights into the concrete practice of expulsion and its connection to racism and colonial legacies, while also highlighting how the “vulnerability” of air travel enabled refugees to resist and sabotage their deportation through physical violence and disturbance. In his comment, Peter Norton identified what he called “back-stories” as a unifying aspect of the three papers. He suggested reflecting on four terms – “return,” “visibility,” “pretense,” and “resourcefulness” – and their possible connection to the papers as a starting point for the discussion.

The sixth and final panel of the conference, titled “Access from Below: Exclusion, Appropriation, Subversion,” highlighted the ways in which individuals have been excluded through infrastructure, and the ways they were able to reclaim access. Olusegun Stephen Titus began with his presentation, which focused on how contemporary Nigerian pop songs portray mobility in Lagos. He showed how songs, and the cultural representation of traffic and transportation can be used to create awareness about the socioeconomic inequality connected to urban infrastructure. Next, Peter Soppelsa gave insight into bourgeois and working-class protests regarding the construction of a Paris tramway in 1897. Dubbed the “barbarian tramway” by the privileged inhabitants of Paris, the tramway resisted attempts of social exclusion and became an instrument of social protest by working-class commuters. Finally, Friedrich Ammermann focused on Indian and African passengers on railways in Bechuanaland as well as Northern and Southern Rhodesia between 1947 and 1964. He showcased how train operators used the division of coaches into first, second, and third class to maintain race segregation in anything but name, and he shed light on the complaints of passengers who demanded the right to travel first (or second) class and questioned the equation of class and race. Commentator Aparajita Mukhopadhyay picked up on the topic of socioeconomic inequality that linked all three papers, and the panelists discussed the

various reasons different social groups utilized transport for, and how the lower classes' lack of access to transportation negatively affected their general means and opportunities.

At the end of three days of lively discussions, Roland Wenzlhuemer opened the concluding Roundtable – which was composed of the commentators of almost all the preceding panels – by summarizing that the conference made aspects visible that do not fit into the usual narratives about mobility and infrastructure. Exclusion as well as social, racial, and gendered segregation are persistent throughout the history of transport infrastructures. Therefore, not only should historians strengthen their efforts to write the history of transportation infrastructures “from below.” They should also, the four panelists agreed, critically engage with the connotations of the term “infrastructure” which always implies the claim for a practical solution to social challenges. Scrutinizing the intellectual history of the term can help historians reveal the manifold attempts to gain political, economic, and cultural power that came with the planning and usage of mobility infrastructures. Focusing on the tasks of historians, the panelists also discussed the need to make the study of infrastructure appealing and accessible to students by highlighting its immanence in their daily lives as well as the need to “engage people beyond campus.” How can we go beyond the writing of history by translating our findings to practitioners who conceptualize, plan, and manage mobility in the present and future? And what insights can historians offer them? These are open questions. As a first step, the panelists suggested, historians need training in communication – and a stronger belief in their own “power to shift the trajectory” of future developments through historicizing and de-normalizing current issues of mobility infrastructure.

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