Wings of Globalization? New Approaches to the History of Commercial Aviation, 1920s–2020s

Conference at the German Historical Institute in Washington DC, November 1-2, 2024, in cooperation with the Free University of Berlin and the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Conveners: Andreas Greiner (GHI Washington) and Stefan Rinke (Free University of Berlin). Participants: Marc Alsina (Johns Hopkins University), Colleen E. Anderson (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum), Alexandre Fortes (Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro), Marie Huber (University of Marburg), Aashique Ahmed Iqbal (Krea University Sri City, Andhra Pradesh), Jana Keck (GHI Washington), Baz Lecocq (Humboldt University, Berlin), Alan Meyer (Auburn University), Priya Mirza (University of Delhi), Jessica Pearson (Macalester College), Melina Piglia (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas), Aimée Plukker (Cornell University), Moritz Alexander Sorg (University of Freiburg), Guillaume de Syon (Albright College), Kaori Takada (Otsuma Women's University Tokyo), Phil Tiemeyer (Kansas State University), Robert van der Linden (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum), John Wong (University of Hong Kong), Waqar Zaidi (Lahore University of Management Sciences), Silke Zoller (Kennesaw State University).

Since its inception over one hundred years ago, commercial aviation has proven itself to be an engine of globalization. The two-day long conference – jointly organized by the German Historical Institute Washington and the Institute for Latin American Studies of Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

– brought together scholars from North America, Latin America, Europe, East Asia, and South Asia. In keeping with the international group of participants, the conference represented a break from earlier research's near-exclusive focus on aviation in the Global North and specifically the North Atlantic. While not neglecting this world region, the panelists also shed light on commercial aviation's development and importance in multiple parts of the world, including Argentina, Brazil, Hong Kong, India, Japan, and the Middle East. In his opening keynote, Guillaume de Syon outlined the conference's goal to utilize aviation history as a lens to study broader social or cultural developments like gender, race, class, the history of cultures, heritage and state-making in the 20th century, postcolonial history and the history of infrastructure, security policy and geographies. This agenda reverberated the different methodological approaches and backgrounds of the attending scholars and their contributions.

The first panel, titled "Users and Producers," was opened by Aashique Ahmed Iqbal, who analyzed the evolution of mass tourism in India in the 1960s. Tourism from the United States and Europe became possible through a liberalization of the country which occurred simultaneously with capacity increases and ticket-price reduction, enabled by new "Jet Age" aircraft technology, especially the Boeing 707. At the same time, for Indians aviation remained reserved for an elite group of people. John Wong's paper highlighted the notable changes in female flight attendants' uniforms aboard the Hong Kong airline Cathay Pacific from a militarized look in the 1960s to modern name-brand fashion in the 1990s. Analyzing the uniforms points to dynamics in the development of the city itself and its struggle to craft an identity as a non-sovereign entity, first under British and, as of today, Chinese control. The third contribution of the panel by Kaori Takada reflected upon Hawai'i becoming a major destination for various types of newly-emerging "jet-setters" in the 1960s. Examining the "Militourism" of U.S.

soldiers serving in the Vietnam War, who used Hawai'i as a vacation destination to reunite with their families, she also highlighted the tourism and activities of Japanese women in Hawai'i, who embraced new freedoms in aviation and Japanese entrepreneurship on the island, following Japan's 1964 policy change that permitted international travel for its citizens, fueled through the interest to build stronger economic ties to the United States. In the final paper, Marc Alsina examined the history of aviation through the lens of the history of labor, national politics, and aeronautical enthusiasm in the United States and Argentina from 1930 to 1980. In addition to highlighting the patronage for aviation in both countries, he emphasized the differences between the government-controlled industry in Argentina and the independent industry in the United States and stressed the importance and struggle of unions for a safe and rewarding workplace. Discussant Phil Tiemeyer concluded that the contributions revealed how flying fostered new social groups, such as mass tourists and "women in motion," who renegotiated societal roles while also demonstrating how political and economic contexts shaped diverse experiences and perceptions of aviation.

Moritz Alexander Sorg kicked off the second panel, titled "The Dangers of Flying," with an examination of the evolution of aviation safety and security discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. By examining media publications—*Time* magazine in the United States, and *Der Spiegel* in West Germany—he highlighted how aviation-related incidents were framed and how the public discourse evolved. Thus, he emphasized how society's responses to aviation accidents and security threats can function as a lens to provide insights into broader societal attitudes to changes of technology, globalization, and security. Silke Zoller discussed the introduction of aviation security measures in the United States in the late 1960s. Metal detectors were introduced in response to a surge in flight hijackings. Zoller highlighted the reactive nature of security policies during the

Nixon administration and how these crises compelled politicians to create mandatory regulations and enforcement measures in an industry that had previously been expected to manage security independently. Discussant Alan Meyer noted that the emotional dimension in public discourse discussed by the panelists, as well as in other contributions to the conference, might be worth further research.

The three contributions of the third panel, titled "Flying Nations," were connected by questions of representation, power relations, and questions of belonging, as discussant Baz Lecocq highlighted in his concluding comment. Priya Mirza, focusing on India under British imperial rule, analyzed the practice of plane gifting between Indian princes and the British Army at the beginning of the First and Second World Wars. Aviation, and specifically gifting aircraft, was one dimension for Indian princes to assert their sovereignty while also presenting themselves as cosmopolitan and modern. Aimée Plukker's talk compared advertisements from the Dutch airline KLM and the Italian airline Alitalia to shed light on another cultural dimension of aviation history in the early post-World War II years. She argued that both airlines no longer simply advertised how to travel, but also how to feel while traveling. Flying was depicted as a glamorous, aspirational venture, connected to imaginations of upward mobility. According to Plukker, both KLM and Alitalia also advertised a specific "economy of services" that created a certain set of expectations among their customers. The panel's third paper, by Jessica Pearson, analyzed commercial air travel with regards to questions of claiming sovereignty in the decolonizing world after the collapse of Europe's empires. Using examples from the 1960s and 1970s from different post-colonial countries, Pearson showed that airline representatives as well as politicians understood tourism by air as a way to promote development and to "rebrand" the newly independent nations. By opening new destinations, setting routes and itineraries for Western

travelers, and thereby gaining agency over touristic movements, postcolonial actors sought to upend the legacies of colonial tourism.

The second day of the conference took place at the Steven F. Udvar Hazy Center of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. After a short introduction to the museum's own history by Robert van der Linden, the fourth conference panel on "Flying in the Global South" highlighted, as discussant Melina Piglia remarked in her commentary, how a (post-)colonial dimension continued to structure aviation projects in the Global South. Marie Huber took a comparative look at aircraft acquisitions by Air Afrique, a multinational airline operated by eleven West and Central African states in cooperation with France, and Ethiopian Airlines, which cooperated with the United States–based carrier TWA. Both airlines' investments in aviation projects were complicated by inherited constraints of existing colonial infrastructures and networks, as well as by Cold War politics and the oil crisis. Alexandre Fortes focused on Brazil during the Second World War and revealed attempts to drive German actors out of the commercial aviation market. He highlighted that successes like the "renationalization" of the German-owned Condor airlines in 1942 should not be solely understood as a result of U.S. expansionist moves into Latin America. Rather, using rivalries between the North Atlantic powers and disagreements within the United States government to its advantage, Brazil acted as an independent actor with its own agenda. The third contribution, by Waqar Zaidi, argued that not only oil but also geopolitical and strategic interest in airspace spurred the United States' interest in the Cold War Middle East, and showed how the interplay between geopolitical interests, aviation, and technological advances within the field shaped both the imagination of spaces and the territories themselves. Due to both the aerial globalism of the 1940s and strategic considerations during the Cold War, the Middle East had become an important

aerial center for military as well as civil aviation by the 1950s. However, with technological advances and shifting US military strategies, the importance of the Middle East as an aerial center decreased by the end of the 1960s.

The concluding roundtable discussion highlighted the importance of the airplane as an analytical lens for bringing forward innovative cultural approaches to the research field. Themes such as power structures, perspectives on gender, questions of belonging, the production of territories and states, as well as tensions between nationalistic and cosmopolitan self-attributions were overarching topics and still deserve further research. At the same time, as repeatedly discussed during the panels, it also became clear that technology still deserves an important place in any study: questions of materiality and technological development should not be neglected as they still hold great explanatory potential. This includes infrastructural conditions, interplays between aviation and other forms of transportation on land and by sea, as well as other topics such as maintenance or accidents. The participants agreed that hitherto ignored historical actors – from flight attendants to the "hidden labor" within and around airports – also deserve further scholarly attention. They also emphasized that the research field should be approached even more from a non-Western-centric perspective. The conference marked a crucial step towards multiperspectivity by offering a truly global perspective on the history of aviation.

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