

The Unsettlers: Solidarity and transgression in white central Africa

Venerdì 23 settembre / Friday 23 September 16.15-18.00

CONVENOR: Jack HOGAN (University of the Free State); Duncan MONEY (University of the Free State); Lazlo PASSEMIERS (University of the Free State)

DISCUSSANT: Ian PHIMISTER (University of the Free State, South Africa)

ABSTRACT: Transnational and global history, the history of colonial and settler societies, histories of crime and conflict and histories of the affective are more in vogue now than ever before. Drawing on this groundswell of historical and popular interest, and the growing recognition of the complexity of the human dimension to colonial contact, this panel seeks to understand the complex and often contradictory history of white settlers and settlement in central Africa.

The questions it seeks to address are diverse: How did settler societies take shape? What was the relationship between the colonised and their colonisers? How strong was the colonial state, and how did it interact with settler society? What forces shaped settler identities? How were norms and values forged, transmitted and shared? How true do stereotypes of settler societies ring when closely examined? How did settler states handle internal and external conflicts? How were settler colonial modernities constructed and defined?

What unites this broad approach to the history of white central Africa is, the hard facts of geography aside, the commonalities of historical experience across settler states and enclaves. Settler colonialism was not the same thing in all places, and at all times, but by their very nature settler societies offer fertile ground for historical comparisons to be drawn. But the notion that these were islands of metropolitan whiteness, divided from the populations they supplanted, and from each other by imperial boundaries, calls out for closer interrogation. This panel's overarching concerns are conflict, crime and the making of common experience and solidarity, framed by a concern with the reality (or unreality) of borders, be they geographic, socioeconomic or cultural, and how these could be made and unmade.

PAPERS:

Jack HOGAN, *Of deviants and District Commissioners: The difficult adolescence of a settler colony*

ABSTRACT:

This is a paper about criminals, fantasists, confidence tricksters and treasure hunters. About, amongst other things, a hushed-up court martial on the eve of the Great War, the chequered life of a self-styled Count, a scandalous appeal at the Livingstone High Court and the curious aftermath of a death in the Angolan borderlands. It is a paper about generative frictions, an attempt to discern the contested, shifting boundaries and margins of the early colonial period in Northern Rhodesia through the lives of those who inhabited or transgressed them. In some cases, these boundaries were physical, like the porous borders that played host to poachers, cattle rustlers and brigands. They were equally likely to be imaginary, at the limits and edges of a state and society in formation. They lay at the interstices of the deeply imbricated worlds of colonised and coloniser, official and settler, missionary and trader, High Commissioner and newspaper editor.

Through a focus on a diverse cast of historical actors, some better known than others, this paper will reflect on frequently crude, occasionally subtle, performances and assertions of power. In particular, this paper will demonstrate how the boundaries and limits of the colonial state were demarcated and shaped by attempts at policing, the application of the law and the assertion of norms in the face of perceived

transgression. If the best way to understand crime and law and order in the colonial context is to conceive of it as an encounter between dynamic, local processes of change in indigenous societies and dynamic and changing forms of colonialism, then this paper is concerned with drawing out the complex human dimension of the latter part of the equation. Through their conformity and deviance, their violence and sexuality, their justifications and prosecutions, these are at times the lives of unsettling figures. Yet they reveal how messy and contested the transition from 'pioneer days' to fledgling settler colony was in colonial central Africa, particularly in the era before the end of chartered company rule and the rise of the Copperbelt.

PROPOSER'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Jack Hogan is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Studies Group, University of the Free State. He completed his doctoral thesis on slavery in Barotseland between 1800-1925 at the University of Kent in 2014. He is presently working on slavery, labour migration, and the socioeconomic history of precolonial and early colonial southern Africa.

Duncan MONEY, *The Wild West in Central Africa: Authority, justice, and white miners in the Copperbelt mining camps*

ABSTRACT:

Mining communities around the world have long developed and maintained differing ideas of authority and justice, and the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia was no different. This paper will examine ideas of authority and justice, their transnational origins and how they differed from, and often conflicted with, the laws and values of the state. Many of the whites attracted to the Copperbelt formed a mobile, transient population who were unconcerned about the particular state or territory they found themselves in and had their own ideas about acceptable forms of behaviour. Guns, gambling, and whiskey featured heavily in these ideas.

From the mid-nineteenth century, mines were often established in regions remote from state structures. The same was true on the Copperbelt where the discovery of commercially viable copper deposits in the mid-1920s triggered a sudden influx of migrants; Africans forced into the labour market and white mineworkers from Britain, South Africa, Australia and North America. The colonial state was poorly placed to extend its authority into these new mining camps, and was wary about displeasing the mining companies who soon provided the majority of the state's revenue. Instead, the Copperbelt effectively emerged as an American colony within Northern Rhodesia. American capital largely funded the development of the region and Americans occupied virtually every position of authority.

Contemporary observers saw a close resemblance between the Copperbelt and the American West, a resemblance which was no accident. The Copperbelt mining camps were modelled on American company towns and American mine managers attempted to run them along the same lines, with very particular ideas about authority and justice. Like elsewhere, white mineworkers on the Copperbelt could be instantly dismissed for minor infractions if they occurred on company property during work hours but could do more or less what they liked outside work and would face no sanction from the company. This was a world of mining camps and attempts by the colonial state to encroach into this world were ignored or resisted.

PROPOSER'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Duncan Money is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Studies Group, University of the Free State and is working on a comparative history of mining regions in southern Africa. He was awarded a D.Phil. in History from the University of Oxford in 2015 where he completed a thesis on the history of the European community on the Zambian Copperbelt.

Matteo GRILLI, *'Congolese' Italians: identity, race and belonging in colonial and independent Congo*

ABSTRACT:

A considerable proportion of the magistrates, engineers, doctors and officials serving the Congo Free State (1885-1908) were Italians. After the Belgian government took over the administration of the Congo, Italian officials and technicians were increasingly outnumbered by compatriots who settled in the colony, mainly as miners or entrepreneurs. Although not directly involved in the management of the colony, the Italian community carved out an important economic role, becoming integral part of settler society. In demographic terms, of the white communities in the Congo, particularly in Katanga, the Italian population was third only to Belgians and Portuguese on the eve of independence. Only Mobutu's "Zairianization" (1973) and "Radicalization" (1974) campaigns led to a drop in the Italian presence in the country.

This paper aims to discuss how the Italian community perceived itself and how it dealt with the colonial state, race, and belonging. During the colonial period, although the Italians maintained some traits of a distinct national identity, they also progressively adhered to the ideological, symbolical and cultural practices of settler society, finally identifying themselves as white Congolese. During the Second World War, the Italians were interned and thus "expelled" from that same settler society, being readmitted once again only after the conflict had come to an end. Using memories and archival and oral sources, this paper examines the changing relationship between Italians and wider settler society, their role in the debate over "white democracy" and white solidarity in the colony during the 1950s, and their involvement in the Congo Crisis. The paper then offers a reflection on the crucial changes wrought by independence and their effects on the Italian community. Italian settlers had to radically reconsider their positioning in a post-colonial society. As in other post-colonial contexts, several Italians worked towards redefining their image in the eyes of the formerly colonized. In reaching its conclusions, this paper will interrogate the efforts of the 'Congolese' Italians to underline their non-involvement in the former colonial government, and their identity as Italians, a people bearing an alleged "special affinity" with the Africans they had not long before ceased to dominate.

PROPOSER'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Matteo Grilli obtained his PhD at the University of Pavia and the University of Leiden (Joint-PhD programme) in 2015. He is currently part of the International Studies Group of the University of the Free State as a postdoctoral fellow. His research focuses on the history of African nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the Italian presence in Africa.

Lazlo PASSEMIERS, *White fright, flight and fight: the Congo crisis and white solidarities in southern Africa*

ABSTRACT:

On 30 June 1960, the Republic of Congo gained independence from Belgium. Five days later, mutiny broke out amongst members of the Congolese army and sporadic bursts of violence directed at white people occurred throughout Congo. A considerable number of these whites became 'refugees', crossing the border into Portuguese Angola and the Central African Federation, and fleeing to apartheid South Africa. In solidarity, Southern African authorities lifted normal immigration procedures and put various initiatives in place to receive and care for incoming refugees. In the context of providing such aid to white refugees, Pretoria ascribed itself the role of the defender of western 'civilisation' in Africa, and used the occurrences in Congo to justify the continuation of its apartheid policy. The flight of Congo's white population became symbolic of the impending fate of Southern Africa's white settlers in a rapidly decolonising continent. Linked to the regional fright of a similar 'white flight' in their territories was the recruitment of white mercenaries. With the knowledge of the authorities in South Africa, the Central African Federation, and Angola, white mercenaries recruited in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia were allowed to transgress the

region's existing borders to defend Southern Africa's imagined ideological frontline during Congo's post-independence 'crisis'.

This paper provides an analysis of how the Southern African region, and in particular South Africa, reacted to and perceived Congo's white refugee crisis, and how it dealt with the illegal recruitment and movement of white mercenaries within their territories. The primary sources used to reconstruct this narrative consist of archival material from South Africa, Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Belgium; South African newspapers and periodicals; as well as structured interviews with refugees and mercenaries. This paper exemplifies how Congo's white flight brought about solidarity amongst Southern Africa's white minority regimes in an effort to protect the region's imagined border against the wave of decolonisation, and highlights the fluid nature of the region's internal borders.

PROPOSER'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Lazlo Passemiers is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Studies Group, University of the Free State. He is presently revising his 2015 doctoral thesis - 'South Africa and the 'Congo crisis', 1960-1965' - for publication. His research interests include Congo, African liberation movements, and Southern African regional studies.