Imperial history is flourishing and the reasons are numerous. After the end of the Cold War and with the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989/1991, questions about the future world order and particularly the role of the United States as the last remaining world power inevitably came to the fore. At the same time, the experience of a spatially and temporally intensified globalisation became increasingly apparent, underlining the lack of explanatory power of a history solely focusing on nation states. Finally, postcolonial studies, emerging since the late 1970s, stimulated a novel engagement with the situation coloniale, treating the colonised as actors in their own right and placing the discourses of colonialism under scrutiny, thereby increasingly highlighting connections between colonial power and its various forms of knowledge. All these factors contributed to the formation of a New Imperial History.

This New Imperial History started in the 1990s with the programmatic call to place metropole and colony within the same analytical framework. While this has stimulated important works on culture, gender and race – and especially on the mutually constitutive nature of both «motherland» and colonies mainly for the British Empire –, an interimperial approach connecting different metropoles or colonies belonging to differing empires has remained a blind spot. Major reasons for this lacuna certainly are the language limitations of researchers and the fact that the...

1 The articles in this special issue go back to the conference «An Imperial Cloud? Did a Collective Imperial Reservoir of Knowledge Exist in the 19th and 20th Century?» held at the University of Rostock in September 2014, which had been generously funded by the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung and the University of Rostock.


historical academy is often divided into national reference frameworks hampering transnational approaches. Recently, however, a tendency to look across imperial boundaries has begun to gain ground. Fuelled by the transnational turn – and most of all by the insight that history takes place not only within or between national or imperial units – historians have started to view empires in connection with one another, carving out their similarities and differences, and analysing their links and encounters. In this spirit, comparative studies have been followed recently by works exploring connections between empires – in terms of interimperial migration and the transfer of knowledge among other topics.

From this transimperial perspective, European expansion during the nineteenth and twentieth century appears more and more as a shared colonial project characterised by common basic assumptions, as well as patterns of thought and techniques. Examples of these collective conceptions included the imagination to «civilise» the colonised, efforts to settle a terra nullius and the widespread attempt to place colonisers and colonised in segregated living spaces in colonial cities. Considering such similarities, it is fitting that, for instance, British, Belgian or German men on the spot – but also at home – often first started to perceive themselves as «European» when they were confronted with the colonial «others» in the imperial periphery. However, historians have hardly asked how interimperial commonalities came into being. Besides referring to transcolonial processes of transfer, which had led to the harmonisation of patterns of thought and practices, some historians have pointed to the possibility of a common reservoir of knowledge, which all impe-
rial powers could access. This readily accessible «settler archive» (Lorenzo Veracini) or «colonial archive» (Robert Gerwarth / Stephan Malinowski) contained knowledge about the colonised as well as techniques for their treatment, exploitation and extermination accumulated in the course of colonialism. If such an «archive» truly existed, it is necessary to examine how it functioned, where it was located, who shaped it, how «data» was stored and retrieved, and how it could be accessed. It is these questions that have not been sufficiently discussed yet and will therefore be addressed by this thematic issue.

Picking up a term from our digital present, we propose to think along the line of a different metaphor conceptualising the shared reservoir of knowledge in question as an «imperial cloud». Cloud computing has been one of the major recent developments in information technology «that allow[s] applications and data to be hosted on a computer external to a business’s [or private person’s] own computing resources».

Today’s cloud storage allows all authorised persons to upload and download data from potentially every place on earth into a common data repository. Similarly, we envision the imperial cloud as a shared reservoir of knowledge, which was not bound to a single empire, but had a multi-local existence and was accessible to agents of different empires, both from the peripheries and the metropoles.

In order to clarify our conceptual offer and to bring out its potential for historical research, in the first section of this article we will discuss alternative ways to think about inter-imperial connections and common imperial knowledge. By critically reviewing the concepts of the colonial archive, inter-imperial transfers and imperial discourse, we try to highlight how the imperial cloud can possibly overcome problems or limitations these approaches entail. Secondly, we will explore the concrete workings of the proposed cloud by introducing and discussing three major questions that will be taken up in the contributions to follow: (1) how the imperial cloud might have come into being, (2) how it might have been used and (3) whether non-European empires had a share in the potential cloud.

1. The Imperial Cloud and Alternative Concepts

Why is «imperial cloud» a more fitting term than «colonial archive» to denote such a reservoir of knowledge? First of all, the colonial archive, described by Gerwarth and Malinowski as the «common knowledge on the treatment, exploitation, and extermination of the colonised»


extermination of ‘sub humans’ accumulated by the Western powers over the course of colonial history’,¹¹ is a rather too narrow category. Colonial powers did not only share applicable knowledge of the handling of the colonised but also certain mentalities, images, stereotypes, narratives and ideologies. One of the most important ones certainly was the notion of the colonised as being inferior, savage and uncivilised. Furthermore, the shared notions and knowledge of empires go beyond what is usually subsumed under the term ‘colonial’. They include, for instance, techniques of informal empire. In this regard, it is telling that the shared repository was accessible not only to strictly ‘colonial’ blue-water empires but also to their continental neighbours such as the Romanov and Habsburg empires, which were, for instance, participating in the Institut Colonial International (ICI), one of the key institutions for the sharing of imperial knowledge as will be explicated below. It is thus preferable to use the more inclusive term ‘imperial’ rather than ‘colonial’ to denote the transimperial repository of knowledge, notions and narratives here in question.¹²

Secondly, as Dörte Lerp rightly argues in her contribution to this volume, the «archive» metaphor suggests a systematic and organised process of knowledge production and storage «in physical form (books, statistics, maps, administrative files, etc.) with the explicit intent to make this information accessible to contemporaries and future generations». This notion of an orderly form of knowledge collection and keeping is at odds with the often unplanned and unsystematic spread of imperial knowledge and the constant transformation it underwent – a fact that rather harmonises with the characteristics of a collective digital repository that is fed from multiple sources and can be constantly overwritten.

Thirdly, and closely related to the last point, the «archive» metaphor evokes the image of a knowledge repository that is physically placed at a concrete location. This implies that it must be located in one empire that would necessarily enact a certain control over its usage, especially by other powers. However this notion is at odds with the impression of a shared imperial knowledge reservoir that goes beyond any single empire and cannot entirely be controlled by one of them. To be sure, there certainly are power relations and other factors at work, thereby making it more difficult or even impossible for some actors to access information in the knowledge repository and especially to feed content into it as we shall see below.¹³

Here, it is useful to remember that today’s cloud storage is not as universally acces-

¹¹ Gerwarth / Malinowski, «Hannah Arendt’s Ghost», 287.
¹² One might therefore rather speak of an «imperial archive» as James Hevia has done, though he was not referring to a shared imperial reservoir of knowledge, but an exclusively British imperial archive. J. Hevia, English Lessons. The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China, Durham et al. 2003, 123–128. See also Th. Richards, The Imperial Archive. Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire, London, New York 1993.
¹³ The centrality of power relations for understanding archives has been amply demonstrated. See for instance the double special thematic issue devoted to «Archives, Records, and Power» in: Archival Science 2 (2002). To a certain extent, this also holds true for the imperial cloud.
sible as one might think. Without the proper hardware and software or without access to the internet, attempts to use such virtual storage are futile. Even after gaining access you might not be able to make sense of the content, for example, if it is presented in an unfamiliar idiom. However, what is of major importance here is that a cloud – if defined as proposed here – does not belong to one state or empire and that it is therefore hardly possible for any actor or group of actors to entirely control access to the cloud.

A case in point is the usage of imperial knowledge by anti-imperial actors. A striking example here is the inversion and anti-imperial usage of European «Orientalism», one of the strongest ideological weapons in the subjugation of non-European territories, by colonial elites themselves. «Orientalism», as coined by Edward Said in his groundbreaking work, refers to a specific «Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient» based upon an «ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‹the Orient› and (most of the time) ‹the Occident›».

This epistemic strategy was later on copied by anti-colonial and nationalist movements in South Asia, China and the Middle East, and turned against Western imperialism by claiming natural superiority over «the West» in a similar way as Orientalism had done over «the Orient».

This move gained plausibility and spread almost on a global scale with the Japanese victory over Russia in 1904/1905.

While the cloud therefore holds certain advantages over the «archive» metaphor, one might question if there is a need at all for a new term to refer to the collective knowledge assembled by empires. Are we not able to better grasp the phenomenon with established concepts? The possibilities are numerous. We could understand the new term as a discourse, that is, the collectivity of possible propositions in the imperial field; as a mentality, that is, the long-term, half-conscious inventory of common assumptions of imperial actors around the globe; or an simply as ideology or an idea of empire. Another take could be to leave the lofty realm of knowledge-based approaches and investigate concretely the personal networks of exchange or circles of imperial actors with the advantage of a possible reconstruction of ways of transfers within and between empires.

To start with this last suggestion, some of the authors of this issue address the investigation of transfers and search the physical colonial archives for evidence of contact, mutual exchange or even transimperial learning among politicians, administrators, militaries, physicians or farmers from different countries. If such contacts and relationships existed – so the initial assumption –, empirical traces must have survived even the confusions of decolonisation, the devastations of wars or long decades of colonial amnesia. This search for concrete ways of transfer and mutual

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learning has proved to be fruitful and deepened in many cases our understanding of transimperial learning and cooperation. Nevertheless, the empirical studies also exposed the limits of this approach. At times, even where – as in Aidan Forth’s and Jonas Kreienbaum’s case discussed in this issue – the similarities of imperial practice over national divisions appeared so striking that a lack of dependence and interconnection became less and less plausible, and the concrete ways of transfer could not be detected.

The destruction of relevant source material is certainly one way to account for this problem, but there is more to it. Historical actors simply did not always record if and from where they took certain knowledge. One reason for this might have been that for the historical actors the exchange of information with foreign partners or competitors became so usual and widespread that they simply saw no need to mention or describe their routines of transimperial exchange, which only today, with the height of nationalist divisions just left behind, has become a rewarding object of study. This would lead to the already fascinating insight that internationalism was always an unconscious and unspoken part of imperialism, as reflected by the silence of its agents.

Another explanation could be that imperial agents might not even have been aware of the sources of certain ideas, concepts or techniques of rule, which they adopted for usage in their own imperial contexts. Indeed, it would be overly simplistic to assume that the transfer of ideas was a strictly two-sided thing with influences being spread neatly from one imperial scene to another, fully understood by the actors involved. Theoretically and empirically, it becomes more likely instead to assume that processes of transfer frequently had different origins, and took intricate and fractional ways – a process that could be more accurately described with the amorphous concept of the cloud. Thus, the imperial cloud complements classical transfer studies focusing on rather clear-cut two-sided exchanges by offering a way to think about more diffused ways in which imperial knowledge proliferated.

However, whatever the reason for our empirical problem to trace certain processes of transfer between empires might be, the fact remains that some existing connections between empires have disappeared from view as if they were covered by a cloud. Here, another metaphorical meaning of the cloud comes to bear as it tends to conceal what happens inside its contours. As cloud computing «means delivering useful functions while hiding how their internals work», the imperial cloud leads us to consider the interimperial connections that we cannot fully trace empirically. To be sure, this constitutes another important addition to the study of transfers, but it also involves a great danger and thus presents one of the potential

pitfalls of the cloud-concept: As researching the imperial cloud necessarily focusses on circuits, networks, transfers and encounters between empires up to the limit of what is empirically detectable, there might arise a tendency to assume that everything was connected, and any imperial conception or technique we study in a particular empire had been previously drawn from another. We should be aware of Frederick Cooper’s warning that even today, in our sophisticated era of globalisation, knowledge does not reach remote places of the world, especially not at the same time and it certainly did not do so in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{18}

To further conceptualise the diffused ways of knowledge transfer, the concept of discourse as a possible alternative becomes an obvious choice. Discourse refers to the amorphous forces structuring the social body with no possibility for individual actors to escape from its formative force. The concept of discourse itself – besides all its own ambiguities and theoretical problems – was introduced to deal with even more obscure and methodologically harder-to-control approaches such as the histories of ideas, ideologies and mentalities.\textsuperscript{19} Discourse prevailed over these alternative concepts because it seemed to offer a more sophisticated methodological concept, results grounded in stricter empiricism, and, of course, a far more comprehensive philosophical programme.\textsuperscript{20}

Not only because of the discourse’s victory over competitive theoretical approaches and its ubiquity in the humanities ever since – as indicated also by its influx into everyday language – does this concept deserve our special attention. Discourse also seems in many ways close to the set of features we propose to be subsumed under the metaphorical term «cloud». Both discourse and cloud are not designed to describe fixed, material-like «ideas» that are consistent, self-contained and transparent. Rather, they contain the many actual utterances or bites of information. Both are not fixed to individual actors or places; they are – as Emma Rothschild described her modified concept of «ideas» in intellectual history – «not things, but […] embodied in things […] and they are the causes of things».\textsuperscript{21} In addition, as Michel Foucault’s concept of «dispositive» associates discourse more with institutions in the material world, the cloud also needs servers and cables without being identical to its physical infrastructure.\textsuperscript{22}

Without having exhausted the striking similarities between cloud and discourse, we should pay attention here to the differences between both approaches to return to

\textsuperscript{19} The locus classicus is taken from M. Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things}, London 1974.
our initial question: What additional benefit might the concept of «cloud» provide? First, one argument could be that despite, or rather, because of its overwhelming success, the concept of discourse itself recently became more and more trivialised and is increasingly used as a pure denominator of being up-to-date with the current theoretical discussion without really being applied in the empirical work. A new term could thus stimulate renewed theoretical debate in the field of imperial history.

Secondly, Foucault, the inventor of the concept of discourse, had no possibility to analyse the revolutionary upheaval that globalisation and the internet would bring to the world of information, politics and power. The usage of theoretical insights of discourse analysis for engagements with the innovations and changes of the internet were carried out by Foucault’s companion Gilles Deleuze and his followers.

Therefore, the concept of discourse was applied in most cases, not least by Foucault himself, to objects of investigation within a strictly national framework, that is, exactly the kind of restriction that more recent trends in global and imperial history try to transcend. Being interested in the commonalities, shared assumptions and resembling practices of imperial powers, this constraint – named by some as the container-concept of the nation state – has to be overcome. Our conceptual offer in the field of imperial history to fulfil this methodologically justified demand would be the cloud, which is designed as a kind of globalised discourse in contrast to the national discourses that are usually examined.

Thirdly, besides this major advantage of the cloud concept, additional benefits are discernible. Discourse is often considered to be ruled and restricted by regimes or orders. These «orders of discourse» limit the possible utterances and regulate access and position of speakers to and within the discourse, thereby establishing regimes to which individuals are subordinated, and limiting their agency. Therefore, actors and their freedom of action are subjects about which the concept of discourse, at least in its «classical» layout, has little to say. The cloud, on the other hand, seems to be more anarchical and less based on standing rules, or at least it seems to open up more space for manoeuvre and evasion, even though the cloud is

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23 See the criticism of this only superficial usage of the concept in: P. Sarasin, Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse, Frankfurt a. M. 2003.
certainly not completely free of power relations. Thus, the cloud leaves more space for the agency of historical actors –, the «authors» or «users» –, opening it up to one of the currently most productive fields of imperial history, namely the study of imperial biographies. Consequently, the role of «users» to upload and download information, and the applications of it in particular contexts will be a central element of the contributions to this issue.

Archive, transfer and discourse – these are three concepts with rich benefits for broadening our understanding of imperial rule, but also with considerable limitations stemming from the particular contexts of their invention and specific questions that they were designed to answer. The concept of the cloud that we propose and explore in the following articles is another offer: an offer to supplement rather than to replace previous approaches. In addition to the benefits mentioned above, the cloud concept has another advantage: It does not hide its inspiration from technological developments of the early twenty-first century. To apply this metaphor to far earlier historical contexts may seem misleading and it certainly entails the danger of naively projecting characteristics of our digitally connected world into the nineteenth century. However, we should not forget that it was the wave of globalisation in the last one-third of the twentieth century that gave historians the inspiration for the reconstruction of the «first globalisation» of the era before 1914 and put into perspective the historical exception of the age of nations. What we basically suggest is to globalise the way we describe the transfer of knowledge in the age of empires as well.

2. The Major Questions – Emergence, Usage and Non-European Participation

Having highlighted the benefits of thinking along the metaphor of an imperial cloud, we now turn to outlining the possible modes of operation of such a cloud. In the following, we will consecutively focus on the questions of how to conceive the formation, the usage and the participation in an imperial cloud.

The Emergence of an Imperial Cloud

The first set of questions must obviously deal with the emergence of an imperial cloud. How could content be deposited in it and by which agents? Where and how could it be stored? How were imperial knowledge, images or conceptions integrated into this imperial cloud? And how could different imperial powers access the cloud?

Imperial knowledge, produced by manifold actors and institutions in the course of imperial rule, spread across imperial boundaries in many ways:


30 Studying the production of colonial/imperial knowledge has become one of the major strands of
commissions travelled to foreign colonies to gain insights into modes of colonial rule. An early example are the German military volunteers who joined Russian forces during the «pacification» campaigns in the Caucasus in the middle of the nineteenth century, which Christoph Kamissek explores in his contribution to this issue. As Kamissek argues, these officers gained experience in wars of colonial conquest that, through their reports and orally transmitted accounts, was passed on and would come to bear in later episodes of German imperialism. Experts as well as policy-makers met at international conferences exchanging and often synchronising their imperial knowledge, for instance at the International Statistical Congress, founded in 1853, which contributed to the standardisation of national and/or ethnic classification in imperial arenas, or the 1884/1885 Berlin Africa Conference, which established de facto instead of de jure rule over overseas possessions as the general norm of colonisation. In addition, international exhibitions such as the British Empire Exhibition of 1924/1925 or the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931 led to the spread and harmonisation of imperial imaginations.

However, it was not only people crossing the borders of empires, but also objects such as maps, cultural artefacts and photographs that helped to spread imperial knowledge or, as Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton have recently noted, « [...] complex flows of printed texts and popular cultural artefacts meant that some ideas moved easily across imperial boundaries». Especially pictures of the colonised might have contributed to a common perception of them as exotic but inferior «others». Of special importance is also the spread of written texts between empires. The texts include famous travelogues such as Alexandre Dumas’ Tales of the Caucasus, which became an international bestseller, and poems like Rudyard Kipling’s...
The White Man’s Burden, which contributed to the popularisation of the idea of a common civilising mission especially in the United States. The latter is particularly revealing, testifying to the transimperial mindset of at least some contemporaries, as the Anglo-Indian author Kipling seemed to have found it natural to address the American colonial endeavour in the Philippines. One can further refer to manuals and reports eagerly collected by foreign imperial actors. A case in point is Charles Callwell’s book Small Wars on colonial warfare, which not only draws on the military experiences of several colonial empires but was also translated and used in French military academies and influenced the development of the US Marine Corps doctrine in the 1920s and 1930s. Besides, officers of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) tried to get hold of copies during the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) – another hint that, at least occasionally, anti-imperial actors could also tap the imperial cloud. Even archival documents could help with the transfer of imperial knowledge. When the United States took over the Philippines from Spain in 1898, they also inherited the local Spanish Archive with some five million pages of documents. This archive, as Frank Schumacher puts it in his article for this issue, «laid the epistemic foundations for U.S. colonial rule of the islands». Something similar might have occurred when the German colonies and some Ottoman possessions were invaded during World War I and subsequently handed over to other colonial powers as League of Nations mandates or when Japan invaded several Asian colonies of Western powers during the Second World War.

Furthermore, the spread of imperial stocks of knowledge by way of international media-circulation should be taken into account. For instance, the major military journals (the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, the Militär-Wochenblatt or the Spectateur militaire among others) regularly translated and published articles from their international counterparts covering issues of imperial warfare. The Revue coloniale internationale founded in 1884 by Pieter van der Lith, a Dutch professor of colonial law at the University of Leiden, dealt with colonial matters in a decidedly comparative way, inviting colonial experts from Europe and the Americas to contribute to the multi-lingual journal. In addition, notably after telegraph lines

39 The adoption of colonial knowledge in these cases may prove fertile field of future research for inter-imperially-minded historians.
and news agencies had been established around the globe in the late nineteenth century, major events in the colonies were immediately reported by newspapers in every empire. Especially imperial wars such as the South African War (1899–1902) and the Boxer War (1900–1901) became global media events contributing to the worldwide spread of notions about how imperial wars were to be fought.41

Finally, colonial institutions, foremost the ICI, which was founded in Brussels in 1894 mainly by French, Belgian and Dutch colonial administrators and experts, deserve special mention. The colonial institute soon comprised delegates from all Western imperial powers, including emissaries from Russia, the United States and Austria-Hungary – a fact that should remind us that the strict separation of seaborne and continental empires, which characterises much of the literature, needs to be reconsidered.42 The institute, which was described by the Deutsches Koloniallexikon as the «international central department»43 for the exchange of ideas on experiences in colonial policy, systematically collected and published knowledge on colonial governing, legislation and economy, and tried to formulate a colonial science of how to colonise. Between 1895 and the 1930s, the institutes’ book series named La bibliothèque coloniale internationale, which was only one of its publication series, grew to more than 40 volumes. In a sense, the ICI «could be regarded as a form of continental European ‹imperial archive›», as Ulrike Lindner has recently put it – or in our words as a major propagator of the imperial cloud.44 During the interwar years, the League of Nations also became an important place of transimperial exchange. Especially its Permanent Mandates Commission, established in 1921 to oversee the administration of the former German and Ottoman possessions which were transformed into mandates during the Paris Peace Conference, served as a spot for imperial communication, with eight of its nine original members being citizens of Western colonial powers.45

All of these – the exchanges of colonial experts and commissions, the workings of the ICI, the flow of all kinds of texts and other cultural objects across imperial boundaries, etc. –, contributed to the emergence of a reservoir of imperial knowledge that was increasingly shared by actors from the different empires. This body

44 U. Lindner, «New Forms of Knowledge Exchange between Imperial Powers: The Development of the Institut Colonial International (ICI) since the End of the Nineteenth Century», in: Barth / Cvetkovski (eds.), Imperial Cooperation and Transfer, 57–78, 66. See also F. Wagner, «Private Colonialism».
of knowledge, which was fluid and at times contradictory, was stored in the myriad of manuals and reports, articles, travelogues and pictures, which were accessible to all empires and, of course, also to the heads of people. Together they constituted what we propose to call the imperial cloud.

This cloud could be accessed by imperial actors both in the metropoles and peripheries, depending on their particular access to the said materials, their possibilities to travel and to attend meetings of imperial experts. But, as already indicated above, colonised subjects at times also managed to tap this reservoir. This holds especially true for literate colonial elites serving as intermediaries between colonial officials and colonised populations and who played a major role in the production of colonial knowledge working as translators or cultural interpreters.\(^\text{46}\) These individuals naturally came into contact with imperial narratives and stocks of knowledge that they at times used to further their own, sometimes anti-imperial, ends. A prominent example is the appropriation of «caste» by the Indian national movement. The British tried to use caste, which they perceived as a central structuring principle of Indian society, to understand, organise and effectively rule the subcontinent. Newly drawing on the expertise of upper-caste Indian intermediaries, who had an interest in portraying Indian society as strictly structured through caste in order to secure their own status, the British ensured that the concept of «caste» greatly gained in importance and rigidity as a consequence. Among the key instruments Britain used in the process were the transnationally developed tools of statistics, such as the 1871 All-India-Census. Once caste was «embedded as the key governing principle» in the late nineteenth century, it in turn became an important tool of anti-colonial nationalism because the growing feeling of togetherness inside the castes, especially intensified through newly created caste associations, could be used to foster the national project.\(^\text{47}\)

Another group, only to be briefly mentioned here, which also certainly enjoyed some access to the imperial cloud, consisted of those colonised moving to the imperial metropole for (university) education. Returning home, many of them – such as India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesia’s Mohammad Hatta and Manga Bell from Cameroon – held prominent positions in anti-colonial movements, and in the early twentieth century started to establish their own global anti-imperial networks.\(^\text{48}\)


Thus, access to the imperial cloud was obviously not as exclusive and as effectively guarded as imperial powers might have wished.

Finally, it has to be stressed that the borders of the imperial cloud were everything but clear-cut. It was not only imperial images and stocks of knowledge circulating across international borders, but all kinds of information, which was often transported through the same newspapers, travelogues or during the same international meetings. To give but one example: Medical institutions such as the Pasteur Institute (founded in Paris in 1887) and the Institute for Infectious Disease (founded in Berlin in 1891) helped to advance and spread the knowledge of tropical medicine across borders, which was of tremendous importance for colonial rule, but they were also engaged in medical questions that mainly concerned the metropoles and had no direct imperial function.\textsuperscript{49} What this suggests is that the imperial cloud intersected with several other transnational knowledge reservoirs. It probably shared certain notions, narratives and knowledge with what could be called a «medical cloud», a «military cloud» or a «legal cloud», to name just a few.

\textbf{Using the Imperial Cloud}

Now, what happened – and this is the second major question of this issue – when imperial actors tried to tap the imperial cloud? Or, more generally, and looking beyond the conscious usage of the cloud, how did images, narratives and stereotypes included in the cloud influence imperial actions?

The beginning of «downloading» knowledge from the cloud often posed a situation in which imperial actors were confronted with novel problems for which they had no established solutions. This was, for instance, the case when the United States suddenly acquired overseas territories after the Spanish-American War of 1898: They now had to rule or when the British administration faced a mortality crisis in the concentration camps of the South African War in 1901. As in the South African case, domestic and/or international criticism could amplify the urge to look for (international) precedents in order to legitimise the actions undertaken. In both situations – as Schumacher as well as Forth and Kreienbaum argue in their articles –, the powers tried to tap the imperial cloud in numerous ways: While Britain mainly looked at its own experiences in India using reports, interviews and the hiring of experienced Indian by personnel to find a recipe to reform the management of the South African camps, the American administration looked for international role models. Sending out experts to British colonies, studying books and reports on colonial rule, and analysing the methods of their Spanish predecessors, they tried to find ways to manage their new possessions.

What is most important to note is that these attempts to «download» knowledge from the imperial cloud were a form of cultural transfer, which is necessarily a

\textsuperscript{49} See Neill, Networks in Tropical Medicine.
creative process. The «import» can never be adopted in its entirety. It is only «bits and pieces», as Christiane Eisenberg formulates in her thoughts on cultural transfers, which are extracted, reworked and mixed with other conceptions. In this way, extracted knowledge was adjusted according to the particular situation the «importer» faced.\footnote{C. Eisenberg, «Kulturtransfer als historischer Prozess. Ein Beitrag zur Komparatistik», in: H. Kaelble / J. Schriewer (eds.), Vergleich und Transfer. Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften, Frankfurt a. M., New York 2003, 399–417, 399. On cultural transfers, see also M. Middell, «Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik – Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis», in: Comparativ 10 (2000) 1, 7–41.}

This was the case with the settlement schemes that Imperial Germany tried to borrow from North America, such as the United States Homestead Act of 1862 and the Canadian homestead legislation of 1872, and also from South Africa at around the turn of the century. As Dörte Lerp argues in her article, the administrations enforcing settlement policies in the eastern Prussian provinces as well as in German South-West Africa heavily reshaped these policies, which lead to a considerable adjustment of the «imports». We can also see this process at work looking at the appropriation of concentration camps by Imperial Germany in South-West Africa in 1905. Concentrating civilians had become a standard means of counter-guerrilla warfare by 1900, aiming at an effective separation of guerrillas and a supportive civilian population. In South-West Africa, as Aidan Forth and Jonas Kreienbaum explain in their contribution, there were no civilians to isolate from combatants and the internment facilities now morphed into draconian forced labour camps. Owing to the special circumstances of this colonial war, an established technology of imperial control therefore developed in new directions.

Did this mutation feed back into the imperial cloud? Once «downloaded», how did the application of colonial knowledge and practices influence the stored «data» in the cloud? While the concentration of civilians and the accompanying mass mortality in the earlier wars in Cuba and South Africa caused a scandal widely reported in the international press – which brought about the «uploading» of concentration policies to the imperial cloud –, the German camps in the African colony did not make it into the headlines, not even in Germany. Therefore, the German remodelling of the colonial concentration camp hardly influenced «data» in the cloud.

The chances of influencing the common pool of imperial knowledge also depended on the prestige that an empire held as the example of the Philippines indicates. Frank Schumacher argues that U.S. rule on the archipelago was heavily indebted to the Spanish precedent. «But», he writes, «Americans were also sensitive to imperial hierarchies of prestige. They obfuscated their «data interlinks» and the true extent of information transfer from Spanish sources in the imperial cloud’s server architecture.» Something similar has recently been argued by Samuël Coghe in an article dealing with the introduction of health care systems in Portuguese Angola and the Belgian Congo during the interwar years. While Belgian adminis-
An Imperial Cloud?

Finally – and this is our third theme –, did non-European empires participate in the imperial cloud? Did they gain access to stored knowledge and could they also have contributed to it? For instance, did Japanese decision makers, when taking over Formosa (Taiwan) in 1895, systematically analyse techniques of rule of European colonial empires as the U.S. administration did when it acquired its first colonies three years later? Or did conceptions of «race», shaped in European colonies, influence Ottoman policies towards ethnic minorities, even culminating in the massacres of Armenians during the 1890s and especially in 1915? By broadening the perspective, we hope to counteract a Eurocentric constriction of the engagement with imperial reservoirs of knowledge. The rise of postcolonial studies has put non-European agents increasingly on the agenda, and the importance of local intermediaries in the production of colonial knowledge is now recognised.

However, European and non-European empires are still usually considered in isolation and their relations have hardly been researched so far. Therefore, it is one aim of this issue to illuminate the contingent participation of non-European empires in an imperial reservoir of knowledge and to highlight the entanglement between these empires on a world stage.

To be sure, there was a tendency among Western empires to form an exclusive club and exclude «non-whites» from their transimperial pool of knowledge. The above-mentioned ICI is a case in point. While this key institution in the transimperial spread of colonial knowledge brought together delegates from both maritime and continental empires, these attendees had to be «white» and Christian, such that...

access was reserved for Europeans and Americans. Moreover, debates within the institute revealed the «strong belief of its members in the superiority of the white race», as Florian Wagner puts it.\textsuperscript{54} This notion certainly was one of the founding stones of European imperial rule and was itself the product of a transnational discourse.\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, other institutions (and opportunities of contact) enabled exchanges between European and non-European empires. The above-mentioned International Statistical Congress, for instance, was one of the institutions helping to standardise censuses as tools of imperial rule, not only in the British, Romanov or Hapsburg Empires but also in Ottoman lands.\textsuperscript{56}

The articles in this issue also indicate that the proposed imperial cloud was not solely a European matter. Kristin Meißner, who scrutinises the role of the oyatoi, foreign experts whom the Meiji government invited to Japan in the late nineteenth century, suggests that these men helped to make a «Western imperial cloud» accessible to Japan and vice versa. For the Japanese government, the oyatoi proved especially helpful in gaining knowledge on techniques of informal imperialism. However, Japanese imperial knowledge was also in demand by Western empires as Frank Schumacher illustrates. When the United States were searching for a new approach to regulate opium sales in the Philippines in 1903, they sent out a fact-finding commission that travelled to Japan, Formosa, Burma, Java, French-Indochina, the Malay Straits Settlement, Hong Kong, Shanghai and the Philippines, to collect statistical data, health reports, and copies of colonial laws and regulations. Finally, the commission voted for an adoption of the Japanese regulations and most of the commission’s recommendations were enacted in March 1905. It is most interesting to note that Japan could, even publicly, be named as a role model for colonial policies or regulations in the early twentieth century. Japan was an empire from which one could admit to have learnt new knowledge. The same was at this point – as we have seen – hardly possible with respect to the old European empires of Portugal and Spain, which obviously ranked below this non-European empire on the ladder of imperial prestige. In addition, it is possible that, especially after it had proved its power with the victory over Russia in the war of 1904/1905, Japan might have had better access to the imperial cloud than some European empires. Nevertheless, keeping the example of the Brussels colonial institute in mind, contradicting notions concerning the exclusivity of transimperial exchange had surely existed simultaneously.


\textsuperscript{56} Leonhard / Hirschhausen, Empires, 53–76.
3. Conclusion – Broadening the New Imperial History

As the foregoing section once again illustrates, empires were connected with one another in multiple ways, sharing parts of their imperial knowledge, notions and narratives. Thinking about these connections, the proposed concept of an imperial cloud might prove particularly useful because it better accounts for the messy and in parts self-contradictory nature of knowledge shared by empires than the archive metaphor does. It also leaves more room for a variety of historical actors than the classical discourse theory, which focuses on rules rather than agency and which furthermore tends to turn a blind eye towards transnational units of analysis. In addition, it complements research on two-sided knowledge transfers by providing a way to conceptualise the transimperial spread of knowledge where a «simple» transfer is not empirically verifiable. Finally, as a conceptual offer highlighting interimperial links, the imperial cloud has the potential to extend the New Imperial History in a meaningful way. While building on the convincing demand to treat metropole and colony in a single analytical field, it also enables us to think about different metropoles and different colonies belonging to diverse empires in the same analytical field. Indeed, this transimperial dimension had already been cautiously presented in Ann Laura Stoler’s and Frederick Cooper’s ground-breaking 1997 attempt to rethink the imperial research agenda when they asked: «To what extent – and by what processes – did the knowledge of individual empires become a collective imperial knowledge, shared among colonising powers?»,57 Yet, this question has hardly been addressed by researchers, who were still mainly working on individual empires. All too often, historians of empire tend to limit their research to analysing phenomena inside imperial units. They «remain wedded to a national-history paradigm, hardly cognisant of other empires and of the broader world around them», as Sebastian Conrad puts it.58 Here, and this holds especially true for research on the British Empire, the above-mentioned «container problem» of a narrow national history resurfaces, though admittedly with larger imperial «containers». The imperial cloud, with its strictly transimperial outlook, offers a way out of this «containerised» perspective, thus answering one of the most fundamental and justified demands of global history.

58 Conrad, «Rethinking», 544.
An Imperial Cloud? Conceptualising Interimperial Connections and Transimperial Knowledge

With a view to the recent trends in imperial and colonial history – especially the focus on encounters between empires, and the characterisation of colonisation as a shared project – this introduction discusses the «imperial cloud» as a new concept for explaining similarities between empires. This imperial cloud is to be understood as a shared imperial reservoir of knowledge, notions and narratives that is not located in a particular empire, but is – at least potentially – accessible by imperial actors in the different metropoles and peripheries. In order to clarify the concept, we first engage with possible alternatives – namely the colonial archive, transfer analysis and discourse. Secondly, we lay out three major questions central to this special issue: How could such an imperial cloud have been created and accessed? How could empires have used it and with what consequences? And did non-European empires participate in the cloud? Working with examples from several empires, we try to show systematically the different ways in which the imperial cloud could be filled and accessed, and indicate where its conceptual potentials and pitfalls lie.

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