Dis:connections in wartime, 1750-1945

Workshop at the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect, LMU Munich

24-25 April 2024

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the complexities of globalisation more clearly than war. The international reverberations of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have painfully exposed the interconnected nature of modern economies and our vulnerability to forces beyond our control. This situation has prompted anxious speculation about deglobalisation in the media. Yet experts agree that the more likely outcome is not isolation but changing geographies of connection.

Similarly, recent historical scholarship has complicated conventional understandings of war as a dividing force, emphasising instead how it simultaneously connects and disconnects. In wartime, enemies are dehumanised in government propaganda, travel is disrupted, and trade blockades are enforced. Wartime is associated with absences, interruptions and detours, as lives are lost, scientific exchanges are cut off, and military personnel travel far from home. Yet these very disruptions also create new spaces of interaction and encounter. For example, interning prisoners of war, while seemingly cutting captives off from the world, simultaneously catalyses new relations between prisoners, guards and surrounding communities. Similarly, war drives the search for new resources and the expansion of geographical horizons through, for instance, large-scale infrastructural connections such as railways, pipelines and telegraph networks. These connections, however, are themselves vulnerable to attack – cables, for example, can be cut – and some contacts might not survive war's end. Connections and disconnections are thus inseparable features of war.

This workshop will bring together historians working on different regions and time periods to discuss patterns and variations in how military conflict has shaped global interactions. Our goal is to challenge simple dichotomies between globalisation and deglobalisation and to interrogate the very category of 'wartime'. Non-conflictual relationships can persist even in a state of war, and wartime conditions can linger long after peace treaties have been signed. In a colonial context, where violence was endemic, the distinction between war and peace might mean very little in practice. Experiences of war have differed from place to place; even ostensibly 'global' or 'world' wars were far from uniform in their effects. We particularly welcome contributions that unsettle Eurocentric conceptions of centre and periphery as well as those that foreground the experiences of historical actors who have been marginalised in the modern history of war. By encouraging a global and comparative approach, this workshop will probe the boundaries between war and peace, investigating war's distinctive impacts on world history and how these have changed over time.

Potential topics include but are not limited to:

· Transnational armies, navies and militias

· Military biographies

· Captivity and internment

· Blockades and smuggling

· Scientific exchanges

· Exile and movement of refugees

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- Natural-resource extraction

- Propaganda and press censorship

- Transport and communication technologies and infrastructures

- Gender-specific connections and disconnections in war

Proposals should include a short CV, a provisional title and an abstract of no more than 300 words. Please send these documents in one PDF file to Callie.Wilkinson@lrz.uni-muenchen.de and t.menger@lmu.de by 30 November 2023. Accommodation will be provided for the duration of the workshop, and we can help with travel costs where required; please let us know in your application whether you require financial support. The workshop is planned as an on-site event, but remote participation will be available for those who cannot attend in person.