

Institutionalizing Transimperial Transfers and Developing Corporative Colonialism, 1890s–1930s

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on a group of men, mainly academics, who worked with and through the European *Institut Colonial International* (ICI) from the 1890s to the 1930s to develop a common set, across the late colonial world, of knowledge and policies about urban guilds and rural cooperatives. ICI members thought that this knowledge and related policies would help mediate the excesses of both cut-throat capitalism and communism. The chapter shows how academics like the Frenchman Louis Massignon used informal and formal connections in “his” empire’s colonies and beyond to build a common body of transimperially useful knowledge; but also pays attention to how “local” colonial people in the know helped interpret the history and very nature of guilds and cooperatives.

Keywords: transimperial, *Institut Colonial International*, Urban guilds, Rural cooperatives, Colonial world

In 1893, colonial experts from thirteen countries established the International Colonial Institute (ICI), the first international organization exclusively dedicated to transimperial exchange. With approximately 200 official members, the ICI held annual thematic conferences to discuss topics such as colonial law, the training of colonial administrators, agronomy, railway construction, irrigation, tropical medicine, and more. Congress participants routinely prepared case studies on subjects within their expertise, which the ICI’s general secretariat compiled into comprehensive comparative studies. These studies formed a shared pool of transimperial knowledge, facilitating the transfer of proven colonial governance technologies and ideally resulting in best practices for colonialism.

Between 1893 and 1949, the ICI’s members involved in transimperial knowledge exchange and production were exclusively white European males from the upper and middle class. By 1893, most of its members were already accustomed to navigating the well-established infrastructure of nineteenth-century internationalism, being university professors, high-ranking civil servants and colonial

officials, heads of ministries and even states, aristocrats, entrepreneurs, and engineers. Their financial status enabled them to pay membership fees, dedicate time to writing detailed and comparative studies for ICI conferences, and travel to these events. The ICI had a very limited budget for reimbursing travel expenses, funded by membership fees and voluntary contributions from (colonial) governments. Typically, these members were multilingual, with a particular proficiency in French, the lingua franca of nineteenth-century internationalism and the ICI's official language. Until the 1920s, the ICI did not provide translations of conference papers and proceedings, which was seldom necessary as members from countries such as Germany, Russia, and Britain were generally fluent in French.¹

A key reason for establishing a new transimperial institution in 1893 was the perceived need to address the first crisis of colonial policy in the age of high imperialism. After the initial enthusiasm of the "scramble for Africa" around the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 had waned, Europeans realized that maintaining empires incurred significant costs. A "second colonization" phase, characterized by expensive "pacification" wars, the establishment of a professional administration, and the efficient exploitation of both natural and human resources, proved to be costly. This realization led to the idea of pooling knowledge and resources to develop more efficient means of governing empires.² The ICI's approach was to study, compare, and emulate successful administrative technologies and governance practices applied in other empires. Transimperial comparisons suggested that "indigenous" corporations and cooperatives might serve as a tool to govern the colonies, avoid unrest, mobilize labor, raise taxes, provide a rudimentary welfare state, encourage development and do justice to a traditional collectivism ascribed to indigenous societies.

The most plausible explanation for the establishment of transimperial organizations like the ICI at the end of the nineteenth century is competitive emulation.³ This concept helps explain why nationalism and internationalism, as well as imperialism and transimperialism, were not contradictory. Competitive emulation refers to nations or empires striving to outdo each other by adopting and adapting successful practices, technologies, policies, or cultural elements from their rivals.

¹ Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); on the context: Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Damiano Matasci, "Imperialism, Internationalism and Globalisation in Twentieth Century Africa," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 5 (2020), 793–804.

² Christoph Kamissek and Jonas Kreienbaum, "An Imperial Cloud? Conceptualising Interimperial Connections and Transimperial Knowledge," *Journal of Modern European History* 14, no. 2 (2016), 164–82.

³ Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History – Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), 429–52.

This process blends competition and imitation, aiming to improve one's position by learning from the strengths and achievements of others. Consequently, while empires often compete for power, influence, and resources, they also engage in mutual learning. The ICI's founding father, influential director of the French colonial lobby group, Union Coloniale, Joseph Chailley-Bert, succinctly captured this idea: "Why invent if inventions already exist? It is more effective to look around us."⁴ Chailley's interest in other empires, particularly in Dutch Java, illustrates that joining the ICI was not solely about smaller empires like the Netherlands and Belgium seeking support from larger powers. He was very skeptical toward the colonial methods of the dominant Algerian settler lobby and viewed France as a "latecomer" in modern colonization, recognizing the value in learning from the Dutch and only occasionally from the British. Also, the seemingly uninterested transimperial production of anthropological knowledge might serve as a tool of violent repression within colonies, as the Dutch expert of Islam and ICI-member, Christiaan Snouck-Hurgronje, reveals. He used his Arabic language skills and his high reputation among Muslim leaders in the Aceh region to violently defeat Indonesian resistance against Dutch rule during the Aceh War (1873–1913). He also used transimperial networks of Islam to secure the support of high-ranking Imams for Dutch rule in Indonesia.⁵

The methodological precondition of competitive emulation was the use of cross- and transimperial comparisons, which are to be found in hundreds of studies published by the ICI. Most efficient were prototype comparisons, which facilitated the adaption of successfully tested micro-techniques of colonization across different empires.⁶ Yet, comparisons were full of pitfalls and frequently used in a manipulative way. This was true for what we can call stereotype comparisons, which idealized or stigmatized other empires, and racialized the colonized populations. The idealized model of the alleged technocratic rule of the Dutch in Java, for example, and the stigmatized rule of Spain's "backward" imperialism were among the most frequent stereotypes shaping the ICI's inter-imperial comparisons since 1893. The "transimperiality" of racism that led ICI members to dismiss indigenous contributions to a colonial modernity equally shaped colonial comparisons and distorted their outcome, while these stereotypes simultaneously spread through transimperial transfers. As Alexander Morrisson has shown when analyzing transfers of manipulated sharia codes from Algeria to Turkestan, adaption processes

⁴ Joseph Chailley, *Java et ses Habitants* (Paris: A. Colin, 1900), ix.

⁵ Antje Missbach, "The Aceh War (1873–1913) and the Influence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje," in *Aceh: History, Politics and Culture*, edited by Arndt Graf, Susanne Schroter and Edwin Wieringa (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 39–62.

⁶ On the nature of transimperial comparisons, see also Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 111–12.

often failed and misunderstandings were frequent, diminishing the value of comparisons and ensuing knowledge transfers: “showing that whilst prestige and access to European networks of knowledge helped to determine which particular pieces of colonial know-how were borrowed, they could not ensure that the transplant would be successful.”⁷ Lastly, archetype comparisons, such as referring to the Roman Empire’s policy by colonial empires of the twentieth century, seemed to have legitimizing effects at best, but contributed little to the declared purpose of making colonial rule more efficient through comparison and transfer. Nevertheless, the fact that the ICI existed until 1982 seems to confirm that colonial experts regarded transimperial prototype comparisons and transfers helpful to strengthen colonial rule. This is why most protagonists of colonial theory and practice joined the ICI sooner or later. Among them were the French Hubert Lyautey, Eugène Etienne, and Robert Delavignette, the British Frederick Lugard, William Malcolm Hailey, and Margery Perham, the Belgian Albert Thys and Pierre Ryckmans, as well as the Dutch Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and Dirk Fock, to mention but a few.⁸

Yet, competitive emulation alone cannot explain the transimperial trajectory that the ICI would take as an organization largely independent of nationalist interest. Combining international experience, colonial expertise, and strategies to minimize costs, free traders came up with the idea of expert cooperation across empires. In theory, they also distanced themselves from protectionism and forced labor. Apart from embracing free trade in the colonies, they intended to portray colonialism as progressive by detaching it from nationalist jingoism and imperialist contest, shifting its image toward internationalist expertise and technocratic government based on scientific findings. Among the free traders was the ICI’s initiator, Joseph Chailley, who was arguably the ICI’s foremost proponent of free trade and economic liberalism. As early as 1886, he addressed the British anti-protectionist Cobden Club, translated Anglo-Saxon free trade literature into French, and regarded Adam Smith as one of his intellectual forebears. Joining him as a founding member was Isaäc Dignus Fransen van de Putte, formerly the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs who had initiated a campaign in the 1860s to abolish the forced cultivation system of the Dutch Indies and liberalize its economy. The infamous forced cultivation system had been introduced in 1830 and compelled Indonesian farmers to allocate a portion of their land—typically around 20%—to the cultivation of cash crops designated by the government, such as sugar, coffee, and indigo, which the colonial

⁷ Alexander Morrisson, “Creating a Colonial Shari’a for Russian Turkestan. Count Pahlen, the Hidayat, and Anglo-Muhammadan Law,” in Volker Barth & Roland Cvetkovski (ed.) *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870-1930 Empires and Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 127–49, Jul 24, 2015, 2.

⁸ On them and many others, see Wagner, “Colonial Internationalism.”

government purchased at a minimum price, exported them to the Netherlands, and sold them on the European market. Alternatively, villagers could be compelled to work for a certain number of days on government-owned plantations. This system earned the Dutch colonizers a fortune, while the indigenous farmers suffered under the compulsory cultivation. Fransen van de Putte—himself a beneficiary of the system as a sugar entrepreneur in the 1830s—later became a prominent critic of the practice. As a member of the liberal party and eventually as Dutch Colonial Minister, he played a pivotal role in advocating for its abolition. While he posed as a liberal indigenophile free trader, both the motivations behind and the consequences of his efforts were less honest and more complex. Van de Putte never fundamentally questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule, and forms of forced labor persisted during and beyond his tenure.⁹ This ambiguity also characterized the ICI's first secretary-general, the self-declared Belgian free trader, Camille Janssen. He had previously been the first governor of King Léopold's Free Congo State but resigned from his post when he realized that Léopold abandoned his initial open-door policy in favor of protectionism in 1890. Up to the First World War, even more liberal economists joined, such as the German colonial minister, Bernhard Dernburg. Unsurprisingly, the proponent of free trade, Léon Say, Chailley Bert's grandfather and grandson of the free trade theorist, Jean Baptiste Say, became the honorary founding member of the ICI in 1893.¹⁰

The free trade ideology might have been transimperial by nature, but its application by ICI members was not as straightforward as it seemed. For example, ICI members believed indigenous populations were not ripe for capitalism and thus pondered whether forced cultivation might be a way to “educate” them and thus prepare them for a delayed introduction of capitalism. By 1900, the ICI increasingly recruited experts on indigenous societies. Among them were representatives of relatively new academic fields such as anthropology and Islamic studies, like the Dutch founding member of the ICI, Pieter Antonie van der Lith. Van der Lith was an ethnologist and expert of Islamic and colonial law and trained colonial officials in the applied geography, linguistics, and ethnography of India, he also established the *Revue Coloniale Internationale* in 1885.¹¹ Claiming to have acquired a transimperial knowledge about the nature of indigenous societies, these anthropological experts proposed craft guilds and agricultural cooperatives to guarantee the “education” for capitalism.

⁹ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, “Imperialism after the Great Wave: The Dutch Case in the Netherlands East Indies, 1860–1914,” In: Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York), 25–46, 27–28.

¹⁰ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 27–28.

¹¹ “Introduction,” *Revue Coloniale Internationale*, 1 (1885), I–II.

The reasons for joining the ICI might have been nationalist for many members, but its development up to the 1920s suggests that transimperial knowledge production increasingly became a field of its own. To increase their expertise, individuals used the ICI not only to enhance their knowledge, but also to get to know specialists in the field, create interdisciplinary networks, bring together science and business interests, apply for jobs, exchange letters of recommendation, and make a career. As to the knowledge produced, the members' research often involved participatory observation, which brought them closer to the colonized. The color bar made "fraternization" with them unlikely, but the ICI indeed encouraged its members to meet and understand indigenous peoples in the colonies. The ICI's notion of transimperial expertise was thus opposed to the idea of the "neutrality of the expert" who avoids mingling with his or her object of study, as was the case for example in the League of Nations' Mandate Commission in the 1920s, whose members were banned from traveling in the mandates they were supposed to take care of. The ICI, instead, required a deeper knowledge of indigenous societies and a certain degree of empathy, which they claimed that "imperialist" administrations in the metropole failed to develop.

While equally dedicated to transimperialism, anthropologists in the ICI embraced a (racist) doctrine of cultural relativism and joined forces with the international lawyers in the ICI who traditionally were reluctant to include the colonized world in the civilized world and concede them the same abilities and rights as the allegedly civilized nations. Both anthropologists and international lawyers warned that the penetration of modernity and capitalism among the colonized population might have effects of alienation, detribalization, and ultimately rebellion. This might have made them opponents of the free traders in the ICI, but it did not. Instead, the debate led them to search for strategies of how to integrate the colonized into the colonial (capitalist) economy without destroying their "traditional" lifestyles and exposing them to the alleged danger of turning against the colonizers or towards socialism. As I will show in this chapter, their transimperial search for solutions again led them to promote a corporatist organization of colonial economies and societies, based on the revival of Islamic craft guilds and rural cooperatives.

In this chapter, I will use the ICI's debate about the revival of craft guilds and rural cooperatives to show how transimperial comparisons and transfers brought about new strategies of colonial governance that lived as long as the colonial era—and as the ICI. The debate resulted in plans for a more general corporatist (re-)organization of empires, especially when the 1920s saw the emergence of the transimperial "Eurafrica" concept that was partly realized after 1945 through the association of African countries with the European Economic Community. While this is the *telos* of the article, the *focus* is the period between the 1890s and the 1930s,

when corporatism was one outcome of transimperial interaction in the ICI and transimperial networks beyond, but in relation to the ICI.

In the twentieth century, corporatism meant many things. We will focus on two interrelated meanings that colonial experts assigned to it between the 1880s and the 1980s. First, more general definitions refer to an economy based on craft guilds or corporations that play an important economic, social, and political role. Craft guilds are typically formed around a certain craft or trade, in which they tend to monopolize both production and marketing. After a highly regulated process of acceptance by a guild, members theoretically benefit from mutual aid, low-interest loans, trade privileges, state protection, health insurance, old age pensions, and a certain stability of wages and prices for their products. Not least, they have a hierarchical structure with elected officials who managed the guild's affairs, enforced rules, and represented members in negotiations with local authorities.¹² Second, the term "corporatism" evokes fascist corporativism, a centralized and authoritarian control of society through corporate interest groups that represent industrial sectors and suppress democratic elections and class organization.¹³

The sources produced in a transimperial context do not draw a sharp line between corporations and cooperatives. The importance of cooperatives for colonial history has caught the eye of considerably few historians. Rita Rhode's study of cooperatives in the British Empire, the only extensive analysis until recently, is largely uncritical and partly idealizing.¹⁴ A few scholars have vaguely hinted at the fact that cooperatives served to perpetuate coerced labor in late colonialism.¹⁵ The

¹² All historiography on Islamic guilds refers to Massignon, starting from Bernard Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds," *Economic History Rev* 8 no.1 (1937), 20, to more recent accounts on the dispositive of the guilds, Thomas E. Jakob, "A Clash of Concepts. Communist Agitation and Organized Labor in Lebanon during the French Mandate," in *Interwar Crossroads*, ed. Leon Julius Biela and Anna Bundt (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020). Their relationship with authorities and religion, as well as their hierarchical character was the interest of the most important studies on craft guilds: André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973–4); Hanna, "Guilds," 910. See also Abbas Hamdani, "The Rasa'il Ikhwan Al-Safa' and the Controversy about the Origin of Craft Guilds in Early Medieval Islam," in *Money, Land, and Trade. An Economic History of the Muslim Mediterranean* ed. Nelly Hanna (London: Routledge, 2002), 51–65; Muhannad Moubaydin, *Sheikh Al-Kar: Al-Sulta Wa-Al-Suq Wa-Al-Nas Fi Dimashq Al-Uthmaniyya [Master of Crafts: The Authorities, the Market, and the People in Ottoman Damascus]* (Al-Rayyan: Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press, 2018).

¹³ Antonio Costa Pinto, *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2017); Jens Steffek, *International Organization as Technocratic Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 84–94.

¹⁴ Rita Rhodes, *Empire and Co-operation: How the British Empire Used Co-operatives in its Development Strategies, 1900–1970* (Edinburgh: Donald, 2012).

¹⁵ E.g., Alexander Keese, "Forced Labour in the 'Gorgulho Years': Understanding reform and repression in rural São Tomé e Príncipe, 1945–1953," *Itinerario* 38, no.1 (2014), 103–24; Mo Moulton,

first critical empirical monograph is Aaron Windel's *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire*, which argued that the cooperative movement was capitalist and reactionary even though the Labour Party served as its patron. His need to justify his critical approach to the cooperative movement at length speaks volumes about the state of the field, which he identified as being shaped by "popular meanings about democracy that are usually attached to the movement."¹⁶ An essay by Andreas Eckert recognized cooperative movements' governmental role in colonial contexts.¹⁷ My own monograph examines corporations and cooperatives across various colonies in a somewhat fragmentary manner, while the following chapter presents new and rather systematic evidence that more clearly highlights their transimperial significance, along with the long-term coloniality of cooperative and corporatist practice and theory, when applied to the Global South.¹⁸ In so doing, I argue that during the transimperial search for knowledge about the best practices in colonial cooperativism and corporativism, ICI members invoked "indigenization" as a pretext to impose and legitimize strict control, collective liability, and compulsory labor across different colonies.

ICI-Expertise and the Production of Transimperial Knowledge About Corporations in the Colonies

To acquire and sell their transimperial expertise, ICI members excelled in appropriating indigenous knowledge and selling it as their own, which in turn made them eligible for membership in the ICI. Only self-declared colonial experts whom the transimperial community of colonizers accepted as such, could join the ICI. While the ICI was exclusively white up to 1949, the knowledge that it produced often came from indigenous experts whom they reduced to the level of "informants." Their names are habitually absent from the ICI's extensive publications, be it conference proceedings or more specific case studies. However, they did exist. The Algerian lawyer, Mohand Said Ibnou Zekri, for example, provided ICI members with important information to understand the 1871 revolt in Algeria and its transimperial background—89,000

"Co-Opting the Cooperative Movement? Development, Decolonization, and the Power of Expertise at the Co-Operative College, 1920s–1960s," *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 3 (2022), 418–37.

¹⁶ Aaron Windel, *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 6.

¹⁷ Andreas Eckert, "Useful Instruments of Participation? Local Government and Cooperatives in Tanzania, 1940s to 1970s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007), 97–118.

¹⁸ Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 281–314.

rifles for the so-called insurrection had come from neighboring Tunisia.¹⁹ More importantly, as early as 1903, he promoted the reform (*islah*), revival, and use of Islamic institutions such as *zawiyas* (Sufi “lodges” or religious-economic centers) and mystic brotherhoods for bringing about the “appropriation and domestication of the social modernity proposed if not imposed by the colonization.”²⁰ This use and modification of indigenous institutions for the purpose of governing colonized societies would soon become a centerpiece of the ICI’s transimperial knowledge production, symbolized by comparative studies and technology transfer.

While “indigenous” agency was often transimperial by default (just think of Islamic faith and institutions, which will be particularly important for our case), ICI members rarely acknowledged its importance in transimperial practice and theory. Indeed, ICI members argued that only their transimperial bird’s eye perspective and knowledge enabled them to fully understand the true nature of colonized societies. Regarding Islam, for example, ICI members claimed to know it better than Muslim intellectuals, having a bird’s eye view of the different schools of law present in different empires, and the amalgamation of regional Islams with local customary law.²¹ Tacitly assuming that Whiteness was a precondition of producing transimperiality, the ICI recruited only white male members between its establishment in 1893 and 1949, when it was reestablished and reframed its agenda.

It was in the late 1920s that ICI members increasingly tried to monopolize transimperialism, which they called internationalism or inter-colonial cooperation, both terms increasingly claimed by anti-colonialists who coordinated their efforts to contest colonial rule.²² By then, the ICI’s transimperialism *avant la lettre* served as a strategic and political tool against anti-colonialism. This strategy referred to using craft guilds and rural cooperatives in a manipulative way to secure colonial rule and establish them as a bulwark against independence movements and radical anti-colonialism. Unsurprisingly, the most outspoken transimperial project emerged when the ICI aligned with fascist movements around 1938 to promote a corporatist Eurafrica, thereby taking corporatism to a new level. When the ICI was re-established in 1949, it pursued a similar strategy, this time incorporating moderate critics of empire to oust outspoken and radical anti-imperialists influenced by the communist international. To prevent them from gaining ground, white ICI members equally offered a corporatist reordering of late colonial empires, doing

¹⁹ X. Yacono, “Kabylie: L’insurrection de 1871,” *Encyclopedie Berbère* 26 (2004), 4022–26.

²⁰ Ben Mansour Abd El Hadi. Chachoua Kamel, *L’islam kabyle, religion, État et société en Algérie, suivi de l’Épître (Rissala) d’Ibnou Zakri (Alger, 1903) Mufti de la Grande Mosquée d’Alger*. Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 2001. In: *Bulletin critique des annales islamologiques*, n°19, 2003, 48–49, 49.

²¹ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 173–208.

²² Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

justice to an alleged need for the collective organization of work without collectivization in the style of a Soviet kolkhoz. Yet this is exactly what had happened between the 1920s and the 1940s in the colonies: colonial experts used corporations and cooperatives to implement and legitimize compulsory labor.

A driving force behind transimperial knowledge exchange based on indigenous informants was the French ICI member Louis Massignon, who joined the ICI in the 1920s and was among the first to systematically explore the role of Islamic craft guilds across various empires. In 1923, he headed the French Service of Indigenous Affairs in Morocco and sent a letter to Idris al-Moqri, asking him to list all craft guilds that existed in the city of Fez. Al-Moqri was the *muhtasib* of Fez and as such was responsible for overseeing the market activities in the town. He kept a record of all craft guilds (*hanati*) and immediately presented a list of 164 corporations in the city. *Muhtasibs* all over the country received similar requests, and French administrators found a questionnaire in their letterboxes, urging them to inquire into the nature of artisan corporations. The initiative came from the Resident-General of Morocco, Hubert Lyautey, who had commissioned a *Survey on Muslim Corporations of Artisans and Merchants* in 1923 and was a member of the ICI.²³ Lyautey chose Massignon to prepare the survey. Its purpose was to preserve and even revive Islamic craft guilds, in which Lyautey and Massignon saw a traditional indigenous institution that might provide the basis for a corporatist moral economy in French North Africa and other colonies that were shaped by Islam.

Their focus was on Muslim corporations, mainly because Massignon, a devout Catholic and admirer of Islam, believed in the cohesive power of religious solidarity: he imagined “collectivist” corporations to slow down the penetration of individualist capitalism. The survey suggested a firm legal grounding in Islamic law, *‘urf* (customs), and *adab* (honorable conduct of life and social intercourse) that allegedly governed the craft guilds and provided legal certainty and reliability. To get to know more about cohesive routines, the survey equally asked about “patronal festivals” and “religious chants and corporative satire” that contributed to a specific esprit de corps. The survey started from the premise that craft guilds existed in every city and were most visible at the local *suq* (market) but had also a strong rooting among the Berbers in the mountainous hinterland.²⁴ Subscribing to a policy of colonial governmentality, Lyautey and Massignon hoped that guilds might help to avoid a hasty transformation of Moroccan indigenous society. The wider goal was to turn North African moral economies into a sustained basis for a more stable colonial economy.²⁵

²³ Louis Massignon, *Enquête sur les corporations musulmanes d'artisans et de commerçants au Maroc* (Paris: Leroux, 1925).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, v-vi.

²⁵ Gude, *Louis Massignon*, 110.

The initiative had not emerged from nothing but had a “domestic” and a “trans-imperial” dimension. To win over North African elites for French rule in the new “protectorates” and to stimulate tourism, French North Africa had already turned into the testing ground for a preservationist policy before World War I. While preservationist laws in Algeria and Tunisia dated back to the 1880s and concerned mainly the vestiges of the “Euro-Roman” Antiquity, the focus shifted to the Islamic and Arabic legacy as soon as Lyautey propagated a more consensual colonialism, based on the voluntary cooperation of the colonized, when establishing the protectorate over Morocco and serving as its first resident-general in 1912.²⁶ Protectionist laws featuring indigenous craft guilds were issued in Tunisia (1907), Morocco (1915), and finally Algeria (1919), seconded by vocational schools for indigenous arts that should revive traditional crafts.²⁷ Preservationist policies went hand in hand with a tightened control, and by 1912, French authorities strengthened the position of the guilds’ official overseers, the *muhtasibs*, who had mostly lost their power in the nineteenth century.²⁸ In a similar way, the *amins* or heads of the corporations were “reduced to mere agents of the government,” as Massignon noted.²⁹

On Lyautey’s initiative, in 1920, the protectorate established the Service of Indigenous Arts under Prosper Ricard, who intended to make Morocco’s corporative past the basis of the colonial future. Ricard redefined Morocco’s artisans as artists to promote their work among European tourists. This had the double effect of preserving Moroccan craftsmanship and attracting European capital. Part of this strategy was the reinvention of Moroccan carpets, certified by the Service of Indigenous Arts and partially exempted from customs if exported to France.³⁰ To stimulate and control the (re-)formation of corporations, the administration opened more vocational schools such as the *Chambre des Métiers* in Fès, in 1924. It had sections for the manufacturing of wood, iron, and copper. An *amin* headed each

²⁶ Colette Zytnecki et al., “Penser le tourisme et le patrimoine au Maghreb et au-delà (XIXe-XXIe siècles),” in *Fabrique du tourisme et expériences patrimoniales au Maghreb, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, ed. Cyril Isnart et al. (Maroc: Centre Jacques-Berque, 2018), 18–20; Muriel Girard, “Invention de la tradition et authenticité sous le Protectorat au Maroc: l’action du service des arts indigènes et de son directeur Prosper Ricard,” *Socio-Anthropologie*, 19 (2006), 31–45.

²⁷ Louis Massignon, “L’Artisanat indigène dans l’Afrique du Nord,” *Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène*, vol. 1 (Paris: Exposition Coloniale Internationale, 1931), 169; Zytnecki et al., “Penser le tourisme,” 20. For the context, see Stacy Holden, “When It Pays to Be Medieval: Historic Preservation as a Colonial Policy in the Medina of Fez, 1912–1932,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 6 no.2 (2006), 297–316.

²⁸ Hanna, “Guilds,” 899.

²⁹ Massignon, *Enquête*, 66.

³⁰ Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des Tapis Marocains*, vol. 1 (Paris: Geuthner, 1923), vii and xi.

section and took care of carpenters, blacksmiths, and copper workers.³¹ Training schools of this kind multiplied and were supposed to revive corporative traditions.

What seemed to be the French Empire's effort to resurrect indigenous institutions for its own colonial economy was in fact a result of a transimperial agenda shared by colonial experts across various empires. Indeed, the Foreign Ministry at Paris that officially took charge of the Moroccan protectorate since 1912, as well as settler-minded experts of the influential "Algiers school," tended to reject the use of indigenous elites and institutions for colonial rule, preferring to model the colonies after a more secular French example.³² Lyautey and Massignon, instead, turned away from Paris and Algeria to emulate British and Dutch policies in India and Indonesia, adopting the transimperial trend to use indigenous economies for stabilizing colonial societies.³³ Unlike Paris, they patronized an indigenous moral economy that should prevent "alienation" and potential unrest provoked by hasty industrialization and an abrupt leap into the capitalist modernity. Exploring the potential of Pan-Islamic institutions, Massignon used his first-hand experience in Muslim Africa and Asia, and consulted like-minded colonial officials in other empires, probably also compensating for the fact that he was rarely in Morocco to research and implement the governmental use of craft guilds. Going beyond French North Africa and even beyond the Muslim world, he identified corporative and cooperative institutions across all empires and religions. He idealized the coexistence of Abrahamic religions in Al-Andalus and declared it a model for multireligious corporations, valued Berber traditions of collective production, studied the Dutch cooperative movement in Indonesia, and embraced Gandhi's strategy to strengthen indigenous craft guilds and agricultural cooperatives.³⁴ His admiration for Gandhi, whom he met personally, prompts the question whether Massignon's transimperialism was potentially anti-colonialist. As we will see later

³¹ Massignon, *Enquête*, 176.

³² Mary Louise Gude, *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 110; Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the invention of Moroccan Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 115; Ellen Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 68.

³³ Burke, *The Ethnographic State*, 4, 15, and 108–14; Jean El Gammal, *Regards sur Lyautey: Actes du colloque de Nancy, 17–18 Septembre 2004* (Special Issue Annales de l'Est, Nancy: Association d'historiens de l'est, 2004); William A. Hoisington, *Lyautey and the Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Daniel Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey à Mohammed V: Le double visage du protectorat* (Paris: Éditions Denoel, 1999).

³⁴ Massignon, *Enquête*, v–vi; Massignon was long admired as an intercultural broker: Jacques Keryell, *Louis Massignon et ses contemporains* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); Wendy de Souza, "Hostility and Hospitality: Muhammad Qazvini's Critique of Louis Massignon," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40 no. 4 (1013), 378–91.

in this chapter, this was not the case. He was an agent of colonialism rather than anti-colonialist transimperialism.

The revival of corporations in Morocco became a much-cited model across North Africa, where corporative artisans were decreasing, but not insignificant. Massignon counted around 25,000, each of them sustaining a family and relatives. Given their significant numbers, the Italian governor of Tripolitania employed Ricard in 1924 to create a similar preservationist department in the Italian colony.³⁵ Resonating beyond the Maghreb, British administrators from India used the 1919 World Fair to inquire about Ricard's scheme to revive "indigenous" guilds in North Africa.³⁶ British administrators subsequently discovered the existence of similar craft guild traditions in India, which supposedly appeared in the Vedas and the Laws of Manu. They equally set out to organize their revival.³⁷ In so doing, they found a stout supporter in Massignon, for whom craft guilds were a genuine attribute of indigenous societies, no matter what their religion was. As mentioned before, he found their roots in a multireligious Andalusia, where Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions converged and highlighted the role of craft guilds in the Middle East, in India, and Indonesia.³⁸

Massignon went as far as aligning North African craft guilds with Indian castes. Although these social institutions had emerged in very different contexts, he claimed that they resembled each other in their hierarchical order and social function. He found similarities between corporations and castes, arguing that most corporations had a "morality of a clan or a caste" and existed in "every Muslim society." Obviously, this over-generalized analogy between Moroccan corporations and Indian castes was rather far-fetched, but an unlikely source backed Massignon's theory.³⁹

The aligning of corporations and castes received support from Indian economists, who indeed looked back on a long corporative tradition. In an important study on Indian cooperative economy, the economist, Hiralal Lallubhai Kaji, explained that castes in India had originally been no more than occupational units and professional corporations. Unlike the ill-reputed castes of the twentieth century, the original castes had been voluntary economic associations rather than hereditary social classes. Thus, the primordial castes were much more flexible and less exclusive: "membership by choice has gone and membership by birth

³⁵ Prosper Ricard, "Les Arts Tripolitains (Parte I)" *Rivista della Tripolitana* 2, no. 4 (1926), 203–35.

³⁶ Alain de Pommereau, "The Invention of the Moroccan Carpet," in *After Orientalism*, ed. F. Pouillion and J.-C. Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 218–35.

³⁷ Eleanor Margaret Hough, *The Co-operative Movement in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 51.

³⁸ École Coloniale, *Congrès International et Intercolonial*, 73.

³⁹ Massignon, "L'Artisanat Indigène," 177.

has come; brotherhood has been replaced by indifference if not hostility and jealousy.”⁴⁰ Bemoaning this development, Indian experts such as Kaji recommended reviving these original professional castes.

Gandhi endorsed this view. It is widely known that he saw in small-scale and self-sufficient families who used the spinning wheel the basis of dignity, autonomy, and ultimately independence. Massignon took up Gandhi’s idea of the spinning wheel that also represented cooperation and solidarity among those involved in the production process. He made a plea to follow “the doctrine of the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and the *khaddar* (hand-spun cloth),” as recommended by Gandhi. Massignon would meet and admire Gandhi, declaring his approach exemplary.⁴¹ Apart from the romanticization of Gandhi, the alignment of corporations with castes reveals the will to engage in a transimperial exchange and find overarching solutions for specifically colonial problems.

In the meantime, Massignon’s idea of using corporations to stabilize the colonial economy and his alleged transimperial expertise attracted the attention of international organizations that lacked deeper knowledge about Islam under colonial rule. In 1930, the International Labor Office (ILO) adopted his strategy, aligning it with their own developing research on artisan crafts.⁴² The ILO’s directory saw “a certain relation with our own enquiry on the *artisanat*,” and sent its attaché, Roger Plissard, on a ten-day study trip to Tunisia. There, he analyzed “the working conditions of Northern Africa” that could provide the basis for a future policy in the “larger domain of the working conditions in a Muslim society.” Plissard’s object of study included the famous Tunisian *chouachis* corporation of artisans and the weavers of Kairouan. Consequently, the ILO prioritized craft guilds in its strategy for the Muslim world, with director Albert Thomas personally advancing this agenda during a visit to Egypt.⁴³

ILO experts regarded Muslim corporations as institutions that fostered “social unity.” An ILO report noted that these corporations, like Islam, were participatory and did not divide society into possessing and dispossessed classes. They opposed the strict employer–employee dichotomy, uniting masters and apprentices into a joint interest group with a shared corporate identity. Salaries were negotiated within the corporation rather than through class struggle. The ILO concluded that “Muslim solidarity” bonded masters and apprentices, tempering their opposition, and “The Koran governs work.” Thus, Muslim corporations seemed to promote

⁴⁰ Hiralal Lallubhāi Kaji, *Co-operation in India* (Bombay: All-India Co-operative Institute, 1932), 14.

⁴¹ Massignon, “L’Artisanat Indigène,” 177.

⁴² ILO Archives, N206/1/01/8, Muslim Labour, Report Plissard, 1931, 1–2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

social peace beyond their religious or economic roles.⁴⁴ This idea shaped the ILO's approach to "Muslim Labor," which was mainly labor in the colonies.

In the 1930s, corporatism became the central strategy of the ILO in its drafting of a "Muslim code of labor" that could potentially be applied to the entire Muslim world. Plissard saw a chance that 240 million Muslims who inhabited the colonial world from Morocco to the Dutch Indies would turn away from communist ideas and revive their time-honored corporative systems: "they constitute a special proletariat because they are artisans trained like our ancient corporations of the old regime by a long practice to the pleasure and the purposefulness of work."⁴⁵

Complementing the ILO's initiative, the revival of corporations and cooperatives was given dedicated attention in a panel at the International and Intercolonial Congress of Indigenous Societies, convened by colonial experts in 1931, partly in response to the ILO's ban on forced labor and the ongoing economic crisis. Distancing themselves from open forced labor, they encouraged economic activities without referring to open coercion. Dismissing British and French habits of inciting indigenous "chiefs" to implement forced cultivation among their subjects, they rather highlighted strategies such as the "*groupement* for collective exploitation with the help of agricultural loans and savings banks" as practiced in Belgian Congo.⁴⁶ What they had in mind was an "indigenous colonization," a sort of reconciliation of the colonized with the colonial project from which they were supposed to benefit.⁴⁷ Massignon was the star of the Congress, whom participants celebrated to have "performed miracles."⁴⁸ Participants also raised the issue of the castes, this time referring to Sub-Saharan Africa. There, some argued, it would be difficult to "recruit elites useful for the colonization" as in North Africa, due to a caste system resembling India's, with impoverished, stigmatized groups unlikely to produce leaders. However, most participants soon agreed that "casting the professions," particularly among blacksmiths and weavers, could lead to prosperity if combined with education.⁴⁹

What is the added value of using "transimperial" as a framework to analyze colonial corporatism? As we can tell from Massignon's focus on "indigenous" corporations, he neither thought of guilds as locally specific nor as a global institution in the sense of a universal phenomenon. Instead, he highlighted the similarity and specificity of "indigenous" corporate traditions lingering on in colonized territories

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *École Coloniale, Congrès International*, vol. II, 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64.

“from Morocco to Java.”⁵⁰ Hence, Massignon neither followed the (still) dominant historiographical habits of analyzing corporations within one city, nation, or empire, nor did he anticipate the recent trend by global historians to emphasize the universality of guilds and cooperatives to present it as the “smoking gun” for an empirical globality that required and justified the new discipline of global history.⁵¹

To be sure, Massignon’s distinction between “traditional” indigenous guilds and “modern-capitalist” corporatism and the cooperative movement in the metropolises was as transimperial as it was racist, because this differentiation served to discursively segregate the world. Guilds were constitutive of imperialist tales about backwardness and the economic and cultural “decline” of those territories which Europeans set out to colonize between the 1880s and the 1930s. The narrative of decline applied also to those parts of the world where Europeans admitted to have achieved a certain degree of civilization, such as India and the (former) possessions of the Ottoman Empire, which indeed stretched from North Africa to Asia.⁵² They were not exempted from the general narrative of decline of corporatist and cooperative “moral economies,” which inscribed itself into the racist story of the decline and potential extinction of indigeneity and collectivism as soon as it encountered a capitalist modernity.

But even in transimperial discourse, as we will see, corporatism often played a more ambiguous role, partly blurring the tradition/modernity dichotomy so deeply inscribed into colonial worldviews.⁵³ Since guilds and cooperatives were reimagined in the nineteenth century as a governmental tool in Europe to bring about sustained progress, colonizers became aware of them as instruments of modernizing indigenous economies in an allegedly participatory way, supposedly in harmony

⁵⁰ Bernard Lewis, “The Islamic Guilds,” *Economic History Rev* 8 no. 1 (1937), 20.

⁵¹ On the local analysis, see Nelly Hanna, “Guilds in Recent Historical Scholarship,” in *The City in the Islamic World (Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1; The Near and Middle East, Vol. 2)* ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 896; Jan Lucassen, Tine de Moor, Jan Luiten van Zanden, “The Return of the Guilds: Towards a Global History of the Guilds in Pre-industrial Times,” *International Review of Social History* 53 (2008), 5–18.

⁵² Ottoman corporate life shaped the world from North Africa to Asia and has received quite some historiographical attention. For a literature review and gaps, see Suraiya Faruqi, “Understanding Ottoman Guilds,” in *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East: Fashioning the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean*, ed. Suraiya Faruqi and Randi Deguilhem (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 16–18. Unlike the European colonizers, the Ottoman Empire seems to have failed in controlling corporations; see Geoffrey D. Schad, “Colonial Corporatism in the French Mandated States: Labor, Capital, the Mandatory Power, and the 1935 Syrian Law of Associations,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 105–106 (2005), 208.

⁵³ Haupt argues that European guilds continued to exist in industrialized societies; see Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed.), *Das Ende der Zünfte: Ein europäischer Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

with indigenous traditionality. To be sure, this allegedly participatory colonialism represented by the revival of guilds and cooperatives rarely went against colonial rule and helped to uphold the colonial system rather than overcoming it. But it could also be used as an emancipative tool, including the transformation of guilds into trade unions and cooperatives into nationalist organizations.

Focused on cultural expressions of twentieth-century coloniality, postcolonial thinkers have rarely questioned the practice of colonialist corporatism and its embeddedness in transimperiality. In the founding study of postcolonial theory, *Orientalism*, Edward Said honorably mentioned Massignon for his exceptional affection to all matters Islam and exculpated him from “othering” the Orient, only to recognize and criticize Massignon’s role in colonial practice in his later work.⁵⁴ Despite his admiration, Said pointed already in *Orientalism* to Massignon’s unintended misinterpretation and willful exaggeration of Islamic institutions. In this contribution, I argue that Massignon and other transimperial experts equally exaggerated the role of Islamic/indigenous craft guilds and indigenous cooperatives, portraying them as a tool to make colonialism consensual and ultimately employing them to justify the continuation of the colonial project in the form of a transimperial project.⁵⁵

The political and social importance of craft guilds in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Islamic world remains a matter of debate, but Massignon promoted them as the basis of a corporatist society in the colonies. Massignon is known to have defended Islamic practices, sought to correct Western misconceptions about Islam, and promoted a spiritual union of Islam with Catholicism and Judaism. He allegedly exemplified the extreme end of engaging deeply with his research subjects, but other ICI experts on Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or African animism, such as Snouck-Hurgronje, were similarly invested. At the same time, they wanted to stabilize colonial rule with their expertise. The ICI facilitated transimperial exchange by allowing such specialists to use their knowledge about Islam not just for theoretical discussions, as in Orientalist congresses, but to apply it practically in governance. Ultimately, the ICI aimed to sustain the colonial system by leveraging such knowledge to win the favor of the colonized.

Massignon stood for a more general trend among ICI members to portray themselves as transimperial intermediaries between the Muslim world and the non-Muslim world. For ICI members, corporatist and cooperative organizations

⁵⁴ James Brown, “The solitude of Edward Said: the fate of Gibb, Lane and Massignon in *Orientalism*,” *Economy and Society* 28 no. 4 (1999), 565; Nicholas Dirks, “Edward Said and Anthropology,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33 no. 3 (2004), 47.

⁵⁵ Massignon willfully exaggerated the importance of Islamic mystic *Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj*, whose biography made him famous; see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), 104. His knowledge about craft guilds was both exaggerated and dated, e.g., on the *muhtasibs*: Hanna, “Guilds,” 899.

seemed to exist among all “indigenous” peoples, regardless of their religion. Craft guilds were important across the Islamic world, but the Indian casts and animistic forms of cooperative self-organization allegedly worked on a similar model. The unifying element of these indigenous forms of grassroots organization seemed to be a specific inclination towards collectivity, ascribed to Islamic and Hindu civilizations as well as to allegedly primitive animistic societies. The interpretation of indigenous societies as inherently collectivist certainly emerged from an essentialist and racist view, but it could also serve as a basis of solidarity among anti-colonial movements.

The ICI members’ emphasis on pre-existing indigenous cross-imperial routines tacitly suggested that indigenous cooperation across colonial borders forced colonial experts to equally get organized across empires to respond adequately to the challenge of indigenous transimperialism. This “responsive transimperialism” was advanced with regard to Pan-Islamic institutions (such as the famous Saniya brotherhood active across colonial borders in North Africa), with Islam being declared not only a religion but a social, political, and legal dispositif that structured the everyday life of colonized peoples from Morocco to Indonesia, and from the Caucasus to Southern Africa.

Yet, the emphasis on transimperial responsiveness was not innocent, and actually served to uphold colonial governance while avoiding democratic participation. ICI experts saw in craft guilds the guardians of a traditional moral economy against the penetration of predator capitalism and communism. They imagined these craft guilds as being representative bodies without being democratic institutions. Hierarchically ordered, the authoritarian heads of the guilds were usually appointed by the colonial governments.

To be sure, Islamic craft guilds were a transimperial phenomenon. But they were neither a movement that intentionally brought about transimperialism for political purposes, nor were they a praxis that engendered transimperiality as a social routine and a cultural determinant. Massignon analyzed the transimperial *phenomenon* of craft guilds in Morocco and in Syria. Only in a second step did he make their revival a transimperial project. It was during the 1920s that transimperialism emerged as a colonial strategy.

Cooperatives as a Tool of Transimperial Rule

In the transimperial studies on corporatism, the ICI does not draw a sharp line between corporations and cooperatives. No doubt, craft guilds are mostly urban, and cooperatives are predominantly rural and dedicated to agriculture, but the ICI also mentions urban cooperatives (e.g., the *nidhi* in India) and rural corporations

(e.g., the *khatatariyya* formed by Berber irrigation engineers of the Rif).⁵⁶ Both seemed to share ideas of collective capital, tools, production, and marketing, as well as mutual aid regarding health insurance and old-age pensions. Both corporations and cooperatives seem to have emerged from a specific moral economy that differs from capitalism and is compatible with religious, indigenous, and collectivist lifestyles. Today, we tend to think of cooperatives as democratic grassroots initiatives, but transimperial discourse emphasizes their collectivist character without necessarily qualifying them as democratic.

The ICI was among the first to study cooperatives comparatively in the colonies from around 1900 and way into the period of late colonialism. What is more, its members were deeply involved in implementing cooperatives as tools of colonial governance and social control of the colonized. Already around 1900, French ICI members had helped establish a large network of Provident Societies (*Sociétés de Prévoyance*) in French Africa. These centrally administered, hierarchically ordered, and often forcefully implemented agricultural cooperatives were supposed to restructure local agriculture and teach Africans “providence” by saving both grain and money for the future. Originally introduced in Algeria in the nineteenth century, French ICI member, Ernest Roume, applied them also to French West Africa, when he became the federation’s governor in 1910. By then, membership in the Provident Societies had become compulsory.⁵⁷ In the 1930s, there were several hundred of them in French West Africa, with around five million members.⁵⁸ In 1934, they had an overall capital of 37 million francs. This led the French to conclude that “we indeed observe the birth of an ‘African cooperativism’.”⁵⁹ While many of these Provident Societies existed only on paper, they had nevertheless left a mark on the colonized producers.

In the 1920s, the ICI focused on less centralized cooperative schemes, consistently promoting the use of indigenous institutions within colonial states. The ICI’s transimperial and comparative studies noted the difficulties of earlier cooperative schemes in Asia, particularly in Indonesia and India. By 1900, the Dutch had established a state-run credit system in Indonesia to fund village cooperatives. However, this system collapsed in the 1920s as few villagers could repay their loans. Before World War I, cooperative banks had loaned 1,643,500 florins, but only 93,000 florins were repaid, leaving 1,550,500 florins unsettled.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Institut Colonial International, *L’Organisation du Crédit Au Point de Vue Industriel et Commercial En Faveur des Classes Moyennes* (Brussels: ICI, 1911), 120–23; Massignon, *Enquête*, 52.

⁵⁷ Louis Milliot, *L’association agricole chez les musulmans du Maghreb* (Paris: Rousseau, 1911), 274.

⁵⁸ Marcel Boyer, *Les sociétés de prévoyance de secours et de prêts mutuels agricoles en AOF* (Paris: Loviton 1935), 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁰ ICI, *L’Organisation du crédit au point de vue industriel et commercial en faveur des classes moyennes* (Brussels: ICI, 1911), 110.

The ICI attributed the failure of Indonesian cooperatives to the lack of self-organized credit banks. Claude Strickland, an ICI member, argued that colonized people would only repay loans from their own “cooperative” peer group, criticizing the Dutch for not “educating” cooperative members. This critique aligned with Dutch views, leading to a 1927 law encouraging grassroots cooperatives in Indonesia. By 1930, 81 new societies were registered under this law, while the Javanese independently formed 519 cooperatives. However, these cooperatives remained tools of control and “education.”⁶¹

Engaging in transimperial comparison, ICI members advanced similar reasons why cooperative schemes had failed in British India. Like in the Dutch case, the 1904 British Co-operative Credit Societies Act was meant to support, register, and control cooperatives in India.⁶² By 1908, there were 15 bigger cooperative unions that watched over 1,766 rural and 227 urban cooperatives with 184,889 members. While most of them seem to have been self-supporting, many seized the opportunity to borrow from the state banks.⁶³ In 1912, the British government created a central registration office to tightly control and potentially dissolve cooperatives.⁶⁴ It held members collectively responsible for the reimbursement of individual loans. Moreover, special bylaws forced the members to participate in joint work, and cooperatives became a tool to implement obligatory “community” labor.⁶⁵ The ICI criticized this development, not so much because it enabled coerced labor, but because allegedly corrupt and irresponsible indigenous management boards supposedly misused state loans and thus provoked the 1929 collapse of the Indian cooperative system.⁶⁶

Indigenous experts on cooperatives such as the Indian economist, Anwar Iqbal Qureshi, who shared their expertise across colonial borders and who advised the ILO and the League of Nations, came up with less simplistic explanations for the collapse. Instead of accusing the Indian management boards, he blamed the British government for introducing unlimited liability for agricultural cooperatives under the Cooperative Credit Societies Act, meaning that the whole cooperative was responsible if one member was unable to pay back a loan. According to Qureshi, well-off farmers, who had much to lose in the case of unlimited liability, did not join the societies in the first place, “seeing that they risk the whole of their property by

⁶¹ Claude F. Strickland, *Co-Operation for Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 427–28.

⁶² Anwar Iqbal Qureshi, *The Future of the Co-Operative Movement in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 6–7.

⁶³ ICI, *L'Organisation*, 120–23.

⁶⁴ Qureshi, *The Future*, 6–7.

⁶⁵ Vaikunth L. Meha, *Co-operative Farming* (Bombay: Co-operative Union, 1959), 5.

⁶⁶ William M. Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 1466.

becoming members.” Consequently, the cooperatives “may often degenerate into an organization of poor and inefficient farmers of the locality, dependent in its activity only from outside (State) resources.”⁶⁷

The ICI accepted Qureshi’s argument, pleading to replace centralized state loans with a revival of the more collectivist and “indigenous” cooperatives. The *nidhi* seemed to be such an institution, since they were mutual loan associations that received their capital from deposits of individual members. *Nidhi* bylaws contained a security agreement, which stipulated that members received the whole amount of their deposits after seven years. This bylaw ensured that members who received loans in the first seven years of their membership paid them back, in order not to lose the total amount of their deposits after their seven years’ membership. *Nidhis*, ICI-members argued, could prevent the corporative and cooperative credit system from collapsing, and recommended them as an example to emulate in a transimperial setting.⁶⁸

The ICI’s agenda to “indigenize” cooperatives owed much to its British member, Claude F. Strickland, nicknamed the “apostle of cooperation in Africa” in the 1930s. Having served as registrar of cooperative societies in the Punjab in British India, he introduced cooperative policies to Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Nigeria, and even Palestine.⁶⁹ Colonial administrations around the world sought his expertise, also because he seemed to have “really entered the minds of the natives,” as the official Gazette of French West Africa remarked.⁷⁰ In public, Strickland emphasized that the colonial state had to keep aloof from controlling cooperatives too tightly and from granting loans to farmers who were nonchalant in paying them back. No state-funded central banks, he argued, could replace the self-educational character of communal and mutual credit societies. He therefore advocated the family as the smallest unit of a cooperative society.⁷¹

Strickland completely abandoned his liberal ideal as an advisor to the British colonial administration in Kenya and Zanzibar, just as many ICI members switched between allegedly neutral internationalism and state-supporting nationalism and imperialism. In Kenya, the most famous “indigenous” cooperative project was the Kilimanjaro Natives’ Planter Association (KNPA), an entirely African cooperative formed by 4,500 coffee farmers in the Kilimanjaro region, who cultivated about

⁶⁷ Qureshi, *The Future*, 22–23.

⁶⁸ ICI, *L’Organisation*, 120–123; Qureshi, *The Future*, 4.

⁶⁹ Rhodes, *Empire and Co-operation*, 183.

⁷⁰ Gouvernement Général AOF, *Bulletin Hebdomadaire d’Information et de Renseignements* 9 (May 10, 1934), 16–19.

⁷¹ Strickland, *Co-operation*, 427–28.

1,500 acres and produced 80 tons of Arabica coffee by 1925.⁷² The KNPA provided common facilities for the purchase of seeds and tools as well as organizing transport, storage, and the fight against pests and diseases. It gave loans to its members and encouraged “the spirit and practice of thrift, mutual help and self-help.” In every society, a professional secretary took care of the bookkeeping and money transactions. Habitually, each village elected its own representative to the committee, which was named the all-African managing committee. By 1929, it had 27,000 members, but the collapse of coffee prices brought it into financial difficulties. Nevertheless, the KNPA stood on its own feet and did not receive outside help or funding, with the colonial government even temporarily withdrawing administrative support.⁷³

In the late 1920s, however, Strickland became an advisor to the Kenyan government and seized control of the KNPA. He used the KNPA’s financial weakness to bring it in line with British coffee legislation and to influence its price policy.⁷⁴ Staging a coup, Strickland imprisoned its leaders and substituted them with a European manager. In 1932, all cooperatives in Kenya became officially registered under the new Co-operative Societies Ordinance.⁷⁵ Strickland’s alleged liberalism was a farce, and he delivered the ultimate proof of his hypocrisy during his transformation of Zanzibar’s clove industry into a state-controlled cooperative economy, which made wide use of force and compulsion.⁷⁶

During the transimperial search for a best practice of colonial cooperativism, the ICI members used “indigenization” as a pretext to implement and justify tight control, collective liability, and compulsory labor in their respective colonies. Ultimately, the ICI particularly promoted a model developed in French Madagascar, the so-called *fokon’olona* cooperative system. Literally, *fokon’olona* meant an „association of people“ who pursued a common goal and followed common rules. Originally, the *fokon’olona* were pure kinship groups based on the traditional clan and lineage structures of the Merina kingdom in central Madagascar. During the nineteenth century, *fokon’olona* cooperatives became known for joint rice production, which included the purchase of seeds, sharing of tools, collective loans, management of irrigation systems, and the marketing of rice. *Fokon’olona* also

⁷² John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 274–80; Andreas Eckert, *Herrschen und Verwalten: Afrikanische Bürokraten, staatliche Ordnung und Politik in Tansania, 1920–1970* (Munich: Gruyter, 2007), 56–61.

⁷³ “A short account of the Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union Ltd.,” *The East African Agricultural Journal* 12, no. 1 (1946), 46.

⁷⁴ Susan Rogers, “The Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association: Administrative Responses to Chagga Initiatives in the 1920’s,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 4, nos. 1–2 (1974), 105.

⁷⁵ “A Short Account,” 47.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism*, 297.

assumed the role of a welfare organization to care for the poor, the sick, and the elderly. Europeans declared these communal self-help groups exemplary because they seemed fully compatible with pre-existing clan and lineage structures.⁷⁷

What international colonial experts presented as the most humane path to cooperative development turned out to be the opposite: the *fokon'olona* became an instrument of oppression. As early as 1902, a French decree forced all residents to become members of a local *fokon'olona*. The government used the *fokon'olona* to collect taxes, holding its board responsible for delivering the correct amount. Added to this taxation were various forms of forced labor: members were required to build infrastructure projects such as irrigation systems, roads, or telegraph lines.⁷⁸ Finally, *fokon'olona* members were collectively responsible for naming and delivering criminals to the colonial government. They thus became an instrument of collective punishment. This, in turn, could be compensated through forced labor. What is more, the *fokon'olona* had actually never been an indigenous institution but had served the pre-colonial authoritarian Merina rulers to control, oppress, and force the “indigenous” population to perform compulsory labor.

Transimperial Corporativism between Liberal, Socialist, and Fascist Internationalisms

As is well known, Gandhi not only stood for the revival of corporations, but also promoted the use of agricultural cooperatives. Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm, which he operated between 1908 and 1914 in South Africa, became a much talked-about experimental field for an emancipative agricultural cooperativism. The 80 members of the Tolstoy farm were mainly occupied with agriculture, but Gandhi used it also to produce sandals, a craft not unlike that of the Moroccan shoemaker corporations. More than that, Gandhi expected the members of the cooperative to learn self-discipline and the love of work, in addition to cooperative and corporate economics, and to internalize the spiritual rationale of nonviolent resistance. In this respect, Gandhi also saw the Tolstoy Farm as an educational tool that helped members to internalize *satyagraha*, or passive resistance to oppression. As we have seen, back in India, Gandhi would declare indigenous Indian cooperative and corporate economies to be one of the pillars of *Hind Swaraj*, self-sufficient and autonomous Home Rule. His cooperative projects were always multireligious and

⁷⁷ “Foreword by G. Julien,” in *Le Fokon'olona (Commune Malgache) et les conventions de Fokon'olona*, ed. Pierre Delteil, (Paris: Loviton, 1931), v; ICI, *L'Organisation*, 95.

⁷⁸ “Organisation de l'Administration Indigène de l'Imerina, Décret du 9 mars 1902,” *Journal Officiel de Madagascar* (April 30, 1902), 7391; Delteil, *Le Fokon'olona*, 79–80.

theoretically disregarded caste hierarchies. Anticipating a much bigger corporative organization of postcolonial relations, Gandhi called the Tolstoy farm a „co-operative commonwealth.“⁷⁹

A more dubious “Indian” who called for a “cooperative world commonwealth” was Freppel Cotta from Portuguese Goa. A renowned expert on agricultural cooperatives in India, Cotta’s work was widely read among liberal cooperativists. For him, ideal agricultural cooperatives were economically self-sufficient communities based on mutual support, with members sharing tools, knowledge, funds, seeds, and marketing strategies. Cooperatives ideally served as credit banks that extended low-interest loans to their members. In India, the colonial administration and Indian economists saw in such cooperative banks a way to combat usurers who lent to and often ruined local farmers.⁸⁰

Cotta found the ideal type of a society’s corporative reorganization in fascist Italy and particularly studied Mussolini’s use of agricultural cooperatives to secure rural support for the fascist state. On paper, Cotta endorsed the liberal British Rochdale model, which provided also the guiding principles for the International Cooperative Alliance that had been founded in 1895. The Rochdale principles stipulated that membership of agricultural cooperatives was voluntary and that members should democratically elect their own board of directors, which acted independently of the state. What was Cotta, who officially adhered to the British liberal cooperative tradition, doing in fascist Italy in 1932? By then, it was widely known that Mussolini had dissolved all pre-existing Socialist and Christian cooperatives and subordinated them to fascist collective agriculture and the state’s corporatist economy. In 1931, Mussolini founded a state agency that controlled and coordinated all cooperative activities in accordance with the corporatist planned economy. These cooperatives spread the fascist doctrine among the rural population and helped implement the fascist “reclaiming of new land” through colonization and settlement inside and outside Italy. Membership was nominally voluntary even under fascism; in practice, it was compulsory.⁸¹

Cotta, aware of the fascist authoritarian and repressive corporatism, defended his admiration for fascist Italy: “As we are treating of Co-operation and not of political systems, any praise or blame attached to the Fascist and any other régime will relate solely to the facts which form the subject of our study.”⁸² He particularly hailed the fascists’ “educational” use of cooperatives, including the possibility of dissolving those who did not submit to fascist ideology. As we will see, Cotta became

⁷⁹ Nishikant Kolge, *Gandhi Against Caste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14.

⁸⁰ Freppel Cotta, *Agricultural Co-Operation in Fascist Italy* (London: King, 1935).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 136–37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.

one of the harbingers of a planned corporatist economy in Salazar's Portugal, which included the colonies in Africa.

No doubt, fascist corporativism was more attractive for colonial administrations than communist collectivization. Most colonial officials saw craft guilds as an instrument to ward off communist and syndicalist ways of organizing worker collectivities. Massignon hoped that the habitually conservative heads of corporations might defend their society against "bolshevist" infiltration. In Tunisia, for example, "the tribunal of the *'orf* or customary law, where the cheikh el medina from Tunis solves conflicts among corporations, has resisted with pain the infiltration of the communist propaganda upon the new professions (dockers, railway workers, tram workers) for two years."⁸³ Again, colonial experts often exaggerated the corporations' propensity to ward off communism. They were not "conservative" by default but also got involved with trade unions to increase their agency, be it on a local, metropolitan, or internationalist level. They also calculated which degree of radicalism accorded most with their own agenda and interests. As Massignon remarked, "the spokesmen of the Tunisian craftsmen, disenchanted with the *'orf*, suspected the followers of the 2nd International of moderantism and announced to only participate in the 3rd, the Muskovite one, via the C.G.T.T." The C.G.T.T. (General Confederation of Tunisian Workers), founded in 1924, was the umbrella organization of trade unions in Tunisia that had emancipated itself from the original French mother organization. Turning to these organizations put the corporatist elite at a great risk. One year later, the French colonial government destroyed the union and exiled its leaders.⁸⁴ In most cases, the colonial governments used the dissolution as an ultima ratio to prevent corporations from turning to communism.

Corporations and cooperatives thus played an ambiguous role and could be used both as an emancipative and as an authoritarian tool. It was this ambiguity that colonizers could capitalize on, mainly by using them as a governmental institution in the Foucauldian sense. They reinvented corporations and cooperatives to maintain control over colonized societies while equally pretending to loosen their grip by granting more autarky and even political autonomy.

When fascist empires emerged in the 1930s and immediately engaged in an intense transimperial exchange regarding the colonies, they appropriated corporative and cooperative strategies to satisfy both capitalist and authoritarian interest groups among their supporters. Fascist empires such as Italy, Germany, Vichy-France, Spain, and Portugal organized society into various corporations, each representing a particular sector of the economy or a specific interest group. These corporations were composed of both employers and employees within the

⁸³ Massignon, *Enquête*, 185.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

sector to control the proletariat and choke off opposition, critique, wage claims, improved working conditions, and any kind of democratic representation. In Italy, for example, there were separate corporations for industries, agriculture, labor, and various professions, all tightly controlled by the state.

It was the combination of representation without democracy and capitalism without freedom that made corporativism interesting for both fascist and colonial administrations, who joined forces to establish a transimperial “Eurafrica” that was economically integrated but remained racially segregated. In the 1930s, fascist empires increasingly identified corporatism as an instrument to guarantee European exploitation of resources and laborers in the colonies while denying them any participation in political and social life. Building on his study of fascist cooperatives in corporatist Italy, Freppel Cotta promoted an overall corporatist reorganization of the Portuguese fascist empire, especially in his influential book *Economic Planning in Corporative Portugal* (1937). It appeared in the wake of other fascist and corporatist pamphlets, such as Mihail Manoilescu’s famous *Siècle du corporatisme* (1936) and Giuseppe De Michelis’ *Reorganisation on Corporatist Lines* (1930). Aiming to transform colonial empires into a pseudo-integrative transimperial “Eurafrica,” De Michelis called for “new systems of European colonisation, founded on association of the native element with the white element,” and suggested that “the construction of what has aptly been called Eurafrica [...] may be found in a just economic distribution of the zones of influence between the various European, Asiatic and American economic groups. We mean that Africa is, and cannot fail to be considered and recognised as strictly complementary to Europe.”⁸⁵ He was among the first to promote a transimperial Eurafrica that should secure the exploitation of “complementary spaces,” such as Africa, by equally maintaining racial exclusion of the colonized.

In his book, Cotta evoked such ideas to promote the transformation of Salazar’s Estado Novo into a corporatist state that indeed dissolved Portugal’s parliament, replaced it with a Corporatist Chamber, and left the legislative to the president/dictator.⁸⁶ Marcelo Caetano, who put this Corporate State for Salazar’s Portugal into practice, wrote the preface to Cotta’s book. An ICI member, Caetano illustrates the increased grip of fascists from Italy, Portugal, and Nazi Germany on the ICI in the 1930s. In 1938, fascist ICI members co-organized the Volta Congress on Africa in Rome. Initiated by Mussolini, this congress assembled 126 colonial “experts” from Europa in Rome, with the purpose of redefining the relationship between a Europe unified by fascism and its colonies in Africa. One of these experts was

⁸⁵ Giuseppe de Michelis, *World Reorganisation On Corporative Lines* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), 92–243.

⁸⁶ Freppel Cotta, *Economic Planning in Corporative Portugal* (London: King, 1937).

Massignon, who found an ideological home among the fascists. As Mussolini had advanced a spiritual unity between Christians and Islam to win over both for the colonial cause, Massignon saw his own ideas confirmed. To realize this spiritual unification—as opposed to democratic participation—Mussolini had promoted a corporatist state, which he imagined as a neo-Roman empire of “Eurafrica” that included the colonies. This idea fell on fertile ground among French, Portuguese, Italian, and Nazi corporatists at the Volta Congress, who equally defined Africa as an economic “complementary space” to supply fascist Europe with resources.⁸⁷

Unsurprisingly, Louis Massignon claimed to have “seen the birth of Eurafrica at the Volta Congress of 1938, in Mussolini’s Rome.”⁸⁸ What is more surprising is that this quote dates from 1951. Disregarding fascist crimes, Massignon and many other participants of the Volta Congress celebrated the corporatist Eurafrica invented by fascists in 1938. In the 1950s, this corporatist Eurafrica equally appealed to the advocates of a European Community. The pro-European movement designed a post-fascist but nevertheless corporatist union between European colonizers and African colonized. Massignon, Labouret, Caetano, and Freppel, who had designed a corporatist Eurafrica, were members of the ICI, which was reestablished in 1949 and rebaptized the Institute of Differing Civilizations (INCIDI). As such, it loomed large in building the Eurafrica of the early European Community and liberal development policies.

Conclusion

The transimperial practice of reorganizing colonial societies through corporative and cooperative models had three interrelated origins. First, colonial experts like Massignon argued that such structures had historical precedents across the Islamic, and indeed the entire colonized world, from Morocco to Indonesia. They promoted them as tools of indirect rule to enhance colonial control, reimagining them as mutual aid societies to offload state responsibilities for healthcare, unemployment benefits, and pensions, while actually using them for collective punishments, tax farming, and forced labor. Second, by reviving craft guilds and cooperatives, colonizers claimed to respect indigenous moral economies, presenting them as alternatives to capitalism and socialism, which were seen as disruptive. In reality, this masked the continued use of forced taxation and labor banned by the League

⁸⁷ Karsten Linne, “Afrika als wirtschaftspolitischer Ergänzungsraum. Kurt Weigelt und die kolonialwirtschaftlichen Planungen im Dritten Reich,” in *Unternehmenskrisen und ihre Bewältigung im 20. Jahrhundert* ed. Jörg Baten (Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 2006), 146.

⁸⁸ Massignon, *Écrits Mémorables*, vol. 1, 665.

of Nations in the 1930s. Third, the fascist Eurafrica project elevated corporatism to enforce totalitarian control, undemocratic representation, and racial segregation.

Disguised as international development policy, this transimperial practice found its way into post-1945 liberal Third World policy and the EG's Eurafrica project alike. UN development agencies, too, recommended *fokon'olona* and *paysannat* schemes as ideal tools for development throughout the twentieth century. With cooperatives and their ambiguous role continuing to shape developmentalist thinking after 1945, corporatist Eurafrica lingered on, too. It informed the movement for European unification, which was inherently a "Eurafrica" project.⁸⁹ One key figure responsible for this continuity was Louis Salleron. As a Vichy official, Salleron had developed and implemented Vichy's corporatist legislation. After 1946, he co-established the influential European Union of Federalists to lobby for a European federation.⁹⁰ A Christian and right-wing activist, Salleron, cooperated closely with Massignon and advocated militantly for a decentralized, federal, and corporatist Europe that admitted only a limited degree of democratic participation.⁹¹ Africa was part of Salleron's corporatist European federation, but no more than a complementary space to be exploited economically.⁹² With post-fascists such as Salleron at the origin of the European movement, it is not surprising that the INCIDI also collaborated closely with representatives of the early EEC, created by the Treaties of Rome in 1957. These treaties did not only create a European federation but also "associated" African colonies such as Algeria. Leading experts of corporatism in the European Union continued to refer to and even rehabilitate fascist corporatists with colonial ambitions, such as Cotta, Caetano, De Michelis, and others.⁹³ In this way, the transimperial corporatism lived on, within Europe and in its development policy toward countries of the "Third World."

⁸⁹ Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The untold history of European integration and colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Post-imperial Possibilities: Eurasia, Eurafrica, Afroasia* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023).

⁹⁰ Marco Duranti, *The conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 259.

⁹¹ Louis Salleron, "Propositions pour Un temps nouveau," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1.6.1963), 20.

⁹² Louis Salleron, "Les chemins de l'Europe," *Fédération*, 104–105 (September–October 1953).

⁹³ Especially Philippe C. Schmitter, "The New Corporatism: Social and Political Structures in the Iberian World," *The Review of Politics* 36 no. 1 (January 1974), 88.

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