



THIRD GROC COLONIAL HISTORY CONFERENCE JUNE 8-10, 2026

This conference, organized by the Groupe de Recherche sur les Ordres Coloniaux (Research Group on Colonial Orders, GROC), will be held from June 8 to 10, 2026, at the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne.

FORCED MOBILITY IN COLONIAL EMPIRES (15TH-20TH CENTURIES)

By focusing on forms of constrained mobility in the imperial context, this conference aims to highlight all the movements imposed, supervised, or limited by a political, economic, or social authority, in which individual freedom is restricted.¹ Through this approach, the goal is to consider exiles, deportations, and forced migrations linked to precariousness or dependence. Also included in this category are movements intended to evade or subvert colonial authority. Thus, constrained mobilities encompass structural mechanisms by which empires organize, regulate, or instrumentalize movement, as well as lived experiences of individuals within imperial worlds.² Whether the displaced are settlers or colonized, we aim to examine the effects of displacement on the diverse range of statuses of people engaged in mobility within empires.

The mobility approach is part of a broader turning point in the humanities, marked by the rediscovery of space as a tool for analysis.³ Emerging prominently in the 1980s and 1990s in the English-speaking world, the *Spatial Turn* in the humanities has enabled a greater consideration of the geographical dimensions of research objects,⁴ which were often neglected in favor of temporal aspects. Applied to imperial history, the mobility approach has proven fruitful in highlighting imperial networks, the movements of actors within, between, and outside empires, as well as questions of representation and the organization of space in colonial situations.⁵

These perspectives have largely inspired the proponents of *New Imperial History*.⁶ The work of these historians has made it possible to rethink mobilities on an imperial scale by analysing the multiple interactions and connections between the colonies, the metropolis, and the rest of the world, moving beyond a simple dichotomy between a centre and imperial peripheries⁷. This new angle of approach has placed a greater emphasis on previously invisible or neglected circulations by expanding

¹ Delphine Diaz, "Comparer Les Mobilités Contraintes", *Hypothèses*, n°117, 2014, pp. 145–55.

² Sophie Dulucq et al., *Au cœur des empires - Destins individuels et logiques impériales, XVI^e-XXI^e siècle*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2023.

³ Mimi Sheller, "From spatial turn to mobilities turn", *Current Sociology*, n°65, pp. 23-639.

⁴ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London, Verso, 1989; Barney Warf & Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Abingdon Routledge, 2009.

⁵ Robert Aldrich and Alan Lester, "Place and space in British imperial history writing", *The Routledge History of Western Empire* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014), pp. 300-314; Hélène Blais, *Mirages de la carte. The Invention of Colonial Algeria*, Paris, Fayard, 2014.

⁶ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997.

⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Par-delà l'incommensurabilité : pour une histoire connectée des empires aux temps modernes", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, n° 54-4bis, 2007, pp. 34-53.

the focus to the lived experiences of individuals on the move.⁸ Scholars have also examined forms of immobility and spatial constraints accompanying these movements.⁹

ARGUMENT

The formation of colonial empires from the end of the fifteenth century until decolonization represents a period shaped by forced mobility. On a global scale, these spaces witnessed large-scale displacements of populations, as in the case of the slave trade,¹⁰ or the forced requisition of men during world wars.¹¹ Such mobilities were fundamental to the functioning of empires: they testify to their ability to control the space and populations under their domination. From the *mita* system, inherited from the Incas,¹² in early modern Spanish Peru,¹³ to the forced labour for the construction of the Congo-Ocean line,¹⁴ or the coerced colonization of Western Siberia within the Russian Empire¹⁵, these displacements structured the daily lives of colonized populations and became defining markers of the colonial situation.

However, these emblematic do not capture the full diversity of mobility under constraints affecting displaced populations. Modern and contemporary periods are marked as much by forced exiles as by more or less massive displacements. Alongside quantitatively significant mobilities under constraints linked to the exploitation of territories (slave trade, forced labour, etc.), the exile of indigenous sovereigns raises questions about the political dimension of constraint,¹⁶ its motivations, and its consequences. The context in which these mobilities occur also allows for the observation of the permanence and evolution of these dynamics between the first and second colonial empires. Thus, from the judicial point of view, the expulsion of convicts to Louisiana between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,¹⁷ or to penal colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,¹⁸ testifies to this same logic of distancing elements deemed dangerous in metropolitan France or in the colonies. From this perspective, this strategy of distancing was formerly employed to compel sovereigns into submission. In 1609, the kingdom of Ryukyu, a vassal of the Chinese Ming Empire, was conquered by the Japanese lords of Satsuma. Its ruler, Sho Nei, was then taken prisoner and detained in Kagoshima, Japan. This

⁸ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm”, in *Environment and Planning*, vol. 38, 2005, pp. 207-226.

⁹ MWF Delhi, Summer School: Making and Un-Making Worlds of Coercion and Confinement, Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies, 2022.

¹⁰ Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les traites négrières. Essai d'histoire globale*, Paris Gallimard, 2003. Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. Markus Rediker, *À bord du négrier. Une histoire atlantique de la traite*, Paris, Seuil, 2013. Caroline Le Mao (dir.), *Mémoire noire*, Bordeaux, Mollat, 2020.

¹¹ Chantal Antier, “Le recrutement dans l'empire colonial français, 1914-1918”, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, n° 230, 2008, pp. 23-36. Laurent Dornel, “L'appel à la main-d'œuvre étrangère et coloniale pendant la Grande Guerre: un tournant dans l'histoire de l'immigration ?”, *Migrations Société*, n° 156, 2014, pp. 51-68.

¹² Izumi Shimada (ed.), *The Inka Empire: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2015.

¹³ Enrique Tandeter, *L'argent du Potosi. Coercition et marché dans l'Amérique coloniale*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 1997.

¹⁴ Bernard Salvaing, “Travail forcé dans les colonies européennes”, *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe* [online], 2020.

¹⁵ Zhanna Popova, “Exile as Imperial Practice: Western Siberia and the Russian Empire, 1879–1900”, *International Review of Social History*, no. S26, 2018, pp. 131–50.

¹⁶ Robert Aldrich, *Banished potentates. Dethroning and exiling indigenous monarchs under British and French colonial rule, 1815-1955*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017.

¹⁷ Charles Frostin, “Du peuplement pénal de l'Amérique française aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: hésitations et contradictions du pouvoir royal en matière de deportation”, *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest*, vol. 85, vol. 1, 1978, pp. 67-94.

¹⁸ Jean-Lucien Sanchez, “Bagnes coloniaux (XIX^e-XX^e siècle)”, *Dictionnaire du fouet et de la fessée. Corriger et punir*, Paris, PUF, 2022, pp. 83-86.

conquest allowed for indirect control of the territory and the collection of tribute from it,¹⁹ In a bellicose context, the expulsion or control of the mobility of populations that had returned to the resistance was an issue for the control of the territory, as evidenced by the “Great Upheaval” of the Acadians by the British from 1755 onwards,²⁰ or the internment of the Kabyle populations after the insurrection of 1871.²¹ Although they had different motives (economic, military, political, etc.), these forced displacements nevertheless remained one of the tools used by the governments of colonial empires.

To escape the coercive frameworks of empires, some individuals develop circumvention strategies by imposing a move within an empire or outside it. While the motives may be religious, as in the case of Iberian Jews,²² or Protestants fleeing persecution in the Americas,²³ they may take on more political overtones, such as Amad as-Sharif as-Sanûsî, who, after fighting the forces of the Entente and Italy in Libya, was exfiltrated by the Germans before reaching Istanbul, where he led the fight against the French in the 1920s.²⁴ In other cases, people flee to preserve their freedom, as in the case of Central Africans who were forced to leave for the south of the country to escape the raids of Muslim slavers in the late nineteenth century.²⁵ These forced mobilities have a wide variety of causes, whether it is fleeing armed violence, conscription, or forced labour. Beyond flight, however, they sometimes constituted a form of struggle and resistance to the installation of colonial orders.

These different examples, if they do not claim to be exhaustive, place this conference on a long-term basis in order to understand the forced and suffered mobilities in colonial empires in a comparative perspective. It will then be a question of getting as close as possible to the actors in order to examine the role of forced mobility: sometimes it serves as a coercive tool for the functioning of empires; sometimes it constitutes levers of resistance for populations under foreign domination. In doing so, this conference intends to highlight the continuities and discontinuities in the conceptions and practices associated with these displacements, across different spaces and throughout the period under study.

This theme will also provide an opportunity to examine the mobilities of decolonization. Whether they are referred to as “repatriates” in France from 1961 onwards,²⁶ or “*retornados*”²⁷ in the Portuguese case, the issue of migrants coming to mainland France in the wake of independence has raised many questions for states, whether from the perspective of compensation, integration, or the memory of these populations. The aim is therefore to overcome the colonial rupture by also integrating these categories of people.

Our diachronic approach to the colonial phenomenon, between the modern and contemporary periods, aims to understand the permanence and innovations of these practices of forced displacement. Far from limiting this conference to European empires over the period under consideration, we invite researchers to consider the theme of constrained mobility in non-European empires. The study of

¹⁹ Nathalie Kouamé, *Naissance et affirmation du Japon moderne (1392-1709). Relations internationales, Etat société, religion*, Paris, PUF, 2024, pp. 184.

²⁰ Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc (dir.), *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation: nouvelles perspectives historiques*, Moncton, Chaire d'Études Acadiennes, 2005.

²¹ Sylvie Thénault, “Une circulation transméditerranéenne forcée: l'internement d'Algériens en France au XIX^e siècle”, *Criminocorpus* [online], 2015.

²² Bruno Feitler, *Inquisition, juifs et nouveaux-chrétiens au Brésil. Le Nordeste, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Louvain, Leuven University Press, 2003.

²³ Frank Lestringant, “Genève et l'Amérique: le rêve du Refuge huguenot au temps des guerres de Religion (1555-1560)”, *Revue d'histoire des religions*, 1993, pp. 331-347. Mickaël Augeron, Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, Didier Poton, *Les Huguenots et l'Atlantique*, 2 t., Paris, PUPS-Indes Savantes, 2009.

²⁴ Odile Moreau, Pierre Vermeren, “Politique et confréries au Maghreb et en Afrique de l'Ouest”, *Journal d'Histoire du Soufisme*, n° 7, 2018.

²⁵ Dennis D. Cordell et al., “Des « réfugiés » dans l'Afrique précoloniale? L'exemple de la Centrafrique, 1850-1910”, *Politique africaine*, n° 85, 2002, pp. 16-28.

²⁶ Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir Métropolitain. Politique d'intégration et parcours de rapatriés d'Algérie en métropole (1954-2005)*, Paris, EHESS, 2010.

²⁷ Elsa Peralta, Bruno Góis and Joana Oliveira (eds.), *Retornar. Traços de Memória do Fim do Império*, Lisbon, Edições 70, 2017. Morgane Delaunay, *Les retornados*. Rennes, PUR, 2024.

empires and decolonization has been intended to decompartmentalize analyses on these subjects for several years²⁸ in such a way that an approach to forced mobility in colonial worlds cannot avoid the study of the displacements operated by other imperial powers. In addition, this interest should also highlight the significance of continuities, legacies, as well as ruptures, discontinuities, and consequences when these populations, initially dominated by other indigenous powers, come under the dependence of European powers, as in the Americas, Asia, or Africa.

AXIS 1: Imperial powers and forced mobility: control, repression, and circumvention

Contributions may focus on the imperial institutions whose mission is to organize and supervise these mobilities under constraints. From a theoretical point of view, these entities develop complex normative frameworks to enshrine these forced movements in law. They framed the daily lives of the dominated populations and made it possible to repress critical actions in the broad sense of the imperial presence overseas.²⁹

Following a conflict, sovereigns administratively organized the displacement of populations deemed dangerous to resettle them in imperial margins or in areas of control, as in the case of the resettlement of Thai elites by the Qianlong Emperor (1735-1796) in the eighteenth century.³⁰ For the French Empire, the generalization of the administrative and penal regime of the *Indigénat* from 1887³¹ onwards to almost all the colonies allowed for the house arrest or detention of subjects, as well as the imposition of forced labour on the “natives” (including requisition, service, annual colonial military recruitment, and penal labour).³² While forced displacement was a major repressive tool, it could also be used to reorganize empires. For instance, the population of Mazagão, which was displaced from Morocco to the Portuguese Amazon in 1769, was used to populate this space, which was still little anthropized.³³ We invite the contributors to examine the development processes of these devices, comparing them to their actual practice, at all scales.

Conversely, imperial institutions led to the displacement of populations to escape their yoke. These mobilities of resistance were carried out under constraint as their purpose was to flee or circumvent the colonial system. By fleeing their homes, the enslaved joined clandestine maroon societies in hard-to-reach regions.³⁴ Colonized populations sought to avoid taxes, censuses, and forced labor through their mobility.³⁵ Activists fled their region or went into the bush to avoid being arrested and imprisoned by the colonial authorities.³⁶ Thus, the institutions of imperial control are also *push factors* in mobility: it is a question of measuring the forms and modalities of resistance and circumvention of these institutions through the weapon of mobility.

AXIS 2: The materiality of mobilities under constraints: logistics, traces, and experiences

These policies of displacement and the resistance they induce can be questioned through the prism of their materiality as a lever in their own right for the construction of space and the colonial

²⁸ Marc Ferro, *Histoire des colonisations*, Paris, Seuil, 1996; Frédéric Cooper, Jane Burbank, *Empires, From Ancient China to the Present Day*, Paris, Payot, 2011.

²⁹ Romy Sánchez, “Expulser les étrangers d’outre-mer : le cas de Cuba, 1840-1880”, *Diasporas*, n° 33, 2019, pp. 105-115.

³⁰ Sirui Dao, “The Forced Resettlement of Tai People During the Reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1735–1796)”, *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 110, 2022, pp. 85–112.

³¹ Isabelle Merle, Adrian Muckle, *L’Indigénat. Genèses dans l’empire français. Pratiques en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2019.

³² Romain Tiquet, “Travail forcé (Afrique occidentale française, XX^e siècle)”, *Dictionnaire du fouet et de la fessée Corriger et punir*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2022, pp. 691-694.

³³ Laurent Vidal, *Mazagão. La ville qui traversa l’Atlantique du Maroc à l’Amazonie (1769-1783)*, Paris, Aubier, 2005.

³⁴ Aline Helg, *Plus jamais esclaves ! De l’insoumission à la révolte, le grand récit d’une émancipation (1492-1838)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2016.

³⁵ Abdou K. Tandjigora, “Fiscalité coloniale et souffrance sociale dans les territoires protégés de la colonie du Sénégal au lendemain de la Première Guerre mondiale”, in Frédéric Chauvaud (ed.) *Histoires de la souffrance sociale*, Rennes, PUR, 2007, pp. 213-226.

³⁶ Florian Bobin, “Omar Blondin Diop”, Maitron biographical notice, 2021.

imaginary. Returning to the materiality of displacement leads us to focus on the circuits, vectors, and logistics that enable individuals to be set in motion and retained.³⁷ However, we cannot overlook the material consequences of these travel policies on the territories, the displaced, the supervisors, and also on those who remain.

Starting from an analysis of the material conditions of displacement, the contributions will offer an opportunity to reinterpret the range of sources available to participants, incorporating the effects and consequences of displacement dynamics into their analysis. Thus, whether it is a question of mobilizing corpora of legislative, judicial and administrative archives (identity papers,³⁸ tax registers, censuses, etc.) or discursive archives (writings from the private forum, travel accounts, etc.),³⁹ economic (private accounts, inventories, etc.) or iconographic (engravings, maps, photographs⁴⁰, etc.), we invite the speakers to analyse the lived and affective experiences of displacement and highlight the physical and psychological experience of uprooting, violence and the resistance that accompanies it.

This attention to the experiences of individuals cannot be limited to displaced people alone; the colonized, colonists, their helpers, and witnesses can also be studied. This attention to the objects, traces, and vestiges of these displacements, as a support for memory or experience, thus gives us the opportunity to reflect on the formation and contestation of colonial orders.

AXIS 3: Social practices and experiences of constrained mobility: gender, family, and intimacy

This axis privileges a “bottom-up” approach, extending beyond narratives that focus solely on political structures to examine the concrete social practices and experiences of displaced populations. It focuses on the effects of constrained mobility on family relations, gender relations, and forms of sociability within imperial spaces.

Researchers are invited to examine the gendered dimensions of mobility under constraint.⁴¹ While historiography has often focused on adult men, particularly in military or colonial contexts, this conference aims to highlight other figures who are often invisible: the “relatives”, in particular women, children, and the elderly. It will also be necessary to consider the impact of displacement or, conversely, forced immobility on the reconfiguration of roles and norms within families and communities. Male mobility, such as that of infantrymen or workers, also had indirect effects on the domestic sphere, particularly the entry of women into the labour market and the contestation of conjugal norms.⁴²

The proposals may be based on a variety of cases, such as the wives of Senegalese infantrymen who followed the military column during its movements,⁴³ mixed-race children repatriated from Cambodia during the post-colonial period,⁴⁴ or the forced displacement of Korean “comfort women” in the Japanese empire,⁴⁵ or other situations where mobility allows for a better understanding of gender roles in travel management. The objective is to reconstruct the strategies of resistance or adaptation, as

³⁷ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

³⁸ Catherine Denys, “Écritures policières coloniales et circulations impériales : le bureau de police de Port-Louis à l’Isle de France (Maurice), 1766-1783”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2019/4, n° 66, pp. 32-52. Erick Noël, *Être noir en France au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Tallandier, 2006.

³⁹ Marcus Rediker, *À bord du négrier. Une histoire atlantique de la traite*, Paris, Seuil, 2013.

⁴⁰ Daniel Foliard, *Combattre, punir, photographier. Empires coloniaux, 1890-1914*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020.

⁴¹ Linda Guerry et al., “Femmes et genre en migration”, *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, n° 51, 2020, pp. 19-32.

⁴² Sarah J. Zimmerman, *Militarizing Marriage: West African Soldiers’ Conjugal Traditions in Modern French Empire*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2020.

⁴³ Camille Duparc, “Le genre à l’épreuve de l’empire et des armes: les femmes des tirailleurs sénégalais (1857-post-indépendances)”, *Revue Historique des Armées*, vol. 306, n°3, Service Historique de la Défense, 28 October 2022, pp. 9-19.

⁴⁴ Magali Bigaud, “« Rapatrié » les enfants métis du Cambodge : un élément de la relation postcoloniale franco-cambodgienne”, *Revue d’histoire de l’enfance « irrégulière »*, n° 22, 2020, pp. 67-83.

⁴⁵ Annie Jisun Bae, “De la responsabilité historique des États : le cas des « femmes de réconfort »”, *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, vol. 36, 2017, pp. 100-113.

well as the reconfigurations of the domestic and affective spheres in the face of the imbalances created by mobility.⁴⁶

HOW TO APPLY

This call for papers is open to all researchers, including both young researchers (PhD students and postdoctoral fellows) and tenured professors. Proposals for papers, consisting of a title, a 300-word abstract, and a short biographical note, are expected by **February 6, 2026, 12 p.m. (Paris time)** and are to be sent by email (groc2026mobilites@gmail.com) or deposited at the following address: <https://groc2026.sciencesconf.org>

CALENDAR

Application deadline: February 6, 2026
Notification of acceptance: April 6, 2026

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