

Responding to Empire

Fourth annual conference of the Research Group Empires (University of Freiburg)

Confirmed Keynote Speakers: Renate Dürr and Franco De Angelis
11 - 13 November 2026, Freiburg, Germany

Responding to empires can take different shapes and forms which are often contradictory — from defending and normalizing, through negating and ignoring, to opposing and resisting imperial structures. From all levels of society, and with different levels of agency, individuals, communities, and institutions were reacting to empires: rebels, maroon communities, settlers, diplomatic institutions, propagandists, translators, scientific societies or missionary orders, among many other examples. Furthermore, people were normalizing the empire even if they were not actively supporting it. With this conference, our interest does not lie simply on the binary opposers/defenders, but also on more paradoxical figures that navigate contradictory roles in ways that challenge simple categorizations.

In this conference, we want to explore responses both on the level of the material practices and epistemological positions, examining how these influence each other in (post)imperial contexts. With material practices we do not refer only to archaeological objects, but also tangible, everyday actions, behaviours and physical engagements that people undertake, which can include labour, trade, migration and rituals. Epistemological positions involve the production and disseminations of knowledge, ideas and discourses about empire, as for example scientific research, propaganda and fictional works.

Moreover, we are interested in considering how these responses sustain and subvert imperial systems within a temporal framework. Looking at time allows us to consider processes of change and continuity, understanding how responses—their causes and their effects—unfold over time. Presenters are invited to think about the temporal dimension of responses to empires such as the timing of (anti)imperial activities, long-term consequences of support and resistance, and practices of collective memory.

We aim to explore a wide spectrum of responses to empires, moving from the binary of supporters and opposers, through shifting allegiances and unresolved positions, to more nuanced and often contradictory stances. Hence, considering both material practices and epistemological positions, the goal of this conference is to create a multifaceted picture of how these responses shaped the empire through time.

Potential topics may include, but are not limited to:

- degrees and shades of responses to empires;
- the role of agency on the individual level as well as on the organizational level;
- rebellions, revolutions and non-violent forms of resistance;
- practices of normalization and negation of imperial systems;
- passivity, support and shifting allegiances;
- paradoxical/ambivalent figures;
- material practices: creation and use of objects, movements, performances;
- epistemological positions: narratives of empire, forms of knowledge production, the role of ideology and story-telling;
- temporalities of response, long term effects and memory construction.

We welcome contributions from the humanities and social sciences, including but not limited to history, sociology and literary studies, aiming at a broad historical coverage (from antiquity to the present) and interdisciplinarity. We especially encourage scholars in the early stages of their career (doctoral and postdoctoral researchers) to submit proposals. Application should include a **working title**, an **abstract of 300 to 400 words**, and a **short biographical note** to conference@grk2571.uni-freiburg.de by **March 13, 2026**. Any further questions or queries can be directed to the same address.

The accommodation in Freiburg will be covered by the conference organizers. We will strive to allocate travel bursaries, prioritizing participants from outside Germany/Europe.

Presenters will be asked to provide a first draft of their paper at least two weeks prior to the conference. After the conference, we intend to publish selected papers in an edited volume. The conference is the fourth of a series of annual conferences organized by the Research Training Group 2571 “Empires: Dynamic Transformation, Temporality and Postimperial Orders,” funded by the German Research Foundation (University of Freiburg, Germany). More

information on the conference can be found at: <https://uni-freiburg.de/empires/annual-conference-2026/> or you can use the QR code:

