

Drink and Power. Alcohol and the Making of Illiberal Regimes in the Long 20th Century

Veranstalter: Sina Fabian, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; Botakoz Kassymbekova, Forum Transregionale Studien/Technische Universität Berlin

Datum, Ort: 15.03.2019–16.03.2019, Berlin

Bericht von: Charlotte Großmann, Historisches Seminar, Universität Freiburg

The international workshop, taking place at the „Forum für Transregionale Studien“, aimed at gaining a better understanding of how leaders and people in autocratic, authoritarian, dictatorial, and colonial regimes in different regions of the world dealt with issues of the consumption and production of alcohol during the *long* 20th Century. The event was conceptualized as a workshop instead of a conference in order to create a space to experiment and discuss, rather than to mainly present papers. While much has been written about the role of alcohol in modern Western democracies, little is known about how alcohol was discussed, managed, promoted, and appropriated under illiberal regimes. The workshop therefore explored whether these political regimes also produced particular drinking policies and practices.

The workshop set out with HASSO SPODE's (Berlin) introductory remarks on the developments in historical alcohol research. While pointing out the major results historical alcohol research has shown so far, Spode also emphasized its shortcomings, such as the lack of transnational and comparative approaches in the field. He advised to question the actual enforcement and control of specific alcohol policies and emphasised to never underestimate the force of people's self-willed behaviour („Eigensinn“).

GUNTIS VAVARIS (Riga) opened the first panel on temperance movements with his paper on temperance town planning in Riga as a backlash to Imperial Russia's liberal alcohol policy in the early 20th century. His study focused on the entrepreneur August Dombrovski and the social worker Marta Rinka, who were prominent figures of the temperance project in the working class suburb *Milgrāvis*. Dem-

brovski's efforts, so Vavaris showed, manifested in an abstinence community centre, which was destroyed by a Russian punitive expedition in 1905. Yet, after rebuilding the centre, the project became a major factor in the search of Riga's working class for a new identity and had a long-lasting impact on the community.

SABINE SCHALLER (Magdeburg) focused on the work of temperance-volunteer-clubs in Prussian Magdeburg before and after the Nazi takeover in 1933. The regime, so Schaller showed, drastically reduced the number of active clubs and constrained the working-facilities of the remaining ones. Some clubs could keep their offices and structure, while others were incorporated into the Nazi-structures or shut down completely, depending on the political compatibility with the Nazi regime. Instead of opposing the state's promotion of German wine, Schaller showed, the remaining clubs suggested the promotion of non-alcoholic fruit juices made from grapes. In other areas, the state's propaganda overlapped with the volunteers' agenda. These discoveries showed both just how ambivalent approaches towards the question of alcohol were during the Nazi-era, and how the spaces for non-state actors were shaped under an authoritarian regime.

ELIFE BIÇER-DEVECİ (Oxford) presented a paper on alcohol control in Turkey and the role of the temperance movement *Yesilay*. Founded in 1920, the movement developed into a non-state actor and mobilized a wide range of prominent figures to support the state's prohibition from 1920 to 1926. Though international developments such as the American prohibition were important inspirations, Biçer-Deveci also pointed out the driving force both of an anti-Western sentiment and of an anti-alcoholic interpretation of the Quran within the movement. Furthermore, she argued that Yesilay's involvement and the network it built around itself had a long-lasting impact on Turkish society that can still be observed in the anti-alcohol policies under Erdogan's regime since 2012. Just like Vavaris and Schaller, Biçer-Deveci also emphasised political flexibility as a key element of the success and the time-specific compatibility of temperance movements.

The second panel explored the role of alcohol in the Soviet state. The opening presentation by PAVEL VASILYEV (Jerusalem) dealt with prohibition and legalisation of alcohol and drug use during the early Soviet years. While there was continuity from the Imperial to the Soviet policies on alcohol and drugs, so Vasilyev argued, the intent behind the policy changed: Whereas the early policy was inextricably tied to the war situation, it was later transformed into an ideological agenda, which was yet later again revoked due to pragmatic reasons. Vasilyev stressed that both Imperial Russia and the Soviet regime were illiberal regimes – but in very different ways: While the Soviet state promoted a more blatant form of biopolitics and community-building through its alcohol policies, its predecessor showed a more liberal approach and only promoted prohibition because of World War I. He also raised the question of whether so-called liberal regimes may have a more illiberal attitude towards alcohol-use amongst their subjects.

BOTAKOZ KASSYMBEKOVA (Berlin) presented a paper on the role of alcohol and Islam in the Soviet periphery of Tajikistan. Showcasing reports of Soviet officials who hosted excessive orgies and feasts in the periphery, Kassymbekova questioned the role of collective feeding and drinking alcohol in governance practises. To do so, she compared the feasts in Tajikistan to those Stalin held at the Kremlin in Moscow and put them into a line of continuity of the long-standing Russian tradition of giving food and drink to loyal favourites as a representation of power. In the panel discussion, the connection of governance, the use of alcohol as a representation of power and masculinity was brought up and fruitfully discussed. Particular interest was aroused by the question of the function of collective consumption of alcohol within publicly pronounced collective oaths of „being ready to die for the regime“.

The third panel on alcohol in the fascist state was opened by KATE FERRIS (St. Andrews), who spoke about the role of women in the so-called „battle for wine“ in early fascist Italy. Non-state actors, the temperance movement, as well as the alcohol industry, so Ferris showed, vied with each other for Mussolini's

support, all of them conceiving of women as an important factor in this fight. While the temperance movement used the image of the skinny, unwomanly, drinking, urban „women of crisis“ („donna-crisi“) as a spectre of modern and indecent life, the alcohol industry claimed that wine and beer were healthy traditional Italian drinks since antiquity. In this rivalry, the alcohol-lobby succeeded, making the image of the modern woman enjoying a healthy drink an integral part of the fascist iconography. Interestingly, Ferris pointed out, both groups claimed their arguments to be of Italian origin while using international and transnational discourse elements.

SINA FABIAN (Berlin) explored alcohol celebrations („Weinfeste“) and their use in the creation of „Volksgemeinschaft“ during the Nazi-rule. Fabian stressed the ambivalent attitude of the Nazi-regime towards alcohol: The regime regarded alcoholics as „asocial“ and often sterilized them; at the same time, it heavily promoted moderate wine drinking. Fabian argued that by promoting the „Weinfeste“ all over the Reich, the regime could accomplish several goals: Firstly, they could strengthen the economically underdeveloped but wine-producing Mosel-region; secondly, the bond between rural and urban population that they welcomed for ideological reasons could be strengthened; thirdly, the luxurious connotation of wine could be removed by adding a national twist to the drink; and finally, the wine festivals gave an opportunity to put the concept of „Volksgemeinschaft“ into practise with urban and rural people from all classes getting drunk and experiencing community together. Both Ferris's and Fabian's papers showed the economic importance of the local alcohol industry for the fascist regimes and the use of old traditions and new elements to create a coherent narrative for promoting alcohol.

The fourth panel, focusing on alcohol and war, was opened by PETER STEINKAMP (Ulm), who analysed the consumption of alcohol and the reprimands of excessive alcohol use in the German Wehrmacht during World War II. Like Fabian, Steinkamp stressed the role of alcohol as a social lubricant within the military forces: While it helped to create comradeship on the one hand, it also enabled the

soldiers to compensate trauma from physical overexertion and combat experiences on the other. Excessive behaviour, so Steinkamp showed, could be heavily punished by transfer to punitive units who had to carry out especially dangerous tasks. Another form of reprimand were enforced stays at mental institutions. Steinkamp stressed the importance of self-control for soldiers, whereas officers were often given more leeway.

KATARZYNA CWIERTKA (Leiden) gave a panoramic view of her vast visual and textual sources on alcohol-consumption in the Asia-Pacific-War. She showed how beer became the most popular drink around the Pacific, how the Japanese and the US-American forces dealt with alcohol consumption within the troops and how they each tried to ensure the constant supply of alcohol and other goods. Building on this, she then raised the question of the differences in alcohol-policies in different political systems: While the Japanese army had no restrictions, the US-American army restricted alcohol in various kinds of ways. Cwiertka's sources showed that public opinion played a major role in the US-American discussions about alcohol-use in the armed forces, while this kind of forum was not available in Japanese society. Concludingly, the presentation emphasised aspects that were earlier brought up in connection to Kassymbekova's paper, concerning the surprising difference of the spaces authoritarian regimes provided in the realm of alcohol consumption on the one hand, and the much tighter grip on alcohol-control in so-called „liberal“ societies on the other.

DIMITRI VAN DEN BERSSELAAR (Leipzig) opened the panel on alcohol and colonial rule with some introductory remarks on the situation in colonial Africa. He argued that the notion that alcohol was only introduced to African cultures by the European colonial rulers is a modern misconception. Furthermore, van den Bersselaar stressed that in both the prohibition and the promotion of alcohol, local elites played a major role apart from the colonial regimes.

DARINEE ALAGIRISAMY (Hong Kong) presented a paper on prohibition policies in late colonial India. She showed that one of the first laws Gandhi and the National Congress

passed in 1937 after gaining power in several provinces was the prohibition of alcohol as a symbol of power in the struggle with colonial rule. Alagirisamy showed that the Christian minority perceived the prohibition to be an infringement on their right to freedom of religious worship, as Christians need wine for the Eucharist. They also felt that the new legislation was against the state's commitment to religious non-interference and saw it as a reprimand for their cultural proximity to the colonial rulers. Alagirisamy argued that alcohol in this context became a highly symbolically charged topic in the struggles between the Indian independence movement, the Christian minority, the fight for civil rights and the struggle for a new national identity.

The last panel centred around the question of alcohol as a symbol of the „capitalist evil“. MARKUS WAHL (Stuttgart) showed how in the case of the early German Democratic Republic, the regime wanted to erase alcohol from society for ideological reasons – but failed in doing so. The regime associated alcohol consumption with various forms of deviant behaviour connected to capitalism, such as prostitution and crime. However, drinking alcohol was deeply rooted in people's lifestyle and hence was difficult to demonize. Furthermore, the planned economy showed major difficulties to produce acceptable and sufficient non-alcoholic alternatives and the state heavily depended on the tax revenue from alcohol. After the uprising in 1953, the state was also scared of enforcing prohibition due to further anticipated uproars.

SIMON YIN's (Hefei) paper showed a different aspect of controlling alcohol in a communist society by focussing on Xi Jinping's alcohol ban and his anti-corruption campaign. In China, so Yin showed, certain valuable liquors are used as a currency in exchange for certain favours. In order to fight corruption, Xi therefore banned alcohol consumption for all higher government officials. Yin pointed out that by enforcing this legislation, Xi showed the exceptional stronghold he acquired in the party. Xi's policy here seems to follow the reverse logic of the traditional system of giving out alcohol and food to loyal servants, as presented by Kassymbekova. Interestingly, both the serving and

the prohibition of alcohol can be perceived as instruments of control of social behaviour and hence, representing the ruler's power over the subjects.

This notion of the inherent connection of alcohol and power in its various forms came up in all presentations. Whether alcohol was used as a social lubricant, an economic pillar, a visualisation to express power, hierarchy or loyalty („Gefolgschaft“), or whether its prohibition was a way of disciplining or „improving“ a society: Most illiberal regimes produced particular policies and attitudes towards alcohol to promote their political agendas.

Conference overview:

Salutatory Address: Sina Fabian (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) & Botakoz Kassymbekova (Forum Transregionale Studien/Technische Universität Berlin)

Hasso Spode (Technische Universität Berlin): Historical Alcohol Research – Introductory Remarks

1. Panel: Temperance Movements and Illiberal Regimes

Chair: Hasso Spode (Technische Universität Berlin)

Guntis Vaveris (University of Latvia): Temperance Town Planning in Riga as a Backlash to Russia's Alcohol Policy. Case Study of the Suburb of Mīlgrāvis (1900–1914)

Sabine Schaller (Magdeburg Municipal Archive): Volunteering to Curb Alcoholism. Changes and Challenges for Anti-Alcohol Clubs in Prussian Magdeburg with the National Socialists Coming to Power in 1933

Elife Biçer-Deveci (Oxford University): Debates on Alcohol and the Ban of Alcohol in Iran and Turkey in the 20th Century

2. Panel: Alcohol and the Soviet State

Chair: Sina Fabian (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Pavel Vasilyev (Van Leer Jerusalem Institute): From Prohibition to Legalization – And the Other Way Around. A Comparative Study of Russian Alcohol and Drug Policy, 1914-1929

Botakoz Kassymbekova (Technische Univer-

sität Berlin): Islam, Alcohol and the Soviet State

3. Panel: Alcohol and Fascism

Chair: Michael Wildt (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Kate Ferris, (University of St Andrews), The Natural Ally of the Campaign Against Alcohol? Italian Women and Alcohol Consumption in Fascist Italy

Sina Fabian (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin): Alcohol, Celebration, and „Volksgemeinschaft“

4. Panel: Alcohol and War

Chair: Botakoz Kassymbekova (Forum Transregionale Studien/Technische Universität Berlin)

Peter Steinkamp (Ulm University): German Soldiers during WWII

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (Leiden University): Alcohol and the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945)

5. Panel: Alcohol and Colonial Regimes

Chair: Dmitri van den Bersselaar (Leipzig University)

Dmitri van den Bersselaar (Leipzig University), Alcohol and Colonial Rule in Africa – Introductory Remarks

Darinee Alagirisamy (University of Hong Kong), Church before Nation. South Indian Catholics and Prohibition Policy in Late Colonial India

6. Panel: Alcohol as „Capitalist Evil“

Chair: Mathias Grote (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Markus Wahl (Institute for the History of Medicine, Stuttgart), Alcoholism and Socialism – Fighting the Remnant of Capitalism in the German Democratic Republic

Simon Yin (Hefei University), Alcohol Ban in Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign in China

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Drink and Power. Alcohol and the Making of Illiberal Regimes in the Long 20th Century*. 15.03.2019–16.03.2019, Berlin, in: H-Soz-Kult 04.06.2019.