

Obsolete. Resilient. Resurgent. The Nation-State in a Globalized World

Veranstalter: CITAS - Center for International and Transnational Area Studies at the University of Regensburg; IOS - the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg University; with support from Hans Vielberth Foundation

Datum, Ort: 02.05.2019–04.05.2019, Regensburg

Bericht von: Lena Gotteswinter, American Studies, Universität Regensburg; Jelena Schryro, Institut für Romanistik, Universität Regensburg

This conference was the first organized by the University of Regensburg's Center for International and Transnational Area Studies, established in 2017. The two-day event reflected the Center's emphasis on exploring transnational phenomena within the multi- and interdisciplinary framework of area studies, with the University's President Udo Hebel outlining this objective in his welcoming address. The conference was guided by the hypothesis that the popularly assumed belief in the obsolescence of the nation-state as the scope of globalization expanded has left a gap in knowledge, making it difficult to understand the current resurgence of nationalist and isolationist thinking as a response to experiences of globality. Hence the focus on exploring the entanglements of the nation-state and globalization historically and in the present in the fields of international relations and international law, economics, migration studies, media studies and cultural studies, and in relation to multiple world regions.

The opening keynote lecture by MATTHIAS MIDDELL (Leipzig) outlined the cyclical nature of developments in conceptual frameworks for examining the spatialization of the world. Currently, he argued, a re-nationalizing approach is making one of its period returns, producing frictions and entanglements with globalization frameworks. Migratory movements are one example of how respatialization of the world emerges from a combination of individual agency and structures rooted in the authority of nation-states and international organizations

who can still determine which „spatial formats“ are feasible in a given spatial order. Traditionally hierarchical spatial formats of empire and „nationalized postcolonies“ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or Cold War blocs, exist alongside new spatial formats characterized by global flows of technology, transport and movement. However, the key for Middell was to avoid celebrating these flows and instead explore the struggles over controlling them taking place on various scales.

The second keynote lecture by JOHANNA BOCKMAN (Virginia) addressed the economic dimensions of globalization and the global dissemination of neoliberalism. She considered the significant role of both nation-states and seemingly peripheral regions in this process. Drawing on case studies of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the positions adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement in its discussions, Bockman argued that the late twentieth-century expansion of capitalist globalization was shaped by colonizing attitudes towards decolonizing nations and then post-socialist states. This was because it overlooked existing efforts among „decolonizing nationalists [...] to create a truly global economy“ as Western institutions sought to impose specific forms of globalization on what were known as Second and Third World countries, severing the networks formed in alternative modes of globalization.

The two keynote lectures' emphasis on the multiplicity of forms and formats of globality resounded throughout the conference panels. The theme of controlling and negotiating flows, whether of people, ideas or capital, in interactions between international and state-sanctioned structures, on the one hand, and individual or group actions, on the other, provided common ground for discussions involving representatives of a range of disciplines working on different areas and periods.

The second day of the conference started with a roundtable discussion exploring the frictions affecting the established international political order. For JACKSON JANES (Washington DC) the current situation of „America First“ and a pivot towards unilateralism, while disturbing, is nothing new. It

does mark a shift from the achievements of US institutional empire building, as manifested in the IMF and World Bank among others, and a commitment to interdependence, with American sovereignty taking precedence in the US relations with the world. STEFAN FRÖHLICH (Erlangen-Nürnberg) also considered what was behind the fragmentation of seemingly established bonds of transatlantic relations. He challenged conceptions that global governance and national sovereignty constitute opposites. As Janes also argued, it was common to say globalization was in the national interest, while now only the EU seems to remain committed to liberal internationalism. Russia is one state where the liberal order has been queried, as CINDY WITTKÉ (Regensburg) critically reflected in her contribution on international law. She noted the question marks over the extent to which its terminology, actors and structures were truly international owing to the asymmetry of both access to the forums of international law and implementation of its sanctions. However, she also noted that seemingly localized issues, such as the Ukraine crisis, could give rise to discussions over gaps in the universal claims of international law. Her comments inspired contributions from the floor that suggested that Europe would need to unite further to stave off Russian and US challenges, although others suggested that Europe was already too internally divided to achieve this.

The lively discussion of apparent crises of the international political order was followed by an assessment of the state of the economic order. ANDRÁS INOTAI (Budapest) weighed up the opportunities and difficulties posed by globalization in recent decades while considering the consequences of „Industrialization 4.0“ in the form of the digital transformation. He stressed the entanglements of the global economy and trade with national and regional objectives, such as China’s efforts to develop a multipolar world. JÜRGEN JERGER (Regensburg) also outlined the multiplicity of conceptions of world trade today. He challenged perceptions that globalization is an inevitability or natural law by arguing that existing state-level and institutional structures can still shape its dynamics and flows, although this will always have impacts

elsewhere. WELF WERNER (Heidelberg) focused on the economic factors that are entangled with rising anti-globalism in the US. He argued that Trump was not a pure protectionist, but could project this impression and thus channel the frustrations stemming from low incomes despite economic growth and certain failings of the education system. The subsequent discussion concentrated mainly on the potential resilience of globalization in the form of multilateral cooperation between nation states that could survive populist simplifications of globalization’s costs and benefits.

The third session emphasized connections between communication, technology and globalization, enquiring into the significance of national frameworks of media and journalism as the online domain becomes the main location of media production and consumption. ANTJE GLÜCK (Teesside) argued that while media technologies are common across the globe, most media content and its reception are shaped significantly by local conditions, as her comparative study of the Indian and British cases illustrated. However, she argued, journalism and the discipline of media studies both require decolonization, as the dominant actors in global news continue to produce a pronounced „disequilibrium in attention“. Echoing Glück’s view that the availability of globalized technology and access to media content is dependent on localized conditions, CHRISTIANE HEIBACH (Regensburg) widened the scope of area studies to the realm of cyberspace. Using the example of the lifecycles of devices that ultimately produce e-waste, she considered how the new spatializations triggered by the globalization of technology also touch countries where access to this technology can be more limited. She contrasted the ethereality of cyberspace with the material and environmental impact of the exploitation of resources, largely in the postcolonial Global South. She thus raised ethical questions of the materiality of globalization and its often localized impact on relations between nation-states and citizens as shaped by the unequal access to resources. Following Heibach’s study on the political impact of producing media hardware, WULF KANSTEINER (Aarhus) focused on internet campaigning and self-presentation of German

political parties. Exploring their use of discourses of memory and identity in presenting their stances on migration, he found that regardless of the parties' position on a spectrum ranging from nationalist to empathetic cosmopolitan, they ultimately overlooked Germany's own history of migration. This suggested that whatever success Germany may have enjoyed in communicating its own efforts to come to terms with certain aspects of the past, its memory culture is failing to inform contemporary debates, with right-wing populists proving to be the most affective and thus effective communicators online. The three contributions to this panel addressed the challenge of how to address the multiple scales of globality, where large-scale infrastructures and widespread formats intersect with localized practices and individual responses.

The migration theme explored by Kansteiner flowed into the fourth panel. JANNIS PANAGIOTIDIS (Osnabrück) contemplated the ongoing relevance of borders and their transgression. He found that the supposedly global framework of human rights is employed selectively to regulate migration. The liberal paradox where the free circulation of goods and capital but not people persists demonstrates that nation-states remain crucial actors in globality as they seek to control flows. He thus echoed both keynotes' arguments on the salience of the nation-state, as well as the debate on the asymmetrical distribution of the benefits of globalization. HEIKE RAPHAEL-HERNANDEZ (Würzburg) picked up on Panagiotidis's observations about crossing borders by offering insight into the significance of African diasporic art about Mediterranean crossings. She drew an analogy with Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic* and his emphasis on the visual image of the ship as the icon of the history of slavery. The selected examples from the art world highlight states' ongoing colonizing power to classify migrants. Similarly to Kansteiner, she found that the motif of the ship was commonplace in representations of migrant and refugee experiences. Western societies more broadly experience „colonial amnesia“ and fail to link it to the broader

colonial history.

The concept of cosmopolitanism and the struggle to develop an effective cosmopolitan consciousness emerged regularly throughout the conference as a framework for discussing experiences of globality. It was also central to the concluding roundtable discussion that focused on the scales of area studies research. VOLKER DEPKAT (Regensburg) discussed the tensions between the concepts of nation and nation-state in the context of the US. American studies research adopting the perspective of critical regionalism highlights the significant variety of spatial formats imagined independently of a state that is officially a union of smaller, diverse States. Their individual histories produced diverse entanglements with both neighbors and the global networks of slavery, for example, that continue to impact how „national“ history is imagined. Depkat recommended a „situational“ or located perspective as one way of challenged exceptionalist narratives. FERNANDO VALLESPÍN (Madrid) examined the successful harnessing of emotions by populists of a nationalist bent, arguing that the cosmopolitan European project might be more appealing if it, too, was more emotionally engaging. This, though, would involve entering the contested and manipulative terrain of cyberspace and social media with effective storytelling techniques. DIRK WIE-MANN (Potsdam) offered a concrete example of this, commenting on the Chaucer-inspired Refugee Tales project in the UK. Likewise positioning his contribution at the intersection of national and cosmopolitan discourses, he argued that in an age of Angloglobalism, national identities could be queried. Literature by migrants, with its significant attention to transnational aspects alongside alternative perspectives on local spaces, could provide one way of opening up debate on established and resurgent national narratives. The discussion emerging from this panel highlighted a broader theme running through the conference, namely that if globalization has revealed knowledge of other spaces this has not necessarily run in parallel with a cosmopolitan openness to the people there nor to an equal distribution of access to the possibilities globalization has opened up. This also poses

an epistemic and methodological challenge for area studies, which could benefit from a multi-perspective and comparative transregional approach.

Early-career scholars will take on the mantle of this challenge. The panel of „turbo talks“ given by doctoral researchers was indicative of the commitment to supporting young scholars in Regensburg. The convivial atmosphere of the presentations continued in informal discussions in small groups. EVGENIYA BAKLAOVA (Regensburg) presented an aspect of her ongoing research, highlighting the theoretical limitations of constructivist normative approaches to international relation. Exploring Russia’s dual role as „norm-taker“ and „norm-maker“, the political practices and discourses relating to international law there reveal the gap between Russia’s commitment and compliance, which is difficult to regulate within international frameworks. VERENA BAIER (Regensburg) presented her research project on life-writings of US-Americans who went to Nicaragua during the Solidarity Movement. She investigated the socio-political aspects of how the American self was constructed in relation to the Nicaraguan significant other. Ultimately, this space could be filled with any content desired in American projections onto it. Meanwhile, PETER WEGENSCHIMMEL (Regensburg) illustrated trans-European Cold War entanglements and their legacies as he explored the transnational aspects, transformation, state controls and participants affecting the shipyards of Croatia and Poland.

Overall, the papers and discussions at the conference made clear that the ideological and structural salience of the nation-state has retained or even gained impetus in the context of globality. This also applies to new technology and media in terms of both their material production and content. As the discussions over cosmopolitanism made clear, the experience of globalization and its political, economic and cultural mechanisms can disrupt the sense of an organic connection between nation and individual, with this imaginary construct not necessarily being rendered obsolete but experiencing a revival. The history and legacies of colonialism provide one site where the failings of both national and

cosmopolitan narratives emerge. The conference encouraged area studies to adopt multiple perspectives, so perhaps a postcolonial perspective could be fruitful, especially in relation to migration. As several contributors made clear, it is necessary to consider more closely the mechanisms of power influencing the issue: who speaks, and who is silenced?

The hypothesis guiding the conference was that the nation-state has been and remains an actor in the processes of globalization and experiences of globality. However, it is clearly one actor on many scales influencing transnational and transregional flows of capital, ideas and people – and vice versa. The project of multi-perspective and multi-scale area studies proposed here can be a step towards avoiding both methodological nationalism and remaining blind towards the state, while acknowledging the roles of seemingly peripheral actors and agents in the transformations of globalization.

Conference overview:

Keynote Lecture

Matthias Middell (Universität Leipzig): Nation-States and Modern Globalization

Session 1: Roundtable Discussion – The International Political Order in Crisis: Global Governance vs. National Sovereignty?

Jackson Janes (American Institute for contemporary German studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC): Back to the Future: From Positive to Zero Sum Thinking about the World

Stefan Fröhlich (FAU, Erlangen-Nürnberg): Seeking Strategic Autonomy: How Europe can Cope with Transatlantic Fragmentations

Cindy Wittke (IOS – Leibniz-Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg): „Is International Law International?“ Reflections on the Politics of International Law in the Post-Soviet Space

Session 2: Panel – The International Economic Order in Crisis: Anti-Globalism in a Globalized World?

András Inotai (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest): The Costs and Benefits of Globalization: A Decade of Experience and

Unchartered Waters Ahead

Jürgen Jerger (Universität Regensburg): On the Motives for and Rationality of Anti-Globalist Policies

Welf Werner (Heidelberg Center for American Studies, Universität Heidelberg): Three Ingredients for Anti-Globalism in the United States: Hegemonic Decline, Technological Progress, Domestic Policy Failure

Session 3: Panel – Communication and Technology: Global Structures, National Discourses?

Antje Glück (Teesside University): One Size Does Not Fit All. What Decolonization Could Contribute Towards More Equal Flows of Global News and to Media Studies

Christiane Heibach (Universität Regensburg): The Global Needs the Local: Digital Infrastructures and National Resources

Wulf Kansteiner (Aarhus University): The Cosmopolitan Dilemma: Media, Migration, and National Memory

Turbo Talks: Doctoral and Postdoctoral researchers' project presentations

Evgeniya Baklaova (IOS – Leibniz-Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg): Russia's Normative Alternative? The Internalization of Norms of Civil and Political Rights and the Dynamics of Contestation

Verena Baier (Universität Regensburg): „The America That I Identify with“: Remembering Utopia in Life Writings of the US-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement and Contra War, 1979-1991

Peter Wegenschimmel (IOS – Leibniz-Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg): The Visible Hand in the Shipyards and the Preservation of the Unprofitable

Keynote Lecture

Johanna Bockman (George Mason University, Virginia): How the Global Became National after 1989: Economic Thinking at Non-Aligned Banks

Session 4: Panel – Remaking Nations and Regions: Citizenship, Borders and Migration

Jannis Panagiotidis (Universität Osnabrück): Unmaking Borders: Liberal Global Orders and Freedom of Movement

Heike Raphael-Hernandez (Universität Würzburg): Visualizing Protest: African (Diasporic) Art and Contemporary Mediterranean Crossings

Session 5: Roundtable Discussion – Beyond the Nation: From Localism to Cosmopolitanism

Volker Depkat (Universität Regensburg): Critical Regionalism and Transnational American Studies

Fernando Vallespín (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid): National Identity vs. Cosmopolitanism: Emotions vs. Reason?

Dirk Wiemann (Universität Potsdam): Objectively Obsolete and Yet Rapidly Resurgent: National Literature in the Age of Angloglobalism

Tagungsbericht *Obsolete. Resilient. Resurgent. The Nation-State in a Globalized World*. 02.05.2019–04.05.2019, Regensburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 02.10.2019.