Global institutions and the East-South circulation of knowledge

Date: 1 September 2017, 04:00-06:30

Venue: Corvinus University, Fovam ter 8, room 309 Abstract

The panel explores the role of international institutions and expert communities in the generation, exchange, and circulation of ideas among East European and Southern societies. By the end of the fifties, socialist states began to play an increasingly active role within the UN-system and in other world-forums. As decolonization gained steam, the Global South became highly influential within the same milieu. New independent states often triggered near-revolutionary reconsiderations of international agendas preparing the ground for post-imperial alignments. They brought about a “diplomatic revolution,” to use Michael Connelly’s phrase, which advanced issues often escaping Cold War segregation such as: population growth, environmental scarcities, supranational institutions, new media forms, and economic and racial inequalities, global health, etc.

The East and the South found common ground in challenging established global hierarchies. Simultaneously, communist parties of the Soviet bloc made great efforts to harmonize their voices in these organizations by way of bilateral and all-party summits. USSR’s hegemonic presence would often have a contradictory impact on the dialogue between the East and the South. The radical rupture promised by socialism was subverted by the spectre of a new neo-colonialism from the left. Nevertheless, such novel juxtapositions impose the re-historicization of the geographical scope of European state socialisms in the postwar period.

East European experts in international contexts often put forward arguments that represented national political and cultural concerns. Particularly, they translated the lessons of the international exchanges onto their own respective domestic vocabularies. These distinct local voices were largely shaped by the encounter with representatives of the postcolonial states. Such encounters expanded and legitimized the paradigm supply employed in Eastern Europe in order to define cardinal concepts such as revolution, development, violence, or history.

The papers in the panel will analyze several types of expert communities in order to clarify the role of the interplay between national, regional, and international environments in the East-South circulation of specialized knowledge. They aim to de-center established bipolar readings of postwar interaction that overemphasize the Soviet Union-United States antagonism or the ideological divide of capitalism vs. communism. The session will focus on expert interactions periphery-to-periphery and how the global projection of state socialisms in international organizations affected crucial facets of their self-definition at home. Last but not least, we wish to explore the possibility of postulating a reading of globalization centered on the East-South synchronizations on world issues that was alternative to the Western-centric one.

Convenor

**Peter Apor** (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Chair

**Tamas Kende** (independent scholar)

Commentator

**Steffi Marung** (Leipzig University)
Panelists

Ana Antic (University of Exeter)
Peter Apor (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)
Corina Dobos (New Europe College Bucharest)
Bogdan C. Iacob (New Europe College Bucharest)

Papers

Ana Antic: Imagining Africa in Eastern Europe: Transcultural psychiatry and global anthropological research in early Cold War Yugoslavia

After the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, when Yugoslavia exited the Soviet-dominated bloc and worked on strengthening its relations with both the West and the non-aligned movement, Yugoslav psychiatrists positioned themselves at the centre of a dynamic and ever-shifting world. They embarked on lengthy educational and advisory trips to the non-aligned world, which allowed them to conduct sociological, medical, psychiatric and anthropological research in the non-Western territories.

The talk explores the role of socialist/ Marxist psychiatry for the development of transcultural psychiatric research. It argues that Yugoslav psychiatrists were uniquely well positioned to establish links and communication models between Western, Eastern and (global) Southern epistemological systems and networks. By looking at Vladimir Jakovljevic - a Marxist psychiatrist educated in France and interested in French and British psychoanalysis and psychotherapy who worked in French Guinea in the early 1960s - the talk examines the in-between position inhabited by such researchers and clinicians, and analyses how political, ideological and geographical-cultural displacement moulded their interventions in transcultural psychiatry.

One of the consequences of Jakovljevic's socialist background was his complicated and constantly changing relationship to Guinea: he was a white European researcher but was emphatically not Western in a crucial political/ideological sense, and travelled to Guinea as representative of a state which consciously strove to offer a Communist alternative to the Western colonial project. For Jakovljevic, discussing Africa and the developing world thus always meant discussing East European developmental concerns: similarities and comparisons abounded, and it remained unclear whether Yugoslavia belonged more squarely to the African or to the West European cultural-psychiatric sphere. The quest for the global always brought Jakovljevic and his colleagues back to local concerns, which limited their horizons. The perceived comparability of Eastern Europe with the decolonising world exposed the tensions inherent in East European psychiatrists’ ‘civilising mission’ towards their own domestic populations.

Peter Apor: Shaping ideas of revolution, peace, and violence in a global context: Hungary in international organizations, 1955-1989

From the late 1950s onwards, Eastern Europe, Hungary included, played an increasingly active role in international organizations such as the UNO (e.g., its special institutions - the UNCTAD, UNESCO) or the World Peace Council. Through these bodies, East Europeans contributed to shaping global concepts of development, revolution, or peace. Communist parties of the Soviet bloc made great efforts to harmonize their voices in these organizations by way of bilateral and all-party summits undoubtedly dominated by the CPSU. Nonetheless, East European party officials and the various experts they delegated to international organizations often put forward arguments that represented national political and cultural concerns. Such interactions only increased the complexity of the meanings of such crucial contemporary concepts as revolution, development or violence.

The paper will take Hungary as a case study of these broader questions. Based on archives of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the records of the international organizations concerned, the paper explores how Hungarian representatives formulated interpretations of the crucial concepts of contemporary socialism. The latter could reflect an allegedly common socialist position and simultaneously support the political identity of the Hungarian elite. For the Kadarist leadership, it was important to remain a reliable and loyal partner to the Soviet Union, while maintaining the idea that compromise-seeking reform socialism was a tenable model not only
for Eastern European national autonomies, but also, for a broader global socialist future.

The paper seeks to understand these questions by investigating how Hungarian officials appropriated Soviet positions. It explores the manner in which such interpretations impacted the formulation of Hungarian reports prepared for the international organizations. Furthermore, Hungary’s readings are situated in relation with the negotiations and discussions with Global South representatives. The paper will assess the influence that the multitude of co-determinations at the international level had on domestic debates about central concepts such as peace, violence, revolution or development.

**Corina Dobos:** Socialist experts and the population-development debate (1960S-1970S)

Most of the literature dedicated to the emergence of 'population' as an object of scientific research and governmental intervention in the 1960s-1970s focuses on the Global South's overpopulation and on the 'challenges' this process brought to the social and economic development of the region. This dominant narrative reflects the epistemological and historical conditions of the post-war institutionalization of demography.

Not much discursive space is left for alternative, regionally defined, population 'problems'. Europe's, both East and West, specific population issues (e.g., aging or decreasing birth-rates) are hardly addressed. By using Romanian and French archival sources and new readings of mostly French-based demographic literature, my presentation seeks to fill in this gap. It explores the socialist experts’ views on the population concerns and solutions discussed in Europe across the Iron Curtain.

The history of population sciences in Eastern Europe and the USSR is characterized by tumultuous political and social contexts determined by international debates and domestic circumstances. I argue that the development and institutionalization of population sciences in Eastern Europe were conditioned by the Cold-War along fairly similar lines as the situation in the USA (Sharpeless, Greenlagh). They were also conditioned the social-economic plans at home (massive urbanization, industrialization, expanding needs of the labor force, fall of the birth-rates, increased life-expectancy and ageing population, or massive female employment).

I explore the opinions they expressed during several East-European, continental and World- meetings on the demographic challenges brought by population-ageing, use of modern contraception, availability of abortion, women’s participation on the labor market. I wish to explore whether a coherent ‘socialist’ perspective came about on the relationship between population dynamics and economic-social development. I examine these experts’ convergence or divergence of opinions during regional versus international meetings in relation with traditions and the mainstream within the global field of demography.

**Bogdan C. Iacob:** East and South, together but apart. Socialist historians and UNESCO’s "History of Humanity"

In the second of the fifties, socialist states found a new arena to showcase and perfect their identity narratives - the United Nations system. UNESCO, for instance, would often have for East Europeans the same role as it had for other so-called peripherals - the recently de-colonized societies. It was a platform for cultural emancipation. Peoples whose histories had often been doubted, marginalized, or ignored in Western centric frameworks would claim their place in a global exchange based on the alleged mutually beneficial interconnectedness of civilizations.

My paper will discuss this common ground between the socialist East and the post-colonial South in the context of

UNESCO-led efforts to design a new universal history. In 1978, UNESCO decided to draft a second edition of "History of Humanity. Scientific and Cultural Development", as the first (English title History of Mankind, published during the sixties) was deemed too Eurocentric and out-of-date in contrast with the rise of the Global South. I will examine various stages of the activity of the International Commission created for the new edition simultaneously with developments within the field of historical studies, as evidenced at the International Congresses in Bucharest (1980) and Stuttgart (1985). My aim is to flesh out different responses to the accelerated globalization of history-writing within UNESCO and the International Committee of Historical Sciences.

I am going to focus on East Europeans readings of specific issues such as imperialism, national originality, revolution, or development.
I wish to signal out moments of overlap or dissonance between state socialist scholars and representatives of the Global South on matters such as the critique of the West or the affirmation of national/regional identities. In parallel, I will analyze how the dialogue between the East and the South within international fora expanded and internationalized the former's conceptualizations about modernity.

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