



DFG-Vernetzungstreffen “Encountering the Global: Concepts and Practices”. Leipzig: GK 844 “World Society - Making and Representing the Global” (University of Bielefeld), GK 891 “Transnational Media Events from Early Modern Times to the Present” (Justus Liebig University Gießen), GK 1242 “Cultural Encounters and the Discourses, 30.05.2008-31.05.2008.

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## DFG-Vernetzungstreffen “Encountering the Global: Concepts and Practices”

Globalisation and transnational encounters currently constitute a vibrant field of research in Germany. To bring together some of the junior scholars working in the field, a DFG-Vernetzungstreffen entitled “Encountering the Global: Concepts and Practices” was held in Leipzig. Members of four research training groups (Graduiertenkollegs) and their boards were invited to present their analytic approaches and to discuss core concepts. The symposium was designed to start a continuous networking process involving a series of biannual meetings. As such, it gave overviews of each group’s conceptual focus and short insights into some exemplary research projects. The research training groups involved were:

GK 844 “World Society - Making and Representing the Global” (University of Bielefeld),

GK 891 “Transnational Media Events from Early Modern Times to the Present” (Justus Liebig University Gießen),

GK 1242 “Cultural Encounters and the Discourses of Scholarship” (University of Rostock).

GK 1261 “Critical Junctures of Globalisation” (University of Leipzig),

The Leipzig concept “critical junctures of globalisation” (Bruchzonen der Globalisierung) looks at the shaping of globalisation processes in decisive moments. It zooms in on particular arenas, on specific periods and spaces of crisis. It is within these “critical junctures”

that individual and group actors respond to changing external conditions, or use them as resources, and thereby shape the course of globalisation. The concept thus applies a gaze from particular crucial instances to the overall process of globalisation, which evolves out of these particularities. The Leipzig group has a regional focus, attempting to de-centre the investigation of globalisation from the West to some of the more peripheral world regions. However, critical junctures do not necessarily have to consist in physical spaces, such as cities, nation states or regions; they can also be metaphoric spaces, such as the internet or a theatre. In these, too, the meaning and production of globalisation can be negotiated. The research projects presented analyse the reterritorialisation of Australian refugee policies and the ensuing modes of sovereignty (Adèle Garnier); the divergence of decision space and identity space in political activities of exile Zimbabweans (Jenny Kuhlmann); and the discursive re-positioning of Japanese ceramics producers in a globalised context (Cornelia Reiher).

“World society” is the framework the Bielefeld group works with. World society consists in a worldwide social system that is divided into distinct functional spheres as produced by functional differentiation. These functional realms constitute worldwide social systems, the subsystems of world society, which operate according to different logics. One of the advantages of such a conceptualisation is the potential comparability of different spheres,

which makes for an analytical tool that may replace the comparison of territorial entities such as the nation state. The historical process of emergence of a world society can be termed globalisation. The Bielefeld approach is one that starts from an all-encompassing world society to explain specific events and developments within this larger framework. Research projects in the group thus either aim to refine the theory or to analyse specific functional subsystems of world society. Increasingly, the group is concerned with matters of interaction and organisational sociology, with negotiations as nodal points, and with the production and representation of globality. The projects presented are concerned with the visual representation of health knowledge and their global semantics (Berit Bethke); the emergence of medicine as a functional system in the terms of Luhmann (Tanja Stein); the different semantics of Christian and Islamic world maps and their claim to globality (Marcus Held).

The GieÄen research training group investigates transnational media events in a historical perspective. Media events consist of both an event and its representation in the media, which itself becomes an event. Media events are self-reflexive in that the media coverage itself becomes a coverage issue, and in that they are aware of their own historical relevance. Transnational media events produce global references and generate a global public sphere. They compress time and space and thus produce worldwide synchronisation. The GieÄen approach thereby focuses on processes that can be understood as components of globalisation, but does not investigate their totality. The group define transnationality as a cross-border experience; representation across long distances is a core aspect of the research projects. However, the group is critical of the term 'transnational' as it lays an unwanted emphasis on the nation; the concept as a whole can be seen as a form of writing a history of interaction. The projects presented examine transnationally distributed images of the Russo-Japanese war (Marco Gerbig-Fabel), the production of a German nationality at home and abroad via the Schillerfeiern of 1859 (Thorsten Gudewitz); and the different presentation of three European holocaust memorials in the media (Maike MÄ¼gge).

Culture contacts and scholarly discourses thereof are the Rostock group's objects of investigation. Research examines both original contacts and later interpretations of encounters in the scholarly literature. The group lays an emphasis on the historical and theoretical conditions of researching cultural contacts and aims to examine innovative approaches for describing cultural contacts. Influenced by the postcolonial turn, it scrutinises the binary

concepts of cultures long reiterated in the literature, and examines the role of cultural difference in a time of increasing interaction (which may be called globalisation). Objects of research include both peaceful and violent encounters between communities that, according to their self definition, differ culturally. As the GieÄen concept, then, the Rostock approach focuses on interactions and representations across long distances, but instead of using technology of information transmission as a starting point, it focuses on the scholarly retelling and interpretation of interactions. Research projects presented included the role which 18th century South Seas explorers played in the representation and popularisation of the Enlightenment (SÄ¼nne Juterczenka); a diachronic comparison of the interpretation of body signs in medieval Nibelungenlied and Parzival (Ronald Richardt); and the occidental perception of the first crusade as a cultural contact (Kristin Skottki).

Ultimately, the meeting showed that a wide variety of analytic approaches to globalisation and transnational phenomena are conceivable. Points of departure range from the more deductive and rigorously theoretical to the rather inductive and conceptually open; from a focus on the total development of globalisation to an emphasis on fragmented and contingent individual events; from contemporary political developments to medieval signifying systems and from the production of nationality to the production of globality. However, all four research training groups have important features in common: They all start from the assumption that transnational and globalising processes are based on cultural and social phenomena as much as on economic tendencies. In fact, they all investigate cultural and social dimensions of these processes, highlighting the production of the global as well as the self and the other through communication and representation. Discussions throughout the meeting pointed major challenges in the investigation of globalisation and transnational exchanges, such as: How can we be precise in our definitions of globalising processes and yet avoid excluding important tendencies? How can a euro-centrism be overcome that might lie at the core of theories and terms we use? How do we deal with binary differences that are produced in the representation of the foreign? These and other questions, it was agreed, will be dealt with on a common website and in future meetings, which, participants were confident, shall initiate a productive process of conceptual exchange.

A next meeting will be held in GieÄen at the end of November 2008 and will deal with the changing dynamics of transnational communication in an age of globalisation.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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