



Centre for  
**Global  
Cooperation  
Research**

Report of the 6<sup>th</sup> Käte Hamburger Dialogue

# Climate on the Rise, People on the Move:

Understanding Today's Global Challenges Differently

7<sup>th</sup> July 2016, Duisburg



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*The 6<sup>th</sup> Käte Hamburger Dialogue included Dr **Doerthe Rosenow**, Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Oxford Brookes University, and Dr **Rolando Vázquez**, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University College Roosevelt of Utrecht University. Dr **Pol Bargaés-Pedreny**, Researcher at the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) of the University of Duisburg-Essen, and Dr **Olivia Rutazibwa**, Lecturer in International Development and European Studies at the University of Portsmouth, chaired the lively discussion.*

In his introductory remarks, Prof. Dr Tobias Debiel, Director of Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) and INEF, put the topic of the Dialogue into the wider context of research at the Centre. In addition to connecting to the research focuses of climate change and migration, the Dialogue and the two moderators also addressed critiques of global cooperation, noted Debiel. He then introduced the two other speakers of the evening, Prof. Dr David Chandler, Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster and Alumni-Fellow of KHK/GCR21, and Lesley-Ann Brown, Poet, Educator, Writer, Blogger and American Expat living in Denmark.

### **Book Presentation: “The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability”**

Afterwards, David Chandler presented his book “The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaption and Vulnerability”, co-authored with Prof. Dr Julian Reid, Chair and Professor of International Relations at the University of Lapland, Finland. He emphasized the connection between the book and the Dialogue’s location, the Lehmbruck Museum, which houses the sculpture “The Fallen Man / Der Gefallene”. Featured on the book’s cover, the sculpture of a beaten man without a spine, Chandler explained, inspired the conceptualization of “The Neoliberal Subject”. The statue worked as a metaphor for a vulnerable subject in governance discourses that is supposed to adapt to economic and ecological crises – instead of resisting and fighting for social change.

### **Word Performance: “Country/cunt-tree – the Map to Liberation”**

In her preamble performance, Lesley-Ann Brown invited the audience to explore the influence of patriarchy and colonialism on language. Using a play on words of the word “country”, she demonstrated how language itself perpetuates these systems of oppression. Looking at a word like “country” differently can help render visible those who are disenfranchised and made invisible by, for example, patriarchal hegemony.



Using this performance as a starting point, Olivia Rutazibwa outlined the goal of the Dialogue: to look at the two biggest examples of current global challenges – climate change and migration – differently.

### **The Climate Change Debate: Stuck Between Competing Extremes**

Subsequently, Dr Doerthe Rosenow began the dialogue with a short introduction into her own work on environmental politics, particularly environmental activism, in which she currently explores perspectives often referred to as “New Materialism”. In her initial remarks, she criticized the climate change debate as seemingly being stuck between two competing extremes. On the one side, Rosenow argued, “the Marxists” represent the sceptics: those who would deny man-made climate change wholesale or see it primarily as a hegemonic narrative by elites (science institutions, green businesses, politicians) who profit from the perpetuation of this discourse. The other extreme is represented by “the Scientists”, “climate change fatalists”, for whom there is no debate about the existence of climate change and whose focus is on the technocratic aspect of climate change mitigation without much regard for the social inequalities and injustices connected with it. Recognizing the two narratives, Rosenow was searching for ways to go beyond this binary of deniers and fatalists.

### **Eurocentrism, Western Modernity and the Decolonial Perspective**

In his initial remarks, Dr Rolando Vazquez introduced the Decolonial perspective and how it can be applied to look at the issues of climate change and migration differently. He summarized how the Western idea of modernity evolved as a name which the West (namely, Europe) has given to itself, in contrast to “the Other”: the non-white, sometimes non-patriarchal. This has its beginning in 1492, when Europe began its colonial expansion and started to build its own image as Europe and as the centre of the world. The Decolonial perspective, he explained, is built on the forgotten memory of Europe’s modernity. In other words, decoloniality is built on what has been excluded from the Eurocentric structures of power which consider all those other cultures as uncivilized, as lagging behind in some way. He emphasized that one can, and has to, look differently at issues like climate change, migration, by including colonial relations and striving for a Decolonial perspective.

### **Bruno Latour: The Two Houses of the Modern Constitution vs One House**

Pol Bargaúes-Pedreny then led back over to Rosenow. While the binary of “the Marxists” and “the Scientists” on climate change discussions convinced Bargaúes-



Pedreny, he asked Rosenow to elaborate on possibilities for overcoming this binary.

Rosenow expanded on her critique of the binary, and introduced the audience to Bruno Latour's analysis of the problem: Both sides of the binary, "the Marxists" and "the Scientists", continue to buy into what Latour calls the "Modern Constitution" – the very particular European imaginary of "how reality works" which has been universalized. This modern constitution works with two separate "houses": a "Social House", occupied by humans with no understanding of the real, objective mechanisms that govern the world, and a "House of Nature", occupied by mute non-humans.

Rosenow highlighted the difference in the perspectives of New Materialism and the Decolonial Perspective and proceeded to outline Latour's solution to overcome the Eurocentrism of the Modern through learning from indigenous people ("the Other") who know more about how to live in harmony with nature. At the same time, she criticized that this approach still *talks about* the Other (here: indigenous people), and fails to let them speak for themselves. By saying, like Latour does, that they live in harmony with nature and that 'we' can learn from them, Rosenow argued, we again impose our own narrative of how the world works on them – even though they never had this distinction implied in the (Western) modern constitution in the first place.

The solution, according to Latour, is therefore to have *one* "House", inhabited by humans, non-humans, and their multiple associations. The different inhabitants of this "House" should work together as a Collective towards a common world, in which humans, non-humans, and human-non-human associations can live together in a particular procedure as set out by Latour. These insights were particularly pertinent in the space of the Lehmbruck Museum, where non-human statues contemplated the discussion, exhibiting their bodies and souls. The fusion between participants and non-humans made the conversation fluent, while the nature-culture divide disappeared.

### **Truth and Facts: The Role of Science and Scientists**

The Dialogue continued to focus on Latour's image of the two Houses: scientists are travellers between the different Houses. They, understanding the natural world, inform the social world of their findings in order to enable the social world (the humans) to make good decisions based on facts. Rosenow's "Marxists" and climate change deniers want to shut the door between the Houses and leave nature to the natural scientists. Since the social world should be governed by social mechanisms and not by the objective, "unsocial" laws of the natural world, scientists should be kept at bay. Responding to a question by



Rutazibwa, Rosenow briefly outlined Latour's idea of the place for science in the Collective. (Natural) science, according to Latour, has a place, but it is just one among others. Its benefit is not the production of cold hard facts. Instead, through its encounters with the objective world, natural science is good at introducing the "element of perplexity" which is usually not found in the social sciences. To sum up, she suggested that science should rather put forward claims that are propositions, instead of facts which short-circuit any debate, in order to retain that element of uncertainty.

Prompted by Bargués-Pedreny, Vazquez connected to Rosenow's remarks on the role of science by elaborating on the colonial framing and decolonisation of science. First, he pointed out the commonalities between Latour's approach as outlined by Rosenow, and the Decolonial perspective. Taking up the idea of propositions to keep a discourse open, he pointed out that the Decolonial school uses a similar approach, calling it the Decolonial option. This indicates that nobody has a right to take the total position of truth. In this context, he also called for a humbling of modernity by taking away from its claims to universality and its claims to the truth. It is important, Vazquez stressed, to acknowledge that every region of the world has thought and philosophy, and is capable of understanding and engagement with other forms of thinking. Therefore, the exceptionalism of modern European thought should be un-built; aesthetics and science should be decolonised through the acceptance of other forms of beauty, other paths of sensing, other ideas of the body, which have been discredited and excluded by one absolute position of truth taken up by European modernity.

By revisiting the image of the two Houses towards the end of his statement, Vazquez drew attention to the underlying anthropocentrism of Western modernity, Western science and philosophy. Firstly, Vazquez addressed the understanding that nature is an objective thing that functions through mechanisms which can be manipulated. He argued that this understanding responds to a Eurocentric notion of science which is completely subservient to the logic of anthropocentrism. Secondly, Vazquez deconstructed the modern cult of the self and of individuality which is unique to Western culture as a dominant model of personhood.

### **Discussion with the Audience**

The discussion that followed revolved around the issues of science, truth and relativism. The audience also questioned the white privilege and how the voices of the marginalised and the silenced can be made heard. Especially the call to turn away from scientific facts towards propositions garnered significant scepticism among the audience and required more clarification from the two



speakers: If science or knowledge has no meaning anymore, where are we left? What kind of politics will we get for that? If all voices have the right to be heard, does that really include *all* voices? What about racist and other extremist claims?

The speakers used the discussion to clarify how discourses should deal with these questions according to their positions: drawing on Latour, Rosenow stressed that slowness is key for the New Materialist deliberation process in the Collective. Only then can every claim be properly debated on its own terms. She acknowledged, however, that in the process of Collective formation, some truth claims deserve to be heard more than others. While all claims have the right to be heard, some will necessarily be excluded. She concluded her remarks advocating for more courage in giving up control over public discourses in order to allow more diverse truth claims to come forward.

In his replies, Vazquez underlined that the Decolonial perspective relies on a very clear ethical framework for the kind of debate it supports, in order to allow the silenced voices of history to come forth and be heard. This ethical framework would not accept voices speaking from a position of totality, or those who only have their truth and do not accept other truths. However, he maintains a kind of non-negotiable facts – historical realities that are not simply a truth or a narrative that can be relativized: (historically) grounded truths, or embodied truths.

Concluding, he criticized New Materialism for remaining subservient to anthropocentrism and radical immanence which reduces everything to a presentism that is lacking political possibilities and a notion of justice in relation to historical injustices like colonialism.

*Report written by Julia Fleck*