



Centre for
**Global
Cooperation
Research**

Report of the 19th Käte Hamburger Lecture

Postcolonial Approaches Towards Global Cooperation

with Professor Nikita Dhawan

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The panel of the **19th Käte Hamburger Lecture**, organized in cooperation with the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) in Stuttgart, included **Nikita Dhawan**, Professor of Political Science (Political Theory and Gender Studies) and Director of the Research Platform Gender Studies 'Identities – Discourses – Transformations' at the University of Innsbruck. Her discussants were **Mathieu Rousselin**, Alumni Postdoc Fellow at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) and **Olivia Rutazibwa**, Postdoc Fellow at the Centre and Lecturer in International Development and European Studies at University of Portsmouth. **Odila Triebel**, Head of Dialogue and Research Culture and Foreign Policy at the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) moderated the lecture.



Ronald Grätz, Secretary General of ifa, introduced the lecture with the words of Willy Brandt: 'We have to work on our "Weltvernunft" [reason of the world]'. He underlined that every nation, not only the decolonized countries, is living in a postcolonial world. The readjusted way of thinking was, therefore, needed to break free from the Eurocentric perspective and to reimagine cosmopolitanism. This message set a frame for the main subjects of the evening and also recurred in Dhawan's lecture that followed. After the welcoming remarks of **Markus Böckenförde**, the Centre's Executive Director, Dhawan started her speech by giving a general overview on postcolonial studies and how it was connected to global studies. She continued by discussing the relationship between states, international civil society and subaltern groups. After giving two concrete examples on the relation between the subordinate and the state, she explained the relationship between post-colonization and European Enlightenment.

Postcolonial Studies



Dhawan observed that postcolonial studies is misleadingly understood as a rejection of European Enlightenment. While in practice there certainly is a relationship between the two, they do not undermine one another. Rather, it reflected the reconsidering of Enlightenment. Postcolonial studies is an effort to understand the process of decolonizing on both sides: the ones who had been colonized and the ones who colonized.

At the turn of the 18th century, Europe ruled over 85% of the global territories in form of colonies, protectorates and dependencies. The colonization was a violent process marked by genocide, exploitation and suppression. Dhawan underlined that this territorial dominance would not have been possible only through military superiority, but transferring power to native elites was also necessary. Therefore postcolonial studies had to take into account the native elites who profited from colonization.



Dhawan continued by drawing connection between decolonization and the de-universalization of Europe or the provincializing of Europe. As the process of 'decolonizing their mind' implied changes in the way of thinking from macro to individual level of Europeans, Dhawan doubted this would at all be possible. The colonial powers used **justification narratives** ('Rechtfertigungsnarrative') to legitimize their colonization. These narratives included the necessity of global process to the common good of mankind; the development projects; and the development assistance. Western altruism to liberalize other countries was understood to be a white man's burden to help. 'Who taught the Western they were saving the world?' Questioning the process of subjectification, Dhawan criticized these justification narratives. Through the lens of postcolonial studies, she urged that decolonization does not mean the power transfer from Europeans to native elites, but it has to be linked to a process of **de-subjectification**.



Before reconnecting postcolonial studies to the global level, Dhawan applied the approach to German context by referring to Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. Quoting Salman Rushdie's notion that the perceived distance of problems caused Britons to be ignorant towards them, Dhawan argued that this problem was not limited to British people only. While Habermas is best known for his theory on the birth of public spheres, Dhawan challenged that these spheres were not created by 'the first world'. To create and maintain the spheres for discussion like coffee-houses, many elements (coffee, sugar or tobacco) had to be brought in from the third world. Along postcolonial studies' line of thought, she provokingly asserted that **'the first world' was literally a creating of the third world**. The connection between the colonies and Germany was also addressed by Hannah Arendt who entangled German colonization and the German Holocaust. Terming it a boomerang effect, Arendt observed how experiments conducted in the colonies (e.g. 'Todesinsel') became the pioneers for what was later known as concentration camps.

The Postcolonial and the Global: Rethinking Cosmopolitanism

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen emphasized that the emergence of democracy was the most important event of the 20th century. Dismissing this statement, Dhawan explained how globally **democracy had changed in the last decades** and nowadays was reduced to tools to attract foreign investments. This led to the problem that interest in capital flows and trade commitments rises while natives were disregarded. Consequently, trade barriers and other structures were reorganised. This phenomenon brought about widespread disenfranchisement and the profound restructuring of the relation between



state and civil society. States claim to be democratic to attract the foreign investments, while Prof. Thandika Mkandawire observed the rising of choiceless democracies. Rather than encouraging the **input legitimacy** and allowing their citizen to participate in matters of the state, regimes increasingly rely on the **output legitimacy** claiming to provide for the well-being of the population.

As states and international organizations mainly aim to create market friendly conditions, they are constantly under pressure to protect the interests of the corporate sector and transnational elites. The rights of their other citizen have to take a backseat. This development causes **a systematic erosion of nation states sovereignty particularly in the Global South** where the international corporate class became more powerful than the democratically elected representatives. The incapacity and unwillingness of states to ensure the fundamental rights of the majority of their citizen contribute to its vulnerability, claimed Dhawan.



Responding to these shortcomings of the state, many scholars suggested that the development of states, especially the social and political emancipation, lay in the hands of the international civil society. With better reputation on human rights and transnational justice compared to states, civil society groups have become vanguards. **The scope and scale of justice had been extended to a transnational level** as a new line of thinking on global cooperation emerged. Transnational activists were concerned about the well-being of people in the other parts of world with whom they may never have had contact. With these connected feelings, transnational actors claimed that duties and responsibilities could not be limited within national borders in a globalized world.

Contesting patriotism and nationalism, contemporary cosmopolitanism has been characterized by political philosophers including Martha Nussbaum and Ulrich Beck as facilitator of these new alliances across state. Beck's concept of 'world risk society' concerns the entanglement of the world's population and dismisses the system that limits responsibilities and commitments to domestic sphere. While Nussbaum and Beck regard cosmopolitanism as an antidote to apathy and indifference, Dhawan herself expressed doubts about this overly positive interpretation. Liberal cosmopolitanism, as she emphasised, needed to be analysed in connection with the articulation of solidarity and the global structures of domination which both mentioned political philosophers claim to resist. The concept of **liberal cosmopolitanism itself is incomplete as it fails to include the questions of historical processes**: How has the world population been divided into the ones who can give solidarity and the others who need this solidarity? 'We maybe all facing the same storm, but we are not in the same boat', Dhawan exemplified.



Relations between the state and civil society



The celebration of civil society groups as motors of innovation and vanguards of global justice must be observed with caution, urged Dhawan. With the proliferation of protest movements in the past decades, **new actors were brought into the political space and have reconfigured international politics**. Public spheres have been transformed by the emergence of counter-publics who through their protest movements intervene in the traditional relation between state and civil society. In many circumstances, civil society actors take over some of state responsibilities. Although this trend has been approved or even deemed necessary by some scholars, Dhawan considered a total state-phobia or attempts to displace the state as 'tricky'. State has been a pivotal institution whose sovereignty was fought for in the postcolonial context. 'It is both poison and medicine', noted Dhawan.

In order to illustrate her point and to show the **ambivalent relationship between civil society and state**, examples of recent developments were discussed. After the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, demonstrations and protests against the violence against women started throughout India. These protests in part criticized the state for the lack of safety provided. Yet, the case rose to its prominent spot nationally as well as internationally and triggered the movement because it involved a middle-class victim. 'Nobody cared about all the violence that had happened to lower-class women. How many have to be hurt until civil society reacts?' asked Dhawan, criticizing the reliance on civil society's judgement and perception.

The second example concerned the New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Germany. Its aftermath saw the systematic demonization of all migrants and refugees associating them with sexual abusers. The occurrence was used by some civil society groups for their own purpose creating negative image against migrants. The state, on the other hand, investigated the case from a broader view and reacted more objectively. Unlike the state, Dhawan summarized, civil societies tend to focus their campaign on specific topic affecting specific societal groups. The decreased role of state and the increasing reliance on civil society could leave certain vulnerable groups overlooked.

Relationship between Post-colonization and European enlightenment

To sum up, Dhawan reconnected the narrated concepts with post-colonization. She compared Post-colonialism to 'a child of a rape', a product of violence. The **challenge of Post-colonialism** is whether and how this product



can be appreciated. Although colonialism was achieved with violence, it brought about various essential legacies of European Enlightenment: secularism, rule of law, sovereignty, equality and the entire discourse of freedom including emancipation. The total rejection of these products because of their origin from violent colonialism is counterproductive. A genuine beginning of decolonisation is to introduce these products to those who are yet to be exposed to intellectual labour. Answering to Audre Lorde's 1984 essay 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', Dhawan concluded her lecture saying that with post-colonialism 'one can use the master's tool to dismantle the master's house'.

Discussion



Rousselin's notes on Dhawan's speech were connected to his own teaching experiences in Tunisia. Firstly, he doubted whether 'emancipation' could be reduced to the inclusion of subordinates to the hegemonic structures. Secondly, he noticed that the theories and practices of decoloniality and Marxism diverge greatly in some cases for example in division of labour. Rousselin raised the question how enlightenment should be handled in practice: Is it better to use respectful distance or ruthless engagements?



Reacting to the lecture, **Rutazibwa** asked how useful it was to think about solidarity starting from cosmopolitanism. She questioned if the main concern of international solidarity was to give subaltern access to Western education. Furthermore, she criticized that the question of 'what to do' was not a useful one. Instead of focussing on the action, it might be more productive to concentrate on actors, recipients as well as locality for the implemented measures. Rutazibwa suggested that effort could better be given to a new way of research in these contexts rather than to redress the concept of enlightenment.

The discussion that followed with the audience evolved around the questions on how civil society should engage with the state, especially with oppressive regime and which problems could appear in participatory research.

In her final remarks, Dhawan advised a more collaborative approach of humanitarian projects. The usual 'parachute' method, in which international communities enter and leave the local area within a short period of time, spares no room for ethical relation to form. Without relations and understanding, humanitarian help could contribute less to the local and might affect the domestic structures.