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Capturing the Political.
How to analyze power beyond state politics
October 21-23, 2010
Berlin

The problem

World politics no longer consist of state politics alone. While this insight has been stressed in various schools of international relations, it is less clear what the conceptual foundations of world politics are and should be, once the reference to mere state politics does no longer suffice. This observation is the starting point for the envisaged conference. Its main aim is to bring together proponents of different disciplines and theoretical traditions in order to inspire a systematic discussion of the foundational vocabulary for a study of world politics that transcends the state and its conceptual fabrications.

The analytical vocabulary for political phenomena that do not fit into the known institutional frameworks - as it is naturally the case for all transnational forms of politics - is clearly under-developed. The symposium *Capturing the Political* attempts to change this situation. It brings together scholars in the fields of international relations, political science and political anthropology that share an interest in theory and have, for the most part, also contributed to the study of political phenomena by empirical investigations in transnational fields.

The subject

When it comes to the understanding of the political in world politics, three current approaches can be distinguished. The first one is connected to the relatively recent concept of governance and refers to societal interests as well as to state politics, thereby largely relying on liberal traditions of political theory and recent management theory. Second, theories of empire and hegemony strive for acceptance, with theoretical roots ranging from realist understandings of power politics to Gramscian and Foucaultian perspectives. On a third field, there is a whole variety of so-called “constructivist” approaches that have, over the last fifteen years, imported the entire spectrum of social theories as, for instance, Habermas’ theory of communicative action, Luhmann’s theory of social systems or Austin’s philosophy of language.

It would be misleading to expect that proponents of these different

theoretical perspectives might ever agree on a shared understanding of the foundational language of political science and on how notions like power, domination and the political should be conceptualized. But all of these contributions have their own blind spots, too. If we take, for example, Foucault's claim that 'power is everywhere' seriously, we may be confronted with a methodological challenge of how to study or observe power. One could go on by naming other theoretical references and discussing their respective shortcomings. They all share the difficulty that they are not easily transferable into a language that allows for an operational study of transnational phenomena we usually characterize as "political". For studies in political science that deal with phenomena within deeply entrenched states, this problem seems less obvious. There is always a landscape of institutions that common knowledge would call "political", consequently rendering all kinds of affairs that relate to these institutions "political" as well. The state is, of course, the major "politicizer" in this regard.

The questions

The guiding question of the symposium is the following: What constitutes the political in the world, and how can it best be studied? This question translates into several further questions and concerns.

A first set of questions guiding the conference refer to the conceptual foundations alluded to above:

- What constitutes the global political space?
- How is the political represented in this space?

Other questions refer to more recent trends in the study of the political:

- Politicization and de-politicization: When do social phenomena become "political" and when do they cease to be so?
- Which practices (strategies or tactics) do actors employ in politicizing, and how do they make use of the symbolic dimension of power?
- Which practices (strategies or tactics) do actors use to de-center or depoliticize the political?

The aims

The envisaged conference will bring together a variety of scholars with diverse theoretical orientations and different disciplinary backgrounds who have contributed explicitly or implicitly to the topic of our meeting. While we do, of course, not attempt to reach any agreement, the main intention of this conference is to move the debate on the conceptual foundations of the study of world politics a step further by directly relating particularly challenging theoretical contributions in this field.

A second aim is to critically discuss the consequences of these different approaches for the empirical study of the political. Which consequences for the choice of topics do they entail? How do differences in the conceptual choices affect the constitution of empirical topics and the methodologies employed?

Preliminary schedule:

Thursday, October 21

The concept of the political

- 13:30 Opening remarks:
Ina Kerner, HU Berlin; Klaus Schlichte, University of Magdeburg
- 14:00 *The external conditions of political possibility*
RJB Walker, University of Victoria, British Columbia
- 15:00 *Politicization: changing semantics of the “political” in political theory*
Regina Kreide
- 16:00 COFFEE BREAK
- 16:30 *Locating the political in political anthropology (preliminary title)*
Madeleine Reeves, University of Manchester
- 17:30 KEYNOTE SPEECH: “*Le politique*”: *Gramsci and Foucault in Africa*
Jean-Francois Bayart, CNRS, Paris
- 20:00 DINNER

Friday, October 22

Concepts of the political in contest

- 10:00 Opening statements:
Benjamin Herborth, University of Frankfurt/M.
Daria Isachenko, University of Magdeburg
- 10:30 *(Title to be announced)*
Ronen Palan, University of Birmingham
- 11:30 COFFEE BREAK

Investigating the political

- 12:00 *The urban sublime: the political and the inauthentic city*
Chad Thompson, Nipissing University, Ontario
- 13:00 *A comparative political economy of domination*
Beatrice Hibou, CNRS, Paris

- 14:00 LUNCH BREAK
- 15:30 *Fantasies of politics: rethinking signs of the state in Central Asia*
John Heathershaw, University of Exeter
- 16:30 *Reclaiming political space in Cyprus (preliminary title)*
Costas Constantinou, Keele University
- 17:30 COFFEE BREAK
- 18:00 Summary and discussion, Input: Klaus Schlichte
- 20:00 DINNER

Saturday, October 23

The globality of concepts

- 10:00 *Following rules: global standards as hidden power*
Dieter Kerwer, TU Munich
- 11:00 *Transnational cooperation and the effects of global
governmentality*
Ina Kerner, HU Berlin
- 12:00-13:00 LUNCH BREAK
- 13:00-14:30 Summary and discussion with opening statements by:
Benjamin Herborth, Goethe-University, Frankfurt/M.
Klaus Schlichte, University of Magdeburg

Registration

In order to register as a conference participant, please send an email to:
stefanie.sanftenberg@ovgu.de

Deadline for registrations is September 19, 2010