

# Reconsidering the Transnationalisation of the States from a Postcolonial Perspective

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Within IPE approaches the role of the state varies. Nevertheless they all share the assumption that there is an ongoing process of transnationalisation of states starting from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

The concepts of states employed in IPE theories oscillate between (1) the (neo-)realist and liberal position, where states are seen as sovereign actors, disposing of a variety of economical, political and social resources, and (2) the neo-gramscian approaches which – derived from Antonio Gramscis figure of the integral state – conceptualise states as an institutionalised field of rivalling social power relations on the national and the transnational level. Hence, neo-gramscian IPE offers the advantage that it includes both the material and ideological bases of the constitution of transnational hegemony, considering at the same time the internal power relations of the nation states.

Despite these analytical divergences all IPE approaches have been temporally and geographically adjusted to the development of the modern western state of the global north. Through historiography Europe has been established as the only desirable model of development which thereupon could be exported to the ‘rest’ of the world, neglecting the *historical entanglement* (Randeria) of global histories for a long time. Considering the entanglement of the multiple histories, the worldwide expansion of markets and of the political order had its root causes not only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but within European slavery and colonialism itself.

This paper will go beyond this general assumption, presuming that globalisation is not a new phenomenon, but must be analysed within the context of colonialism and in continuity with it. From this perspective colonialism becomes one of the organising principles of the global hegemony of modernity. On this basis it is possible to perform an analytical shift, considering the postcolonial states not only as victims of hegemonic Western countries. Following Shalini Randerias concept of the *cunning state*, we will discuss the question, whether the postcolonial state already emerges as a transnational state, which due to the interaction of internal and external power relations develops specific strategies to preserve its

agency on the transnational level. Doing so, we also intend to show the productive connection between the neo-gramscian state concept and postcolonial approaches.

In order to substantiate this argumentation, we will first give a short introduction into the debate on the transnationalisation of states in the IPE field. Then, we will discuss transnationalisation within the broader context of globalisation from a postcolonial perspective along the concepts of ‘entangled histories’ and the ‘cunning state’ (both Randeria).

### **1. The Transnationalisation of the State: an Overview**

Due to the recent processes of economical and political transnationalisation it seems as though the ‘traditional’ national state has become an obsolescent model (cf. Hirsch 2005: 141). Together with the national state, the future of liberal democracy too is called into question (ibid.; Randeria 2007). Within marxist and neo-gramscian IPE it is widely acknowledged that the crisis of Fordism initiated a reorganisation of class relations, which reinforced the global division of labour as well as the importance of global value chains, finally provoking the emergence of transnational networks of entrepreneurs, being able to act independently from national class compromises (cf. Hirsch 2005: 141). This reorganisation of class structures apparently led to an economic deterritorialisation and a pluralisation of political and legal instances at a local, national, regional and transnational level. But, whereas liberal IR theorists already predict the replacement of the national states as decision makers by new pluralised governance structures, critical approaches perceive the national states as both, agents and subjects of the processes of transnationalisation (cf. Bieling 2007: 149; Hirsch 2005: 142; Jessop 2007: 189).<sup>1</sup>

Within the current transformation of national states, the following tendencies must be mentioned (cf. i.a. Hirsch 2005: 145-147; Jessop 2007: 189ff.): Due to the flexibilisation of capital, national states are exposed to growing economical competition, putting under pressure the social and environmental standards defined on the national level. While we can observe a multiplication of border-crossing economical linkages, the social fracturing within national states is amplified. Through the commodification of more and more areas of life, as well as through the privatisation of politics, private actors, transnational companies and NGOs take

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<sup>1</sup> However, we must admit here, that within certain neo-gramscian IPE approaches too, the role of the state is reduced to the function of „a transmission belt from the global to national economy“ (Cox 1996: 302; qtd in Bieling 2007: 146), although this position is controversially discussed within its own theoretical field, as we will see below.

over former state functions. Previous democratically legitimised structures are replaced by new public-private structures of negotiation and decision making, rendering political strategies unaccountable. As a consequence of the border-crossing economic structures, transnational forms of regulation become necessary. This explains the emergence of regional economic cooperation such as the EU, NAFTA etc., as well as the creation of supranational organisations and transnational agreements. These processes are reinforced by the rise of a transnational capitalist or manager class, which does no longer depend on a national compromise (cf. Demirović 2007: 37f.). Far from it, the new dependencies are tied within this flexible and polycentric web of transnational companies, NGOs, Think Tanks, editors, scholars etc. (cf. Wissel 2006: 246). As a result of the transnationalisation of regulation, a new battlefield is created around the transnational regulatory organisations and agreements. Within this area the flexibility of the transnational networks enables the new transnational elites to shift the terrain of conflict from one organisation to the other, if their favoured policy is not implemented by the former (forum shifting/ forum shopping) (cf. *ibid.*: 247f.). Due to the privatisation and the rise of public-private structures of decision making, it is possible to speak of an enlargement of the integral state, based on the growing complexity and strength of the relation between civil society actors and the state (Hirsch 2005: 161). As a consequence, the separation of the political and the economical sphere, as one of the main characteristics of modern western statehood, becomes more and more precarious (*ibid.* 199).

Within neo-gramscian IPE, Bieling distinguishes a new transnational constitutionalist approach (cf. i.a. Gill, Sklair, van der Pijl etc.), which embraces the contradictory tendencies of globalisation: the valorisation of transnational agents as organisers of neoliberal hegemony on the one hand, and the persisting relevance of the national states on the other hand (cf. Bieling 2007: 144). It is one of the main achievements of neo-gramscian IPE to have added a society centred perspective in this research field, which has so far been dominated by state centred (neo)realist IR theory. In general, (neo)realists define the state as a single acting unit (O'Brien/Williams 2007: 15, Krell 2004: 171) with its main purpose being to act as a “rational [and] self-interested actor” (Chowdhry/Nair 2005: 4), trying to achieve or keep power in the anarchical international system. Whereas in (neo)realist approaches international hegemony is attained through economical and military strength of a state, neo-gramscian IPE – based on the gramscian concept of hegemony – provides us with an analysis including not only economical conditions of social reproduction, but also discursive and ideological bases of social compromise (Bieling 2007: 145). The gramscian concepts of the integral state and of hegemony are thereby projected onto the architecture of global governance.

“Hegemony at the international level is thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into subordinate modes of production. It is also complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries. World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must all three.” (Cox 1983: 171f.)

Thus, the role of the state in the global hierarchy depends on the power relations within and across states. However, the society centred approach holds the risk to overstate the role of transnational civil society actors reducing the agency of national states to a complete loss of significance. Through the concept of ‘new constitutionalism’, by contrast, Gill (1992; 1995) explains the transformation of national states against the background of the entire range of processes of reorganisation of national and transnational decision making (Bieling 2007: 152f.). The double process of economic liberalisation and the loss of democratic legitimation is analysed within the interplay of structural, institutional and contractual dimensions, always regarding the context of the global structures of economical reproduction (ibid: 150).

Still, new constitutionalism should not be considered as a homogenous process, free from any contradictions, but as a new transnational arena, or as to the definition of Gill (2002: 61): “New constitutionalism is a strategic political project, rather than a completed historical process. As such it has a contingent and contested character.”

## **2. Towards a postcolonial revision of the IPE field**

Although neo-gramscian IPE takes into account not only the economical structures of power, but also the ideological basis of world hegemony, providing us with a detailed analysis of the processes of transnationalisation and therefore the transformation of states in the world system, it continues to act from an exclusively Western perspective. Overall, the postcolonial critique is mainly focusing on concepts of power employed in the theoretical field of IR/ IPE and the lack of attention paid to the intersection of power structuring categories such as ‘race’, class and gender (cf. Chowdhry/ Nair 2004). The postcolonial critique is taken still further to include the analysis of representation of ‘other’ cultures within these approaches. Emin Fuat Keyman and other authors state, that as a discipline being constantly in contact with the so called ‘Other’, IPE should be aware of the way it approaches and represents these ‘other cultures’, asking to what extent the hierarchies of the global system are constructed through the politics of representation (cf. Darby/Paolini 1994; Fuat Keyman 1995; Slater 1998).

Instead of entering the debate on representation and cultural identity in IR/ IPE, we want to take a step backwards, considering the formation of the contemporary world system from a historicising postcolonial perspective. The argument made in this paper to sustain the idea that it is imperative to consider the colonial context when analysing current processes of transnationalisation will be twofold: On the one hand we will argue in a contrapuntally reading of globalisation, that the ‘nationalisation’ of the global system is quite a recent event, which obscures the entanglement of global histories. On the other hand, we will examine the emergence of (post-)colonial states as genuine transnationalised states, raising the question, if postcolonial states mirror the future of transnationalising metropolitan states today (cf. Randeria 2007: 4).

### *2.1 Colonialism as an Organising Principle of Global Hegemony*

When we presume, that the contemporary processes of state transnationalisation must be analysed within the context of colonialism, this argument is deeply linked to a critique of the eurocentric idea of Europe’s unique and self-sufficient but universal development. Considering transnationalisation as a phenomenon starting from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, neo-gramscian IPE too, reproduces the narrative of a singular European history, disconnecting it from the global history and neglecting the long-lasting cultural and economical exchanges which conduced to the formation of Europe, and more generally the West, as global powers (cf. Randeria 2007: 4; Chowdhry/ Nair 2002: 5).

Taking into account the traces of the imperial histories while analysing the contemporary transnational world order, may contribute to the historicisation of the debate on globalisation/ transnationalisation (Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 10). Thus, globalisation is not a new phenomenon. Instead of overstating the singularity of the recent development of globalisation, with Europe and the West as the only motor of history, Frederic Cooper states that we should emphasise on the processes of demarcation of the national territories and their national histories, asking when and in how far these frontiers are transcended by the processes of transnationalisation today (Cooper 2005: 10).

Aiming to overcome the myth of an isolated Western-European development, which legitimises the imagined occidental superiority, Randeria introduces the concept of ‘entangled histories’ (cf. Randeria 2002). Within this notion the global linkages and (inter-)dependencies are taken as an initial point for a transnational historiography. The concept of ‘entangled histories’ embraces the twofold idea, that on the one hand the various societies through the political, economical and cultural interactions have shared experiences and therefore contributed to the formation of the modern world. On the other hand, the growing mobility of

people and goods also created a desire for more particularity and demarcation of the 'Others'. At the same time, Conrad and Randeria warn us, that while focusing on the interactions and the entanglement of global histories, the dependency and the violent character of global relations, as well as the exploitation and forced transformation of entire societies should not be left unconsidered. (Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 17)

Hence, the European master narrative of modernity is challenged by postcolonial approaches through the deconstruction of the so called 'Western' modernity as a colonial product (cf. i.a. Conrad/ Randeria 2002; Cooper 2005; Quijano 2010). The analysis of this eurocentric interpretation of history reveals that the myth of a unique and superior Europe exporting its 'achievements' to the 'rest' of the world, is a result of the demarcation of its history from the others, neglecting any external influences (cf. Amin 1989; Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 13).

The shift to a postcolonial perspective permits us to analyse the global order as a result of the 'coloniality of power', characterised on the one hand by the racialisation of global hierarchies, through which the relation between ruling and ruled were naturalized, and on the other hand by the new system of global exploitation of resources and labour based on the capitalist mode of production and first of all on slavery (Quijano 2010: 33ff.). Simultaneously, the contributions of colonised societies to the formation of Western modernity become visible, having been obscured by the colonial relation which ensured above all, that the basic principles of modernity such as personal freedom, property rights and equality were refused to the majority of the colonial subjects (ibid.). However, the postcolonial historical debate also shows us the impossibility to reconstruct discrete or 'pure' histories of the colonised societies without slipping into an essentialising nativist narrative (cf. Feierman 2002).

The conclusion that we draw out of this analysis is that instead of trying to disentangle the global histories, we should rather deconstruct the narrative of an independent development of the West in order to render visible the strategies of national demarcation, which contribute to the separation of the 'West' and 'the rest'. Fernando Coronil resumes these strategies under the concept of 'occidentalism', which he defines as

„the ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which (1) separate the world's components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalize these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.“ (Coronil 1996: 57).

## *2.2 Nationalising the Global – Territorialising History*

In the field of postcolonial theory it is consensual that the material and violent colonial conquest was sustained by epistemological/ ideological forms of violence – mostly resumed under the term of ‚representation‘ – and that the contemporary hegemonic position of western countries still relies on this specific power/ knowledge complex (Hall 1996: 250; Said 2003 [1978]; see also Ahluwalia 2001: 13; Castro Varela/Dhawan 2005: 24). The territorial expansion was prepared and accompanied by colonial fantasies, the creation and reproduction of cultural difference and the internationalisation of the promise of progress which naturalised the colonial idea also in the colonised world (Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 29). An important strategy to separate the globe into bounded units was the destruction of the ‘Other’s’ histories and identities or at least the dissociation of their histories and cultures from actuality, leaving Europe as the only subject of history (Chakrabarty 2000: 27; Quijano 2010: 31).

The formation of the nation state plays a crucial role in the territorialisation of history (Coronil 1996: 76; cf. Poulantzas 1978: 114). The nation state with its institutionalised form corresponded to the double constraint of universality on the one hand – created by the growing global interactions – and the desire for particularity on the other (Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 19). It can therefore be seen as both: the fundament of capitalist and colonial relations but also as its result. The national histories, which link the nation state to a certain territory and which reinforce the material as well as the ideological border lines, were globally written in a very similar format, so that they can be analysed as an expression of the universal – particular dialectic (ibid.). The creation of national history went along with the fixation and naturalisation of the national territory. Through the linkage of a seemingly naturally created national territory with a certain history the relations with other societies were masked (Coronil 1996: 77). According to Coronil the national units can be regrouped into “groups of nations or supranational entities: the West, the Occident, the third world, the East, the South [...]” (ibid.), with the West “as an imperial fetish, the imagined home of history’s victors, the embodiment of their power” (ibid. 78), which consequently served the world as the only historically relevant model of development.

The exemplary character of the nation state and the ‘West & the rest’ dichotomy were consolidated via the simultaneously emerging eurocentrism of modern historiography and the methodological nationalism of the social sciences, as well as the creation of regionally differentiated disciplines. Although this can not be analysed as an intentional process, it can be said that the colonial differences between ‘modern’ Europe and the ‘pre-modern’ ‘Others’ were institutionalised through the separation of disciplines into the euro-centred disciplines

such as sociology, economics and political science on the one hand and the ‘other’ disciplines such as ethnology and anthropology on the other hand. (cf. Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 21) Osterhammel states that whereas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century European scientists did not hesitate to compare Europe to Asia, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe became incomparable (Osterhammel 2001: 84; qtd from Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 21).

As a conclusion we can say that from this perspective history and other social sciences have been mainly characterised by concealment and interstices, neglecting the influences non-western societies could have had on the European development. In order to counter the methodological or conceptual nationalism of modern disciplines, the concept of “entangled histories” permits us to take a perspective on globalisation which questions the national borders as a product of (colonial) modernity and to include the reciprocal influences within the (post-)colonial relation, without neither homogenising nor essentialising the differences (cf. Conrad/ Randeria 2002: 42; Slater 1998: 670).

### **3. (Post-)colonial States as Genuine Transnationalised States**

The transnationalisation of states, as we have seen above, is mainly characterised by a pluralisation of actors – local, national, transnational, public or private – and the subsequent shifting of responsibilities between the different levels – local, national, transnational. Through the increasing importance of supranational institutions, the growing influence of expert think tanks and the emergence of a transnational capitalist or manager class, national hegemonic compromises are weakened. The privatisation of public goods as well as the commodification and juridification of more and more areas of life, via transnational agreements such as TRIPS, GATT etc., diminish the influence of democratically legitimised governments. The exclusive authority of the nation state is therefore questioned. (cf. i.a. Hirsch 2005: 141ff., Randeria 2007)

We totally agree that the processes of transnationalisation have reached a new quality from the beginning of the 1980’s on, but it seems to us, that they have a different impact on the various states, especially seen from a postcolonial perspective. The pluralisation of political and economical agents, acting on a national as well as on a transnational level and enabling private economical but also civil society actors to operate past the nation states, is not a new phenomenon in the (post-)colonial context. So, the revision of the global entanglement of history may also raise the question whether the “former colonies mirror the future Europe today” (Randeria 2007: 4).

The emergence of states from the colonial system must be analysed as a process of violent transculturation (cf. Ahluwalia 2001: 72). The fixation of colonial borders in a great majority of cases artificially united an ample variety of societies or simply cut across existing political systems. Local political formations were either integrated into the colonial system or destroyed. The colonial administration, on the other hand was often realised by private or semi-private actors, such as colonial companies, e.g. the British East India Company, the German Colonial Company (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft) etc. With the creation of the League of Nations, the British Commonwealth of Nations and the French Union (Union Française), to name only some of the first supranational institutions, further legal and political agents were added. Thus, the erection of the colonial administration encouraged the emergence of a great plurality of political and legal decision makers.

Furthermore, it can be said that due to the orientation of the colonisers towards metropolitan interests and transnationally operating trade companies, the colonial administration did not depend on consensus with the subaltern classes. The colonial state, according to Ranajit Guha, was based only on a partially universalisation of bourgeois interests and its hegemonic world view onto the colonial elites (cf. id. 1997). These elites were constituted of both external and internal actors, such as colonial administrators, foreign companies, merchants, great land owners on both sides, missionaries, national industrialist and trade bourgeoisie (id. 1988: 44). With independency the national elites did not manage to establish a national hegemonic consensus, giving birth to an autonomous sphere of the subaltern classes (ibid: 40ff.). This sphere can be seen either as an expression of the social exclusion and of the social gap characterising the majority of former colonies, but it can be considered as an opening space for popular resistance too.

So, if it is reckoned, by neo-gramscian and other Marxist authors, that the new transnational classes do not anymore depend on a national hegemonic compromise, and that the authority of nation states is questioned by the influence of transnational organisations and companies, they should be aware of the fact that these are no new phenomena in the postcolonial context. Still, it can be stated that within current developments they are reaching for a new quality which could be considered a “new hybrid regulatory web [...] woven together by state and non-state actors” (Randeria 2007: 27).

In her review of the relation between law, territoriality and state Randeria opposes the analysis of states alongside a strong-weak dichotomy by highlighting the agency of both the subordinated states as well as their populations (Randeria 2007). Considering the ongoing transformation of the nation state and external constraints the subordinated states are

subjected to, she introduces the concept of the ‘cunning state’, emphasising on the strategies these states have developed to preserve their agency at the transnational as well as at the domestic level. ‘Cunning states’ are mainly characterised by a twofold strategy: “They play on their perceived weakness to justify specific policy choices to citizens and to international donors, short-changing both in the process” (Randeria 2007: 6).<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, they point to external pressure to avoid domestic discontent and on the other hand “they use their weakness vis-à-vis certain domestic constituencies to justify to international institutions a partial or selective implementation of policies, projects and programmes” (ibid.). According to Randeria these strategies are used by ‘cunning states’ in order to render unaccountable their policies within the new architecture of global governance and towards their citizens alike (ibid.). Furthermore, Randeria states – in opposition to neo-gramscian IPE – that ‘cunning states’ too make use of the strategies labelled as “forum shifting” or “forum shopping”.

On the other hand, whereas the subordinated population of these societies have continuously less possibilities to claim their rights using liberal democratic procedures, the transnationalisation of political decision making also opens new spaces of resistance for them to operate past the nation states (Randeria 2007:19). Taking another step backwards, Cooper reminds us, that

„The backward projection of the post-1960’s world of nation-states into a two-century-long path of inevitability affects our understanding not only of the relationship of national and imperial regimes but of the diversity of opposition to them.“ (Cooper 2005: 24)

Especially transnational forms of resistance – considered as a new phenomenon of the era of globalisation – are obscured by the focus on the nation state, ignoring widely the importance of movements such as the Négritude, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism etc. (cf. ibid.).

## **Conclusion**

The postcolonial approach to the debate on transnationalisation thus helps us to historicise the current global developments beyond a history of capitalist expansion, which is mainly analysed as a north-south process. It permits us to render visible the reciprocal relations which contributed to the emergence of national states. Moreover, it reminds us to take into account that the characteristics of state transnationalisation are not new in the postcolonial context.

Furthermore, the postcolonial shift allows us to push Europe and the West out off the centre of history, giving us the opportunity to perceive the subordinated states as actors,

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<sup>2</sup> Randeria’s concept of the ‘Cunning States’ serves her only to describe states as the BRIC states, but we would argue, that these strategies can be found also within the politics of less powerful states.

despite their subordination and the global (colonial) dependencies. The postcolonial approaches therefore underline the agency and the possibilities to resist in a globalised world of both the subordinated states and their civil societies.

This change in perspective on the transnationalisation of states calls on IPE to focus even more on the internal-external relations, which, as a colonial heritage, questions the nation-state-model of being the “unitary source of normative order“ (Randeria 2007: 27) since the very beginning of their existence.

On the other hand, we would state, that it may lead to a very copious symbiosis bringing together neo-gramscian IPE approaches and postcolonial theory, especially in the analysis of the growing plurality of agents on a transnational level. It seems to us, that the strategies of the ‘cunning states’ are only explainable through the conception of statehood, including on a supranational level, as a conflictive field of rivalling power relations, as stated within the approaches of ‘new constitutionalism’ or in the analysis of an emerging transnational civil society. It is only through these approaches that the decisions of ‘cunning states’ can be traced back to the interests of the plurality of actors and decision making instances, relating it to the reigning mode of production but also to the hegemonic world view which goes far beyond the analysis of economical structures. Meanwhile, the postcolonial perspective reminds us within this discussion to include the coloniality of power as an organising principle of world hegemony.

Finally, the postcolonial shift adds as an argument to the general questioning of the national state as a separated entity, rendering visible its discursively constructed nature.

We would therefore plead for a broader and more systematic discussion between the approaches of neo-gramscian IPE and postcolonial theory.

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