

EEGA at the BASEES Annual Conference 2022, Cambridge, UK

Round Table “Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and African Decolonization: New Perspectives”

The Round Table “Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and African Decolonization: New Perspectives” took place on 8 April 2022, 4 pm, at Robinson College as part of the **British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) Conference 2022**, in Cambridge, UK. Panels and roundtables at the conference featured papers from Politics, History, Sociology and Geography, Film and Media, Languages and Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures, and Economics.

With participants **Lena Dallywater** (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Germany), **Christopher Saunders** (University of Cape Town, South Africa), **Helder Adegar Fonseca** (University of Evora, Portugal), **Natalia Telepneva** (University of Strathclyde, UK), and **Ulf Engel** (Leipzig University, Germany), the Round Table was composed of these different disciplines and perspectives. Adopting an interdisciplinary, transregional perspective, and inspired by the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences, the participants in this roundtable aimed to cast new light on aspects of the role of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the decolonisation of Africa. The roundtable drew on new sources to explore some of the networks that were shaped through the movement of individuals and ideas from Africa to the “East” and from the “East” to Africa in the decades in which African countries moved to independence. It is now widely recognised that a Cold War perspective falls short in unfolding the complex geographies of such connections and the multipolarity of actions and transactions, some of which continue to influence relationships today. The history of the ties that existed between African liberation movements and the socialist bloc were of particular interest, taking further themes explored in a collection of essays published by the organisers of the roundtable in 2019.

The round table started with an introduction of guests, background and idea of the book, followed by a presentation of glimpses of the book’s individual chapters on transregional connections between for example South(ern) Africa, Lusophone Africa, and Hungary, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. **Natalia Telepneva** and **Ulf Engel** gave critical comments each on concept, structure and set-up of the volume, relation to state of the art in respective field, connection to and comparison with other books, projects, and perspectives. Telepneva enriched the discussion with a Soviet Union History perspective, highlighting the role of actors from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the Cold War, as well as the role of Eastern European states in the process of decolonization, looking at economic dependence, effects of socialist internationalism, and anti-imperial influences by China, whilst Ulf Engel focused on the perspective of African studies. He pointed out the disciplinary breadth and geographic scope of the anthology, emphasizing the impact of networks that provide for reciprocal movement of people and ideas between the East and Africa, shedding new light on the Cold War entanglements of the two regions and thus able to challenge even mainstream narratives. Finally, he pleaded for further discussion of the tension between historical path dependencies and dynamics between East and South that are more recent.

Panel on “New Regionalisms in Eastern Europe”

Under the heading "New Regionalisms in Eastern Europe", EEGA hosted a panel at the BASEES Annual Conference, chaired by EEGA spokesperson **Sebastian Lentz**. The starting point was research concepts from the Leipzig Collaborative Research Center 1199 and the finding that processes of globalisation are often accompanied by attempts to create new or even novel spatial formats. The conceptual focus of the panel was on regions or the attempts to create regional constructs. The aim of the exchange between geographers and political scientists was to compare their empirical approaches and their concepts of regions in light of recent developments in Eastern Europe.

As all other panels of the Annual Conference, this one was also heavily influenced by discussions around Russia's war against Ukraine. Whereas the production of regions had previously been conceptually linked to considerations of new spatial orders, all panelists as well as visitors now posed the question of the reconfiguration of a world order.

The presentations included scales in a very wide range from the local to the global. From the perspective of political geography, **Ekaterina Mikhailova** (Univ. Geneva) showed how actors in cross-border town twinning between Russia and Norway had initially found a trusting working relationship and balance of interests, which, however, in recent weeks has again been increasingly overshadowed by central government controls on the part of Russia. **Corey Johnson** (Univ. of North Carolina) asked about large-scale transformations from the perspective of Critical Geopolitics. He referred to the "splintering regionalisms" that are the result of energy infrastructure policies of recent decades in Eastern Europe. At the same time, he warned against interpreting such analyses in terms of inevitable consequences that would make the actions of political actors appear to be determined and predictable with certainty. He referred in particular to the anticipated reorientation of energy infrastructures both spatially and technically (the renewable energy sector) and of European integration, triggered by the war against Ukraine. **Margarita Balmaceda** (Seton Hall University) presented her research concept, which aims to gain better insight into the black box of national energy policies using a "follow the molecule" approach. She, too, pointed out the extent to which spatial relations and political multilateralism have already been altered by the Nordstream 1 and 2 pipelines, since supply contracts for gas and oil concluded at national level are usually very non-transparent (e.g. with regard to pricing) and include, among others, the prohibition to resell energy carriers internationally.

The subsequent discussion emphasized repeatedly how fruitful an interdisciplinary exchange of this kind is, so that, among other things, the joint publication of the presentations given was agreed upon.