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More World. Berliner Gazette's 20th anniversary initiative on communal tools for planetary challenges

#climate change #migration #digitalization

berlinergazette.de / Krystian Woznicki

Climate change, migration and digitalization: these are the greatest challenges in the current phase of globalization. How can we meet them? In its 20th year, the Berliner Gazette, under the motto MORE WORLD, is highlighting communal practices that confront these planetary challenges. In this text, Berliner Gazette founding editor Krystian Woznicki describes the ideas of the project and how you as readers can contribute.

"We must ask anew what the world wants of us, and what we want of it, everywhere, in all senses, urbi et orbi, all over the world and for the whole world, without (the) capital of the world but with the richness of the world." (Jean-Luc Nancy)

Offers to escape the complexities of globalization are ubiquitous. Especially in weakened, crisis-ridden or authoritarian democracies something that could be called *globalization escapism* is becoming increasingly popular, while the state as a self-sufficient and encapsulated shelter is stylized as a fantasy refuge. The proliferation of nationalist right-wing populism in the global public sphere aggravates this dangerous escapism. Though this may seem pretty obvious, the consequences are less perceptible and therefore require more of our attention. The escapist tendency, that, following Hannah Arendt, could be called "Weltentfremdung" (alienation from the world), shrinks accesses to the world. Meaning, what is shrinking for all of us are accesses to *the world as it is* as well as accesses to *the world as it could be*. This particularly strongly affects marginalised, invisibilized and illegalized actors. But the privileged are also affected: persons with unlimited legal status, access to the higher education system, jobs subject to social security contributions, etc.

This development makes the escapist fantasy untenable and we are obliged to develop a new sense of reality and a new love for the world. The question arises, to what degree the state can function as a shelter at all. Whoever asks this question needs to face and affirm the complexities of globalization in the first place, and needs to find ways not to see them as *threats*, since this triggers paranoid defense mechanisms that have devastating consequences. Instead, we need to see the complexities that are becoming increasingly visible in the course of globalization as *challenges* to be tackled cooperatively by all of us – privileged and dispossessed alike. The MORE WORLD project proposes that these challenges can be overcome neither by the nation state alone, nor without it. Rather, the challenges should be approached by combining communal,

state and global structures. The MORE WORLD project suggests starting at the micro level, that is, exploring communal practices and tools that are potentially useful for the multi-layered interplay of communal, state and global structures. To this end, the project will focus on complexes that are produced by and productive of globalization, for instance climate change, migration and digitalization, which the Berliner Gazette (BG) intends to take up in an exemplary manner and relate to one another as *interconnected planetary challenges*.

With this goal in mind, the BG in its 20th year calls for exploration of the complexities that populisms are currently attempting to ignore in particularly harsh ways. Firstly, the fact that the state is not only permeable to cross-border movements but always tries to make them productive in order to secure its continued existence. Secondly, the fact that our societies have always been more rich, meaning more diverse and more heterogeneous, than any dominant notion of social life could project. In other words, the We has always been more rich than homogenized images of 'society' – nowadays turning to extremes due to right-wing populisms – would have us believe. Hence we are challenged to make this repressed richness of the social world visible, especially those other ways of living and working together at the communal level that forge tools for planetary challenges arising from within the world-shaping process called globalization.

Call for Contributions: The BG's 20th anniversary project MORE WORLD invites you to explore together communal tools for planetary challenges. To this end, the BG will create a special section in the Internet newspaper berlinergazette.de which will be open for contributions from all over the world. Moreover, we will organize a series of events. Further information on that can be found on this website: https://more-world.berlinergazette.de If you

would like to learn more about the project's questions and ideas, please continue reading here.

Climate Change, Migration, Digitalization

Today, climate change is one of the most pressing planetary challenges. It appears to be something that surrounds, envelops and entangles us, but it is literally too large to be seen and understood in its entirety. While climate change seems to be intangible, nowhere and everywhere at the same time, it is linked to everything and everyone, not least to migration and digitalization. The millions of people who are fleeing their homes in the Global South are ever more often on the run due to climate change and related disasters. Research has also provided initial insight into how global warming may already influence armed conflict. So, increasingly, mass movements of migrants and refugees are fleeing their devastated homes and destroyed life-worlds also because of wars breaking out due to climate change, such as in the Syrian conflict. There is more to come. And we must prepare ourselves for further entanglements. We also need to take notice of further interdependencies, which are becoming more complex and dynamic, for example, in the wake of digitalization.

Digitalization is an ongoing worldwide process, including the expansion of cloud infrastructure: the installation of fiber optic cables, the erection of data centers and server farms, etc. This infrastructure has a geopolitical dimension that is rarely discussed, which materializes itself at border controls, in immigration decisions or drone attacks, and is also linked to global warming. The political geography of cloud infrastructure transcends the sovereignty of nation-states and apparently also suspends the responsibility of nation-states for the influence of cloud

infrastructure on global warming. Meanwhile, higher temperatures cause stress for cloud infrastructure, while an incessant increase in 'cloud activities' leads to higher temperatures through the rising heat of server farms, etc. In the midst of this environmental infrastructure crisis, political spaces are emerging in which civil and human rights are muddled and seem to be criss-crossed. The people most affected by this, are those who wish to assert their right to freedom of movement. Thus, migration is becoming a 'risk game' in which markets and states that want to benefit from the 'mobile workforce' shift the risk solely to those who are among the most vulnerable in this 'game': refugees, asylum seekers, paperless and stateless persons, etc.

How can we find ways to make heavier the apparent 'lightness' of cloud infrastructure that accelerates climate change and passes judgment on people's lives? How can cloud infrastructure be appropriated by existing networks of solidarity? How can cloud infrastructure be undermined and replaced by alternative communal structures that, last but not least, can also support vulnerable people on the move? What kind of communal practices and tools are useful for the interplay between communal, state and global approaches to the planetary challenges at hand?

These are far-reaching questions. But somehow we need to get started. If we want to meet the complexities of globalization at the height of their current development, we must first recognize that climate change, migration and digitalization are interlinked geopolitical complexes that can only be managed appropriately if tackled by an interplay of communal, state and global organizational structures. But this is easier said than done. After all, escapism abounds. In the course of this, accesses to the world are shrinking. In other words, to reiterate, not only do accesses to

the world as it is disappear, but also to the world as it could be. This world shrinkage has two interconnected dimensions. Firstly, complex problems such as climate change are suppressed. Secondly, the diversity of the social, as it also arises in the course of migration, is suppressed. Everything is supposed to become clear and easily manageable – can that go well? That's highly doubtful. After all, the problematic complexities at hand are brought about by the diversity of the social and vice versa. This said, **complex problems cannot be overcome without the potential of social diversity. Therefore, it is vital to create new accesses to the We, which always also means creating new accesses to the world – and vice versa.**

The Destructive False Front of Right-Wing Populism

Today, we cannot avoid taking note of the damage caused by populism to any emancipatory endeavor. But we should not stop at this awareness. Populism's agenda should not devour too much of our attention and energy. After all, we need enough strength for our own agenda. But first to populism. Nowadays, the most dominant form of populism is nationalist right-wing populism. It is spreading rapidly in countries as diverse as Hungary, India, the USA, Turkey, Japan, Brazil and Germany. Where it finds supporters, simple solutions to complex problems are promised. This deceptive formula for success conjures up a homogeneous and authoritarian nation-state as a shelter, ignoring that the nation-state has for centuries been a catalyst for the expansion of transnational networks and traffic flows. It thus also obscures that **the nation-state has always played a decisive role in globalization, in other words right-wing populism is suppressing that the nation-state has crucially contributed to the production of planetary problems and, by conjuring up the phantasm of the**

nation, has even been responsible for some of the most atrocious crimes in human history, e.g., in the course of colonization.

By blocking out that the state has created the conditions for globalization, nationalist right-wing populists are simultaneously suppressing the fact that the state produces exactly those complexities and problems that they want to hide from inside the state. This irreconcilable contradiction is systematically suppressed by nationalist right-wing populists today. As they spread their misleading propaganda ever further, the suppressed is discharged into increasingly threatening energies. One can witness, for example, the hounding of 'the others' of society, the ostracizing of 'inhomogeneous alliances' and, ultimately, the self-destruction of societies as in the case of Brexit. In the course of this we are risking a regression into fascism as the proliferation of public debates on the subject, for example under the heading of "neo-fascism", also reminds us. Following the Frankfurt School, they give us the following to think about: Fascism is driven by a kind of lack of courage. First of all, a lack of courage of all those who join the fascists out of fear of the fascists, but above all also a lack of courage of all those who are afraid to face the richness of the world in all its entanglements and complexities.

At the beginning of this tendency stands escapism: the right-wing populist renunciation of global interdependencies and transnational obligations, i.e. of the complexities of economic and ecological, technological and cultural globalization. In shrinking the world and the accesses to the world, the escapist renunciation is sanctioned by forms of irrationality that are being legitimized by the nationalist right-wing politics of affect. What is particularly telling about this tendency is, that **it is not enough to appeal to the reason of those who have apparently gone mad. Ultimately, the escapist renunciation of planetary interdependencies goes hand in hand**

with the revival of the proto-fascist idea of white supremacy (e.g. Trump, Orban, Gauland), and thus also with the revitalization of an idea of rationality that – born inside the European Enlightenment-colonization-complex – ultimately represents and even enforces white supremacy.

World shrinkage and alienation from the world thus are forms of escapism that are performed as an ecstasy of irrationality, or rather, as an excess of a reason that stands under the sign of white supremacy. What today haunts the public sphere as disinhibited resentment is often an example of both: ecstasy of irrationality and excess of reason that is informed by notions of white supremacy. These processes vitalize a nationalist right-wing politics of affect, and discredit in the same breath other affect-driven social movements, as recently celebrated, for example, in the public debate using the case of the indignados in Southern Europe. The discreditation of such revolutionary politics of affect is at issue for various reasons, one of which is: nationalist and revolutionary politics of affect appear increasingly indistinguishable to the general public, so that revolutionary politics of affect seem to be robbed of their claim to be historically right and truthful. This sets the stage for a paradoxical predicament: Today, the rise of nationalist right-wing populism is creating conditions in which the broader spectrum of revolutionary politics is being delegitimized, while the 'irrational' agenda and doings of the nationalists and the extreme Right appear legitimate and rational.

In this political climate the public sphere is being severely constricted, catalyzing a far-reaching shrinkage of the world (that is always also a shrinkage of the We) and contributing to shutting down the public discourse for opposition, for dissent and, above all, for the greatest possible plurality of contributions to the discourse; the latter would also include marginalized, invisibilized and

illegalized actors, for whom discursive openings generally tend to be less secure than for others.

Needless to say, the incessant creation of an open public sphere – open for dissent and, above all, for the greatest possible plurality of contributions – has always been the vital basis of any democracy; yet, remarkably, it is in this historic moment, in Europe, in the USA and beyond, that the greatest collective courage needs to take hold to perform any basic democratic engagement and to live the richness of the We as it is and as it could be. Thus, we are challenged to explore how this courage can manifest itself productively.

Who Needs Blocked Accesses to the World Anyway?

While exploring and searching, it is necessary to critically note that 'the courage to democracy' and 'the courage to the We' are often limited to the self-defense of the privileged – those 'at the center of society', those composing 'the majority of society': persons with unlimited legal status, access to the higher education system, jobs subject to social security contributions, etc. Unsurprisingly, their self-defense is highly problematic, as it is complicit with the proto-fascist tendencies nurtured by right-wing populism.

For instance, the privileged are claiming, not without good reason, that 'the nationalists are threatening the achievements of liberal democracy'. Yet, they do not bother to ask who remained and remains excluded from those very 'achievements'. Instead, they take as the only measure of the threat those who have benefited from them and who now seem to be benefiting less in terms of freedom, security, influence, status, etc. In remaining focused on their own certainties – often mirrored in their to some extent uninhibited

fixation on the nationalists – the privileged ultimately support the currently dominant tendency normalized by nationalist right-wing populism to sanction relating all precarious developments exclusively to oneself, rather than to others. This has particularly grave consequences, as the real threat of shrinking discursive-political accesses to the world is not so much to the privileged, as to those who are truly vulnerable: marginalized, invisible and illegalized actors, including stateless persons or people of color, as refugee activist Jennifer Kamau reminds us.

Therefore: If we now demand MORE WORLD, then we do so *for and with* those who – according to nationalist right-wing populist propaganda – allegedly are of no concern to us, and who allegedly should be ignored, excluded or even killed. But we also demand this *for and with* the privileged. They too need more accesses to the world as it is and as it could be. Because – and this is the crux of the matter – only if we all together create and use more accesses to the world can we constructively meet planetary challenges.

Unshrinking the We

Today, we are challenged to reverse the trend towards world shrinkage. We have to create conditions for *more world*, which, in the sense of Hegel's "positive infinity", should always mean 'ever-more world'. In other words, we need to create conditions for an infinite *more* of the riches of the social world, which have been forcibly suppressed or fought against under white supremacy and its white, male rationality. Thus we need to enable and support the recognition of other ways of thinking, living and working together, and ultimately, of other politics of affects that are practiced day in, day out in the shadow of hegemonic discourses on the micro-level

of the communal. Moreover, we need to support the visibility of those actors at the communal level who arrive at globalization as responsible contemporaries by recognizing and dealing with global dynamics without necessarily declaring themselves as political actor models. After all, these are actors who are rising to their status of actors from within global dynamics in those very networks and movements that hold our societies together in tension and conflict, and who are, in the course of this, critically analyzing and modeling the handling of these complexities as an interplay of communal, national and transnational approaches. All of this also means supporting the visibility of practices that are deploying communal structures and connecting them with state and global structures to tackle global challenges.

One important source for this endeavor is Avery F. Gordon's "The Hawthorn Archive. Letters from the Utopian Margins". This impressively kaleidoscopic and genre-bending book is based on research that Gordon began in the 1990s on utopian traditions that have been systematically excluded from the Western canon. Organized in the form of an archive of actual and fictional experiences of living and working differently, Gordon's book makes a vast array of "subjugated knowledge" (Foucault) visible and available for appropriation. "The Hawthorn Archive" unearths neglected utopian traditions that are less about some distant future place that would have to be built according to people's ideals and more about living and working differently in the here and now. Here, those who were struggling for the Commons (and against enclosures) in 17th-century England are a major reference point for a variety of other movements, including those who struggled for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the Americas and those who struggled for decolonization in the Global South.

Needless to say, these struggles are still taking place. Making their history accessible by raising documents not as witnesses but rather as voices, makes it possible to situate contemporary struggles in a wider context and to understand how to detect them in the present. **After all, aren't many of the contemporary practices of living and working differently at the communal level simply taking place, rather than being declared and recorded as explicitly political, not to say utopian, projects? Thus, these undeclared acts tend to be overlooked when we are collectively making sense of the world in general and globalization in particular. And the richness of communal practices remains buried in the "utopian margins", as Gordon puts it.**

Rebooting the Commons Question

When probing the potential richness of the communal in the present political climate, it is compelling to take a closer look at the 1990s, that is, at the official beginning of the most recent chapter of globalization. Comparing our present moment to the 1990s, we may ask what constitutes continuity, repetition and difference. One thing is certain: the by-now largely forgotten social movements that emerged back then were challenged, like we are today, to position themselves at various fronts at the same time and to develop new alliances along the way. For instance, they had to position themselves in a doubly antagonistic fashion – both to globalization *euphoria* (apropos 'global triumph of the free market and liberal democracy') and to globalization *phobia* (see, for example, the rise of international right-wing populism or racist-motivated attacks on asylum centres in Germany).

Since movements of the 1990s cultivated a critical distance to the tendency of 'irrational' reactions to globalization, this critical

distance enabled an *analytical clarity* that could prove vital vis-à-vis the 'false clarity' incited in the currently 'irrationally' heated right-wing populist climate. In this sense we could approach the critical movements of the 1990s as buried toolboxes to be unearthed in this historical moment. We could inspect them as to how they realized key political practices, above all making possible a revival of the practice of the Commons: the local self-administration of resources and livelihoods that are increasingly being destroyed or privatized in the course of neo-liberal globalization, which has kicked off a new phase of enclosures.

Around the Commons question, ways of living and working together at the communal level were cultivated that were at once local and global. No wonder: after all, these were movements of the early Internet era. Ushering forms of collective imagination and cooperation across borders, their actions were driven by something that activist and scholar Angela Davis calls "hyper-empathy" – an empathy that enables solidarity beyond the limits of the nation-state.

In the course of this, alliances were formed between the Global North and the Global South and between the West and the East, the former, for example, in the case of movements as different as Zapatism, No One Is Illegal or Afrofuturism; the latter, for example, in the case of net activism or cyberfeminism. Not least, the interplay of municipal, state and global structures could be tested in seminal ways. A particularly dazzling example of this would be the Zapatistas. **In order to organize their livelihoods communally, the Zapatistas claimed regional autonomy, appealed to the rule of law and cultivated international solidarity networks – all in the shadow of and in resistance to the predatory doings of private-sector and governmental global players.**

Resisting idealizing them nostalgically, we could rescue these approaches from the shadows of the utopian margins, thereby making their subjugated knowledge about communal practices visible and putting the usefulness of this knowledge for today's situation up for discussion: How did the movements of the 1990s model the communal and, more generally speaking, the We in relation to state and global structures? What lessons do they offer for today's (planetary) challenges at the intersection of climate change, migration and digitalization? What can we – the privileged and dispossessed alike – learn from their failures?

Getting involved: Learn more about how to join Berliner Gazette's 20th anniversary initiative on communal tools for planetary challenges on this website: https://more-world.berlinergazette.de