Introduction - "Narratives of the Global South"

Introdução - "Narrativas do Sul Global"

Ulrich Mücke[1]

The four articles of the dossier are the product of the research group "World Order Narratives of the Global South", located at the University of Hamburg and the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (Hamburg). It may therefore be helpful to discuss the four terms of the group's name: World Order, Narratives, Global, and Global South.

To start with "world order", it is important to underline that this is not an analytical concept. It is impossible to study the world order in the singular because it is completely unclear to what this order refers to. It could be the political order of independent nation-states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries after the disintegration of colonial rule first in the nineteenth and second in the twentieth century. In this case, the world order would be the sum of the treaties and conventions signed by the nation-states and one could study the content of these treaties and conventions and the extent to which they regulate power politics between the states. But, of course, this would be a very specific state and law-centered idea of the concept of world order. Other ways of researching world order could focus on economic, social, or ideological phenomena. One could investigate global economic entanglement, international migration, or the diffusion and adaptation of ideas, beliefs, and modes of consumption. But it would be impossible to research all these topics at the same time. One cannot research everything at once. Research always implies a delimitation of interest.

Therefore, the research group does not concentrate on world order, but on ideas, or more precisely, narratives about world order. We are not so much interested in political, economic, social, ideological, or cultural entanglements that make the world appear as a single order, but in narratives about the ordering principles of this entity called the world. Of course, this approach is also a way of studying the world order because the ideas about the world order are part of the world order as are the ideas about the ideas, and so on. This is the characteristic of our self-reflexive epoch, usually called modernity.[2]

One of the starting points of our approach is a critical debate about the history of geopolitical thinking. The idea of geopolitics emerged at the end of the nineteenth century when the rise of the United States decentered power on a global scale for the first time in world history. Prior to the European expansion from the fifteenth century onward regarding political power, the world was divided into a number of subregions that might have trade relations but whose wars and conflicts had no global impact. This changed, of course, with European expansion and colonialism from the sixteenth century onward.

European wars tended to become wars inside and outside Europe, and in the same way conflicts outside Europe would have consequences inside Europe, too. But in the end, European technology and weapons were so powerful that no non-European power would challenge the Europeans in Europe or would conquer regions that had been European colonies. With the rise of the United States and, in the same way, Japan after the Meiji reform power relations on a global scale became more complex. Now one could imagine the United States or Japan intervening outside their own regional spheres. When President James Monroe declared in 1823 that the Western Hemisphere was of vital interest to the United States and that the United States would not accept European interference in the Americas, it was very clear that at that moment the country would not be able to help the former colonies of Spain and Portugal that had become independent years before. But power relations changed during the nineteenth century, and the United States became the most important power in the Caribbean, in North and Central America. At the turn of the century, the United States occupied the Philippines and Hawaii, changing the global order as it replaced the European colonial powers in the region. Across the Pacific Ocean, Japan had emerged as a regional power since the Meiji period, and when it defeated Russia in the 1905 war it became clear that from now on the world would henceforth be divided between European and non-European powers. Not surprisingly, people began to debate which nations would take the lead and which would fall behind.

Since the starting points of this debate were first the emergence of transregional powers outside Europe and second the assumption that conflicts would take place between individual nation-states, a completely new way of imagining the world order had emerged. No wonder a new term was coined to label this new way: geopolitics.[3] The first important geopolitical theory, or rather geopolitical assumption, came from a US naval officer: Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890). In his book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, published in 1890, he argued that control of the seas determined the destiny of nations. If the United States wanted to maintain and expand its power, it had to care about its commercial fleet and its navy. It is clear that power now was conceived on a global scale and thus the sea became crucial for supply lines in most of the international conflicts that could be imagined. No wonder that Mahan's ideas were so influential or – to put it in another way – the growing importance of sea power in the twentieth century now had a name: Mahan.

From a European point of view, Halford John Mackinder (1904) responded

some 14 years later to Mahan's assumptions by stating that it was not sea power but control of the pivotal landmass of Northern Asia that would be decisive for international power in the twentieth century. In his view, this landmass would guarantee control of the adjacent areas of Europe and the rest of Asia, first of all India and China. Obviously, Mackinder was wrong. Neither pre-revolutionary Russia nor the Soviet Union was able to control all of Europe or much of Asia south of its territory. Nevertheless, Mackinder made clear that land was still of crucial importance for global political power. Control of the sea was not possible without control of the land and thus Mahan and Mackinder became symbols of two different but ultimately interdependent approaches to power in world politics.

After World War II, geopolitical thinking was shaped by the Cold War, or in other words, geopolitics was the explicit description of the Cold War. It was George F. Kennan (1947) in an article in *Foreign Affairs* who explained that the Soviet Union was an expansive power that would not respect treaties or diplomacy. Hence, it had to be *contained* through power politics. This was applied to all aspects of international relations, whether diplomatic, commercial, military, or propaganda. The idea of containment would persist until 1989 whether in its harsher form of persecuting an alleged expansion by internal enemies or in its softer form of trying to come to terms with the eternal enemy. Only a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Francis Fukuyama (1989) implicitly declared the end of the containment paradigm arguing that liberal ideas had conquered liberal and non-liberal societies and that therefore non-capitalist societies would fall apart, meaning that the capitalist paradigm would triumph all over the world. This was apparently true for the next years, but some thirty years later the end of history seems to be very different from what Fukuyama had imagined. What is important, however, is that Fukuyama challenged the geopolitical paradigm of industrial and military power arguing that ideas are stronger than weapons and political power.

Seven years later, Samuel P. Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Like Fukuyama, Huntington did not pay much attention to industrial and military power, but focused on cultural aspects, especially religion. He divided the world into a number of vast cultural areas that he believed would eventually clash. Hence, after a century of geopolitical thinking, nation-states were replaced by non-state entities called "cultures". But while nation-states exist in reality, Huntington's cultures exist only between the covers of his book. By ceasing to see the nation state as the exclusive force

of worldwide power politics, both Fukuyama and Huntington made geopolitical thinking much more complex and difficult. The research group and the four articles in this dossier reflect this state of what formerly had been geopolitical research, in that they do not focus on worldwide confrontation of particular nation-states, but analyze deeper trends in the way worldwide power is imagined and constructed.

This approach means moving away from an understanding of geopolitics as an exclusively intellectual activity that affects politics by virtue of its ideas. The history of geopolitical thought is part of the history of geopolitics, because geopolitical thought articulates and shapes political interests. From Alfred Tayer Mahan to Samuel P. Huntington, authors write about geopolitics in order to intervene in international politics. In most cases, authors see themselves as a kind of advisors to national governments or even hold positions in the political administration. This raises the question of what kind of text we are talking about. It seems obvious that we are not dealing with purely academic writings that are not interested in influencing politics. Rather, it seems that the academic aura of the above-mentioned texts is only meant to hide the fact that they are first and foremost political pamphlets rather than neutral, academic treatises that respect scientific methods. Following the speech act theory, according to which words are deeds, the Cambridge School around Pocock and Skinner developed an interpretation of the history of ideas in which political ideas are not timeless entities, but rather communication contexts within concrete historical situations (SKINNER, 1969). But while it is patently clear that words can be actions, it is much less plausible that an idea has an immediate impact in a communicative context. This is due to the word "idea" itself, which does not express any activity, but has migrated from Plato's understanding of an idea as something non-material that a person sees into the various European languages. Therefore, the term "idea" could lead to the misunderstanding that we refer to abstract, academic thinking and not to written interventions in politics.

What term should we use to avoid this kind of misunderstanding? For several reasons, narrative seems the best. Unlike "idea", "concept", and similar expressions, narrative refers to an act of communication involving at least two persons or entities. There is no narrative without one telling the other. Even a self-narrative refers to a narrative about the self, not to the self. In this sense, narrative is similar to discourse. One might argue that we can have an understanding of idea or concept that also implies communication. But this

ultimately goes against the spontaneous, pre-academic understanding of these terms.

But why do we speak of world order narratives and not of world order discourses? First of all, discourse is a polyvalent term that can be a speech, a discussion, or a treatise. In academic language, it can refer to what people believe and communicate in public. But it can also be understood, with Michel Foucault, as the sayable, that is, a kind of all-encompassing norm. Narrative, on the other hand, is a basic mode of human speech and thought. We speak of a narrative when something said refers to an event.[4] An event always takes place in space and time. This means that there is no narrative without space and time. An argument or a description is not a narrative. So, if I say my car is blue, that is not a narrative. But if I say I am driving my car, that is a narrative because it implies a time frame, that is, a before, a during, and an after. So narrative does not just refer to literature, like novels or short stories. On the contrary, it is a fundamental way of imagining and speaking about the world. It is so fundamental that we imagine narratives at every moment. For example, when we see something in a place where it was not before, we imagine that someone put it there. When we see a plant, animal or person that looks different than we remember, we imagine a change over time. Much of the human world is made up of narratives.

It is evident that texts on geopolitics are always narratives. They refer to changes and continuities over time. And moreover, they are really stories of countries, cultures, or regions imagined as human-like actors struggling against each other. The resemblance of nations in geopolitical texts to human beings is striking. In some cases, geopolitics seems to be a kind of Boy Scout game in the woods applied to world politics. Labeling geopolitical texts as narratives underlines that action-in-time is one of the distinguishing features of these texts.

However, there is a second reason why we prefer to speak of narratives. Since narratives are a basic way of imagining the world, narratives can be found not only in texts, but also in music (without lyrics) and in images (photos, paintings, etc.). This is because the human brain transforms music and images into narratives. When we hear a march we imagine people marching, and when we see two cars collided in a photo we imagine a car crash. It is a natural predisposition and a socialized skill that we always imagine how something we see became what we see. Applied to geopolitical thinking, this means that geopolitical narratives can be expressed not only through texts but also through other media. This said,

it is evident that the academic texts mentioned above are only a very small part of the media that convey geopolitical narratives. What people outside the US-American and European academic elites think about geopolitics may also be expressed and communicated in media other than books and journal articles. Thus, to get an idea of what people in the Global South think about world order, it is helpful to speak of narratives because this term emphasizes the time-space dimension of geopolitics and at the same time allows non-textual media to be included in the analysis.

It is easy to criticize the concept of the Global South. The term came into widespread use after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the political turn in China. This was not the end of history because there are still different political models competing on a worldwide scale. However, the economic division of the world has disappeared. Therefore, the Cold-War concept of a First, Second, and Third World no longer makes sense. The term "Global South" could therefore be seen as a kind of replacement for the term "Third World" or even of Third and Second World together. The old understanding would thus survive in a completely changed world order. But this criticism overlooks the meaning of both "global" and "Global South".

The term "global" began its success story in the 1990s, in parallel with the impression that the world was experiencing a period of intensified globalization. The main reason for this impression was, of course, the end of communism in Europe and Russia, as well as China's turn to a capitalist market economy. There was a sense that these epochal changes were strengthening connections and interdependencies around the world. A brief look at the evolution of global trade shows that these political changes did not have an immediate impact. Between 1970 and 1980 the value of international trade increased sixfold, between 1980 and 1990 it increased by 75%, and between 1990 and 2000 it increased by just over 80%. In the first decade of the new century, it grew more than 250%, while in the next decade growth was much slower, not only because of the pandemic, but long before that (WTO, 1995). Thus, in the 1990s people became aware of the globalization processes that had begun decades earlier and that may have been one of the causes of the fall of socialism. Regarding trade, however, the 1990s were not a decade of acceleration, but in the long run rather a decade of slow growth.

In academic research and beyond, "global" has always had two meanings. First, global means worldwide. A global player, for example, is an entity that is present all over the world. Global history, therefore, means the history of

the world. In this sense, global is just a synonym for another word, and it is used because it sounds better for one reason or another. Referring to history it goes without saying that until recently there was no global or world history. The Americas and Europe had no relevant contact until 1492, and it took the Europeans centuries to subdue the entire American continent. Similarly, other regions of the world would only have been connected to world history in the last five centuries. Before that, there were a small number of regions that considered themselves to be a world but were not connected to each other at all, or only to a very small extent (REINHARD, 2015). Thus, the old world history expressed the Eurocentric idea that world history began in the so called "Orient" and Mediterranean Europe just to bring the culture of the Old World to other regions of the world. European expansion was world history. Global history has a more decentered view of the world. But it also assumes that from a certain moment on, history takes place on a global scale. The same can be said of post- or decolonial history. The starting point of this approach is also that the world is connected by European expansion. But, unlike other approaches, expansion now means something bad, be it exploitation, slavery, or the extermination of local cultures and people. In the end, however, in all these very different approaches the term "global" means worldwide and is used to describe the process of creating an interconnected world.

In contrast to this understanding, the term "global" is also used to describe interconnectedness, entanglement, or integration. According to this meaning, global refers to small- and large-scale processes through which countries, regions, or people get connected. It can refer to social, political, economic, or cultural connections. Entanglement can occur through migration, political ties, trade and investment, or the consumption of music, movies, or other artistic products, to name a few. The different meanings of global become clear when we consider the term global history. For some historians, global history is the history of the world. For others, global history refers to a methodological approach that focuses on processes of entanglement. Unlike other approaches, this global history is less interested in national histories than in international and transnational ones. This includes the mentioned social, economic, and cultural phenomena.

The two meanings of global are related to differences in historical research. For those who read global as synonymous with worldwide, historians should look for deeper explanations for longer trends and developments in world history. These may be systems, structures, ideas, or other human-made

forces that drive history over longer periods of time. Those who understand global as entanglement in concrete spatial settings generally believe that there is little point in seeking overarching principles of order in the global historical process. This opinion often goes hand in hand with the view that the search for worldwide systems or structures usually ends up in Eurocentric understandings. The former reminds us of Hegel's idea of history. The right-wing emphasizes the spread of European civilization; the left-wing, European colonialism and exploitation. The second approach is closer to a traditional historicist understanding of history, although it does not share its nationalist tone. Obviously, the tension between the two meanings of the global is the tension within historical research itself.

The term "Global South" is even more complex than "global" because it is used in academic and non-academic contexts with very different meanings. Although it existed long before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became widely used only after 1990 and especially after 2000. Historically, it is a term that would replace "Third World". The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in its *Handbook of Statistics*, defines "North" as the developed countries and "South" as the "developing" countries (UNCTAD, 2022). In this case, it is clear that only the words have changed but not the ideas. For the UNCTAD, North and South do not refer to points of the compass or to geography, but to socio-economic data at the national level. Moreover, the change from "Third World" to "Global South" does not express a critique of the development paradigm but on the contrary is used to reinforce the idea that development means implementing capitalist market economies in all countries in the world and erasing any differences regarding production and consumption patterns.

The use of the term "Global South" in the sense of UNCTAD is problematic not only because it is closely related to the development paradigm, but also because today the so-called Global South is an extremely heterogeneous area. Countries that might have belonged to the Third World, today are much closer to the industrialized nation-states of the North than to their former counterparts from the "Third World". Thus, different classification systems compete nowadays to label countries according to their supposed development. There are developed, developing and least developed countries or high-, middle-, and low-income countries. However, on the one hand, the development paradigm is part of these categories too, and on the other hand, the classification of countries changes over time as one country becomes relatively richer and

another poorer in the course of contemporary history.

In sum, as an analytical term, the "Global South" is of little value, as it repeats a very problematic understanding of historical change and is based on extremely vague differences between countries that are, moreover, constantly changing. However, the term can also be understood as an alternative to highly normative concepts such as civilization/barbarism, modern/traditional-archaic, or developed/underdeveloped (or developing, least developed). Unlike these concepts, "Global South" does not literally imply a hierarchy. "North" is not better than "South". On the contrary, there is probably more praise for the South than for the North, even from people in the North. Thus, unlike the older terms, "Global South" can go along with worldviews that do not adhere to hierarchies and even to the idea of development. "Global South" can be used by people who oppose capitalist market economies as well as by people who praise them. It is much more neutral. Of course, this does not mean that such an understanding leads to clearer boundaries. Regardless of the meaning of the term, no one knows exactly which countries belong to the Global South and which do not.

The difference between the most common way of understanding the Global South (the UNCTAD way including the idea of development) and a non-normative understanding of the term refers to different worldviews. A Global South that includes the development paradigm is based on a universalistic worldview. According to this view, all human beings are equal and have the same rights. Therefore, inequalities and differences should disappear. But this means that all kinds of customs, habits, and culture that do not promote equality must also disappear. Societies in which women are not equal to men, homosexuals are not equal to heterosexuals, and agnostics are not equal to believers must disappear, or in politically correct terms, they have to develop. When we speak of the Global South in a normative sense, we imagine a world made according to our ideas of how people should live. In most cases, this is Eurocentric, or more precisely: Intellectual-centric.

However, the term Global South can also be understood in a relativistic sense. In this case, Global South refers to those countries, regions, cultures, and people that see themselves as different from an imagined North. This includes people who want to maintain local customs and habits, but also people who want to kill adulterers or imprison homosexuals. Relativism does not mean that the Global South is the good side of history. It simply tries to improve research by eliminating normative concepts that make a deeper understanding

of the world difficult. This does not mean that one does not hold on to these concepts. Society is a normative system and everyone is part of a particular society. However, for research, one should try to use a relativistic understanding of the Global South.

The four articles in this dossier refer in one way or another to the concepts discussed in this introduction. Thiago Henrique Oliveira Prates studies the narratives of the new Uruguayan left about China in the 1950s and 1960s. For those disillusioned with Soviet communism, the Chinese revolution was an option for rethinking the world order from the Global South, that is, from a place independent of both the so-called Western world and the Eastern bloc. Although the pro-Chinese narrative would never be accepted by the majority of the left, it is a good example of how people have invented world order narratives of the Global South since the beginning of the Cold War.

Natália Ayo Schmiedecke focuses on the other model of independent socialist revolution: Cuba. Analyzing posters of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL), she highlights the role that Cuba played or tried to play in the construction of world order narratives. The OSPAAAL posters were intended to spread specific ideas about worldwide structures and conflicts. One of the most important messages was that Cuba itself was part of the South and that the countries and peoples of the South needed to unite. It goes without saying that they highlighted the atrocities of imperialism on the one hand and the heroic struggles of socialist freedom fighters on the other. OSPAAAL posters were highly influential, both for their aesthetics and content, and were being distributed by thousands in many countries around the world.

The collective article by Mohammadbagher Forough, Eckart Woertz, Khalil Dahbi, and Alex Waterman shows a number of narratives currently circulating in the Mashreq, India, Morocco, and Iran that explicitly challenge European or US-American assumptions about the global order. The authors' overview emphasizes the differences between the analyzed narratives. There is not just one world order narrative of the Global South. Rather, different countries, regions, and cultures produce different narratives, as do different political movements. The old hegemonic idea of a development led by the industrialized countries of Europe and North America has not been replaced by another hegemonic narrative.

Finally, Diana M. Natermann discusses the visualization of "non-white" Africans. Beginning with colonial photography, she shows how specific racist

stereotypes and prejudices were part of a visual culture closely related to photography. Through images, it was possible to construct and transport specific narratives about the order of the world, which were, of course, extremely hierarchical and exclusionary. Natermann emphasizes that the colonial visual tradition did not disappear with national emancipation. On the contrary, one has to change one's ways of seeing and visualizing in order to overcome the coloniality inscribed in older photographs.

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Notas

[1] Ulrich Mücke is Professor of Latin American History at the University of Hamburg.

[2] For "the reflexivity of modernity" see Giddens (1991) (quote: p. 32). Following Ortega y Gasset (2017, p. 100, footnote 6), I prefer not to use the term "modernity".

[3] The term first appeared in Kjellén (1899).

[4] For the following, see Abbott (2008).

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Sociedades Científicas