



PANEL SESSION:

FB-ST22 From Grassroots to Global: Civil Corporate, Accountability and World Politics. The 17th Pan-European Conference on International Relations 2024 Lille, August 27-31, 2024

In times when world politics transcends state-centric paradigms, this panel explores the evolving role of non-state actors in global affairs by looking at the cause of corporate accountability. It examines the interplay between civil society, corporate behavior, and the creation of norms, knowledge, and regimes outside national boundaries. By challenging the marginalization of non-state actors in international relations, the panel advances discussions on how societal stakeholders, including civil society, can address global problems. The field of corporate accountability is particularly well suited to answer questions on where, how, and why non-state actors impact global politics, due to its potential of conflict and the wide lack of agreement between opposing actors. It looks at the places and fora beyond state power where norms and knowledge are produced. It observes the dynamics and strategies of different societal actors, notably civil society and transnational corporations, in their interaction with states and international regimes. It also examines the limits of state-centered solutions to problems that are overwhelmingly global in their nature. The panel brings together papers that interrogate the different contributions of civil society to shaping norms and forming knowledge in the field of corporate accountability, emphasizing divisions, the influence of diverse cultures of knowledge - including indigenous perspectives on justice and earth rights - and the impact of varied legal traditions. In particular, the panel offers insights into the internal dynamics of organizations involved in different transnational networks across the world, studies the diverse visions of justice in Latin America, assess the potential of legal means in the struggle with supply chains, and analyzes the effects of boycott and divestment campaigns on international relations and global politics. The panel, therefore, contributes to discussions on the role of non-state actors, global civil society, and, most notably, on power relations within world politics.

Chair: **Henry Rammelt (SNSPA)**

Presenters:

Victoria Basualdo (SNSPA), *Corporate Involvement in Human Rights Violations: Transnational Entanglements between Argentina, Brazil and Chile*

This paper examines the impact of transnational dialogue between Argentinean, Brazilian and Chilean activists and academics on discourses and accountability strategies regarding corporate involvement in human rights violations. Starting in the first decade of the 21st century, such transnational cooperation fostered an ever-growing regional civil society and judicial concern with corporate accountability and expanded the debates to include central topics, such as the role of economic actors in race, gender and environmental violence. The paper shows, in the first place, how Argentina, a country that is considered a pioneer of corporate accountability in the context of transitional justice, influenced Chile and Brazil in terms of legal strategies, social activism and historical research of corporate abuses committed during the 1970s dictatorships. Such studies



impacted the preliminary studies on corporate responsibility in Argentina: the connections and exchanges with Chile and Brazil led to a more complex and encompassing focus on corporate responsibility, taking also into account rural areas, peasant organizations and indigenous communities, underlying aspects of racial and gender violence, as well as impacts on ecological, productive and territorial issues that had only been limitedly explored before. The transnational collaborations among epistemic communities thus led to the expansion and enrichment of approaches to corporate accountability and more widely to the shared ethical understandings underpinning the norms, institutions and practices in world politics.

Andru Chiorean (SNSPA), *Safeguarding Neoliberal Global Governance: Tactics, Collaboration, and Mobilization in the Transnational Business Advocacy*

Economic globalization and trade liberalization have elevated corporations as global private authorities with powers that match and often surpass that of national governments. By converting their economic capital into political power, TNCs often sidestepped the regulatory role of the state to avoid accountability for their social and environmental impact of their business operations. In the absence of effective institutions of transnational governance, an increasingly active transnational civil society has combined legal and political strategies to curb the power of TNCs and provide access to remedies for victims of corporate human rights violations. It is in the argument of this paper that these counter-hegemonic attempts, subject of a burgeoning literature, are understood better in tandem with the responses of hegemonic actors (TNCs) to evade, oppose, and co-opt political and social pressures. Businesses also constantly mobilize various agents (NGOs, business associations, research institutions etc.) to maintain their ideological and economic supremacy. By focusing on major business organizations and NGOs such as International Organisation of Employers, International Chamber of Commerce, US Council for International Business, and East African Business Council, this paper explores their strategies to constrain the reach, the scope and the enforceability of cross-border regulation of their economic activities and human rights adverse consequences.

Raluca Grosescu (SNSPA), *Civil Society, World Politics, and Divisive Discourses on Corporate Accountability*

This paper explores different ideological approaches to corporate accountability for human rights violations and massive environmental degradation, and the way they impact on norm formation and justice processes. Based on empirical analysis of transnational advocacy networks linking Europe, North America, and Latin America, and the examination of academic literature on global corporate accountability, I identify four scripts of dealing with corporate violence: 1) the neoliberal script emphasizes the value of corporate self-governance, including social corporate responsibility and auto-regulations of various industries; 2) the liberal script endorses binding regulations, but still put in the center of the attention the importance of free markets as a key factor of development and economic growth; 3) the neo-Marxist script takes a bold stance against structural inequalities generated by capitalism in general, and neoliberalism in particular – followed by claims of restructuring not only the corporate accountability legal arrangements, but also the current economic system; 4) the indigenous script, emerging particularly from Latin America and claiming



an alternative visions on human rights, environment and economic development that challenges both the liberal and the neo-Marxist approaches. I argue that while civil society organizations and epistemic communities play a key role in promoting corporate accountability, their internal fragmentation also limits the corporate accountability visions and strategies. Within the current dominant framework of neoliberalism, the predominance of neoliberal and liberal scripts allows both states and business communities to choose strategic civil society partners and limit radical approaches to business and human rights.

Henry Rammelt (SNSPA), *Mobilizing a global cause for a local wrong? A comparative study of boycott and divestment campaigns against states and corporations*

Contemporary approaches to IR often transcend traditional state-centric perspectives, warranting questions regarding actors, fora, and power relations between these actors. Studying the global cause of corporate accountability, a highly contentious field, where very powerful actors (corporations and governments) are challenged by other actors, has the potential to reveal the intricate and oftentimes conflictual relation between civil society and powerful actors. Boycott and divestment campaigns can both be seen as protest actions mobilized by the former to compel the latter to change their behavior. Why do some boycotts work, while others fail? Why do some divestment campaigns become Global success stories, whereas others pass almost unnoticed? How do states and corporations react to such campaigns? This paper tries to answer such questions through a comparative of three global campaigns. It looks at the intersection of emerging political participation, corporate conduct, and regime type through an in-depth analysis of the boycott against Shell in Nigeria, the divestment campaign targeting Sudan for the Darfur genocide, and the divestment initiative against Burma for human rights violations. The paper has three key objectives: first, understanding the nuanced relationship between evolving forms of political participation and the conduct of multinational corporations within specific geopolitical contexts; second, situating these campaigns within the broader landscape of political participation and assessing their role in advancing (global) justice; third, providing a comprehensive and global perspective on boycotting and divestment campaigns and the corresponding reactions of businesses.

Christian Scheper (University Duisburg-Essen), *Legal struggles over corporate accountability: Politics of implementation in the case of the German supply chain act*

New legal frameworks are emerging in several countries to address the environmental and human rights impacts of transnational corporations and their supply chains. These frameworks mark a significant evolution in transnational regulation, aiming to improve decades of relatively ineffective transnational private governance. Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act, which came into force in January 2023 after protracted civil society advocacy, represents a critical juncture in this evolution. The law provides a valuable case for examining the evolving dynamics of legal struggles for transnational corporate accountability. This paper examines the politics of implementation of the German Supply Chain Act. By integrating empirical data from regulatory debates on the importance of implementation processes with theoretical perspectives from political economy and legal sociology, it highlights the political dimension of disputes over the



interpretation and limitation of national laws during their enactment. It identifies instances where public regulation merges with private management practices, their norms and operational logics, and civil society engagements that are more evident not in the legislative process but in the implementation of the law. Drawing on textual analysis, expert interviews from the ongoing implementation phase, and participant observation of civil society debates in Germany, the paper highlights the socially constructed and contested nature of corporate compliance with international rules and norms.

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