



PANEL SESSION:

Solidarity or Subsumption? Corporations, Civil Society, and the Politics of Corporate Accountability in Europe's Global Relations
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Europe has long imagined itself as a space of integrity, solidarity, and unity; values embodied in the welfare state, human rights, and transnational democratic commitments. Yet, the practices of European corporate actors and civil society organizations reveal ambivalent dynamics when it comes to social progress, democracy, and the protection of rights, notably abroad. This panel examines the contested terrain of corporate accountability for human rights and environmental harms, a travers these actors for both their past and their present role. Consequently, the panel focusses on the role of European corporations and civil society in relation to justice and human rights in the Global South, where claims of solidarity often collide with economic interests and paternalistic visions of development. Initiatives such as peoples' tribunals on corporate accountability further expose the gap between symbolic gestures of justice and the absence of binding mechanisms to address European corporate abuses in the Global South. Contributions explore the ideological scripts of European NGOs and their selective solidarities with Global South struggles; corporate narratives of responsibility in relation to their Nazi past and the ways museums and archives shape memory and accountability; the effectiveness and limits of boycotts and divestment campaigns in challenging corporate impunity; the role of peoples' tribunals as symbolic arenas of justice that contest corporate impunity while exposing the limits of non-binding accountability mechanisms. By juxtaposing corporate self-presentations with civil society

strategies and institutional responses, the panel foregrounds the contradictions of accountability politics: do they democratize the economy and strengthen solidarity, or do they reproduce the very inequalities they aim to contest?

Victoria Basualdo: European multinational corporations and human rights violations: history, archives and collective memory in Europe and Latin America. This paper examines how two major European multinational car manufacturers, the German corporations Volkswagen AG and Mercedes-Benz AG, have addressed their involvement in crimes against humanity. It does so in two directions. First, it analyzes how these corporations confronted their role in forced labor and other violations under the Nazi regime, emphasizing their decades-long resistance to accountability until the 1980s, when pressure from trade unions and civil society organizations compelled them to acknowledge this past, open corporate archives, and establish heritage initiatives around collective memory. Second, it considers their policies regarding human rights violations during the Cold War dictatorships in Argentina (1976–1983) and Brazil (1964–1985), underlining the double standards of these corporations in avoiding accountability and civic responsibility in the Global South. The analysis raises broader questions about the role of European corporations in shaping narratives of solidarity and justice across borders. By contrasting their selective memory politics in Europe with their silence on abuses in Latin America, the paper shows how corporate actors undermine the very values of integrity, solidarity, and unity that European societies claim to uphold. It argues for stronger acknowledgment of victims regardless of nationality or status, and for robust and binding policies of corporate accountability and reparations. Such measures are essential not only for building more solid democracies in Latin America but also for reimagining Europe's future as grounded in genuine commitments to solidarity and justice at the global level.

Andru Chiorean: People's Tribunals, European Solidarity, and Transnational Corporate Accountability. This paper explores the engagements of European NGOs and legal scholars with people's tribunals addressing transnational corporate (TNCs) crimes, from the Second Russell Tribunal on Latin America (1970s) to contemporary initiatives, such as the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) on corporate power in Southern Africa (2016–2018). Emerging from European traditions of anti-colonialism and universal aspirations of human rights, people's tribunals sought to expand the Eurocentric vocabularies of postwar legal thinking and create more inclusive interpretations of international law to condemn Western (state and corporate) imperialism and colonialism in the Global South. Regarding corporate accountability, people's tribunals document corporate abuses – ranging from land grabs and displacement of local communities to violence against anti-extractivist activists – and reclaim political agency where state and international mechanisms fail. The paper retraces a long tradition of European intellectuals', lawyers' and NGOs' commitment to build transnational solidarity networks for global justice, with a specific



focus on three PPT sessions held in Swaziland and South Africa (2016–2018) and which examined the complicity of EU-based and other transnational corporation in human rights violations. I argue that European-based NGOs – such as The Transnational Institute and Friends of the Earth Europe – and European lawyers – from Lelio Basso to Philippe Texier, created networks of solidarity with Global South counterparts to convene people’s tribunals, expose the role of TNCs in human rights violations and advocate for stronger national and international regulation of business activities. This transnational cooperation consolidated solidarity for corporate accountability and social justice at a global level.

Henry P. Rammelt: Gatekeepers of Solidarity? European Civil Society and the Reproduction of Inequality in Corporate Accountability Networks. Civil society organizations active in corporate accountability are often celebrated as counter-hegemonic actors advancing integrity, solidarity, and justice across borders, with the potential to contribute to the democratization of the economy. Yet their organizational structures and transnational ties may reproduce the very capitalist and colonial power relations they seek to contest. This paper interrogates these dynamics through a social network analysis of 190 organizations active in corporate accountability, focusing on the intersection of donor dependency and geographic location. We map how Global North and Global South actors connect, which organizations occupy central hubs, and who brokers agendas across clusters. The analysis reveals a network dominated by large, Global North organizations, often recipients of state or charity funding, that function as gatekeepers. These actors filter and moderate dissent, while South–South solidarities remain weak and peripheral. The result is a pattern of vertical dependency ties that undermines the possibility of autonomous and transformative agendas emerging from the Global South. European organizations are disproportionately central in the field, yet their structural power risks reinforcing hierarchies rather than fostering unity across civil society globally. While Europe presents itself as a guardian of social progress and rights, its civil society networks remain entangled in dependencies that compromise their emancipatory potential. This analysis suggests that the future of European solidarity cannot be detached from the structural inequalities embedded in transnational activism; inequalities that risk hollowing out hopes of integrity and unity in practice.

Raluca Grosescu: European NGOs and Divisive Discourses on Corporate Accountability for Human Rights Violations. After the economic crisis of 2008-2010, numerous European NGOs have initiated campaigns designed to challenge the neoliberal order and hold accountable multinational corporations involved in human rights violations. From global NGOs originating in Europe, such as Amnesty International, to national based-organisations with cross-border activity such as Sherpa or PAX, European NGOs have committed to corporate accountability and have joined transnational networks to support this cause. Yet, an analysis of their ideological foundations reveals different ways of imagining accountability and social justice within Europe and at a global level. Based on analysis of transnational advocacy networks linking Europe and Latin America, I identify four scripts of dealing with corporate violence, according to different visions of rights, development and democracy. The neoliberal script emphasises the value of corporate self-governance and posits free markets as the best source of social progress. The socio-



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liberal script endorses binding regulations for corporate responsibility, defend social and economic rights, but still understands free markets as the key factor of development. A combined post-colonial and neo-Marxist script underlines colonialism and capitalism as sources of systemic inequality, supports binding regulations and seeks to restructure the global economy based on principles of global solidarity and equality. The Indigenous script challenges both liberal and neo-Marxist approaches and struggles for an alternative world, based on equal rights of humans and nature. I conclude that, with few exceptions, European NGOs have generally aligned with the first and the second scripts and showed limited solidarity with more transformative, Global South ideas of corporate accountability.