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Conference Report on “Realms of Royalty: New Directions in Researching Contemporary European Monarchies”

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC)

Justus Liebig University Giessen, 20-21 April 2017

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Organized by CHRISTINA JORDAN (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen) and IMKE POLLAND (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen) and hosted by the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU), the interdisciplinary conference „Realms of Royalty: New Directions in Researching Contemporary European Monarchies“ assembled a wide array of researchers and subjects. Ranging from debates of royal celebrity culture to various media representations or analyses of geo-political and diplomatic roles of the sovereigns, the two-day event offered innovative and enlightening views on European monarchies.

Transnational Monarchies in the 19th Century

The first panel already showcased this diversity of approaches, as it broadened the perspective on the geographical and geo-political realm of monarchies on the one hand, while connecting it to domestic nation-building on the other hand. CINDY MCCREERY (University of Sydney) and her discussion of royal tours highlighted the manifold repercussions of royal visits, both at home and abroad, concerning issues like early celebrity culture, translation, and appropriation of local imagery. MIRIAM SCHNEIDER (University of St Andrews) turned her attention to Denmark, focusing her talk on the Danish Crown and its use of the sea as mythical and cultural symbol, as well as an historical and economic resource. TORSTEN RIOTTE (Goethe University, Frankfurt/M) explained the numerous strategies of dynastic survival of monarchs in exile, e.g. their participation in global flows of finance or successful negotiations with democratic governments. Finally, using Michael Billig's concept of ‚banal monarchy‘ and analyzing material objects and royal ceremonies, DAVID SAN NARCISO (Complutense University, Madrid) showed the vital role of Isabel II in the reconfiguration of the Spanish nation in the 19th century.

Monarchy and Media

The next two panels both concentrated on diverse forms of popular cultural representations of monarchy in the media, from TV and film to music and comics. First, STEFAN TRAJKOVIĆ FILIPOVIĆ (GCSC, JLU, Giessen) elaborated on the barely known story of the imposter Stephen the Little of Montenegro and subsequently compared two filmic versions of the myths surrounding the tsar (from 1955 and 1979), situating them in their respective media landscapes. KATI VOIGT (Leipzig University) focused on the first season of the Netflix series *The Crown* and its efforts to not only humanize Elizabeth II, but also to present an uncritical confirmation of monarchy without addressing more problematic issues like colonization. MARIE MENZEL (Freie Universität, Berlin) remained on the small screen and explored the often humorous uses of monarchical figures and symbols in *Doctor Who* as memory sites and historiographical intertexts.

The proceedings continued with an approach extending ,traditional‘ fields of royal studies, as JESSICA KOCH (Bielefeld University) presented her interpretation of royal insignia in modern professional wrestling and their ironic activations of the US American colonial past. Next, ALEXANDER SCHERR (GCSC, JLU, Giessen) addressed anti-royal sentiments in alternative music (*The Smiths*, *Primal Scream*, *Leon Rosselson*) and identified them not as personal attacks, but institutional criticisms and expressions of wider trends of discontent with the monarchy. NATALIE VEITH (Goethe University, Frankfurt/M) presented her insights on three neo-Victorian comics and their representations of Queen Victoria. While Victoria seems to be largely absent from the stories, Veith showed that her character is still central in negotiating key themes and mirroring narrative composition in her short appearances. The day ended with the first keynote lecture by SUSANNE SCHOLZ (Goethe University, Frankfurt Main). Guided by the modern fascination of the ,dancing queen‘ Elizabeth I, Scholz analyzed central dance scenes from several films about the queen’s life, spanning her talk from dance history to visual culture. In these scenes, Elizabeth I appears as a fantasmatic projection of contemporary desires, turning the spectator’s gaze from her ‘body politic‘ to her ‘body natural‘ (cf. E.H. Kantorowicz 1957), and thus complicating the portrayal of her political agency.

The Royal Family as Brand and Asset

The second keynote lecture of the conference took a slightly different angle: PAULINE MACLARAN (Royal Holloway University, London) centered her talk on the branding of the English Royal Family and its intersection with consumer culture. In her analysis, mainly based on producers, consumers, and collectors, Maclaran identified different sub-divisions of the brand, like the human, family, heritage or luxury part of the branding, all trying to solve the ,paradox of access to the mystique‘ by balancing access and exclusivity.

The subsequent panel took on similar questions, starting with DEIRDE GILFEDDER (Université Dauphine, Paris) and her exploration of three English kings' speeches in the 1930s. She argued that the medium of the radio was paramount for the royals' strategy of stabilization of the Empire, humanization of the monarchs, and solidarity in times of war. EDWARD OWENS (Lincoln University) continued this discussion by focusing on the broadcast of Princess Elizabeth in 1940, especially in regard to its role in establishing a new 'royal language' of personal grief and suffering, and its reception in the streets of London. FALKO SCHNICKE (German Historical Institute, London) then turned to diplomatic history and examined a debate of the 1970s on whether royal state visits could be used as an asset to aid the British economy and forge economic relations.

After a session including poster presentations by students of the Department of English (JLU, Giessen) with topics reaching from speculations about a future King Charles III, TV adaptations of Henry VIII, to the fashion of the Duchess of Cambridge and Queen Letizia, the last panel picked up several strands of conference discussions. MARTIN SPIES (JLU, Giessen) took a closer look at exhibitions of royal fashion, often staged in palaces, and their various ways of creating (or sustaining) the aura of the (female) monarchs. EVA KIRBACH (JLU, Giessen) analyzed two plays depicting Elizabeth II, *The Audience* and *Handbagged*, highlighting their representations of female monarchic power strategies and their subversion of known gender stereotypes.

In their wide-ranging discussions of European monarchies in their historical and contemporary forms the contributors showed the great variety of current royal studies. Throughout the assortment of case studies presented at the conference, there were several themes which were debated recurrently. These included royal celebrity culture and its repercussions, from branding and commercialization in consumer culture to mythical auras which help to stabilize nations and empires. Another would be the monarchy in popular culture, whether the analysis focused on media specificity, on representations of monarchs in cultural productions or the appropriation of royal symbols in sometimes surprising contexts. „Realms of Royalty“ brought together these diverse discussions and showcased the diversity and vitality of the emerging field of royal studies.

Programme

Innovative Historical Perspectives

Chair: Joanna Rostek (Justus Liebig University, Giessen)

- Cindy McCreery (University of Sydney): "The View from Abroad: what foreign royal tours (and tourists) tell us about nineteenth and twentieth-century European monarchies"
- Miriam Schneider (University of St Andrews): "'Path of the Dane to fame and might! Dark rolling wave!' The Danish monarchy and the realm of the sea from the 19th to the 21st centuries"
- Torsten Riotte (Goethe University, Frankfurt/M): "Between politics and dynastic survival: nineteenth century monarchy in post-revolutionary Europe (1815-1918)"
- David San Narciso (Complutense University, Madrid): "Banal Monarchism and Nation-building in Isabelline Spain (1833-1868)"

Monarchy on Stage and Screen

Chair: Daniel Dornhofer (Goethe University, Frankfurt/M)

- Stefan Trajković Filipović (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "'The Fake Emperor was, perhaps, better?' Contemporary Reception of Tsar Stephen the Little of Montenegro (1767-1773)"
- Kati Voigt (Leipzig University): "Long Live the Monarchy: Peter Morgan's Depictions of Elizabeth II in (Film, Theatre and) TV"
- Marie Menzel (Freie Universität, Berlin): "Kings and Queens and an Alien: British Monarchy on Sci-Fi TV"

Monarchy and Monarchical Symbols in Popular Culture

Chair: Robert A. Winkler (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen)

- Jessica Koch (Bielefeld University): "'Bow down to the King' – Insignia of Royalty in Narratives of 21st Century Professional Wrestling"
- Alexander Scherr (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "'[H]er very Lowness with her head in a sling':
- Anti-Royal Identity Construction in British Alternative Music from the 1970s to the 1990s"
- Natalie Veith (Goethe University, Frankfurt/M): "The (In)Significance of Queen Victoria in Neo-Victorian Comics"

Keynote Lecture

- Susanne Scholz (Goethe University, Frankfurt): "'Who's Queen?' Visions of Elizabeth I in Contemporary Culture"

Keynote Lecture

- Pauline Maclaran (Royal Holloway University, London): "'We'll Never be Royals': The British Royal Family in Consumer Culture"

Monarchy, Politics and Public Relations

Chair: Simon Ottersbach (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen)

- Deirdre Gilfedder (Université Dauphine, Paris): "Three Kings' Speeches of the 1930s"
- Edward Owens (University of Lincoln): "The Family Firm at War: the House of Windsor and Public Relations, 1939-45"
- Falko Schnicke (German Historical Institute, London): "An Asset to be Exploited? The Royal Family and British Foreign Politics in the 1970s"

Student Poster Presentations

- Magdalena Bock (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "'The Passage of Our Most Dread Sovereign Lady Queen' – One of the First Written Images of Young Queen Elizabeth I"
- Franziska Eick (Justus Liebig University, Giessen) & Alexandra Hartmann-Flechtner (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "The Power of Appearance: In What Way Do Royals Use Attire to Their Advantage? (A Case Study)"
- Tabea Eckl (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall – Adapting Henry VIII. For the Small Screen"
- Marie-Luise Daumann (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "'I Have to Play This Game, It Is Not Just My Own Pleasure.' Elizabeth's I Attitude towards Marriage"
- Marie Stickel (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "The Future Monarch Prince Charles: A Royal Operating on the Fine Line Between Constitutional Duties and Personal Rights"

Monarchy and Modes of Representation

Chair: Paul Vickers (GCSC, Justus Liebig University, Giessen)

- Martin Spies (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "Realms of Fashion: Exhibitions of Royal Dresses in the 21st Century"

- Eva Kirbach (Justus Liebig University, Giessen): "Gendered Strategies of Power: Queen Elizabeth II as a Politician in Two Contemporary British Plays"
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