

**UNESCO and the Cold War, March 4-5, 2010
at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies**

Though the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) often became an arena for ideological confrontation between East and West during the Cold War, it also provided rare channels for exchange between the opposing blocs. A two-day conference dedicated to UNESCO and the Cold War drew attention to the organization's important and oft overlooked role in mitigating East-West conflict through cultural, educational and scientific spheres. Furthermore, the conference contributed to the growing discourse on ways in which the history of intergovernmental organizations can enrich understanding of transnational and transcultural histories. The Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA) hosted and organized the symposium with UNESCO, marking the third and final symposium held by the International Scientific Committee for the UNESCO History Project.

In keeping with UNESCO tradition, participants spoke in either English or French, relying on the simultaneous interpretation provided throughout the conference. Françoise Rivière, the Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO and patron of the project, spoke on behalf of the new Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, welcoming the participants and emphasizing the independence of the community of scholars now working on the history of UNESCO through the UNESCO History Project.

Detlef Junker, Founding Director of the HCA and Jean-François Sirinelli, Director of the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po, Paris then opened the conference. Detlef Junker conveyed the official greetings of the chair of Germany's National Commission for UNESCO, Walter Hirche, and welcomed the participants to the newly renovated and enlarged HCA premises, giving a brief history of the university and the institute's ongoing role as an international center. Sirinelli, as president of the scientific committee, framed this third conference in relation to the first two conferences organized by the committee, "Towards the Transnational History of International Organizations: Methodology / Epistemology," held from 6-7 April, 2009 at King's College, Cambridge, UK and "UNESCO and Issues of Colonization and Decolonization," held at Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal, from 4-6 October, 2009. This third conference, Sirinelli said, should be one where the history of cultures meets the history of international relations.

Robert Frank (University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne), gave the introductory speech, in which he acknowledged the Cold War's overall chilling effect on international relations, while nevertheless emphasizing the comparative autonomy of international relations in the field of culture. Frank also addressed the bifurcation of the Cold War into two distinct "wars," the first taking place between 1955 and 1972 and the second after 1979, while pointing out the impossibility of assuming an entirely bipolar view of this long history of intersections.

Session 1

Mohieddine Hadhri (Qatar University) chaired the first session, whose title, "UNESCO and the Member States: In the Turmoil of Cold War Politics," provided a general thematic umbrella for the broad variety of theoretical approaches which panelists took to examine the roles of different states and individuals concerned with UNESCO. Starting in East Asia, Liang Pan (Tsukuba University, Japan) addressed "Japanese Relations with UNESCO during the Cold War," examining why and how Japan channeled such a considerable portion of its outreach to Third World nations through UNESCO. Japan supported the organization not only during the early heyday of enthusiasm following its admission, but also during the withdrawal of the UK and the US from UNESCO. Pan argued that a semi-official faction of retired bureaucrats personally committed to the idea of UNESCO were responsible for maintaining government support during the early 1980s, when Western support for the organization hit its nadir.

Approaching UNESCO history from an East Africa perspective, through "The Role of UNESCO in the Field(s) of Education, Science and Culture in Post-Independence Kenya," Joshia Osamba (Egerton University, Kenya) surveyed UNESCO's contributions to education in Kenya, demonstrating the centrality of a multilateral body in the shaping that nation. Anikó Macher's contribution (Paris Institute of Political Studies) on "Hungary, Member of UNESCO: Its Admission and its Activities (1945-1963)" carefully documented the ravages of the Cold War on Hungarian cultural relations, while maintaining that UNESCO often provided Hungary's sole window to the world beyond the Eastern bloc. Finally, in his special presentation on "UNESCO and the Cold War from a Human Rights Perspective," the retired director of UNESCO's human rights division and Czech émigré, Karel Vasak, recounted his personal experience of UNESCO's inability to enforce human rights standards prior to the Helsinki Accords. Following the 1976 UNESCO General Conference in Nigeria, however, the

organization was able to secure some East-West cooperation to protect the human rights of teachers, scientists, journalists, writers and other intellectuals in its member states.

In her commentary on the papers, Laura Wong (HCA/Harvard University) suggested that filtering UNESCO's history through a purely Cold War lens allowed for an insufficiently narrow view of the organization. At the same time, she acknowledged the sensitivity required in drawing out individual narratives which were indeed deeply affected by East-West bloc tension during the first portion of UNESCO's existence. She praised Pan and Macher's use of new sources and urged the panelists to enrich their stories with more details about the individuals who had emerged in their papers.

Session 2

Ilya Gaiduk (Russian Academy of Sciences) chaired the second panel, titled "Engaging the Other Side of the 'Iron Curtain,'" which featured both historical and personally informed accounts given by former officials from the UNESCO Secretariat, NGOs and national delegations. In his talk on "How UNESCO Helped 'Rust' the Iron Curtain through East-West Volunteering," Arthur Gillette, former director of UNESCO's youth and sports activities division, described the achievements of East-West workcamping initiatives conducted under the auspices of a UNESCO-supported NGO, which brought young people from communist and capitalist countries together for work and exchange during the 1960s. While documenting the individual bonds forged by the young participants, he lamented the American media's misrepresentation of the efforts as communist propaganda.

Leland Conley Barrows, now of Vorhees University (USA) and formerly of the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), gave a nuanced history of the center, which UNESCO opened in Bucharest in 1972. Created during the détente period of the Cold War, CEPES' presence in Romania made UNESCO the only international organization based in Western Europe to have a European presence on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Following Barrows, Klaus Oldenhege, the retired vice-president of the German Federal Archives, argued in his paper on "UNESCO, International Council on Archives (ICA) and the Cold War," that while the ICA, a non-governmental organization under the umbrella of UNESCO, was subject to national political influences during the Cold War, there was little evidence of professional self-restriction among archivists at ICA conferences. Oldenhege

gave personal examples of individual cooperation between archivists on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as they attempted to repair and build their archival collections. Roman Romanovsky (Belarus) then addressed “The Role of UNESCO in Overcoming Consequences of the Chernobyl Catastrophe at the End of the Cold War,” noting that UNESCO was one of the first intergovernmental organizations to respond following the Soviet cover-up of the accident. He argued that UNESCO was responsible for sparking the earliest waves of international attention to and solidarity for the Chernobyl victims.

Christian Ostermann (Cold War International History Project, USA) observed the common thread running through the papers, namely, that of international organizations and individuals carving out space amidst the conflict. While these were indeed interesting examples of human concerns transcending global politics, Ostermann warned that it would be anachronistic to ignore the immense conflict around which they were operating.

Session 3

Glenda Sluga (University of Sydney) chaired the last panel of the day, “In the Struggle for Peace and Mutual Understanding,” covering five papers oriented around UNESCO normative instruments and related programs. Focusing on the Indian example, Omprakash Dash (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India) demonstrated how the country was able to take part in relatively open cultural exchange with both Soviet and US allies during the Cold War through cultural exchange and “World Heritage” programs. On the other hand, Beatriz Barreiro Carril (Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid) approached the subject of “UNESCO and the Cold War: Cultural Diversity and Cultural Industries,” from a legal historical perspective, arguing that the ideas of cultural diversity expounded in UNESCO policies were overshadowed by the boldly propagandistic cultural campaigns waged by the superpowers during the Cold War.

In an approach resonating with Barreiro Carril’s, Christian Bolduc (National Library and Archives of Quebec) suggested, in “The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The Hague Convention of 1954): An Illustration of the Impact of the Cold War on UNESCO’s Flagship Project,” that despite the existence of grounds for agreement between the experts, representatives of the Eastern and Western blocs in the end hued to bloc loyalties during the drafting process. He concluded, citing the US, UK

and Canadian non-ratification of the convention as evidence, that the convention had remained hostage to the conflict for the duration of the Cold War.

Suzanne Langlois' paper (York University, Canada) on "UNESCO and the United Nations Film Board: Coordinating Information Films (1945-51)" explored the brief window of promise which existed for progressive documentary film-making by international organizations. She examined UNESCO's early attempts to define its specificity within the UN system through its documentary film activities, detailing UNESCO's film-making activity and cooperation with the short-lived UN Film Board. By the start of the Korean war, however, it seemed that a shortage of resources, exacerbated by international political polarization had withered the UN system's film potential.

Moving forward in time, Michael Palmer (University of Paris III) introduced "The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and the Cold War: Issues and Perspectives," looking at the 1974-1984 UNESCO-led debates calling for a more "balanced" flow of information between developed and developing nations. The NWICO addressed the concerns of many developing nations that the "free flow of information" in fact assured that a few powerful nations and institutions controlled a one-way stream of information that stemmed from and focused almost exclusively on America and Western Europe. UNESCO support for NWICO raised concerns in the West about press freedom, and contributed heavily to the US and UK decisions to withdraw from UNESCO in 1984 and 1985, respectively. Palmer concluded that the split over NWICO represented less of an East-West confrontation than a reflection of the growing North-South divide.

In her commentary, Madeleine Herren (Heidelberg University) drew upon the theme of identifying and crossing over borders, whereby she called on panelists to elaborate on the ambiguities of transcultural versus transnational issues, and to explore the porosity of lines between national and international concerns, as exemplified in UNESCO's administration.

Session 4

Tom Weiss (City University of New York) chaired the final panel, which met on Friday morning. This issue-focused panel, "UNESCO: A Platform for Promoting Culture, Science and Education," examined how UNESCO addressed the environment, the social

sciences, space research, race, textbooks and mathematics education. Jacob Darwin Hamblin (Oregon State University) wrote on “Cold War Science and Environmental Change in the UN Specialized Agencies: The Case of UNESCO.” Hamblin argued that UNESCO’s deeply rooted humanitarian outlook led it to initially frame science and technology as tools to exert mastery over nature. Although the environmental movement of the early 1970s challenged this “development” ethos, the US and the Soviet Union were still committed to the transformation of the environment to generate more food, water and wealth. So, despite efforts of ecologically-minded elements within UNESCO, the organization stuck to its “transformative” approach and failed to establish an environmentally-oriented framework for science and technology during the Cold War.

Taking a regional focus, Fernanda Beigel (National University of Cuyo, Argentina) described “Latin American Social Sciences and the Struggle for UNESCO’s Leadership during the Cold War: The Competition between Chile and Brazil.” Beigel addressed the internationalization of the social sciences by looking at tensions between two UNESCO-sponsored institutions in the Southern Cone: the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), founded in Santiago in 1956, and the Latin American Research Center on Social Sciences (CLAPCS), founded in Rio de Janeiro, also in 1956. Wagner Rodrigues Valente (Research Group on Education History of Mathematics (GHEMAT, Brazil) discussed his work on “UNESCO and the First Two Inter-American Conferences on Mathematics Education.” Improved math education was a Cold War educational priority and policy makers worldwide wanted to reform basic math teaching to bring it in line with changes going on in higher mathematics. Using the UNESCO archives, Rodrigues Valente demonstrated that the inter-American conferences had become sites of tension between the US, which tried to use the conferences to promote a pan-American reform policy, and UNESCO, which struggled to limit American dominance of the agenda.

Hervé Moulin (University of Paris IV Sorbonne) approached “UNESCO and the Birth of Space Activities,” arguing that UNESCO successfully acted as a third force which brought competing parties together to cooperate, particularly, around satellite communications. Randle Hart (Southern Utah University), in “A Campaign of Ideas: The American Radical Right and UNESCO,” looked at the responses of the radical right to UNESCO statements on race and UNESCO textbook activities. He suggested that the radical right did not instrumentalize the early UNESCO statements on race to rally support because conservative mainstream scholars

in the US had already dismissed the idea of race as a primarily social construction. Abhorring identification with even the most conservative aspects of academia, right extremists found the issue had no useful polarizing charge prior to the desegregation of American schools, legislated in 1954. In contrast, they were able to strengthen their networks through nationwide campaigns against the use of UNESCO publications in public schools and libraries because theories of conspiracy and the hunt for “subversive” materials enjoyed a widespread appeal among potential radical right supporters.

Looking at UNESCO and textbooks in a much different milieu, Eva Schandevyl’s (Free University, Belgium) paper, “A Contribution to International Understanding: Belgian Historians and Revision of Textbooks,” concluded that historical objectivity had suffered for the sake of peaceful relations. Schandevyl focused on the Belgian-German textbook commission’s 1954 Brunswick textbook revision conference, arguing that participants actually privileged conservative postwar German historians’ interpretation of First World War responsibility in order to make it easier for Germany’s post-Second World War integration into the Western bloc.

Iris Schröder (University of Magdeburg/Humboldt University) reviewed the papers and urged the authors to go beyond the metahistorical narratives of tension they had employed. She proposed methodology which would consider the circulation of ideas, discourses and historical actors in order to develop more spatially and geographically informed narratives. Focusing on organizations, networks and individuals, she suggested, would help to overcome the dichotomous tendencies often present in Cold War narratives.

Round Table and Closing Remarks

Akira Iriye’s message (Harvard University) opened the final, round table session of the conference. He first acknowledged the overwhelming presence of Cold War geopolitics as a shaper of world history since the Second World War. Nevertheless, it would be entirely plausible to write a history of the world since 1945 by focusing on issues like health care, eradication of diseases, and aging, all phenomena that have an integrity and a chronology of their own apart from the vicissitudes of the Cold War and other geopolitical developments. The importance of this conference, he suggested, lay in the fact that the manifold projects and themes developed by UNESCO were being brought together to add an important dimension to

post-1945 history. Observing that UNESCO played a critically important role in redefining the world, in exploring the question of what it means to be human, Iriye said that the study of UNESCO and the Cold War should reveal “how rich and diverse the history of the contemporary world can begin to appear when we examine these subjects in juxtaposition, each with its own logic, but without assuming that there is only one way of understanding the past.”

Robert Frank, Glenda Sluga, Ibrahima Thioub (Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal) and Ilya V. Gaiduk led the discussion following Iriye’s remarks. They articulated some of the most prominent problems and themes the conference had generated, including: the usefulness of UNESCO history in drawing attention to multilateralism during the Cold War; the question of whether or not there had been a “global” Cold War; the need to separate the so-called Cold War period from the Cold War itself; and the possibility that the study of UNESCO’s history could help to reshape the overall narrative of the period.

Françoise Rivière, Jean-François Sirinelli and Jens Boel (UNESCO) closed the conference, noting that the end of the conference series should mark only the beginning of a research movement. Sirinelli emphasized that in a multi-form world, there could be no simple, single conclusions; that the recentness of UNESCO history posed special problems; and that the study of the circulation of knowledge was raising new questions for historians. Françoise Rivière thanked Jens Boel, UNESCO’s chief archivist and coordinator of the UNESCO History Project, acknowledging his essential role in the transmission of UNESCO history. Boel announced that the committee would present its findings at the International Congress of the Historical Sciences, meeting in Amsterdam this August. He then thanked his organizational team from UNESCO, led by Caroline Michotte, and also thanked the HCA organizers, led by Matthias Kutsch. The conference ended with a festive dinner at the historic student club and restaurant, Zum Roten Ochsen.