

# Sovereignty as spectacle: Fetishizing the state system at a World's Fair

Natalie Koch, Ph.D.

Department of Geography and the En-  
vironment, Syracuse University

The recent Russian military invasion of Ukraine has been a stark reminder for many in the West about the fragility of the state system – the hegemonic system of organizing geopolitics around territorially sovereign states. The Russian war is not just a rejection of Ukrainian sovereignty, but also a fundamental challenge to the state system. Following the invasion, hundreds of visitors to the World's Fair in Dubai, EXPO 2020, flocked to the Ukraine pavilion to post notes of support and sympathy for the country's ongoing tragedy. Indeed, EXPO's organization around state-based pavilions explicitly works to make the state system fun and natural, drawing on nationalist tropes that justify territorial sovereignty. Like most reactions around the world, visitors to the Ukraine pavilion expressed horror at the Russian violation of the principles of statehood and sovereignty. These reactions – at EXPO and beyond – cumulatively reinforce the fetish for the territorial state, which is essential to its contemporary reproduction. Considering both the reactions to the Russian invasion and wider dynamics at EXPO, this talk shows how the state system is fetishized through enlisting ordinary people to participate in the spectacle of sovereignty – and how this is underpinned by specific moral geographies of good and evil at a time when it is violently being called into question.

Donnerstag, 23. Juni 2022

16:15 – 17:45 Uhr

Raum: HS 4 1.43



**Institut für  
GEOWISSENSCHAFTEN  
und GEOGRAPHIE**  
Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT  
HALLE-WITTENBERG

