



GÖTTINGEN SPIRIT
SUMMER SCHOOL

***Multiple
Modernities***

1.-5. September 2014

Preface

Since August 2013, eight postdocs from Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and England came to Göttingen. We all had followed a call for applications to build up an interdisciplinary group of young researchers at the Göttingen Graduate School of Humanities. Shortly after we had started our work in Göttingen, the presidential board of our university gave out a call for applications for the Göttingen SPIRIT funding line. Göttingen scholars were invited to design a summer school series and to apply for a kick-off funding. There were no thematic restrictions, but a clear goal: Göttingen SPIRIT Summer Schools should attract doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from all over the world to share and enrich this “Göttingen spirit” that Nobel Prize Laureate Richard Courant had once evoked while being exiled from Nazi Germany in New York. Following the call, our newly assembled group put their heads together and over a short period of time developed a concept that proved to be successful.

Now that the “Multiple Modernities” summer school has taken place, it is safe to say that the primary objective of the original design has been more than achieved. “Multiple Modernities” attracted participants and keynote-lecturers from all over the world. This international character was indispensable to an innovative thinking that needs to approach questions of modernity from a range of perspectives that cannot always be rehearsed, but need to be experienced in communication and exchange. This open and productive intellectual climate made sure that a Göttingen Spirit will stay with the participants after the return to their home institutions.

Julia Hauser und Jens Elze

Acknowledgements

The summer school would not have been possible without our Presidential board that brought to life the Göttingen SPIRIT initiative and without the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony that is generously funding our graduate school.

In our university's research department, we like to thank our colleagues Kerstin Mauth, who is coordinating the Göttingen SPIRIT- programme, and Kacha Friedrich-Fil who helped tremendously in all administrative matters.

Last but not least, a very special thanks goes to the "Verein Internationale Studentenfreunde e.V." for generously funding course and accommodation costs of five selected participants who otherwise would not have been able to participate.



Looking Back at Five Days of Multiple Modernities

The summer school format was mainly targeted at profiting the research and the theoretical profundity of the participants through exchange. Therefore, large segments of the school were devoted to the discussion of the individual ideas and projects of the participants.

Each day was opened by a Keynote lecture by a renowned scholar in the field. As far as possible the following seminars were thematically harmonised with the keynotes of the day to enable intellectual synthesis and profit.



Questioning Eurocentric Concepts of Modernity

The first day

opened with a duo of Keynote lectures by **Gurminder Bhambra**, sociologist from the University of Warwick and **Christof Dipper**, professor emeritus of history from the Technical University of Darmstadt. Bhambra offered a wide-ranging critique of Eurocentric concepts of modernity, a critique that extends to newer concepts of modernity like Eisenstadt's "Multiple Modernities", which allows for different trajectories of modernity, but only one origin: Western Europe. Bhambra critiqued that none of these notions consider the role of colonialism in the emergence of modernity and its institutions. Dipper's keynote complemented Bhambra's by focussing on modernity as a particularly European phenomenon. While he opted for a concretely European origin of modernity, he also opted to localise – or even provincialise – rather than universalise modernity, as a specific historical constellation, rather than a teleology. A controversial discussion ensued.

The afternoon continued with a seminar session that first continued the theoretical discussion with **Nishant Narayan's** discussion of the "semantic notion of multiple" in the term multiple modernities.

Afterwards **Satheese Chandra Bose** focussed on the concrete case of Kerala in South India as a specific regional mode of modernity. Kerala modernity achieved a very high standard of living without having gone through a phase of industrialisation that many accounts of modernity consider a prerequisite.

Religion in and for Modernity

The second day

opened with a keynote lecture by **Gauri Viswanathan**, professor of English from Columbia University.

She focused on the Indian intellectual and political leader B.R. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism; an act, which in turn sparked the conversion of many Dalits (the untouchables of the lowest Indian caste) to Buddhism.

By these conversions the Dalits sought to place themselves outside of the social cosmologies of Hinduism that continued to oppress them after the end of official colonialism. Conversion in this context functions both as a critique of a specific mode of Indian Hindu modernity, but also a social dynamic of suffrage inherent in modernity. Most of the afternoon's session continued the focus on the role of religion in and for modernity.

David Schick discussed the networks of Jewish trade in the cities of Odessa, Vilnius, and Lodz. He inquired specifically into the role of Judaism to business structures and business transactions, in order to challenge the modern assumption of a separation of public activity and private belief, that is so central to accounts of modernity from Weber to Sennett.

Mundi Rahayu gave a presentation on the "Hijaber's community", a Jakarta online community, in which women wearing the Hijab (the headscarf) come together to talk about fashion in the context of Muslim sartorial traditions. Rahayu discusses how the Muslim Indonesian middle-class women frequenting the blog, seek to negotiate their Muslim identity with modernity.

Their use of the Hijab, and its entering into the (inherently volatile) domain of fashion is also an emblem of a Muslim path into modernity and an instance of contemporary global modernity's multiplicity.

Religion in and for Modernity



In the second afternoon session Sjoerd Griffioen reflected on the role of Christianity for modernity. He counters the Weberian narrative of ‘modernisation as disenchantment’ that sees Christianity exclusively as modernity’s other. In a critical reading of the works of Hans Blumenberg, Peter Berger, and Marcel Gauchet, Griffioen discussed instead how modernity is grounded in Christian transcendence, which ultimately prepared the worldly stage to be taken over by human activity and will.

Jaquelin Rothfus discussed the modes of policing, normalising and integrating a group of Caribbean Dutch men with criminal records in Groningen that are referred to as the Top 50. She critiques the Foucauldian notion of power as too pervasive to understand these complex and ambiguous processes and discusses instead the policies and practices implemented in the interaction between social workers and the Top 50 in terms of Michel De Certeau’s subversive concept of tactics and Annemarie Mol’s notion of logics.

In the evening the whole group took a guided tour of the impressive collections of the Göttingen Department of Anthropology.

Bodily Practices and Everyday Objects

The third day

of the conference opened with **Parama Roy's** keynote "Empire's Proximities", in which she explored the role of food consumption in colonial India. She focused on the Hindu monk Sri Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and his politics of "prescriptive meat-eating", which was a fundamentally anti-traditional practice within the context of Hindu vegetarianism across all castes, as advocated by Gandhi and others.

For Vivekananda, carnivorousness was part of a larger project of "muscular Hinduism", as the means to cancel out one central rationale that had been justifying British rule over India: the trope of "muscular Christianity". Roy discussed this carnivorousness as a profoundly modern product of the colonial encounter in that it reflected the contradictory and elusive character of modernity and modernization.

The afternoon presentations continued their focus on bodily practices and everyday objects.

It opened with **Yulia Karpova's** discussion of the decorative turn in Soviet design. She introduced the audience to the "new decorativism", an anti-utilitarian movement that was formed as a reaction to the narrow options left by official Soviet modernism, which despite its opening under Khrushchev limited the modes of expression and design, not only ideologically, but also by a shortage of many high-quality materials. By resorting to traditional object-forms and by undermining the applicability of its design objects, these designers also raised the question on the relation between modernity and its objects, as well as between art and design.

Bodily Practices and Everyday Objects



Stefan Hübner presented a paper on the Far Eastern Championship Games (1913-1934) and the early (1951-1974) Asian Games. In his reading, these games sought to balance local traditions with demands of modernity, especially in architecture/planning while the host countries also used the games to communicate globally their specific versions of modernisation. He also discussed the notion of sportsmanship and athleticism—which derived from YMCA's and other reformers' involvement in Asia—associated with the games to Western notions of progress, social control, and self-improvement.

The second session was entirely devoted to cultural readings of fashion.

Kaitleen Staudt opened with reading novels by Virginia Woolf and Halide Edib Adivar in the context of fashion. In Woolf, the use of fashion is not only a means of putting fashion on equal footing with male pre-occupations such as sports, but it even functions as literary technique to highlight the past-ness of fictional time. Edib's work, which is set in the Kemalist period of a rapidly modernising Turkey, revisits some of the dress codes of the Ottoman era to pit them against Eurocentric stereotypes of Eastern fashion and against the ideal woman envisaged by Kemalism.

Kaamya Sharma discussed the role of the Sari in urban Tamil communities in Chennai. She observed how the Sari is utilized as a symbolic tool of cultural empowerment, especially by middle class women, who seek to express their modern cultural selves through recourse on Indian sartorial traditions. Her research, however, also showed how lower middle class women continue to perceive the Sari as a restriction, as impractical, and as an emblem of their continued exclusion from modernity and privilege.

Historiography in a Globalised World

The fourth day

was entirely devoted to projects from the field of history, and appropriately opened with a nuanced critique of historiographic method.

Stefan Haas' keynote discussed the challenges to historiography in a globalised world and under the auspices of postmodernism. After introducing the audience to a range of recent developments in historiography, he argued for a radically stand-point based approach to history. He argued, that such an approach may mediate between the Eurocentric assumption that history can be written about anything and anybody with the same methodology and the competing, and equally limiting, claim to the incommensurability of non-European experience.

Isabelle Wöhler discussed the founding paradigm of Egyptian historiography and Egyptian modernity that is usually projected to have started with the rule of Mohammed Ali in 1805; a periodisation that is itself an invention of the early 20th century. This history of modern Egypt, from 1805 to the popular revolt of 2011, is largely pitted as a very "modern" history of revolts. Wöhler shows how this history and historiography of constant foundations and revolts, itself needs to be overcome in order to sustainably re-define the role of the state, the military, and civil society in Egypt.

John Boonstra talked about the French silk industry in Lebanon in the 18th and 19th century. He sought to challenge the discourses of technological modernisation and cultural backwardness that are usually recruited, when thinking about such encounters. Rather, he presented how the concept of 'modernity' was articulated in complex and dynamic interactions between French economic and industrial practices, Orientalist worldviews, and the territory and populations of the Near East.

Historiography in a Globalised World



Linh D. Vu showed how the biographies of the Martyrs of the Yellow Flower Hill, a 1912 republican revolutionary attempt, can be considered a project of retroactive Chinese nation-building. Vu argued, that nationalist mythology has focussed especially on this failed attempt, in order to erect the vanquished as the morally superior force in history that legitimates the national movement and barbarises its opponents. By combining ideas of revolution from the West with Confucian ideals these Bildungsroman-like autobiographies offer multiplicitous outcomes of modernity.

Pawel Marchewski talked about republicanism and radical enlightenment among 18th century Polish noblemen. His talk counters the thesis of an 18th century Eastern Europe completely caught in feudal backwardness, while the West was quickly modernising and democratising. In terms of the radical nature of their espousal of meritocracy and justice, these Polish “noble sarmations” actually exceeded the watered down enlightenment status quo that had become socially manifest in Western Europe.

On thursday evening the summer school featured a cultural highlight in cooperation with the Göttingen “Literarisches Zentrum”: The Congolese author **Alain Mabanckou**, who has been dividing his time between France and the U.S. for many years now, read from his novel *Black Bazar*. The novel pays homage to the everyday-culture of Africans in Paris and offers a highly ironic and differentiated perspective on racism and postcolonial stereotypes.

Postcolonial Media and Arts

The fifth day

opened with **Lars Eckstein**'s keynote lecture introduced the phenomenon and cultural impact of postcolonial media piracy. He focussed on modes of postcolonial appropriation of media technologies and media products through illegal modes of copying, reproduction, reuse, and transformation. Interestingly, the works that emerge in the context of postcolonial media piracy bear some striking resemblances to the signature tropes and aesthetics of modernism, without receiving any of its cultural praise. These piratical works radically transform Eurocentric modes of authorship, creativity, and aesthetics.

The afternoon sessions continued the concern with questions of artistic appropriation and transformation in global modernism.

Sarah Alam presented a paper on magical realism in the work of Salman Rushdie, most notably on the role of this literary mode for his representation of the city of Bombay/Mumbai. She detected a double structure in which both the city of Mumbai in its cultural, religious, and architectural hybridity is best expressed in the modes of juxtaposition afforded by magical realism, while Rushdie's predisposition to satire, cosmopolitanism, and post-rationalism equally lends itself to the uneven temporalities of this style.

Rahul Dev discussed the relation between Dalits and expressionism. In Indian terms, expressionism must be considered an alternative mode of modernism, as Dalit artists turned to expressionism, because officially advocated Indian modernism was concerned with resurrecting exoticist and traditionalist accounts of Indian high culture that continued to exclude the Dalit experience. Expressionism not only offered an idiom uncorrupted by high caste art, but also offered thematic traditions of abjection and bodiliness that lend themselves to the Dalit experience.

Postcolonial Media and Arts

Ekatarina Nemenko discussed Soviet and French modernism's relation to questions of political engagement of the arts. She claimed that in the Soviet Union engagement was more readily associated only with the narrow options of conformism or exile. In French modernism, on the other hand, engagement was less value-laden, but artists sought to dissociate themselves from active party-politics to become "free-creator-revolutionaries". Nemenko concludes that what unites both modes is an anti-bourgeois notion of the democratisation of cultural production.

Musicologist **Anna Piotrowska** concluded the summer school with a discussion of the role of emotions in modernist music. Where as musical modernism is usually associated with the experimental and atonal overcoming of the emotive and affective harmonies of earlier classic music, she focussed on the work of Michał Spisak, whose use of harmonic folk elements also points to an alternative strand of musical modernism.



Multiplicitous Relations to the Modern

Despite the wide range of topics that were presented throughout the week, it is no exaggeration to emphasise that discussions were immensely productive and lively. The international line-up of the school and the interdisciplinary backgrounds of the participants allowed for a range of perspectives and inputs that other formats could have never provided.

Aside from this breadth of contexts, a previously circulated reader ensured a common base of theoretical reflection, to which we consistently returned. Throughout the discussions the conveners placed special emphasis on questions of temporality and linearity, the relation between religion and secularity, or transcendence and immanence.

On a more basic level many of the diverse contributions resonated thematically, by resorting to questions of tradition and traditional modes of expression and their ambiguous – or rather multiplicitous – relations to the modern.





Participants, Lecturers, and Staff of the Summer School 2014 Göttingen



Equal Opportunities for Excellent Young Researchers



For decades, the Göttingen-based “Verein Internationale Studentenfreunde e.V.” has been dedicated to promoting international understanding among scholars.

The association has generously funded course and accommodation costs of five selected participants who otherwise would not have been able to participate.

Without Lin D. Vu, Nishant K. Narayanan, Rahul Dev, Satheese Chandra Bose and John Boonstra, the Göttingen SPIRIT summer school on “Multiple Modernities” would not have been the same. We asked them to share their impressions and experiences which you will find in the interviews below.



Interview Linh D. Vu



Why did you apply for the Summer School?

I'm looking for opportunities to present my work so that I can get feedback from people. I usually go to conferences in the US and Asia, so a new continent was very crucial and Germany has different frameworks.

How do you think it helped you in your work?

The long duration of the Summer School helped to interact with others. There were lots of interactions outside of lectures and seminar sessions which was very helpful on so many levels for my work.

Do you think events like this are useful in promoting global academic exchange?

It certainly is. I'm familiar with exchanges and what was special about this Summer School was that it was advertised worldwide. There were many different disciplines and different topics at the summer school. This made me more aware of the different centers of research in the world. It also helped to have contact of people from different countries, which gives you a wider academic circle.

What did you like best and what would you like to criticise?

I liked it a lot how the Summer School was organised: The key note lectures but also an opportunity to present and exchange in seminar sessions. The Summer School combined both aspects and mixed it up. What I think could be done in the future is assigning participants to someone else's paper and the assigned person really engages in the paper and lead the discussion on that paper. I also would have liked to engage more in the town and get to know Göttingen more.

Why did you apply for travel subsidies?

I think money should not be a limiting factor in what conferences I can be, because conferences are very important to my research. I think there should be academic freedom for my research which means I can also visit conferences that are far away from my university. My fellowship doesn't cover travelling to conferences.

Interview Nishant K. Narayanan



Why did you apply for the Summer School?

It was the fact that the theme is part of my research. I wanted to meet other researchers from different disciplines and different countries.

How do you think it helped you in your work?

It helped in a way that I got feedback from people from different disciplines. There was a balance of combining and sharing perspective.

Do you think events like this are useful in promoting global academic exchange?

They are because it is important and fruitful since we're living in a time of globalisation. Scholarship can grow in sharing and exchanging ideas even if we don't agree.

What did you like best and what would you like to criticise?

It was wonderfully organized. GSGG was taking extreme care of the participants, right from the beginning when we were selected. It's very rare that a Summer School pays for travelling, so that was great.

I think what could be done better in the future is to organise a day with a tour of the city because participants are not familiar with the city. That would be a good opportunity to familiarise them with social and cultural aspects of the city.

Why did you apply for travel subsidies?

It's financially not possible for me to pay for travelling to Europe on my own.

Interview Rahul Dev



Why did you apply for the Summer School?

I was fascinated by the theme. I already took master courses about the theme and continued working on that in my PhD.

How do you think it helped you in your work?

It helped a lot because I'm very interested in global history. It gave me an opportunity to learn about different views on modernity.

Do you think events like this are useful in promoting global academic exchange?

Events like this help us to grow and to learn about other institutions and how they are working.

What did you like best and what would you like to criticise?

The organisers have taken great care of the entire trip; they have done hard work from the beginning. The theme is impressive and we got views from different parts of the world. The Summer School could be organised for two weeks so that the key note speakers could have more time and there would be more engaging in the theme. Also, more readings could have been done in two weeks. The seminar sessions should finish by 4:30 pm so that the participants can have personal time in the evening.

Why did you apply for travel subsidies?

I'm in the process of completing my PhD. My institution cannot pay for travels outside of India because previous participations at conferences were sponsored by the institution.

Interview Satheese Chandra Bose



Why did you apply for the Summer School?

I was attracted by the theme of the Summer School and I'm working on the same theme.

How do you think it helped you in your work?

It helped a lot that I could talk to people who work on the same theme. The discussion on the papers helped to evolve my work and make it better.

Do you think events like this are useful in promoting global academic exchange?

Of course, it brings together scholars of different parts of the world. The discussions with the scholars were very fruitful.

What did you like best and what would you like to criticise?

I liked it very much how well the event was organised. We could listen to very good academic speeches but could also participate in discussions. I think that the afternoon sessions were a bit tight. I'm coming from India, which is far away so I was having jetlag.

Why did you apply for travel subsidies?

My salary is inefficient to take me to Europe.

Interview John Boonstra



Why did you apply for the Summer School?

I'm doing dissertation research at the moment and it seemed like an opportunity to force me to look more into my research. And the concept of modernity came up in my research. It was also a way of exploring how to look into materials.

Besides, I was an exchange student in Northeim twelve years ago and this was a great opportunity to come back.

How do you think it helped you in your work?

Talking with people from different disciplines and being exposed to different histories with the concept of modernity was very helpful. It was also very enriching as an historian to get a better understanding.

Do you think events like this are useful in promoting global academic exchange?

It definitely is. So, I'm from the US, I'm working in France and my research is focusing on Lebanon. There are already multiple international connections. Being exposed to the kind of things people do in different countries helps to get to know the structure of institutions in different countries.

What did you like best and what would you like to criticise?

I liked a lot the precirculating of the papers and the structure of the Summer School. It was very helpful that the key note lecturers stayed for the presentations of the participants to get feedback from established scholars. What I also liked very much about the Summer School was that there were people from different disciplines. I really enjoyed the reader and I would have liked to engage about the reader with the other participants more directly, which I have experienced as very thought provoking at previous Summer Schools.

Why did you apply for travel subsidies?

I'm funded in Europe to do research but it doesn't fund for conferences but I think conferences are very important for research and exchange with other people.



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