

Opening Event of the Research Training Group Minor Cosmopolitanisms: Goals of the Doctoral Fellows

Potsdam, 28th of October 2016

Dear Research Training team, dear guests, dear past and future colleagues, partners, mentors,

On behalf of the first generation of doctoral candidates of the RTG Minor Cosmopolitanisms, we would like to extend to you a warm welcome to our inaugural event. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this venture, and we thank the Research training team for trusting our zeal and sharing this journey with us.

Consistent with the enthusiasm upon beginnings, our group gathered amongst ourselves and deliberated what it means for us to be here, and to be a part of the RTG Minor Cosmopolitanisms. What follows is a collage of our contributions.

We begin with the acknowledgement that despite the wide variety of cosmopolitan visions, political landscapes still foster expulsion, exploitation, abjection, repression and erasure. Our projects seek to understand the underlying grammars which perpetuate these forms of violence. At the same time, we commence our studies with the attempt to grasp how theoretical and practical struggles could contribute to an equality which recognises differences and alterities in their gendered and transcultural variations. We enter the research team aware of the academic and political desideratum to hear the so-called Global South in this polemics and hope that our projects will commit to the integration of post- and de-colonial theory in German academia and beyond.

For us, the notion of the minor is, before anything else, an ethical position, or an ethics of being, which enables progressive politics and an opening-up of thought. This openness entails reading against white male epistemological inheritance and investment; it entails contradiction, self-reflexivity but also commitment to transcultural collegiality and interdisciplinary cross-pollination.

It is a great opportunity to be funded by the German Research Foundation in this endeavour and we recognise the incredible chance to engage and inspire each other - focusing almost exclusively on research. To us this privilege, however, should serve as a reminder of and a critique of the fact that PhDs and postdocs, particularly in the humanities, are generally faced with a severe lack of funding and disproportionate teaching loads. This observation of privilege, for all its regional complexity and individuality, generally holds true for academia in Germany as much as for education in South Africa, for example, where students are protesting right now for access to quality, decolonized education under the hashtag #FeesMustFall. We believe that our work within this graduate school must address these asymmetries.

We stand here today with the recognition that our research projects will and should be an entry into the paradoxical: in reading against the para-logos, para-lexis, power access and excess of white hegemonic articulations. This practice of reading, we hope, will be carried out with the consciousness of our own implicated and complicated positionings. It will also be framed with the awareness that to destabilise institutions from within institutions in the attempt to hear subaltern frequencies remains an impossible and combustible paradox.

Here, we can only struggle to make paradoxes fruitful, creative spaces which allow us to learn from, listen to and hear. We are committed to the qualifier minor and to the pluralities of minor cosmopolitanismS. It will and should be a challenge. Having said all this, our projects and their framing within this particular program stand for the hope that there are - already existing and/or emerging- forms of transnational solidarities and commonalities that can offer alternatives to Eurocentric models of understanding.

We look forward to working with each other and with you in this endeavour. Stay tuned :)