

**“Minor Cosmopolitanisms”:
A Report on the International Summer School,
University of Potsdam, 9-13 July 2012**

It is always a matter of perspective: cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, as “a supra-national, governmental principal and universal right that pertains to everybody on the planet” and, on the other hand, as “a philanthropic and humanitarian ideal (that often has a hidden neocolonial or imperial agenda)”, as the website of the Summer School on “Minor Cosmopolitanisms” put it. Similarly, for some the Enlightenment project offered freedom, equality and reason to all humanity. For others, it excluded, nonetheless, people of non-European origins from these ideals. Indeed, it is all a matter of perspective, and that was exactly what the International Summer School at Potsdam University offered: a rare and precious opportunity for fruitful exchange of critical perspectives and theoretical approaches to the realities of our global, cosmopolitan and multicultural world.

The summer school specifically focused on “a range of ‘discrepant’ forms of cosmopolitan citizenship and belonging that have been the reality for colonial subjects in the past and have become the contemporary reality for millions of migrants as well as Indigenous people around the globe” (*Minor Cosmopolitanisms*). Lars Eckstein, Anja Schwarz, Dirk Wiemann and Alexander Dunst from the University of Potsdam brought together a good number of noteworthy scholars from all over the globe. The participants also included a number of international post-graduates and research fellows from countries such as Germany, South Africa, the United States and Turkey. As was to be expected from a summer school, trans-

national and interdisciplinary by nature, a rich platform – morning lectures, group workshops, plenary sessions, film screenings and poster presentations – was offered to the participants, which provided them with the opportunity to engage in enriching debates on a range of issues. The topics in focus were divided into one main roundtable session “Enlightenment and Global Justice”, and four smaller two-day workshops; “Postcolonial Justice”, “Minor Mobilities”, “Glocal Aesthetics” and “Indigenous Universals”.

During the roundtable session “Enlightenment and Global Justice”, the concept of cosmopolitanism was investigated with a view to its historical emergence within the context of the European Enlightenment and the formulation of a norm of universal human justice. Six different panellists – Prof. Satish Poduval (EFL University Hyderabad, India), Prof. Russell West-Pavlov (University of Pretoria, South Africa), Prof. Shaswati Mazumdar (Dehli University, India), Prof. Stephen Muecke (University of New South Wales, Australia), Prof. Rüdiger Kunow and Prof. Helmut Peitsch (both from Potsdam University, Germany) – offered their own take on this history of cosmopolitanism. Being deeply rooted in the European Enlightenment project, this historical notion of cosmopolitanism was criticised for remaining highly insufficient in itself when it comes to bringing justice to all humanity.

A morning lecture series focussed on specific aspects of the debate around cosmopolitanism. Lecture topics included *Change is Cosmopolitanism? Culture, Agency and the Social* by Prof. Rajni Palriwala, *Cosmopolitan Food Practices* by Dr. Sujith Pariyal (EFLU Hyderabad, India), *Queer Cosmopolitanisms* by Dr. Hongwei Bao (Nottingham Trent University, UK), *Women of the World: The Flight Attendant and Cosmopolitanism* by Dr. Prudence Black (University of Sydney, Australia), *Can You Anchor a Shimmering Nation State via Regional Indigenous Roots? Aboriginal Literature and the Brokerage of Decolonial Cosmopolitanism* by Prof. Anne Brewster (UNSW, Sydney, Australia), *Cosmopolitics in Broome: Techniques for Destroying and Protecting Worlds* by Prof. Stephen Muecke and *The Geo-Graphics of a Minor Cosmopolitanism: Alexis Wright’s Carpentaria as Indigenous World Literature* by Prof Russell West-Pavlov.

During the daily workshop sessions, the participants focused on two out of four topics: “Postcolonial Justice”, “Minor Mobilities”, “Glocal Aesthetics” and “Indigenous Universals”. Each workshop provided an enriching platform to examine specific topics from different theoretical perspectives. The first workshop group “Postcolonial Justice”, chaired by Prof. Mazumdar and Prof. Wiemann, discussed different concepts of cosmopolitanism, and their relation to human justice. The second workshop group, “Minor Mobilities”, was instructed by Prof. Palriwala, Dr. Bao and Prof. Schwarz. The participants related the concept of minor cosmopolitanism to global and local societies in transition. The third workshop group “Glocal Aesthetics” concerned itself with “the trans-national status of arts” and was chaired by Prof. Poduval, Prof. Muecke and Dr. Dunst. The fourth workshop group, “Indigenous Universals” was chaired by Prof. West-Pavlov, Prof. Brewster, Prof. Eckstein and Dr. Sinha and discussed the notion of an “indigenous cosmopolitanism” (*Minor Cosmopolitanisms*).

Other highlights of the Summer School included a PhD poster session where young researchers exhibited their PhD projects in the form of posters to a responsive, yet critical audience so as to promote exchange of ideas and receive feedback on their research work in progress. Film screenings of *My Migrant Soul* (dir. Yasmine Kabir, Bangladesh 2002), *Vers Nancy* (dir. Claire Denis, France 2002) and *Bamako* (dir. Abderrahmane Sissako, France, Mali, USA 2006) also attracted attention and enabled fruitful discussions.

Lastly, the Potsdam Summer School on *Minor Cosmopolitanisms* provided students with valuable insights into the world of academia and fully lived up to the expectations of all of its participants, as well as presenting an unparalleled opportunity to strengthen the ties between young researchers and established scholars from all over the world. The different sections of the summer school, all of which were brought together in a well-balanced and productive manner, provided its participants with the opportunity to engage in stimulating discussions and arrive at valuable and constructive new insights. All in all, it proved to be a success: a perfectly organised, well-scheduled and memorable summer school with a friendly atmosphere.

Hazal Burcu Kislak (Berlin)