

**Hermeneutic Conflict, Cultural Entanglement and Social Inequality. Power of Interpretation in Intersectional Perspective**

**Veranstalter:** Graduate School „Power of Interpretation. Hermeneutic Conflict in Religion and Belief Systems“, University of Rostock  
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**Bericht von:** Sabine Jarosch / Danny Otto, University of Rostock, Graduate School „Power of Interpretation. Hermeneutic Conflict in Religion and Belief Systems“

The symposium brought together international scholars from various disciplines (Sociology, Political Science, Cultural Studies, Literature, Philosophy and Theology) to discuss questions of cultural and social difference and inequality reflected in the theoretical field of intersectionality. One aim was to connect them to theoretical issues of power of interpretation and hermeneutic hegemony. Addressed at various levels, intersectional ideas guided the overall view as a lens that points us towards the entanglement of categories of difference and inequality, emphasizing the importance of questioning received categories and turning our attention to the context-sensitive search for (epistemic) marginalization or privileged treatment. This widens the research on hermeneutic power by adding (even more) layers to theoretical and empirical studies concerned with „ways of knowing“, explicitly including the reflection of one's own (academic) subject position.

GABRIELE DIETZE (Berlin) exemplified this in her keynote lecture on „Ethnosexism. Phantasms about Muslim Migrants and Refugees“ by reflecting on the debates around sexism connected to the „moral panic“ surrounding the sexual harassment of women supposedly by migrants from Arabic-Muslim countries at New Year's Eve 2015/16 in Köln and other German cities. Dietze proposed the neologism „ethnosexism“ to show that an intersectional analysis of sexism enables us to see how not only women are the targets of sexism but also homosexuals and especially ethnically marginalized men. Her focus was placed on liberal forms of „ethnosexism“ e.g. in German newspapers of the academic

bourgeoisie, which tend to produce a self-heroization of the white German/European man as supposedly post-heroic enlightened man in order to assure the occidental self of its supremacy. In the current example the tightening of rape sentencing and penalization of street harassment was discussed on the foil of possibilities to facilitate a deportation of refugees, which shows the powerful political effect „ethnosexism“ can have in law-making. Dietze therefore promoted to analyze the discourse on migration as a „sexual problem“ and referred to the powerful effects of problem setting (Foucault).

PAULA-IRENE VILLA (München) focused on the intersections of gender, race, body, especially health and fitness in popular culture in the United States. By referring to a study of Shirley Tate on Michelle Obama's arm muscles, Villa showed the contrast between the peculiar performance of the first black First Lady of the USA and racial stereotypes of black women that variously exoticize and fetishize them as „angry“, hypersexual, physically strong and overwhelmingly maternal. Villa proposed to see the different (self-)performances of Michelle Obama's body in the light of „the contemporary normative ideal of the managerial self“. This leads to an understanding of agency and empowerment as a deeply „ambivalent strategy of subjective refusal to be a victim“. Villa saw in Obama's performing of autonomy and self-control a post-essentialist embodiment of this form of ambivalent empowerment: not meaning that race, gender etc. are no longer at stake but as a strategy to not let herself be defined by her these cultural categories. She identified fitness and health as both a possibility for everybody and an ideal of neoliberal (self-)enhancement.

Also referring to the concept of the entrepreneurial self, MICHAEL MEUSER (Dortmund) reflected upon „hegemonic masculinity“ (Connell/Wood) in post-industrial societies and the „crisis discourse“ surrounding it. His talk focused on the neoliberal transformation of labor and its consequences for the construction of masculinity, thereby pointing us to intersections of class and gender. He argues that while a „traditional masculinity“ is weakened by changes in employment (se-

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curity) for working and middle class men, it is reinvented at the same time. This reinvention centers on the figure of the enterprising self and states a „transnational business masculinity“ as hegemonic. He introduces this new form as an individualistic and project-like masculinity that seems to lead to a flexibilization of hegemonic masculinity.

INA KERNER (Berlin) complemented the talk of Dietze by approaching the issue of „ethnosexism“ from the perspective of some Pakistani feminists who called for a clear support of their feminist struggles. After recalling the postcolonial critique of an uncritical assumption of global feminist sisterhood, Kerner asked whether intersectionally working feminists in the West embodied the awareness of the othering of sexism and the danger of occidentalist attitudes so much that they restricted themselves to critical self-reflection in order to carry out a „politics of clean hands“. She rejects a return to homogeneous concepts of religion and culture as well as of the victimization of e.g. Muslim women. But how could a complex critique of cultural and religious contexts different from its own look like? Without giving up an intersectional framework, Kerner called to not let solidarity end at national borders, but still search for adequate ways to implement a vision of transnational feminist solidarity.

SABINE DIEVENKORN (Santiago de Chile) gave us some insights into her work on Bible translation together with a multicultural group of female theologians in Chile. Confronted with deep suspicion towards the Biblical text and a lack of education to be able to verify biased translations of the „Holy Scripture“, Dievenkorn suggested to make explicit the authorship and the particular intentions of each translation, and also to make transparent other possible translation options. For the Chilean Bible translation she recommended a gender- and culture-sensitive approach taking the perspective of the unprivileged local population as a starting point. This may include ethical questions, e.g. how to translate biblical expressions of violence.

In his explorations of the „Panarchy“ and its „Cross-Cultural Dynamics of Place in 19th Century America“ JOHN J. KUCICH

(Massachusetts) took us along to the „more-than-human“ world and vividly described how „the circuits of colonial encounter run through the webs of the material world“. Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives - including studies of place (i.a. Lefebvre; Heise), studies of contact and settler colonialism (i.a. Tompkins; Rifkin) and new materialism (i.a. Bennett; Latour) - he offers „Panarchy“ as a term to grasp the complexities in which actants, „who have their own agendas and stories to tell“, partake in shaping eco-cultural contacts and cultural exchange. He exemplified the gain of this perspective beyond the classical range of intersectionality („defying classifications“) with case studies on literature of Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir.

Other dimensions of (official) classification were addressed by VICTORIA NAMUGALA (Tempe) in her talk on „Childhood Amidst Armed Violence“. Based on empirical studies in Northern Uganda she questioned the relation of population categorization and their affects on use and access to social services, especially humanitarian assistance. The key issue in this intersectional approach, combining age, race, gender, nation and class, was the deconstruction of dominant (Western) conceptions of childhood and to contrast them with alternative understandings of age and stages of maturity in Northern Uganda. She outlined contradictions between universalistic notions of childhood and local experiences evolving around other cultural interpretations of agency, individuality and vulnerability and their consequences for solving hermeneutic and also very physical conflicts (e.g. definitions of childhood by humanitarian assistance programs differ from local, understandings of childhood with respect to the social functions of the young). She concluded with a call for context-specific scientific investigations as well as approaches for NGOs taking local and lived understandings of childhood into account.

These insights into post-colonial power constellations were complemented by the historical focus of RÜDIGER KUNOW (Potsdam), who analyzed the „Living Connections“ between „American Empire and the Ecosphere“. He emphasized the role of bio-

ecological factors (e.g. infectious diseases) on the building and maintenance of the American Empire and shows how epidemics were often constructed as resisting or counteracting the expansion of political control. Using as case studies the 1793 Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic and the 1899 revolution in Cuba, he points towards the construction of different narratives of „imaginary immunity for an imaginary community“ to counter the threat of „infectious tentacles of the empire that are reaching the homeland“. Tracing back the „Trojans“ that brought the diseases, constructing invulnerability for the indigenous population, even if they were deported as slaves, and promoting it „the white man’s burden“ to „clean the world“ are only a few of the (narrative) strategies of the imperial „geographies of blame“ Kunow detected in the historical source material.

Following the intersections of race, nation, health and the indeterminate flow of disease LALATENDU KESHARI DAS (Hyderabad) enriched the discussion by presenting the entanglement of class, caste and subalternity in the case of the „anti-dispossession struggle in Chilika, India“. Taking a Gramscian view on power he reconstructed the struggles about the shrimp agriculture in Chilika Lake and stressed the involvement of state officials, courts of law, constitutional rights, NGOs, crime organizations and others in the capitalist transformation of the lake. His detailed account of current developments and its connection to earlier successful anti-capitalist counter-movements is based on qualitative field work and points towards surprising constellations of „co-optation“ and complicity that challenge the aggressor-resistor binary in the discourse on capitalist accumulation of environmental resources.

JOAN MCGREGOR (Tempe) examined intersections between ecology, indigeneity/race, property and territory in indigenous and white US-American perspectives concerning land ownership. She showed that whereas white Euro-American settlers were, and contemporary jurisdiction partially still is, epistemically disadvantaged to understand Native American concepts of land and property, their „white ignorance“ was actually helpful in legally appropriating

the land. McGregor examined this form of cultural imperialism by tracing its legal logic to property-related theories of classic Western philosophers (e.g. Kant, Hobbes, and Locke). The narratives of appropriation include the religious doctrine of divine providence, the Lockean doctrine of labor-related ownership of land, as well as the narrative of the translation of knowledge from east to west. Concluding that the disarticulation of indigenous knowledge about land produced the ignorance necessary for legitimizing the process of dispossession and gaining white hegemony in America, McGregor asked for ethical evaluation parameters of the knowledge production of that time.

In the final discussion it was argued that the symposium succeeded in extending the scope of intersectionality especially by adding further criteria for social inequality and theoretical approaches (especially postcolonial ones) to the triad of race-class-gender: categories such as body, age, indigeneity, territory, the non-human or posthuman. Several papers addressed the (asymmetrical) relations of power between different interpretations, e.g. of nature, childhood, and land ownership.

It was agreed that besides proposing a wide critical framework for Intersectionality or Interdependency, the scope of common theories of interpretation may need to be expanded as well by including such additional critical perspectives. Hegemonies of certain interpretations over others are most likely explicable with regard to conflicts between several of such epistemic categories. These should be shown and analyzed in each case. It is therefore necessary to trace the processes by which certain knowledges gain power and to study the „micropolitics of power“. A hermeneutic approach foregrounds the importance of adequate readings of these phenomena, including the analysis of processes of making invisible (invisibilization), of producing absence, of setting a problem, or replacing indigestible realistic descriptions with mythical narratives. Such close readings of culturally entangled conflicts often reveal the legal dimension of power (e.g. in legal rationalizations of physical violence, migration law, ecocide, territorial dispossession).

The symposium combined intersectional

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analyses looking at the metropolis as well as the periphery. Historical investigations complemented empirical ones. It became clear that an intersectional framework can make us see the overlapping of privileges and marginalization through complex approaches. This opened up the view for ambivalences of agency strategies and empowerment. Still, the need for action was emphasized, the sensitivity for complexities should not lead to a dead end.

**Conference Overview:**

Gabriele Dietze (Berlin): Ethnosexism. Phantasms about Muslim Migrants and Refugees

Paula-Irene Villa (München): Twerk and Muscles: The Display of the 'Post-Essentialist' Body in Popular Culture and its Intersectional Analysis

Michael Meuser (Dortmund): Hegemonic Masculinity under Pressure? Transformation of Labor and Changing Gender Relations

Ina Kerner (Berlin): Religion, Culture, and the Complexities of Feminist Solidarity

Sabine Dievenkorn (Santiago de Chile): The Translating Theologian as Agency-Oriented Mediator between Exegesis and Eisegesis seen in the Light of De-colonial Theories of Power

John J. Kucich (Massachusetts): Panarchy and the Cross-Cultural Dynamics of Place in 19th Century America.

Victoria Namuggala (Tempe): Childhood amidst Armed Violence

Rüdiger Kunow (Potsdam): (American) Empire and the Ecosphere

Lalatendu Keshari Das (Hyderabad): Emerging Subalternities and Anti-Dispossession Struggle in Chilika, India: A Gramscian Analysis

Joan McGregor (Tempe): Property in Land? Different Epistemologies Relating to Land, Intercultural Values, and the Law

*Final Discussion*

Gesa Mackenthun (Rostock) / Sabine Jarosch (Rostock) / Danny Otto (Rostock)

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