

Section

Community in Difference
Collective Agents in Intercultural Contexts

International Conference

Knowledge, Creativity and Transformations of Societies

Vienna, 7-9 December 2007

www.inst.at/kctos

Section Chair:

Bertold Bernreuter

Outline

Human beings are 'social animals'; they organise themselves in groups, communities and societies, and are human through their sociality. Thus in political debates, and particularly in the intercultural arena, we are consistently confronted with two kinds of agents: individuals and collectives, collectives of different sizes operating on different levels. For a collective agent to act, there needs to be (possible) recourse to an existent consensus. Without this, the collective agent would collapse (or relapse) into an expression of authoritarianism, paternalism, or chaos. Just like the concept of identity already always implies difference, the idea of a collective agent implies questions about internal structures of democracy.

When reflecting upon the concept of community and its practical relevance, two general questions have to be raised: firstly, who constitutes themselves as a community? – the question of identity and autonomy. Secondly, how does the community articulate their interests? – the question of representation and democracy.

One can explore further the basic dimensions of community and go on to ask: when and where does the community construct and reproduce itself? – the question of historicity and locality. What does community generate and articulate? – the question of authenticity and normativity. What does community aspire to move towards? – the question of finality. How does community articulate itself? – the question of mediality. And finally, why does it articulate itself at all, on which grounds? – the question of legitimacy.

In many non-Western philosophies, the community has a special status as a collective subject. There, the fixation of Western rationalism on the individual as unique and exclusive subject seems somewhat incomprehensible and deficient. But also in the West

itself this one-sided fixation has been criticised, for instance in communitarianism, and the reality of collective agents has been acknowledged, as the discussions about a third generation of human rights show (the collective and solidarity rights).

In this section we aim to engage critically with discussion about the concept of community, in particular by drawing from non-Western traditions, in order to arrive at a better understanding of the role of collective agents, specifically in intercultural contexts. Hereby, we point to the need for an awareness about the ideological traps inherent in this discourse; this is needed to create space for a kind of reflection that will be able to envisage creative and adequate alternatives to the multiple processes of transformation in particular societies and within a global society on the whole.

Programme

Friday, 7 December 2007

15:00 – 18:00

15:00 – 15:45 **Krasimira Marholeva** (Prague, Czech Republic): Between the Old and the New Homeland: The National Identity of The Czech Community in the USA in Early 20th Century

15:45 – 16:30 **Niels Weidmann** (Tübingen, Germany): Dimensionen von Gemeinschaft – ein Blick auf afrikanische Traditionen

16:30 – 17:15 **Kai Kresse** (Berlin, Germany): Community in Difference? Reflections on Coastal Muslims in Postcolonial Kenya

17:15 – 17:45 **Discussion**

Saturday, 8 December 2007

9:00 – 16:45

9:00 – 9:45 **Sudarsan Padmanabhan** (Chennai, India): Indian Social Imaginary

9:45 – 10:30 **Francesca Ervas** (Rome, Italy): A Naturalistic Explanation of Communication Across Cultures

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 – 11:45 **Fouad Kalouche** (Reading/Penn., USA): *Sensus Communis* in Intercultural Contexts and the Need to Reassess Knowledge and Meaning: Contemporary Forms of Subjectivization and Possibilities for Radical Social Transformation

11:45 – 12:15	Discussion
12:15 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 14:45	Bertold Bernreuter (Mexico City, Mexico): Gemeinschaft und kulturelle Differenz in der politischen Philosophie von Luis Villoro
14:45 – 15:30	Wolfgang Cernoch (Vienna, Austria): Collective Agents, die Organisation der Organisationsformen und Identität
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee Break
15:45 – 16:45	Final Discussion

Abstracts and Short Biographies

Bertold Bernreuter (Mexico City)

Gemeinschaft und kulturelle Differenz in der politischen Philosophie von Luis Villoro

Die Fundierung eines dynamischen Gemeinschaftsbegriffs abseits kultureller Homogenisierungen ist ein zentrales Anliegen der politischen Theorie des mexikanischen Philosophen Luis Villoro. Er versucht dabei, die Irrungen des liberalen Modells ebenso zu vermeiden wie die Zumutungen seines egalitären Gegenmodells. Stattdessen nimmt er die Anerkennung des konkreten Anderen zum Ausgangspunkt für einen Entwurf einer in sich differenzierten Gemeinschaft, die Identität nicht auf Kosten der Differenz gewinnt, sondern im solidarischen Ringen um Gerechtigkeit. Diese Offenheit für das Andere und den Anderen zeigt Wege auf, wie ein Kollektiv auch im interkulturellen Kontext der inneren wie äußeren Heterogenität gerecht werden kann und somit als kollektives Subjekt agieren kann, ohne in autoritären Kulturalismus oder in multikulturelle Beliebigkeit zu verfallen. Im kritischen Nachvollzug von Villoros Annäherung an einen zeitgemäßen Gemeinschaftsbegriff sollen in diesem Referat mögliche Kriterien und Eckpunkte für eine philosophisch fundierte Reflexion zur Rolle von kollektiven Agenten im interkulturellen Kontext herausgearbeitet und präzisiert werden.

Biography

Bertold Bernreuter (*1969 in Amberg) ist Dozent für Philosophie an der Universidad Intercontinental in Mexiko-Stadt. Er ist Gründer und Chefredakteur der internationalen Zeitschrift *polylog. Forum für interkulturelle Philosophie* (www.polylog.org). Er studierte Philosophie, interkulturelle Kommunikation, Germanistik, Geographie und Pädagogik in Münster, Wien, Mexiko-Stadt und München. Arbeitsschwerpunkte sind interkulturelle Philosophie, Kulturphilosophie und politischer Philosophie, mit einem regionalen Schwerpunkt in lateinamerikanischer Philosophie. Publikationen in Deutsch, Spanisch und Englisch vorwiegend zu Fragen interkultureller Philosophie, zuletzt „Zehn Fallstricke in der Praxis interkultureller Philosophie“ in *polylog. Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren* Nr. 16, 2007.

Wolfgang Cernoch (Vienna)

Collective Agents, die Organisation der Organisationsformen und Identität

Kollektive wie individuelle Agenten handeln in einen schon existierenden Sozialraum. Kollektive Agenten handeln über ihre Mitglieder nach außen und nach innen. Der individuelle Agent vermag bestehende Organisationen und Stabsstellen (Prä-Organisationen, Stabsstellen von Organisationen) auch informell zu benutzen, wenn in der Interessenslage und Themenstellung Übereinstimmung besteht. Kognitiv geht es bereits um eine Liste von möglichen Themen, da in einer scheinliberalen Massengesellschaft der umfassende Sozialraum bereits über Negationen und Simulationen, nicht über die Vorstellung von allgemeiner Zweckrationalität identitätsstiftend wirkt.

Die Art der Entstehung kollektiver Agenten hängt von der Ausgangsformation ab: Gruppen und Großgruppen können spontan entstehen, Organisationen müssen geplant und gegründet werden, Massen benötigen eine Infrastruktur, einen Anlass, und ein spontanes Netzwerk, daß sich zu Bildung von Stabsstellen eignet. Bei Bestand gibt es je nach Organisationsform verschieden wahrscheinliche Felder möglicher Folgen, zur Identitätsstiftung ist die abermalige Organisation der verschiedenen sozialen Formationen (A) organisierten Gruppen, (B) Organisationen, und (C) Massenbewegungen einerseits, und deren kultursoziologische Beschreibung als (a) flanierende Trendsetter in Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur, (b) Wirtschaftsunternehmen bzw. politische Organisationen und c) Öffentlichkeit bzw. Markt andererseits in einer Massengesellschaft Voraussetzung.

Die Zielsetzung von sozialen Agenten überhaupt ist erstens idealiter die Artikulation der allgemeinen Zweckrationalität in ihren Abstufungen der Staatsaufgaben eines zivilisierten Gemeinwesens und zweitens praktisch vorrangig die Betonung der jeweiligen Interessen und Wertsetzungen. Paternalismus ist im Wesentlichen als antihumanistische Restform von Authentizität und Legitimität anzusehen. So könnte man meinen, das Problem der Koordination verschiedener Agenten läge in der demokratischen Legitimierung, also die Legitimität läge allein in der rechtsstaatlichen Form. Allerdings können paternalistische Legitimierungen im Zusammenhang mit emanzipatorischen Wirkungen national wie sozial nicht gänzlich ausgeschlossen werden. Im Zuge der Globalisierung setzt sich die nichtstaatliche Organisationsform von Interessensvertretung international fort. Vorläufer waren etwa Gewerkschaften, humanistische und politische Gesinnungsgemeinschaften.

Die Legitimität in rechtsstaatlicher Hinsicht rückt in soziologischer Perspektive ein in die Randbedingungen der umfassenden Gesamtgesellschaft, die nicht ident mit dem Staat ist. Damit tritt die Frage der Legitimität in die der Moral und die Bewertung verschiedener Agenten in der Geschichte über. Der Spielraum ergibt sich u. a. auch daraus, daß grob gesagt, zwischen Struktur- Ziel- und Leitbildbewußtsein verschiedene Rationalitätstypen zur Ausformulierung tätig sind, sodaß die allgemeine Zweckrationalität nicht grundsätzlich als System oder Handlungsanweisung oder Algorithmus zu behandeln sein kann, sondern nur punktuell aus Einsicht ins Mögliche und Notwendige (die eigentliche allgemeine Zweckrationalität) zu einem wechselseitig nachvollziehbaren Handeln als Gesamtgesellschaft im (innen-)politisch relevanten Sinn gelangen kann.

Biography

Wolfgang Cernoch (*1952 in Wien). Studien der Architektur, Psychologie und Politologie. Mitarbeit an Projekten von Dr. Herbert Rauch (Wien, Innsbruck), insbesondere über Gruppentheorie, Organisationssoziologie, regionale Entwicklung und internationale Konflikte. Studium der Philosophie bei Prof. Dr. Michael Benedikt (Wien). Mitarbeit an der bislang fünfbandigen Philosophiegeschichte Österreichs "Verdrängter Humanismus – Verzögerte Aufklärung" von Michael Benedikt und Reinhold Knoll. Veröffentlichungen zu

Bolzano, Zimmermann, Brentano und Popper. Der Autor arbeitet zur Zeit an Entwürfen zur Gesellschaftslehre, welche den Ansätzen der Evolutionstheorie, Verhaltenstheorie und Soziobiologie einerseits und der Soziologie, Nationalökonomie und Politik andererseits kritisch eine Stellung in der philosophischen Anthropologie anweist.

Francesca Ervas (Rom)

A Naturalistic Explanation of Communication Across Cultures

This proposal hopes to answer three questions. The *first* question it would aim to answer is: "What is a social norm?" To answer this question, I would assume the central role of communication in explaining social rules and conventions, their similarities and differences across cultures. Above all, I would like to give a naturalistic explanation of how communication works across cultures and how social norms emerge through communication. Therefore I would propose an attempt to "naturalize" normative aspects of communication, to provide a scientific explanation of the nature of social norms that guide communication in all its shapes and of how they are represented by the human mind as part of nature.

Within this theoretical approach, public language and its use in communication would deserve particular attention, since language use plays a fundamental role in the expression and communication of thoughts among people. Moreover, intercultural communication, instead of a process of coding and decoding, can be considered an inferential practice that involves the human capacity of mind-reading:

"Cognitive systems are characterized by their ability to construct and process mental representations. Cognitive systems capable of communicating also produce and interpret public representations. Representations, whether mental or public, are themselves objects in the world; they are found inside cognizers and in the vicinity of communicators; they are potential objects of second-order representations or 'metarepresentations'" (Sperber, *Metarepresentations*, 2000, 3).

So, understanding this evolved capacity to construct metarepresentations is a way to go to the roots of human sociality, because it allows us to give an explanation of human communication, comprehension, translation and transmission of thoughts in terms of a specific, natural ability of attributing mental states to others and to oneself.

Consequently, the *second* question I would like to answer is: "How do metarepresentations work in intercultural communication?" In intercultural communication, translation – a fundamental way of communicating among cultures – is nothing but a kind of metarepresentation based on an *interpretive use* where it is represented a new, additional utterance built from another one and resembling it in some respects. Then, as any utterance may be used to represent another utterance it resembles, any thought may thus be used to represent another thought. So thoughts themselves may be *interpretively used*, or as interpretive representations of other thoughts that they resemble. This mental mechanism constitutes the condition of possibility of communication and constitution of social groups.

The *third* question I would like to answer is: "Why is the human mind specifically characterized by such a complex linguistic-communicative and metapsychological capacity?" A possible answer to this question could come from an evolutionary perspective: the mechanism of socialization would have exerted a strong selective pressure

on the development of such a capacity. Human capacity for intercultural communication and mind-reading reaches such a refined level as to allow complex forms of socialization. Or better, as I would like to argue, the human capacity of mind-reading is so different from animals' corresponding capacity exactly *because of* the relationship between intercultural communication and mind-reading typical of human beings.

Biography

Francesca Ervas (*1978 in Treviso, Italy) is a Post doc Fellow in Philosophy of Language at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Roma Tre. 2002 Degree in Philosophy, University of Padua, with a thesis entitled "Il problema della traduzione in Donald Davidson. L'interprete radicale come 'misura' della traduzione" [The problem of translation in the work of Donald Davidson. The radical interpreter as "measure" of translation]. 2004 Visiting student at the Department of General Linguistics, University of Helsinki for research in the "Multilingual Communication Programme". 2006 European PhD in Philosophy and Theory of Human Sciences, University of Roma Tre, with a dissertation, written in English and entitled "Equivalence in Translation. A philosophical approach".

Fouad Kalouche (Reading, PA)

Sensus Communis in Intercultural Contexts and the Need to Reassess Knowledge and Meaning: Contemporary Forms of Subjectivization and Possibilities for Radical Social Transformation

The paper will start by assessing what "sociality" has been associated with theoretically, building on analyses of Nietzsche, Castoriadis, and Foucault. Sociality always already presupposes a *sensus communis* that is developed through the delineation of social imaginary significations within the spheres of giving meaning (*sens*) to socialized individuals (through processes of socialization and acculturation) and to political subjects (through processes of subjectivization). Socialized individuals create and/or belong to collectivities at varying levels through teleological "projects," including such projects as "autonomy" or "democracy." Autonomy consists of an individual or communal intrinsic claim to the power of differentiation of meaning. Democracy consists of an individual and communal intrinsic claim to participation in the creation of meaning and in the transformation of processes of socialization, acculturation, and subjectivization.

The next part of the paper will explore how various thinkers imagined the foundation of political participation in social cohesion: Aristotle, Confucius and Mencius, and Ibn Khaldun, just to cite a few, agree on *nomos* being the foundational power of creating *sensus communis* (respectively related to "Friendship," "Filial Piety," and "Assabiyah") as socialization processes create stable communities where conformity is the rule, but within which time and experience allow for creativity and change. Forms of contemporary political subjectivization are effectively changing various modes of sociality associated with building *sensus communis* (via traditional, ideological, or imaginary social significations): intercultural contexts are becoming the norm rather than the exception in social spaces of creation and transformation of meaning and regulatory institutions (that socialize, acculturate, and subjectivize individual and collective agents). In today's world of "globalization," we see increasing numbers of collectivities (as sub-communities of meaning) acting in the name of cohesive and homogenous traditional, ideological, or

social imaginary significations (re-producing nationalist, ethnic, religious, or other group identities) attempting to resist change and transformation through means of imagining petrified meaning and history. We also see a number of collectivities acting in the name of heterogeneous and differentiated approaches to similar goals or projects. The question is whether these latter forms of collectivities, not being communities of meaning in the historical sense (of *sensus communis* as a shared social and cultural meaning), could still be considered “agents” of social and political transformation—or whether they are merely products of political subjectivization associated with emerging global processes of socialization and acculturation where the role of the media, and of mediation, is primordial and deserves particular attention. In order to problematize this last question, the paper will focus on investigating the production of contemporary subjectivities, finding some support in transdisciplinary analyses. The focus will be on modes of domination and of control associated with the production of reality and with the absencing of the other (or difference). The production of contemporary subjectivities will be situated within a transformed Capitalism that produces needs and desires through a global culture (media, communicational and informational networks, marketing and movies, etc.) invested by social imaginary significations that construct reality by controlling both being and meaning.

The final part of the paper will assess possibilities of social transformation, building on singularities/power relations that value difference and re-inscribe that difference within intercultural contexts. Such forms of social transformation do not rely on a stable foundational being that allows for creativity and change within determinate, circumscribed, and reductive places of meaning production. A community built on difference would have interculturality flourish in the various manifestations of the *sensus communis* and is held together by individuals or collectivities (as sub-communities of meaning) that privilege projects of “autonomy” and “democracy” proper to ontologies and epistemologies of multiplicity and difference. We need to look back to the Taoist and Buddhist epistemologies and ontologies to reassess the dominant (capitalist) forms of producing or giving meaning. In a way, that is precisely the project that contemporary social and political philosophy is engaged in: reproducing social imaginary significations corresponding to a foundational becoming where difference is immanently creative and transformative, and where indeterminacy, multiplicity, and irreducibility characterize meaning itself and permeate emerging forms of socialization, acculturation, and subjectivization. It is within these anti-reductive intercultural (and anti-capitalist) global social imaginaries that we need to re-situate the political projects of autonomy and democracy and not within the dominant reactive (and reductive) economic, nationalist, religious, or cultural global social imaginaries associated with the dominant forms of subjectivization of consumer culture and its “others.” Our ways of knowing (including understanding “project,” “agent,” and “community”) need to be radically reassessed in order to transform our ways of living.

Biography

Fouad Kalouche is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Albright College in Reading, PA. He has written on Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern ethics and political philosophies privileging Multiplicity and Indeterminacy. Kalouche is also the co-editor of two volumes of essays by Ali A. Mazrui on African Studies and Political Science, and the co-author (with Eric Mielants) of a study on the contemporary transformations of Capitalism. He is currently writing on political subjectivization (relying on Nietzsche, Castoriadis, Foucault, Deleuze, Braudel and Said, among others). Fouad Kalouche is co-editor of *polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* (www.polylog.org).

Kai Kresse (Berlin)

Community in Difference? Reflections on Coastal Muslims in postcolonial Kenya

In this paper, I seek to reflect upon my current ethnographic project, working as an anthropologist on the internal ideological tensions and social dynamics among Muslims on the Swahili coast in postcolonial Kenya, by using some of the general framing questions suggested in the panel outline.

While it makes sense to talk about 'coastal Muslims' in Kenya as a kind of wider community loosely defined by religious affiliation, their internal diversity is significant and marked from within, with reference to ethnicity and cultural background but most importantly by different interpretations of Islam (and, in consequence, the practice of it) among and within Muslim groups. Looking closely at selected examples of ideological disputes and confrontations about proper Islamic interpretation and practice between rival groups (with their respective international networks of ideological, organizational and financial support) contesting to shape and dominate the wider regional Muslim community, I discuss the internal social dynamics following Talal Asad's paradigm of 'Islam as discursive practice'. The empirical material upon which my discussion is based consists of Islamic pamphlets and speeches (recorded on cassette) in Swahili – the regional lingua franca – that I collected over several years of research, as well as my own fieldwork observations and many informal (and some formal) conversations with a variety of local Muslims many of whom I know well personally.

In discussion, I am particularly interested in tracing how a position of sustained ideological predominance within the region is sought to be achieved, and I proceed by looking at the reference to and invocation and use of Islamic knowledge, history, and rhetoric, in the ways that the discursive negotiation of Islam is played out socially. I will reflect upon fundamental conceptual inter-relationships involved, and discuss how those aspects relate to and underpin Islamic authority and social legitimacy in terms of political leadership and its acceptance by the constituency of regional Muslims. I will seek to sketch out whether and in which ways the goal of achieving a social consensus plays a role here, also with a view to the variety of translocal and intercultural factors that are involved in these negotiations, not least posed by the challenge to adapt ideological influences from elsewhere (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan) appropriately for local consideration.

With a view to the titles of this panel and the conference overall, coastal Muslims in Kenya can surely be seen as a 'community in difference' which is constantly shaped and re-negotiated by a diversity of individual and collective agents (groups); thereby, reference to 'knowledge' plays a major role within the various respective attempts at transforming society. Introducing my case study from the viewpoint of an anthropology of Islam, I will discuss these issues at the general conceptual level that the panel description asks for.

Biography

Kai Kresse (*1969) is Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews and currently Research Fellow at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. He has published a monograph, *Philosophising in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast* (Edinburgh University Press 2007) and several edited collections, among them *Reading Mudimbe* (special issue of *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2005), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, with Edward Simpson (Hurst and Columbia University Press 2007), and *Sagacious Reasoning: Henry Odear Oruka in memoriam*, with Anke Graness (Peter Lang 1997). He is also part of the editorial team of *polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* (www.polylog.org).

Krasimira Marholeva (Prague)

Between the Old and the New Homeland: The National Identity of The Czech Community in the USA in Early 20th Century

The history of the Czech migration to the United States is a history of two countries on opposite sides of the Atlantic. The emigration from the Czech lands to the United States began in the late 1840s and reached its peak in the 1880s-1890s. As 1990s American historiography points out that, in order to explore and to explain the behaviour of "hyphenated" Americans, one needs to follow the settlers "from their places of birth to their places of death".

This paper aims at investigating the national identity of Czech community in the USA in the first decade of XX century as described in two American periodicals – "*Charities*" and "*Outlook*" in 1904 and 1906, respectively.

One of the main issues, which the American authors raised was the integration of the Slav newcomers to America, in particular, the Bohemians, as the Americans called the Czechs. The Americans felt that it was a matter of social duty and obligation for the "general public" to contribute to their integration.

Speaking about their inevitable assimilation and integration to the American culture and tradition, the American authors stressed on their struggle with their nostalgia, increasing little by little the gap between the new and the old homeland, in a similar fashion to the first American settlers.

The American authors pointed out that the school was the most reliable means of assimilation, but sometimes not enough strong to "baptize" Slav newcomers into "American faith". They also focused on the family as a place for struggle between the traditions of the old country and those adopted from the new one. Children, being more liable to assimilation, were described as interpreters – the living connection between the new world and the old one, symbolized by their parents. By embracing the new ideas and values, they became leaders of their families. The children's ideals are formed by teachers and politicians and the former sometimes had more influence on them than their own parents. Thus, the home influence was sometimes weak to keep the old identity.

I argue that in this case, family and school were involved unintentionally into an unconscious struggle for the "souls" of the "youths", turning themselves into "cultural enemies". In this sense, the school assumed the role of a disintegrating factor – separating the first and the second generation. The paradox is that, parents, led by their wish to provide their offspring with better life, by integrating it into the new society through the school, built a strong wall between themselves and their children. Thus, this was not merely a conflict between two generations but between two national and cultural identities.

The second generation growing up in the United States felt removed from traditional Czech culture, regarding it as old-fashioned. That was why, some of the authors warned against the "dangers" of such "fast" Americanizing process. Though regarding the assimilation of the immigrants as inevitable, they supported the preserving the memory of the old homeland.

The authors explained that although the American Czechs were integrated to their new homeland, the assimilation was not full, because their language proved to be quite strong to be swept; it helped the Czechs keep alive their national consciousness.

Thus, the Czech community in the USA formed they own world, a "state within the state", or, to use the words of one of the American Czechs, "*New Bohemia in America*". They kept their national consciousness through their language and numerous Czech periodicals,

published in the USA. Their Czech identity became “visible” during the First World War, during which the Czech immigrants would actively participate in the struggle for the Czechoslovak independence.

Biography

Krasimira Marholeva (*1975 in Sofia) is a PhD student at Charles University, Prague. In 1998, she obtained an MA in History (thesis: “The Entente and the Establishment of Czechoslovak Republic, 1914-1920”), and in 2005 a PhD (thesis: “The USA and the Czech and Slovak National Problem, 1914-1919”), both by the Department of Modern and Contemporary History at Sofia University. From 2001 to 2002, she was Assistant Professor at Sofia University. Her professional interests are History of Eastern and Central Europe (18th -20th century), Nationalism in Eastern and Central Europe, 18th- 20th centuries (with special focus on the Habsburg Empire), Slav immigrants in the USA, and American history (19th-early 20th century).

Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Chennai)

Indian Social Imaginary

The post-colonial societies have been bequeathed with the Sisyphean task of experiencing pre-modern, modern and post-modern social transformation synchronously. Due to the stultification of organic social and cultural development during the colonial rule, the post-colonial societies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East encounter a conflictual process of constructing social, political, cultural and linguistic identities. While the Western societies anticipate rapid desacralization and secularization of the post-colonial societies, I argue that without the construction of a cultural social imaginary the transition into consensual communities is not possible. I examine the cultural and social transformation of India and the problems encountered by the Indians in contesting cultural, social, linguistic and religious identities. I analyze the role played by the Bhagawad Gita the most popular Indian scripture and the concept of non-attached action emphasized by it. I advocate a social action that is asymmetric which I call cooperative action that is weakly deontological, weakly utilitarian, evaluator relative, consensual and dialogical, but takes into account the need to encourage intersubjective interaction in all aspects of the life world.

Biography

Sudarsan Padmanabhan is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. In 2005, he graduated with a Ph.D. in Philosophy from University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (thesis: “Two Models of Consensus”). He also holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Pondicherry University, India (thesis: “Jürgen Habermas' Rational Theory of Social Action”). He was a Visiting Assistant Professor in Philosophy at Kenyon College, Gambier, OH during the academic year 2005-2006 and taught as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL in Spring 2007. His area of specialization is social and political philosophy, Indian philosophy and culture, and comparative philosophy. Among his publications can be mentioned a chapter entitled “Civil Society in India: Its Presuppositions, Problems and Projects” in *Enworlded Subjectivity: Its Three Worlds and Beyond*, edited by R. Balasubramanian, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006.

Niels Weidtmann (Tübingen)

Dimensionen von Gemeinschaft – ein Blick auf afrikanische Traditionen

Menschen sind immer auch sozial verfasst, sie stehen in einer Vielzahl sozialer Verflechtungen, seien dies die Familie, der Freundeskreis, der Sportverein, der Clan, die Nation oder die Religionsgemeinschaft. Nun gilt es zu sehen, dass solche Formen von Gemeinschaft nicht einfach das Ergebnis des Zusammenschlusses mehrerer Individuen sind, sondern Sinnfolien aufspannen, vor deren Hintergrund sich die Mitglieder dieser Gemeinschaften selber neu und anders erfahren. Gemeinschaften entstehen dort, wo Menschen gemeinsame Erfahrungen machen – und zwar so, dass die Gemeinsamkeit des Erfahrens für die Erfahrung wesentlich ist. Zugleich erfahren sich die einzelnen in diesem Prozess selbst auf neue Weise, ja sie erfahren sich in dieser Situation im Ganzen durch die Gemeinschaft getragen. Individuum und Gemeinschaft sind keine stehenden Größen, sondern Dimensionen eines Erfahrungszusammenhangs, der immer wieder von neuem erfahren werden muss, sollen die gemeinschaftlichen Sinnfolien nicht hohl werden und zu bloßen Ideologien erstarren.

Ein Blick auf die Traditionen von Gemeinschaft im sub-saharischen Afrika lehrt nicht nur, wie gemeinschaftliche Erfahrungen immer wieder erneuert werden und sich die Menschen deshalb viel stärker als im europäischen Kontext von Gemeinschaften her verstehen, sondern er zeigt darüber hinaus vor allem, dass der zugrunde liegende Erfahrungszusammenhang nicht auf zwei Dimensionen, Individuum und Gemeinschaft, begrenzt ist, sondern eine Vielzahl von miteinander verschränkten unterschiedlich weit ausgreifenden Dimensionen konstituiert. Das Zusammenspiel der verschiedenen Dimensionen, wie es sich in Altersgruppe, Clan, Ethnie und andere differenziert, verleiht den einzelnen Dimensionen erst ihren spezifischen Sinn. In jeder einzelnen Dimension klingen alle anderen auf bestimmte Weise an und sind darin mit aufgenommen. Geht diese Durchlässigkeit verloren, weil eine einzelne Dimension verabsolutiert und gegen alle anderen als alleingültige durchgesetzt wird, hat das zur Folge, dass nicht nur alle anderen Dimensionen verdrängt werden, sondern zudem selbst die herausgegriffene Dimension von Gemeinschaft ihren Sinn verliert. Genau das ist in Afrika während der Kolonialzeit mit den Ethnien geschehen, als die Kolonisatoren in der Bindekraft der Ethnien die einzig verlässliche gesellschaftliche Struktur afrikanischer Völker sahen und sich ihrer bedienten, um die eigene Macht zu sichern. Die Folgen sind noch heute überall zu sehen.

Biography

Niels Weidtmann (1967 in Tübingen) ist Wissenschaftlicher Leiter und Geschäftsführer des Forum Scientiarum an der Universität Tübingen. Von 2004 bis 2006 leitete er das Berliner Büro der Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes. Von 2002 bis 2004 war er Wissenschaftlicher Referent im Bundespräsidialamt im Bereich Bildung, Forschung, Familie, Jugend und Sport, zuvor seit 1998 Wissenschaftlicher Referent bei der Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes. Er studierte Biologie, Philosophie, Politikwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaften an der Universität Würzburg und der Duke University in Durham, NC, und promovierte 1998 in Würzburg im Fach Philosophie zum Thema „Der Weltcharakter der Kulturen in der interkulturellen Welt – eine Auseinandersetzung mit Hermeneutik und Strukturphänomenologie am Beispiel Afrika“. Er ist Redakteur der Zeitschrift *polylog. Forum für interkulturelle Philosophie* (www.polylog.org).