

## Multiple Modernities – Multiple Gender Cultures

**Mark B. Bibbert & Elisabeth Hill**

From September 15<sup>th</sup> to September 17<sup>th</sup> 2016, the University of Augsburg hosted the International Conference “Multiple Modernities – Multiple Gender Cultures,” organized by Prof. Dr. Heidemarie Winkel (University of Bielefeld), Prof. Dr. Angelika Pofert (TU Dortmund University), and Prof. Dr. Reiner Keller (University of Augsburg).<sup>1</sup> The conference was organized in cooperation with the Women and Gender Studies Section and the Sociology of Knowledge Section of the German Sociological Association. Over the course of these three days, the conference focused on the worldwide multiplicity of gender orders as well as how they might be conceptualized and compared against the background of multiple entangled modernities. Various empirical and theoretical contributions by international speakers were discussed with the intention to integrate transcultural and post-colonial perspectives in the multiple modernities paradigm (Eisenstadt).

On Thursday, the first day of the conference, the organizers welcomed all guests and opened the floor to *Heidemarie Winkel* (University of Bielefeld), who talked about “Differences and/or Similarities? Gender as an Epistemic Test Case”, as Manuela Boatca was unfortunately unable to present as planned. Winkel started her presentation by invoking Sousa Santos’ concept of the sociology of absences. In doing so, she criticized the global fixation on capitalism and Western theories, for example, the multiple modernities approach, which is in itself euro-centric and takes Europe as a point of origin for its assumptions. She posed the question of whether or not other cultures need Western ideas of a political society and participation, which are indeed bourgeois ideals. Heidemarie Winkel went on to ask if gender is still an adequate concept, especially when taking into account that not all women have the same gender. In Europe, the epistemological foundation of gender is its symbolic continuity, but beyond focusing on structures and institutions, culture needs to matter, too.

On Friday, *Gudrun Lachenmann* (University of Bielefeld) started the day with her lecture about “Negotiating Transformative Gender Orders in Translocal Spaces in the Global South.” In her talk, she posed methodological questions regarding the analysis of processes of globalization and localization from a translocal perspective. Lachenmann showed how the addition of concepts of multiple modernities and new concepts of diversity can be made useful by including the local in the global. Starting with criticism of modernity and feminism as Western, she nonetheless pointed out that development is a positive slogan in Senegal, Sudan, and Malaysia, and that development studies have also used ‘gender’ as an important category for quite some time. Continuing, she addressed various methodological challenges in times of globalization, such as the danger of losing focus on given societal contexts when analyzing ‘global’ phenomena. Further, she advised caution in comparing different societies or cultures with their specific transformations and contexts, especially

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because of the risk of fixating concepts of culture or falling into “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer, Glick, Schiller). Another common pitfall is that of systems of ignorance, which can have disastrous effects when analyzing statistical data that relies on Western concepts such as the household. She illustrated her methodological intentions by giving research results from her case studies in Senegal, Sudan, and Malaysia. Empirical data reveals that there is a considerable diversity of gender realities. Regarding women’s rights and their transformations, the importance of Islam, the authority of knowledge as well as gender order in economical and local governance, and the negotiation of the importance of global concepts were elaborated. She also noted that feminism has become a rejected term of sorts, as observed when looking at current titles of international ‘feminist’ conferences that prefer wordings such as “looking for a common ground.”

Subsequently, *Anna Spiegel* (University of Bielefeld) presented her research findings regarding “Negotiating Gender in Multiple Public Spheres. The Case of Malaysian Women’s Activists”, based on her ethnographic study in Malaysia about women activists. Starting with a critique of Habermas’ concept of the public sphere as Western and bourgeois, she looked at the construction of different public spheres by different organizations. By politicizing different issues in different ways, different public spheres emerge. Anna Spiegel differentiated between a counterpublic of urban advocacy women’s organizations, a complementary public sphere of semi-urban social work organizations, and a public sphere of resistance of women’s workers organizations. She did so based on her work with female activists and NGO’s in Malaysia in 2004/05. Her research draws on the concept of global ethnography (Buraway), which she complemented by focusing on actors and taking gendered social spheres into account. Her data contain observations of formal and informal gatherings, interviews with activists, and documents, whereby events are considered as a manifestation of a global public sphere. The counterpublic acts as an alternative to the male political party system and focuses on setting and achieving realistic goals by referring to global concepts but reframing them to fit the local context, as in the case of violence against women, which is a less politicized notion than human rights. The complementary public refers to Islamic notions as well as Malaysian concepts of female strength and beauty and frames problems as social ills. The public sphere of resistance engages in violent labor struggles and reframes the poor as avant-garde, for example, when squatters become urban pioneers. With this study, Anna Spiegel portrayed how local identities are entangled with global contexts and dichotomies like “the West – Islam”. The entailing discussion addressed questions of ethnic diversity and the nature of the relation of global and local identities.

Later in the course of the morning, *Shirin Zubair* (University of Oslo) gave her lecture titled, “We Can’t Cross our Limits: Sexuality and Desire in Urban Pakistani Youth’s Gendered Performance”. She started by raising the question about the core definition of modernity and stated that human agency, rationality, and autonomy are main aspects of modernity. Units of analysis can, for example, be religion, practices, or rituals. Furthermore, she stated that researchers from the so-called Global South must adopt international Standards (from the Global North) to be ‘heard’ in international contexts. Knowledge about gender is no exception to this, so Western theories about the performance and social construction of gender and self are important to Pakistan as well. Keeping in mind the segregation of space(s) experienced by young women and men during puberty in Pakistan, and Western theories as well, she focused on Pakistani youth’s gendered performances in same-sex group discussions and hereby especially on their perceptions and experiences of sexuality.

Connecting to that, she pointed out that English is a colonial language and that language is decisively important in naming phenomena: the term ‘feminism’, for example, cannot be translated into Urdu. Accordingly, not only is the underlying social reality different, but so is the nomenclature used to describe it. What young people read in international literature may significantly vary from rules and norms in Pakistan. Data show that women tend to use euphemisms while talking about sexuality, desire, and relationships and distance themselves from Western concepts of liberation. Young men, on the contrary, boast about sexuality and use sexually explicit terms and taboo words. Zubair reasoned that this indicates a departure from, and a contestation of, normative public discourses. According to Zubair’s research, young Pakistanis distinguish between a more private identity, which can be located in private spaces and intimate talks about sexuality, and a public identity in which sex is a taboo subject. In the following discussion, the question about modernity posed at the beginning was picked up again: there are multiple checklists in sociology to confer with when determining whether or not one can speak of a modern society, but these lists seem to ignore diversity. Furthermore, the importance of language issues was emphasized once again. Translating social phenomena and terms into another language can be an arduous task, but even the meaning and understanding in one’s own language can be hard to decipher. Moreover, the performance of masculinity Zubair observed can be seen as a ‘doing of masculinity’ and may not just be characteristic for Pakistani young males. Similar references may be found in Paul E. Willis’ study about young men and their talks about sex, for example.

After that, *Lena Weber* presented her and *Birgit Riegraf’s* (both University of Paderborn) collective research project “Multiple Modernities, Plural Gender Orders and FEMEN’s Transnational Fight for Women’s Rights”. They see a major challenge in gender research in terms of analyzing modernized gender relations in transnational spaces, as the concept of transnationality is widespread in gender studies. In this concept of transnationality, social spaces emerge through transnational entanglements, which have their own social patterns, practices, knowledge, institutions, and materialities; and which are assumed give rise to – new and more egalitarian – gender arrangements. Riegraf and Weber argued that the idea of transnationality makes it difficult to investigate modernized gender relations both empirically and theoretically, and suggest using Eisenstadt’s paradigm of multiple modernities instead. With Eisenstadt’s approach, interactions in a globalized world can be analyzed under the assumption that social orders, artifacts, and symbolic systems are non-static. With the example of FEMEN’s body protest in Tunisia and Egypt, the researchers want to focus on how gender relations change through interactions and exchanges of different modernities. In order to do this, they concentrate on media reports (in the case of Amina Tyler Sboui) of Aljazeera and The Guardian. Their aim is to reveal how the ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ view and pictures of feminism are constructed, how ‘modern’ gender relations are expressed and what legitimations are used to undermine this. After giving input about FEMEN and a critique (e.g., male gaze) of this organization, Lena Weber presented some of the research results to date, for example, the emphasis on religion, which is a remarkable factor that appears consistently in the protests of Muslim women’s organizations. After Weber’s talk, the discussion centered around the reception of FEMEN being part of Western imperialism in ‘the East’, although it should first and foremost be considered as a very specific Eastern European phenomenon, and secondly, shares more criteria with a media campaign than a ‘real’ social movement. Further, FEMEN’s actions were criticized by participants of the

conference as only being part of media culture and not as real protest, which ought to show varieties of (female) bodies like queer movements seek to do.

The next lecture, titled “Gender and Modernity in Japan: Converging Modernities and Discourses of Difference”, was held by *Michiko Mae* (University of Düsseldorf), who gave a profound insight in Japanese Women’s movements, starting with the process of modernization and its role in developing differentiations between nation, culture and gender. The fear of colonization led to the first phase of modernization, in which the unity of the nation was decisive for the unity of culture and vice versa. Before that, women were not a distinctive social category or group, other criteria like class were more important distinctive features than gender. Taking this into account, gender is a rather modern category of differentiation in Japan and can be dated back to the Middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The new distinction between men and women included a patriarchal and hierarchical structure of gender. Women were of prime importance, defined as mothers and wives, and gained rights, but also lost some, in the modernization process. Starting at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women organized as women’s groups: writing became one way to sensitize others about women’s rights (for example in the *Seito* magazine), just to name one aspiration of women’s involvements. The triad of nation, gender, and culture was still an impediment in terms of completing equality between the two genders. However, in 1946, the new Constitution stipulated equality between women and men, something that, for example, has not yet happened in the United States. Mae underpinned the legal equality status with various articles of the Japanese Constitution, for example Art. 14, which defines “that all people are equal”. Though women had these rights on paper, they nevertheless had to fight against discrimination. The nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll caused the foundation of a mothers’ movement, which criticized the dangers especially for the younger generation. This movement later merged, in the 1970s, into the new women’s liberation movement, the so called lib-movement. Social criticism of the traditional mother role was pivotal for Lib-women, but not as a basic objection to the ‘duty’ imposed on women to become mothers, but rather the conditions afforded to motherhood, which were denounced. A system in which women could not work and earn their living was seen as an indication for gender segregation. More than anything else, it became apparent in the separation between public and private manifest in the role of women as mothers and housewives and men as breadwinners. Finally, in 1985, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted, and in 1999, the Gender Equality Law was introduced, which ensured that everyone could participate in the labor market, no matter what gender the person has. Recently, the gender free concept is discussed in Japan, a concept which claims freedom of sexual differences in social and cultural contexts, in contrast to the Western concept of gender mainstreaming.

*Haideh Moghissi* (University of York, Toronto/Canada) talked about a “New Kind of Gender Activism in Post-Revolutionary Iran”. In her speech, she described over three decades of women’s resistance in post-revolutionary Iran and their fight against Islamization policies, whether they appear open and with coercion or more subversive forms of persuasion. A new generation of women arose, socialized under Islamic rules, unwilling to be subjugated under the new government’s re-Islamization process and trying to undermine the regime’s moral and legal order with new forms of activism with a high degree of self-confidence. Moghissi pointed out the ways the regime is trying to gain power over women’s bodies: by abolishing abortion in order to enlarge Iran’s population, for example. In this context, Moghissi drew parallels to the beginning of capitalism in Europe, when women’s rights were

one of the key points. She indicated that women's rights can be seen as the "test of modernity". Step by step, the regime succeeded in a "de-womanization of the public sphere", for example, by withdrawing from women the right to study law and to become fully accredited lawyers before the age of 40. Another example Haideh Moghissi presented was the extension of the parental (maternal) leave in correlation to the number of children, resulting in a decrease of working hours of women. In addition, public places in Iran are constructed as unsafe places for women, and they are obliged not to go there alone. Each of these examples is only a building block, but together they build a wall which excludes women from the public and assigns them to the private sphere. The repressive rules women face in Iran converge in an increasing number of suicides and homelessness amongst young girls. Moghissi emphasized emphatically that culture cannot be an excuse: Western academics cannot use culture as an ultimate answer to differences. Rather than conceptualizing culture as something ahistorical, culture is dependent on the various ways it is made and performed. Iranian women try to change the cultural situation through a variety of actions, but are nevertheless cautious with intended changes, as Iran's neighbor states are more or less in an unstable state and Iranians are apprehensive about their own future. In conclusion, culture is the key point for Iranian activists in achieving social changes, as there is more or less indifference about politics and their actions. The ensuing discussion centered on the media output of the Iranian underground in forms of films and music.

"Identity, Karama (Dignity), and the 'Arab Spring'" was the topic of the subsequent lecture held by *Lilia Labidi* (University of Tunis/Tunisia). From a psychoanalytical and anthropological perspective, she addressed the new problem of involuntary celibacy in Tunisia among young women and men and outlined the consequences of how dignity is constructed. With the decrease of maternal and infant mortality and an overall improvement of health indicators, a 50% growth in population within the age group of 15 to 29 has occurred. Altogether, those under 25 years constitute one-third to two-thirds of the population, with a quarter of these in universities. In a parallel development, the unemployment rate rose to 21.8% in 2008. Along with these changes in society, a new problem of involuntary celibacy emerged as the rate of unmarried women went from 17.7% in 2001 to 37.5% in 2006 and 50% of young male adults being unmarried too (Ben Amor). With the Islamic notion of marriage being the fulfillment of half of one's religious duties, this has consequences for the identity work of young adults. The traditional rites of passage for male and female adults are tied to marriage and serve the construction of a dignified identity. With these now being unattainable, a new subversive practice of identity work appears, for example wearing the hijab, fasting outside of Ramadan, and studying the Qur'an. This new framework of identity subverts the dominant notions of the moral personality as constructed through rites of passage that would – now being out of reach – keep them in a devalued status. So the slogan of the Arab spring "liberty, karama (dignity), and work" can be interpreted as demand for a moral identity. The new religious framework is not a backlash, but serves as a politicization of the private, a classic feminist notion, which is met by violence against women in public spaces. The discussion following the presentation revolved around the concept of elastic sexuality, prostitution, and a phase of male homosexuality tied to the rites of passage. It was also noted that one has to differentiate between rules/rites and the practice/doing.

The day was closed by *Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's* (University of Gießen) presentation “The colonial in the modern: Visceral misogynist culture, racism and the migration-asylum nexus”. In her talk, she addressed the German media discourse on refugees while focusing on Cologne’s so-called “New Year’s Eve incidents” and the changes to criminal and asylum law resulting from this. Starting with a critique of ‘classic’ sociology construction of the non-Western Other, she traced the concept of race back to the notion of ‘blue blood’ which in the process of colonization became global and took on a different understanding from distinguishing between royal/non-royal to human/non-human. From the observation of this change, she moved to the transformation of exile to the present idea of asylum, which is highly contested in today’s discourse in Germany. Also, the prevalent ignorance regarding Germany’s responsibility in creating a racist modernity was criticized. The media discourse on the New Year’s Eve incidents in Cologne constructs a savage sexuality and barbaric masculinity that needs to be eradicated by education. In comparison, the discussion about sexual violence in refugee camps portrays a female Other lacking all agency. This current discourse was contextualized by referring to Stuart Hall’s analysis of the then-emerging phenomenon of mugging in the 1970s that shares the same basic narratives. The covering of the incidents in Cologne led to changes in the criminal law regarding sexual violence, and political asylum law regarding the coupling of sexual crimes with deportation. Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria were declared safe countries of origin, effectively barring their nationals from applying for permanent refugee status. Through these changes, structural sexualized violence is naturalized and racialised. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez also introduced the notion of a “post-‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ patriarchal heterosexuality” which combines feminalism, homonationalism, white supremacist notions, ideas of eurocentric superiority and erotic capitalism. The ensuing discussion started with a reference to Adorno’s statement that capitalism turns to racism in times of crisis, which was rejected by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, who views racist elements of capitalism and modernity instead as a legacy of the colonial. The other issue being debated was the role of the sociologist in times of crisis or moral panic.

On Saturday, *Julia Roth* (University of Bielefeld) spoke about “Citizenship, Transnational Migration, and the Gendering of Modern/Colonial Inequalities”. She started by showing a rather controversial piece of art by Tanja Ostojic: “Untitled/after Courbet” (L’origine du monde), also known as “EU Panty”, from 2004, which depicts a photo of a woman’s crotch, which is covered by underwear with the European flag. According to Roth, the picture underscores the fact that gender has been an influential factor on migration. By taking up global and postcolonial gender perspectives, Roth detected the ways in which citizenship and gender provide crucial factors for extreme inequalities between countries. Citizenship has historically been an exclusion of non-European, non-White, and non-Western people from various rights. Theoretically, citizenship ought to be a factor against social inequality, granting access to, for example, social security systems, but has turned out to be one of the distinctive factors along a gendered division. According to Roth, gendered and racialized hierarchies can be revealed inter alia in the designation of migration, as in the cases of Western male migrant’s migration being defined as “relocating” for “business purposes” and women as “poverty migration”. Global female migration fulfills work (care/household, etc.) in the Global North. Taking these examples into account, gender and citizenship still mark the most decisive factors for inequalities between people from richer and poorer countries. Roth further referred to citizenship in

a global perspective and cited Bruebaker, who says that citizenship is a decisive factor for global inequalities and is limiting access to citizenship to “natural” heirs, whereas Schachar sees citizenship as “the birthright lottery”. She pointed out continuities between articulations in West Europe and its former colonies, which maintain inequalities between genders, but also between modernity and coloniality (Global North/Global South). In “acts of citizenship”, which was also part of Roth’s talk, she drew attention to phenomena like marriage between two individuals with different statuses, or sex tourism, which both intend to subvert, reinscribe, and appropriate engendered colonially racialized structures. The following discussion raised questions about citizenship in general: how can citizenship from countries of origin be classified in case of “sham” marriages? Is citizenship not bound to some kind of self-confidence? How easily is citizenship distributed? In the ensuing debate, questions about subaltern citizenships and the value of citizenships of the Global South were raised, and the special status of former colonies in regard to the possibilities of obtaining a passport of the Global North, e.g., France, was noted.

This was followed by *Ilse Lenz* (University of Bochum) with her presentation on “Multiple Modernities, Feminism and the Negotiating of Gender Orders: Comparing Germany and Japan”. She started by distinguishing between gender orders and gender culture, the first referring to institutions and the latter to knowledge, with the gender culture legitimizing the gender order. In Japan, gender itself assumes the role of a trendy buzzword. Also, it would be wrong to characterize the Japanese Society as patriarchal, as this implies a top-down relationship and the reality is far more complex than this. In her comparison of Japan and Germany, Lenz identified three historic phases of post-industrial gender orders, which are only applicable for conservative welfare states and therefore do not constitute a general theory, as was noted in the ensuing discussion. The first phase is that of male superiority, which manifests itself in the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Through, for example, the influence of women’s movements, the second phase of gender differentiation emerged, though the question of what causes were responsible for this change is an empirical one. It was specifically noted that women’s rights were not imported by the US after WWII, as there were older struggles for political participation, comparable to a suffrage movement. In the case of Japan, this phase of gender difference becomes visible in the concept of good motherhood and the sexual division of labor as well as the right to political participation. The third phase is one of flexibility. This shows itself through concepts like ‘gender-free’, which was also addressed by Michiko Mae, increasing part time work, deterioration of labor conditions but also increased chances for women. This current phase is accompanied by a kind of backlash, as more and more women in Japan idealize marriage and economic safety systems based on sexual division of labor.

Concluding remarks were given by *Angelika Poferl* (TU Dortmund University), who drew attention to the questions of “Cosmopolitan Perspectives: How to Talk about Difference and Equality?” She raised attention to the question mark and to the fact that the title of her concluding remarks is posed as a question. This not only leads her to her specific interest, but also clarifies the basic intentions of sociology: sociologists should start with questions and an analytical distance. Knowledge is uncertain and researchers find themselves in the paradoxical situation about how to find an answer, as there is no absolute truth. Knowing can accordingly be interpreted as the production of relative truth. In this sense, Poferl argues for a sociology of knowing instead of knowledge. Further on, Poferl clarifies that the multiple modernities approach makes it possible to capture the complexity of reality better than

the concept of liquid modernity, as the former addresses agency and responsibilities. The cosmopolitan perspective provides a framework for grasping the social changes at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and can explain a naive 'othering' (understood as construction of difference) and the male dominance from a global point of view. The term 'cosmopolitization' (Ulrich Beck) follows a cosmopolitan perspective and allows researchers to think differently, as it offers a descriptive category of social reality as well as an observer position. Moving on, Poferl referred to the theory of Reflexive Modernity. She underlined its plurality and its attempt at restructuring the social: who makes decisions about meaning and purpose (*Sinn*)? A cosmopolitan perspective stresses the importance of internal differentiations, which means acknowledging the 'Other-ness of the Other' but to question the distinction between 'us' and 'others' at the same time. In conclusion, Poferl argued for a language of difference that can positively reinforce respect, but is still pragmatic in a colloquial and sociological way: human beings are inherently different. Nonetheless, she remains skeptical of the concept of collective Other, as this notion includes the Other, but sets the Other apart from the public at large. She ended her presentation by calling to mind the positive effects of the Western concept of equality, especially for women. The talk was followed by a discussion about the relation of the macro-concept of othering and the micro-concept of alter/ego. It was noted that othering refers to a strange, collective other, while alter/ego refers to somebody who is similar to 'us'. Also discussed was the relation between vulnerability and empowerment with regard to the basic conditions of human existence. Likewise, the concepts of difference and equality were debated and connected to a connoted meaning of respect and the right to claim rights (Hannah Arendt).

Last but not least, a final discussion rounded off the conference. A main point of criticism was the Western ignorance towards 'their own' problems regarding inequalities. To answer this, more comparative studies within the global North are needed. There seems to be an inequality in social sciences in the way that Southern researchers acknowledge Northern knowledge production, but on the other hand, the North more or less ignores Southern knowledge. Whether this problem lies in ignorance or the impossibility for Northern scientists to read and understand publications from the South remains uncertain. Besides that, a heated debate about cultural relativism and naturalization of culture emerged using the example of female genital mutilation. The notion of culture as embedded in this discourse was criticized, and it was argued that a focus on the 'doing' of culture, its practices, might be more fruitful in terms of epistemology and methodology. All in all, the conference raised manifold questions about modernity.

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