

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

Lecture cum Seminar

Thursday, October 27, 2011, 16.00 – 19.00

Freie Universität Berlin, Raum J 23/16, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

Bodhisattva Kar

(Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta / Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam)

– Empire and Etymons: The Philological Problematic of Nationalisms in Colonial South Asia

Chair: Manan Ahmed (Freie Universität Berlin)

This lecture critically explores the philological path of negotiating the riddle of origin in a bourgeois empire. Focusing particularly on the strange attraction to the etymological thought of a wide range of nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalists in South Asia, it tries to understand how in the analytical unit of the etymon were condensed various nationalisms' (mutually conflicting) struggles with the arbitrary, endorsements of the familial and concerns regarding the originary. At one level, this helps us to identify the discursive trade-offs between the imperial economies of filiation, the changing grammatical cultures and the emergent territorial nationalisms in the colonies. At another, this also allows us to approach the disciplinary history of philology at its popular, and seemingly undisciplinable, frontier. While most of the historical materials used in this particular lecture come from the eastern and north-eastern regions of British South Asia, its analytical claim extends across the usual divide between metropolitan Europe and the colonial peripheries. Indeed, it is a central contention of this lecture that in the period under discussion, etymology functioned not simply as an axis of vertical temporality connecting the original and the existent, but also as a critical principle of ordering the spatial extents of such circulatory structures as nations or empires. In the seminar part of the event, an attempt will be made to re-inspect some of these points through a close reading of William Jones's canonical 1792 text "The Ninth Anniversary Discourse, on the Origin and Families of Nations", while critically responding to a number of conceptual and methodological challenges inaugurated by R. Howard Bloch's 1983 work *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*.

Bodhisattva Kar is Fellow in History at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India. His immediate area of specialization is the north-eastern frontier of British India, and in his work he tries to bring economic and cultural histories into conversation. A PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University of India, Kar has taught and held fellowships at El Colegio de Mexico (Mexico City), Oxford Brookes University (Oxford), Zentrum Moderner Orient (Berlin), École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris), and Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (Amsterdam).

He has just finished a book manuscript titled *Accumulation of the Primitive: The North-Eastern Frontier of British India, 1790s -1930s*, and is now working simultaneously on two book projects provisionally called "Some Histories of the Social: Essays in Spatial Politics" and "Fantastic Histories of the Naga Hills." He has also recently co-edited a volume of essays called "New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices" with Partha Chatterjee and Tapati Guha-Thakurta which is scheduled to be published in 2012.

Lecture-cum-Seminar

The Lecture-cum-Seminar series is a central element of the scholarly program of the Zukunftsphilologie project. It is conceived as a working seminar of 3 to 5 hours. The lecture (ca. 45-60 minutes) is meant to introduce the audience to the research problem and provide the general analytical and theoretical framework for the topic. This is followed by a practical seminar, wherein the speaker demonstrates his or her case by reference to texts in the original language and in English translation. It is hoped that this Lecture-cum-Seminar series, a combination of theory and a direct engagement with texts, will enable scholars to examine the comparative aspect of the problematic without neglect of the local and singular nature of the texts examined.

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The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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For more information please see:

www.forum-transregionale-studien.de

www.zukunftsphilologie.de

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/friedrichschlegel/promotionsprogramm/kooperationen/Zukunftsphilologie/index.html>