



ASK FOR MORE
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I study global, transnational, and comparative history. My interests include the fields of modern South Asia, modern Germany, the modern Caribbean, and the comparative study of race and empire. I am especially interested in the intellectual and social histories of the Global South. My work adopts postcolonial and critical perspectives on the study of race, colonialism, diaspora, and capitalism. My current research projects focus on global plantation histories that circulated across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. I recently completed an oral history project on Bengali and Bangladeshi intellectuals in the age of decolonization. My publications include “Plantation Dispossessions: the global travel of agricultural racial capitalism.” In *American Capitalism: New Histories*, edited by Sven Beckert and Christine Desan (New York: Columbia, 2018); *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Delhi: Routledge, 2010). I am the founding Chair of the Department of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora at Tufts. I have held fellowships from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study. And I’m honored to have received the 2017 Lillian and Joseph Leibner Award for Excellence in Teaching and Advising of Students at Tufts. – Address: Department of History, Tufts University, East Hall 03, Medford, MA 02155, USA. E-mail: kris.manjapra@tufts.edu.

Is today’s terrain for academic discussion a level field? Or does the work of the mind in a community of disparate scholars operate according to a patently different design? My generative and inspiring year at the Wissenschaftskolleg provided a period of experimentation

to explore this question. The Wissenschaftskolleg is an ideal space for experiments. But these experiments do not take place solely on the scale of individual scholars pursuing self-prescribed itineraries of study and research. Rather, the intellectual experiments of the Wissenschaftskolleg also take place on a social scale. It is not just individual scholars who are testing limits and teetering, sometimes disconcertingly, on the edge of the unthought and unexplored. But the social space of the Wissenschaftskolleg, itself, is also a party to the test – an agent without a single nucleus – that stretches and contorts and transforms in unexpected ways, as if in an ongoing metamorphosis.

Some say the Anglophone American philosophical tradition lacks a wealth of terminology to describe the agency of collective social entities and formations. Indeed, among some Fellows this year, there seemed to be a palpable weariness with the supposed limits of the American “mind”, and they often charged, “Amerikanismus!” The German language, on the other hand, apparently offers us powerful analytical keywords to talk about collective agents and group formations, such as *Kultur*, *Geist*, and *Gestalt*. So how might we describe the *Geist* of the Wissenschaftskolleg in 2017/18, or reflect on its *Gestalt*? I propose the spirit of the Wissenschaftskolleg was characterized by contortions and contradictions that were themselves an expression of intellectual life in our times.

Far from a neutral and placid domain of isolated experts, the Wissenschaftskolleg created a bracing field for intellectual disruption and interchange. Many of the scholars at the Wissenschaftskolleg this year engaged in interdisciplinary inquiry, crisscrossing the pre-assigned domains of the humanities and the social sciences. Many crossed cultural boundaries, and historical thresholds, and employed diverse modes of social and critique and analysis. In our cohort of Fellows, there were scholars fascinated by the relational and critical study of race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and colonialism and empire. The biologists and ecologists in our cohort broadened the discussion to inter-species proportions. They invited us to focus on the study of species beyond the human; and ways of being that relate to and diverge from human ways of being; and orders of life that challenge and destabilize the way the Humanities and Social Sciences conceive of the human “order of things”.

As the year progressed, it became ever more clear that the social space of the Wissenschaftskolleg was not flat, but productively striated and bendable. This bending of space at the Wissenschaftskolleg created torsions and tensions, especially as the stakes for intellectual inquiry were raised by the awareness that we are living in perilous times. Whether we think of the #MeToo movement, or Brexit, or the rise of authoritarianisms

worldwide, or the state decompositions in the Middle East, or the international migration crisis, our world in 2017/18 felt awash in large-scale historical transformation. These are volatile times, teetering on the edge of something unknown. And this external, worldly context projected itself into the social and intellectual experiment of the Wissenschaftskolleg in myriad, everyday ways.

We weathered a fugue of contradictions and conflicts at the Wissenschaftskolleg in 2017/18. Sometimes there was even a sense that a return to flat social and intellectual space – the space of the familiar, of the self-same, of the “harmonious community” – would be preferable to the challenges of intense debate and irresolvable differences of scholarly opinion and perspective. Sometimes contradictions were expressed in intellectual debate, but other times, contradictions took the form of political and even emotional explosions. If the first months at the Wissenschaftskolleg seemed placid, the contradictions were brewing and eventually bubbled to the surface by the end.

But the cohort of Fellows this year never fled the field of engagement. We all persisted through the contradictions. We began to understand the striations and bends and the tensions and torsions of our multi-nucleated intellectual community as the very material for our experiments together. Perhaps we not only reflected upon, but also practiced a new kind of scholarly community that characterizes these 21st-century times in which we live: volatile yet sober, playful yet serious, generous yet critical, concentrated yet dispersed. The figure of the Wissenschaftskolleg in 2017/18 took shape this year through forces of contradiction.

As the 2017/18 cohort experienced flashpoints in discussions about gender and sexuality, race and colonialism, and diversity and difference, one hopes that the Wissenschaftskolleg will only open itself up even further to these flashpoints in coming years. Dominant Western epistemological frameworks should co-exist in creative contradiction with perspectives that reflect on the limits of Western epistemes through the critical study of race, class, ethnicity, diaspora, gender, sexuality, and disability. And the inter-species framework contributed by the life scientists enhances the potential to place all our assumptions about order, institution, agency, identity, and intelligibility under scrutiny.

One hopes that the future cohorts of Wiko Fellows will continue to reflect this ongoing embrace of creative contradiction, with increased recruitment of scholars from the Global South (e.g. African scholars, Middle Eastern and West Asian scholars, Latin American scholars, and scholars from South Asia and the Asia-Pacific) and from racialized diasporic communities within the Global North (e.g. European scholars with a migrant heritage

and scholars from the Black, Asian, and Latino diasporas in Europe and in North America). One hopes the Wissenschaftskolleg will increasingly complement its corps of Permanent Fellows and Members of the Governing Board with scholars who bring diverse kinds of backgrounds and situated knowledges to their scholarship. One hopes that the Wissenschaftskolleg will continue to ask for more. I was grateful to participate in this institution in 2017/2018, and I look forward to witnessing the exciting transformations underway.