

Fluid Identities: spaces and genders in permanent migration.

A Cologne Summer School in Andalusia

From 23rd to 30th July 2017, 47 students and professors from two South American and 12 European universities met in El Bosque, Spain. El Bosque is located in the mountains south of Sevilla and is famous as being one of the picturesque “pueblos blancos” of the Sierra de Cádiz. Its small streets and whitewashed buildings are a visible reminder of how strongly Andalusia has been influenced by the centuries-long presence of the Moors. El Bosque therefore presented itself as the perfect location for this academic course, which focused on migration and the transformation of traditional categories of identity.

The Summer School *Identidades inestables: espacios y géneros en migración permanente* was organised and run by the “Centro Latinoamericano de Colonia” of the Arts Faculty. It was also supported by the Cologne Competence Area IV, “Cultures and Societies in Transition” and a consortium of Southern European and Latin American universities. Each participant had prepared a presentation of a relevant example or project from their specific field of study or research. The presentations were given and then discussed among the group over the course of the 12 three- to four-hour working sessions.

The deliberately complicated title of the Summer School, which in English would translate to “Fluid Identities: spaces and genders in permanent migration” and was the focus of the discussions, contained three key words that refer to urgent political issues, even beyond the academic discussions. The first word refers to the increasing anonymity of a growing number of transitory spaces, such as airports and super markets, and the correlating increase of the homelessness of the individual in the Western world, a phenomenon underlined in Marc Augé’s 1992 publication *Les non-lieux*. The second refers to the very closely related, yet very distinct issue of the consequences of gender differences, which is still being virulently discussed in individual European Union States. The third and last is the controversial issue of “migration”.

The Summer School therefore offered a space for reflection on concepts of identity and their role in an environment which has been greatly influenced by migration, especially since the beginning of the current “refugee crisis”. The main focus was on the reflection of these societal developments in language, literature, music and art. Just like the 2016 Summer School *Serendipity: Migration as an Opportunity*, this was an interdisciplinary course. Once again, the Summer School also had the character of an 8-day symposium with participating MA Students, PhD candidates and professors from different fields of study, such as literature, linguistics, Spanish and Latin American cultural studies and history, musicology, sociology, anthropology and the history of science.

There was, of course, theoretical reflection on the increasing differences in the determination and role of gender and origin, and the corresponding insecurity and loss of identity, which are the consequences of the lack of contact with familiar places and traditional behaviour, as well as the unfamiliar coexistence in Europe. In addition, issues surrounding migration were made more realistic by watching documentaries and having direct talks with affected people, such as with a Palestinian who fled Syria, and a social worker from the NGO *Lucena acoge* (<http://lucena-acoge.blogspot.de>), who works with refugees.

The Summer School also focused on contributions regarding the question of how a complex understanding of identity can lead to the further development of artistic expression. There was also reflection regarding to which extent population movements, time and again, have opened up new possibilities for interaction with rapidly changing ways of life, which are a result of the accelerated circulation and a confrontation with new concepts. Although these aspects were primarily investigated by analyses from the fields of literature and art history, they were also covered in a presentation on new sound spaces in Argentinean electroacoustic music. Furthermore, we went on excursions to the harbour towns of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where Columbus began his third journey to the New World, and of Cádiz, where European and overseas representatives of the Spanish empire met in the 19th century to draft the first constitution for Spain and its colonies.

In fact the working sessions were complemented by evening events as well as weekend excursions, all of which were relevant to the Summer School program. This offered the students not only useful information about PhD options, libraries and research foci at the University of Cologne, but the participants were able to visit the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic coast on the aforementioned trips to Sanlúcar de Barrameda and Cádiz. A third outing led them to the “pueblos blancos” of the Sierra de Cádiz. These short trips gave the participants an idea of the geographical and cultural particularities of Western Andalusia. So they were able to see the cause and effect of the fruitful exchange with regards to religion, fine arts, music and cuisine. Highlights of these excursions were a visit to the exhibition on early modern navigation entitled *Cuando el mundo giró en torno a Cádiz. 300 años del traslado de la Casa de la Contratación. 1717- 2017*, enjoying a modern performance of Lope de Vega’s play *Fuenteovejuna* in Cádiz, as well as a visit to the sherry winery Bodega Argüeso in Sanlúcar.

The interdisciplinary splay of the topics that the professors and students contributed, coupled with this connection to reality, facilitated the participants’ theoretical and empirical approximation to questions of identities and their transformation using the examples on the individual as well as collective levels. The sometimes ideologically influenced discussions were the natural result of the choice of topic and the international character of the group, but thanks to the atmosphere of the summer school this never posed a problem and the good accord among the group was never inhibited.

A selection of the written contributions are currently being edited to be published in book form and the students’ work will be published online.

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