

Theory Workshop for Ph.D. Students

Date: May 11th, 2011, 1 - 5 p.m.

Venue: Reichardtstr. 6, Seminar Room

Past experience has shown that well-conceived and thoroughly worked-out dissertation proposals, prior to going out into the field or conducting research, are of utmost importance, not only for completing the dissertations “on-time”, but also in surmounting unexpected obstacles as well as being able to rapidly respond and adapt to the situations at hand. To this end, we have implemented a new component into the Work-in-Progress (WIP) concept, namely the Theory Workshop. In conjunction with the above mentioned WIP sessions, which usually deal with the proposal projects as a whole, and a later scheduled Methodology Workshop, the Theory Workshop represented the increased effort on the part of the Graduate School (GS) to more closely address the needs of Ph.D. students, especially those at an early stage of their research. Here, we discussed which theories and authors the Ph.D. students anticipate as playing a key role in their respective doctoral research pursuits, and then attempted to assist them in establishing concrete and useful ways of coming to grips with the necessity and advantages of having a clear understanding and grasp of the underlying or background tenets of their projects.

In this session, three doctoral candidates presented the theories they use more in their researches. Adadow Yidana, Hami Inan Gümüs and Stephan Knauß were the presenters, and all of them, with the help of power-point presentations, introduced their theoretical approaches in about 30 minutes. Each presentation was followed by a discussion, in which post-doctoral fellows and professors Sackmann and Nell engaged critically with their ideas, with the aim of enabling the students setting up more realistic goals for their researches and more productive ways of dealing with their theories. In what follows it will be analyzed in more details some of the main issues that were brought up into the discussion.

The first speaker, Adadow Yidana, presented his discussion on “Faith healing and Pentecostalism in Northern Ghana. Some Theoretical Reflections”, which was divided into different sections, starting from the very title, the objectives of his research, the main questions, the analytical questions, to his approach to the theories he makes use of. These latter are, at this stage, the rational choice theory, phenomenology, and phenomenology applied to religion, through which he approaches his research theme, that is the healing as performed by Pentecostal Churches in a town in Northern Ghana. Another interesting aspect was the mingling of economical thinking applied to the competition among different Pentecostal denominations, each of which tries to address a particular niche of the “market” that looks after religious salvation and healing.

The second speaker, Hami Inan Gümüs, presented his discussion on “Metaphor Analysis and Unanticipated Consequences: A Compromise of Theory and Methodology”, which he applies to his research topic that deals with American missionaries’ activities in late Ottoman Turkey (nineteen century). He discussed in details the conceptual metaphor – which in his understanding is tantamount to metaphor *tout court* – and its different applications. He then moved on to introduce the theory of unanticipated consequences, addressing the possible reasons that caused them, before entering into the details of his research questions. He closed his presentation with a review of the primary sources he uses in his research.

The third and final speaker, Stephan Knauß, introduced his presentation on “Protection or Paternalism? Concepts of justice in post-colonial Latin American thought” with a song “protect me from what I want” that in his view was instrumental to enter into the debate of the moral philosophical interpretation of human rights. He then started to explain the various ways in which he uses theory in his research, first as data in itself (for instance, as a factor of identity in Latin American thought), as method (heuristic instrument to interpret data), and as a product (as the discourse on human rights, both in Latin America and in the West).