

Acknowledgements

Remerciements

2019 was a year of overlapping remembrances: It pointed back to the 250th anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte's birth, to the 230th anniversary of the French Revolution, and it marked the 30th year after two very contradictory events of global significance, the massacre of Tiananmen square, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. All of these remembrances do still play their role for our contemporary condition and for the attempt to understand what is going on in the world we live in. Being landmarks of a complex history of emancipatory achievements of modernity on the one hand, and of structures of dominance and hegemony that went along on the other, the events are also turning points in the interpretation and narration of world history. What they are inscribed into is an understanding of the world in which the 'West' was not only the point of civilisational reference but also the place of its fulfilment – in the follow-up of Hegel's Universal History this is to be understood in both senses, epistemological and ethical. After 1989, due to different changes and developments, it gets evermore clear that the legitimacy of this understanding, fixed by an "ism" as a powerful doctrine, but also of criticism, has come to an end. So, when together with our institutional partners from Mexico, Tunis and Hong Kong, we invited colleagues to gather in September 2019 for a first colloquium realised in the context of our research project "Minor Universality. Narrative World Production After Western Universalism",¹ funded by the European Research Council, in order to reflect on a fundamental aspect in the understanding of modernity, '2019' seemed to be like an ironic wink of the historical moment. We would like to express our gratitude to the then present colleagues for the vivid discussions and the substantial contributions documented by this volume.

The symposium took place in the Villa Europa in Saarbrücken to which the director of the Institut Français, Valérie Deshoulières, kindly opened the doors. We are very grateful for her welcoming reaction when we first presented the idea for the conference in a nutshell, for the practical and financial support, and, above all, for the generous hospitality at the Villa. We are also very indebted to the Villa Europa-team, Marion Balay, Sandra Fuhrmann, Fatma-Pia Hotait, and Denise Rodriguez.

¹ See for more information: <https://www.uni-saarland.de/forschen/minor-universality.html> (15 June 2020).

Hospitality and solidarity are certainly universal needs and gifts, but as certain as this is the fact that many Europeans struggle with them and have to relearn them often enough, eyes wide open, when they come around in the world. How much this fact is linked to a universalist understanding of Europe, has been rightly and painfully explained by Achille Mbembe when he speaks of what is called the ‘Western society’ as a “society of enmity”, a democratic society that has ever since dialectically built on its “nocturnal body”, of those who were exploited by the imperial powers whilst its inhabitants claimed to represent the values of liberty, equality and solidarity. Therefore, a place dedicated to the reflection on Europe seemed to fit very well as a place where to launch a project on “minor universality”, on new ways and hopes to experience and reflect a shared humanity that shall no more subsume particularities. “Is there anything that relates us to others so that we can say that we are?”, asks Achille Mbembe. To approach this question, a step back seems necessary to what that was, Western Universalism, as a motor for emancipatory ideas, and as an ideology of domination at the same time.

The conference held at the Villa Europa was the first one we organized at Saarbrücken continuing years of shared activities on “experiences of the global” at Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin. This is the occasion to thank the colleagues who have shared thoughts with us throughout many years and thus helped shaping the “Minor Universality” project. Our special gratitude goes to Wolfgang Asholt, Martin Bauer, Albrecht Buschmann, Raffaele Carbone, Leyla Dakhli, Islam Dayeh, Emmanuel Droit, Kazuo Fujino, Moritz Epple, Ottmar Ette, Thierry Fabre, Gunter Gebauer, Wolfgang Knöbl, Teresa Koloma Beck, Marcel Lepper, Giovanni Levi, Avi Lifschitz, Tanja Michalsky, Sarga Moussa, Gesine Müller, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, Olivier Remaud, Bénédicte Savoy, Camille de Toledo, Jürgen Trabant, and Michael Werner.

We are very grateful to Saarland University for the generous institutional and financial support that helped realising this first international conference with ease. A particular word of gratitude goes to Patricia Oster-Stierle, former President of the Franco-German University based at Saarbrücken, and member of the Academic Senate, who not only accepted to welcome us on behalf of the University, but who had already enabled cooperation before and opened up so many opportunities. In reverse, this book also expresses our will to inscribe our activities into the initiative for new perspectives on Europe at Saarland University, where a cluster for reflection on Europe’s challenges within a changing world is under way of being build up.

This book is a starting point in yet another sense. It opens the new series *Beyond Universalism – Partager l’universel* that will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of our contemporary. If globalisation does not necessarily entail a universal awareness, we rather witness a wide array of cultural, relativ-

istic, and racist contestations of a common world. But how can universality be addressed after the necessary epistemic and ethic critique of Western universalism? Building on the importance of such concepts as concreteness and reparation, narration and translation, this new series seeks to understand how a new consciousness of universality is under way of *being produced*. Its wants to enlarge our understanding of how contemporary cultural and social practices open up concrete settings so as to create experiences, reflections and agencies of a shared humanity.

We are grateful to Walter de Gruyter publishers for hosting this series. A special thanks goes to the responsible editors Ulrike Krauß and Anja Michalsky, as well as to the project editor Gabrielle Cornefert who has been accompanying this first volume from the very start to its publication. A series can only be a success if it is lively and if it covers a wide array of perspectives and positions. Therefore, we are delighted that such notable colleagues as Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho, Christopher M. Hutton, Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Mohamed Kerrou, Soumaya Mestiri, Olivier Remaud, and Sergio Ugalde have accepted to be a member of the board of the series. We are very grateful for the rich exchanges with them. They do not only themselves contribute through their works to debates related to the questions raised by the series, but they also gather different disciplines, theoretical understandings, and methodological approaches stemming from many different contexts. May their work offer different points of contact to the series, because that is what it mainly wants to stand for: a transdisciplinary, transnational understanding of humanity in times when borders, physical and ideological, are built up everywhere with stunning rapidity and force.

A great thanks for formatting and indexing, which is a huge piece of work in a bilingual book, goes to Silvia Becker, Annalena Böke, Antonia Schmidt, and, especially, Azyza Deiab. And last but not least, we would like to express the highest gratitude to our colleagues Mario Laarmann, Carla Seemann, Hélène Thiérard, and Jonas Tinius, who all pursue research within or in the context of the ERC “Minor Universality” project and to whom we feel highly indebted by their intellectual remarks and linguistic revision of the texts.

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Saarbrücken/Berlin, 15 June 2020

