Call for Papers

Doing and Undoing Comparisons: ‘Practices of Comparison’ in the Americas from Colonial Times to the Present

Comparisons – and, in particular, practices of comparison – are essential for establishing relations between different units, ordering the world, reducing complexity and propelling intellectual and historical change. With regard to the Americas, practices of comparison have played a central role for the creation of geopolitical imaginaries – be they Eurocentric or Creolist – and have fueled images, clichés, and stereotypes about the region and its peoples. Practices of comparison have also been involved in the making and remaking of the north-south divide within the Americas, whether real or imagined in regard to relations between countries, regions or on a hemispheric scale. Beyond rigid binary structures, contact zones, entanglements, forms of assimilation, and hybridization have produced in-between and fluid categories that not only complicate or refuse simple comparisons and classifications, but also stimulate re-negotiations of and reflections on particular categories, and excite new practices of comparison.

In order to be able to do comparisons, the objects, elements or aspects to be compared (comparata) have to share some characteristics (commensurability). Furthermore, criteria (tertia comparationis) are necessary to observe differences (or similarities) between the comparata. Practices of comparison are neither innocent nor objective. In doing comparisons, actors differentiate; they create categories, and hierarchies between different comparata. Different regions, ‘races’, groups, cultures, sexes, beliefs, or forms and styles of cultural production are compared by various actors – by individuals, groups, and institutions. This holds true for discourses in the humanities as well as in the natural sciences (for example with regard to racial ideology). As various subaltern, countercultural and avantgardistic movements have shown, practices of comparison can function to question, re-negotiate, or create new categories and undermine or destabilize particular power structures/relations. This applies to the field of identity politics, too, where, for example, indigenous and afrodesendent groups have drawn upon global comparisons, imagined transnational and translocal relations, and focused on similarities between people of African ‘descent’ in the Americas and beyond, thus creating global ‘indigenous’ or ‘black’ communities with ‘shared’ characteristics.

In this issue of fiar the editors want to focus on and explore practices of comparison in all periods
and areas in the Americas in a transdisciplinary way. The editors are interested in a whole range of practices of comparison – whether, regarding oral and written expressions, clothings, rituals, movements, organizations, politics or regarding forms, styles, and performances of and within cultural productions (such as music, arts, literature). This issue of fiar welcomes articles that explore (but are not limited to) the following issues:

- Which functions did/do marginalized positions have in the Americas with regard to practices of comparison?
- Who are the actors involved or excluded in practices of comparison? Who is or is not ‘allowed’ to compare? Which practices of comparison are available to what kind of actor?
- In what regard did/do new practices of comparison and/or new comparata question established practices of comparison and trigger new ones, or negotiate old categories?
- Which kinds of practices of comparison can be identified? Did they get replaced by new ones, and if so, how?
- What role have practices of comparison played in processes of colonization?
- What role have practices of comparison played in decolonial thinking and politics?
- In which way do practices of comparison depend on local context?
- Can we distinguish practices of comparison specific to the American hemisphere?

fiar fosters a dialogic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Americas, and we are open to contributions from different disciplines such as media studies, cultural studies, literary studies, art history, history, sociology, political sciences or geography. We explicitly encourage interdisciplinary approaches and a dialogue between the different areas in the Americas.

We ask authors interested in publication to first submit a 300-word abstract by December 15, 2017, which will be reviewed. Authors invited to submit full articles (not to exceed 10,000 words), are expected to submit them no later than April 15, 2018, following the submission guidelines of the journal. See: http://interamerica.de/submitting-to-fiar/submission-guidelines/. Full articles are reviewed prior to being accepted and published. We welcome articles in in English, Spanish, Portuguese or French. Please note that, all articles need to include a 300-word abstract and the author’s name, current affiliation, and e-mail-address.

For inquiries about the CFP, please contact: fiar@interamerica.de.