

DIE AMERIKAS: FORSCHUNGSKOLLOQUIUM ZU DEN AMERIKAS AUS KULTURWISSENSCHAFTLICHER SICHT

Donnerstag, 16. Mai 2019

16:50 – 18:00 Uhr

**Senatssaal (E106) Hauptgebäudes LMU,
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1**

Prof. Dr. Ricardo López-Pedrerros (Western Washington University)

A Class that Does (not) Matter: Rethinking Cold War Latin America from the Middle

The last decade has seen the publication of important edited volumes or special issues in journals from different disciplines on the formation of the middle classes across the world. (Julian Go, 2010; López-Pedrerros and Weinstein, 2012; Rachel Heiman, Carla Freeman, and Mark Liechty, 2012; Parker and Walker, 2013; Adamovsky, Visacovsky, and Vargas, 2014). This paper seeks to bring together some of the arguments put forward by these scholars to initiate a critical interdisciplinary conversation on how to rethink the historical formation of the middle classes—as a social category, a cultural construction, a political project, a subjectivity, and a material reality—in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. The paper proceeds in two ways. First, it offers a transnational genealogy of the idea of the middle class in the Americas in order to explain why such class still appears as marginal—that is, as a class that does not matter—to what is considered a “proper” study of power relationships in Latin America. Second, by drawing on the Colombia case in a transitional framework during the Cold War, it demonstrates how the study of the historical formation of the middle classes opens up a multiplicity of methodological and theoretical questions to rethink major historical processes in Latin America: meanings of citizenship, the relationships between state and society, experiences of (counter) revolutionary change, the growth of affective labor, the naturalization of different forms of material inequality, the class and gender of decoloniality, and political discourses about democracy. The paper is an effort to stimulate a broader discussion on how we materialize interdisciplinary approaches to critically question the role of the middle classes in our current neoliberal order now that scholars and policy makers alike have yet again sacralized the middle classes as the solution to the “crisis” of democracy, the expansion of unequal distribution of wealth, and the political repercussions of neoliberalism across the world.