

Academic research in a decolonizing world: towards new ways of thinking and acting critically?

Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) / Leiden University

- Date: 8-9 October 2018
- Venues: Gravensteen (Pieterskerkhof 6, Leiden), Academy Building (Klein Auditorium, Rapenburg 73, Leiden)
- Organizers: Sanne Rotmeijer (KITLV), Marieke Bloembergen (KITLV), Priya Swamy (Museum of World Cultures)
- Co-Funders: LU research profile 'Asian Modernities and Traditions' (AMT), KITLV Research, KITLV Vereniging

This two-day interdisciplinary workshop in Leiden on 8-9 October 2018 will explore what concepts of 'de/coloniality' and 'postcolonial' mean for current critical scholarship, particularly in the field of (post)colonial history, social sciences, and area studies. This question is most immediately a response to the call for decolonizing academia that has recently intensified within and outside academic institutes worldwide. Why and how should this matter to scholars today?

Context

In 2015, the protest movement 'Rhodes must fall' began at South African universities with the call to transform universities' curricula and institutional structures. Since then, this movement has spread to universities across Europe and the USA. The Netherlands has been no exception. 'No Democratization without Decolonization!', was one of the main slogans of the 2015 Maagdenhuis Protests at the University of Amsterdam. These protests highlight an increasing awareness of the need to rethink knowledge production, in general, and to gauge the public role and legacies of academic institutions with colonial roots, in particular, among a new generation of academics. These debates, however, are not new. Current attitudes towards academic research and knowledge production recall the critical approaches advocated by decolonial thinking, feminist- and postcolonial studies that emerged in the 1970s. What can we learn from previous approaches? Where do they intersect with newer approaches? How do we move forward? These questions speak not only to academics and academic spaces, but also to ongoing public debates about institutionalized racism, white privilege, and global inequality.

Two-day Program

Together with two prominent keynote speakers, early career and senior scholars, we will reflect upon and deepen critical awareness of our past and present academic positions and research practices in relation to the call to epistemically and politically decolonize academia.

The workshop will consist of two interconnected parts, divided over two days. The purpose of the first part (day 1), 'Academic Institutions, Research, and Education in a Decolonizing World,' is to engage with research and teaching practices through the lenses of decolonial thought (Quijano 1989; Mignolo & Escobar 2010), subaltern studies and postcolonial theory (Guha 1998; Said 1987, 1993; Gandhi 1998; Cooper 2005). We will constructively compare these schools of thought, and, thereby, create a dialogue between them (cf. Bhabra 2014) as well as between the local histories in which they are rooted: Asia, Africa, and the Americas. While differing in disciplinary backgrounds, geographical locations, and historical time frames, postcolonial and decolonial theory share a similar goal: to expose and challenge the consequences of colonialism that has produced, and continues to produce, (the knowledge about) today's world. Despite overlapping concerns, decolonial thinkers have criticized postcolonial studies for maintaining European points of reference and thereby risking to reinforce colonial knowledge production. Postcolonial scholars, on the other hand, have pointed to the tendency of decolonial scholars to romanticize spaces prior to and "outside" the colonial – as if such spaces exist and would be better. Other than focusing on their differences we wish to explore the complementary resources both approaches offer for critical research and education. What can we learn from decolonial thought in dialogue with postcolonial studies for doing academic research and teaching? In addition to two panels: 1) *Postcolonial & Decolonial Thought in Dialogue*, and 2) *Education & Decoloniality*, there will be two keynote speakers invited to reflect on post- and decolonial thought through time. The day will be closed by a roundtable discussion on looking back on and forward to post- and decoloniality in the Dutch context.

During the second part (day 2), 'Case studies and research practices in a Decolonizing World,' we will reflect upon concrete case studies and research practices. These practices include postcolonial approaches and decolonial perspectives as well as transnational and transregional approaches that seek to go beyond empire- and (post)colonial state-centered framings. During this second day, cases and practices will be explored divided over three panels: 1) *Alternative Ecologies*, 2) *Mobilities & Heritage*, and 3) *Citizenship & Intersectionalities*. For each theme participants will present a case study out of their (past or ongoing) research and to explicitly reflect on postcolonial and/or decolonial theorizing regarding research practices and results –and vice versa.

In the first panel, Participants will explore social and historical studies of ecology and environmental issues in relation to postcolonial and/or decolonial approaches. Thereby we engage with the recent scholarly turn towards social ecologies (cf. Gómez-Barris 2017), political ecology (cf. Schulz 2017), and global environmental perspectives (cf. Campbell & Niblett 2016; DeLoughrey, Didur & Carrigan 2015). The second panel will focus on the study of practices and politics of heritage in light of postcolonial and/or decolonial thought. Also the following question will be addressed: to what extent transnational mobility of people, goods, and ideas yield insight in alternative mechanisms of exclusion, alternative periodizations, or alternative communalities, beyond those of the 'colonial' (cf. Amrith 2014; Ho 2006; 2017; Guterl 2013)? In the third panel, we will discuss the values of decolonial and/or postcolonial theorizing for the study of forms and practices of citizenship in relation to intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

We will end the workshop with a roundtable session; *Beyond the Colonial? Towards openness, vulnerability, and inspiration*. Together with curators, activists, and students, keynote speakers and participants will explore the implications in, at the borders of, and beyond academia of insights shared during the workshop.

References:

Amrith S (2014). *Crossing the Bay of Bengal. The furies of nature and the fortunes of migrants*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Bayly S (2007). *Asian Voices in a postcolonial age; Vietnam, India and beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bhambra G K (2014). Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues. *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2): 115-21.

Campbell C & Niblett M (Eds.) (2016). *The Caribbean: Aesthetics, World-Ecology, Politics*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Cooper F (2005). *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Oakland: University of California Press.

DeLoughrey E, Didur J & Carrigan A (Eds.) (2015). *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities. Postcolonial Approaches*. London: Routledge.

Gandhi L (1998). *Postcolonial Theory; A critical Introduction*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Gandhi L (2006). *Affective Communities. Anti-colonial thought, Fin-de-Siecle radicalism and the politics of friendship*. Durham NC: Duke University Press

Gómez-Barris M (2017). *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Guha R (1998). *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Guterl MP (2013). AHR Forum Comments: The futures of transnational history. *American Historical Review* 118(1): 130-139.

Harding S (2016). Latin American Decolonial Social Studies of Scientific Knowledge: Alliances and Tensions. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41(6): 1063–87.

Ho E (2006). *The graves of Tarim: Geneology and mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley, LA, London: University of California Press.

Ho E (2017). Inter-Asian concepts for mobile societies. *Journal of Asian Studies* 76(4): 907-928.

Mignolo W D & Escobar A (Eds.) (2010). *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. London: Routledge.

Pratt M L (2008). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* [2nd edition]. London: Routledge.

Quijano A (1989). Paradoxes of Modernity in Latin America. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3(2): 147-77.

Said E W (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.

Said E W (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Schulz K A (2017). Decolonizing political ecology: ontology, technology and 'critical' enchantment. *Journal of Political Ecology* 24: 125-43.

Tuck E & Yang KW (2012). Decolonization is not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1): 1-40.