

2. Towards Decolonizing Contemporary Decolonization Studies (Workshop)

Diego Ballester, University of Bonn

Jacqueline Knörr, Max Planck Institute, Halle

Contemporary anthropological thinking and practices are often articulated around postcolonial/decolonial perspectives that, within the academic institutions of the West, have been presented as a theoretical turn providing a more critical view of one's own discipline's (role in colonial) history and research practices. Notwithstanding these perspectives' merits, they also include aspects that reproduce the same colonial worldviews that gave rise to them and that they set out to overcome. Being developed in a top-down framework, they exclude conceptualizations and practices of decolonization of those at the grassroots levels of colonial and postcolonial societies, thereby preventing a more radical questioning of the colonial epistemological and ontological implications that underlie much of western anthropological knowledge (production) and practice.

An anthropological perspective from below that includes the views and voices of those who suffered from colonization shows that decolonization as an intellectual and political endeavor has been intertwined with colonization and coloniality throughout its existence and involved people of all walks of life and backgrounds. These realizations promise to contribute to a widening epistemological and ontological horizon of how we look at and deal with colonial legacies and decolonization and to generate a broader and more contextualized understanding of both in the production of anthropological knowledge.

This workshop therefore explores the silences, omissions and gaps in the construction of (Western) postcolonial/decolonial theories. It shares novel theoretical perspectives on historical and contemporary practices of decolonization and aims to overcome the elitist bias of decolonization studies by engaging in intersectional dialogues concerning experiences, memories, subjectivities and agencies of decolonization that go beyond Western-centrism and conventional Global North/Global dichotomies and hierarchies.

The (im)possibilities of decolonization

Diego Ballesterro, University of Bonn

In recent decades, anthropological practices in Anglo-Saxon countries have been subordinated almost exclusively to the so-called post- and decolonial perspectives. These have fostered a critical revision of the disciplinary past and promoted a theoretical shift. However, these perspectives have been subjugated by Western epistemological logic, reducing and subsuming the pluridiversity of knowledge of the Global South into a linear, monolithic and monologic discourse.

In order to refute this tendency, this presentation discusses the political and epistemological positionality of these perspectives and their current "boom" along with the denial and marginalization of Latin American knowledges and practical experiences. From these points I intend to contribute with elements for the decentralization and dewesternization of the current epistemological oligopoly of Anglo-Saxon academic spaces and to generate a collective reflection on the need for an anticolonial or countercolonial perspective of anthropological practices.

Marxists from below

Helena Zohdi, Goethe University Frankfurt

Within postcolonial theory much has been written on the subject matter of how Marxism can be drawn and, furthermore, on the relationship between Eurocentrism and Marxism. Yet such debates often ignore the contradictions and frictions within both canons. In practice it cannot be denied that Marxism remains a core analytical framework for wide swaths of emancipatory movements in the global South. It is through the human agency of social actors in the global South that Marxism does travel, is debated, embedded, and vernacularized. By focusing on how members of the organization of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists, as one of the main leftist actors in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, grapple with Marxism, I examine how debates on eurocentrism, decoloniality and beyond are engaged with in theory and practice by Marxist social actors from the global South themselves. Through my ethnographic field research with Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists, I highlight that much of the academic postcolonial debates on Marxism and Eurocentrism sideline the agency of social actors from the global South, their theoretical and practical endeavors, and own modes of knowledge production, which, I argue, must be given much more weight in a contemporary understanding of Postcoloniality, Marxism and the Left.

Decolonial resistance to epistemological colonialism: what we ought to celebrate in 2023 on the bicentenary of the first standardisation of isiXhosa

Mariana Kriel, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha

Following the epistemic decolonial turn, Poka Laenui's five-stage model of (de)colonisation has served as a framework for numerous studies across a range of disciplines and contexts. Conceding that they may overlap, Laenui (2000) identified (a) *re(dis)covery*, (b) *mourning*, (c) *dreaming*, (d) *commitment*, and (e) *action* as the five phases of decolonisation.

This paper, though, follows authors such as Nakagawa (2021:359) and Ellis (2020:9) in arguing that these phases, "as a linear progression, are based on the colonisers' viewpoints rather than the perspectives of the colonised", and that "all of the stages are themselves part of decolonizing *action*, which does not come only at the end of a linear sequence".

To make this argument, I draw on an example from the British-ruled Cape Colony of the 1800s, namely the first standardisation of the South African language isiXhosa. Initiated by Scottish missionaries, it was an act of colonial epistemicide that will reach its bicentenary in 2023. From the outset, as Deumert and Mabandla (2018) have demonstrated, this colonial enterprise was met with resistance, that is, with overt expressions of decolonising *action*. The question I pose is whether this *action* was the first expression of anti-/decolonial ethnic-linguistic nationalism on South African soil.

Power relations, Cokwe songs and forced labor in 1950's colonial Lundas, Angola

Cristina Sá Valentim, University of Lisbon

Gonçalo Santos, University of Coimbra

This presentation builds on Valentim's historical anthropological research on *Cokwe* songs related to mining forced labor in colonial Lundas, Angola (Valentim 2022). These songs were collected in the 1950s under Portuguese colonial rule in the northeastern region of Angola by *Companhia de Diamantes de Angola* (Diamang), a powerful international diamond mining company with close connections to the Portuguese colonial state. Valentim's research was based on a collaborative approach that combined anthropology with history and postcolonial studies through multisited archival and fieldwork research in Angola and Portugal. In addition to local memories as evoked in the rich repertoire of collected songs, Valentim's research combined ethnographic materials with colonial archive

materials to render more visible the complexities of colonial power relations, the existence of multiple African voices, and the simultaneity of different and apparently contradictory logics. The aim was to overcome the merely epistemological critique that characterizes much of the postcolonial/decolonial literature, deconstructing false dichotomies of colonizer/colonized, domination/resistance, modernity/tradition, North/South, and showing how the subjectivities of African ex-colonized populations are intertwined with the agendas of European colonial domination. Centering the analysis on the songs sung by local subaltern populations experiencing conditions of forced labor, Valentim's research demonstrates the importance of an empirical research on how African communities dealt with the effects of the colonial system in their lives, and how they interpreted colonial power to gain control over it. In this presentation, we would like to use this example and a few other examples from other contexts to make the case that the analysis of songs and other cultural forms resulting from the apparently non-political activities of powerless citizens and subaltern populations under colonial rule are a good site to think about the question of political contestation and contested knowledge.

The richness of modern traditions: looking at decolonization through the lenses of popular culture

Wilson Trajano Filho, University of Brasília

A top-down perspective has characterized the main approaches developed by the social sciences to deal with the phenomenon of decolonization (that of postcolonial studies and that of decoloniality). The most obvious implication of this framework is the treatment of decolonization as a phenomenon as detached from the everyday practices of the societies that experience it. This is the source of two problematic effects that is pervasive in this field of study. The first is the erasure of the variety of forms of historical consciousness existing both in the societies that emerged from the processes of colonial domination and in the empires that exercised such power. The second effect is a kind of essentialism that becomes apparent in the depiction of everything classified as an object of decolonization as Eurocentric: languages, political institutions, knowledge, technologies, values.

I propose in this paper to approach decolonization by looking at practices related to popular culture. By looking ethnographically at practices associated with music, religion, sport, and language I hope to show that to carry out the project of change implicit in decolonization studies has often implied turning away from the everyday practices at the grassroots levels of postcolonial societies and, in a sense, to surrender to the hegemonic worldview of the elites of global power centers.

Dynamics of creolization as important dimensions of decolonization in colonial and postcolonial societies

Jacqueline Knörr, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle

Current theories of decolonization are in many, rather troubling ways, reflections of colonial worldviews insofar as they are developed in the framework of top-down, rather than bottom-up perspectives, thereby substantiating rather than questioning epistemologies and ontologies rightly suspected of reproducing colonial worldviews in a postcolonial world. Current theorizing of decolonization largely excludes the perceptions, conceptualizations, and actions of decolonization undertaken by people at the grassroots levels of postcolonial societies in much the same way as historical studies of decolonization ignore the decolonizing efforts of those not belonging to the (indigenous) elites in colonial societies.

It is my endeavour to show that the application of anthropological approaches in studies of decolonization on the one hand and a focus on the connections between creolization and decolonization on the other will reveal that decolonization – not least through creolization – has been closely interrelated with colonialism throughout its existence, stretching from the beginnings of colonization to contemporary postcolonial society. The disclosure of the connections and interactions between creolization and decolonization thereby also promises to contribute to throwing over the heap decolonization studies' elitist and exclusive bias.