

Introduction: Postcolonial Knowledges

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This curated volume of *Postcolonial Interventions* takes issue with the systemic marginalization of local knowledges throughout the postcolonial world and works toward a re-centering of local cultures, languages, literatures, and histories in academic enquiry, thus critiquing epistemological hierarchies and helping facilitate epistemic pluralism. This special edition brings together contributions from literary and cultural studies to explore how knowledge systems and traditions are affected by colonial and postcolonial conditions, which are in turn increasingly marked by asymmetrical power relations, heterogeneity,

and transculturalization. From postcolonial theoretical positions, the authors examine ways in which colonial and postcolonial constellations have been reflected, shaped, and negotiated through symbolic and discursive knowledge practices. This introduction discusses briefly processes of hierarchical ordering of knowledge systems in colonial eras and examines knowledge systems in the post/colonial era with examples related to diverse traditions, languages and practices of academic and literary knowledge production in changing societies. Furthermore, it looks at different strategies of decolonizing academic and literary discourses. The final section gives an overview of the contributions in this volume.

1. Epistemic Hierarchies

Postcolonial Knowledges aims to critically analyze historical and ongoing global knowledge production, hierarchical ordering of knowledge systems, and practices of domination and appropriation of the world's knowledge systems, discourses, and languages through ubiquitous European-centered intellectual traditions and languages. Walter Mignolo describes this as “an unconscious dismissal that has run through the history of the coloniality of power in its epistemic and ontological spheres: the self-assumed Eurocentrism (the world seen, described and mapped from European perspectives and interests)” (2015, ix)—a dismissal he has elsewhere termed “the coloniality of knowledge” after the Peruvian sociologist

Aníbal Quijano (Quijano 1992; Mignolo 2007). This dismissal has generated an almost complete primacy of Eurocentric¹ knowledge, discourse, and practice in academia, where both natural sciences and the humanities are largely founded on Western logocentrism and Cartesian dualism that tend to exclude other knowledge and knowledge practices. Accordingly, postcolonial, Indigenous, and other local knowledges have largely been viewed as primitive, unscientific, insignificant, and folkloric—a tendency that only recently started to gradually change as non-Western oral, geographical, or pharmaceutical knowledges have been consulted and acknowledged. This ‘intellectual dominance’ (Emeagwali 2003) of the West (the “Northwestern European tradition,” Spivak 1999, 6) emerged and was legitimized by way of colonial histories as ‘destined’ trajectories that re-ordered the world, of ‘naturalized’ cultural hierarchies, and of thus ‘grown’ all-encompassing epistemologies rooted in the Greco-Romanian worlds. In conjunction, modernity was mainly thought of as a Western phenomenon and theorized from a European-centered perspective (e.g. Bauman 2000; Beck 1999; Giddens 1991), cementing the notion that modernity is an advanced stage of progress from traditional societies, while the growth of reason, rationality, and scientific consciousness is thought to be exclusively Western, and non-Western cultures are associated with the early stage of tradition and pre-modernity. Modern political practice, for example, is unthinkable without concepts such as citizenship, human rights,

equality, democracy, and scientific rationality born from the European Enlightenment, concepts that help critique Western capitalism and colonialism (Chakrabarty 2008, 4); and at the same time, these concepts are part of a dominant intellectual discourse. Enlightenment humanism, one must not forget, did not include non-European cultures in its understanding of man, whose image rather presented the “settler-colonial white man” (5; cf. Spivak 1999, 26). Reintroducing the “rejected Aboriginal” (Spivak, 26) and non-Western people into perceptions of the philosophical subject is only the beginning of a decolonizing project.

Postcolonial and Indigenous scholars around the world critique the construed dualism between Western and non-Western knowledges and, moreover, the pervasive notion that non-Western or Westernized cultures do not contribute to the relevant intellectual traditions and remain but passive recipients of Western science and technology (Battiste 2005; Kuokkanen 2007). In the same vein, postcolonial critics argue against a notion of modernity as Western phenomenon, stressing that Western and non-Western societies alike undergo processes of industrial and scientific development and rationalization, and centering postcolonial hybridized modernities that emerge from European and non-European intellectual and materialistic traditions (Ashcroft 2009, 2014; Chatterjee 1997; Chakrabarty 2008; Gaonkar 2001; Taylor 1995). The task is to delink, as Mignolo would have it,

“from the idea that there is a single and primary modernity surrounded by peripheral or alternative ones” (2011, 5). By “creative adaptation”, people adjust themselves to global and local processes of societal modernization, which produces modernity and modern knowledges, if we interpret Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar correctly; “it is the site where a people ‘make’ themselves modern, as opposed to being ‘made’ modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny” (2001, 18). Thus, “globalization may now be characterized by the multiplicity of its modernities” (Ashcroft 2014, 5; emphasis in original). Shifting toward the idea of pluralistic hybridized knowledge systems and practices in perceptions of knowledge production as well as including and integrating pluralistic knowledge systems and practices proper into the notion of global knowledge production is the interventional task of the postcolonial critic—critical work to which this special edition seeks to contribute.

2. Colonizing non-Western Knowledge Systems

Everywhere in the world we witness the displacement of Indigenous and local knowledge systems, as well as their accompanying social, ecological, political, and legal practices. This displacement and erasure can have far-reaching results in terms of global ecologies and politics—for instance, the effects of climate change, natural and human catastrophes, terrorism, and warfare. The pred-

atory appropriation of natural resources, corporatized agriculture, capitalist industrialism, and a mushrooming tourist industry have also resulted in large-scale environmental destruction, the loss of traditional medicinal and horticultural knowledge, and marginalized local languages (Chakravarty 2014, 2). Whole communities and cultures are threatened by the loss or destruction of land, from which they struggle, or have failed, to sustain themselves. For example, in Africa the gradual erosion of local technologies, science, and medicine through colonial legislation, diverse manipulative mechanisms, and overpowering colonial cultures has consolidated a culture of dependence which, in Gloria Emeagwali's words, "entailed subordinating knowledge systems and existing epistemologies of the colonized African to the logic and dynamics of colonial production systems and hierarchies" (2006, 12).

Much of the knowledge and discourse on various non-Western cultures was established within a pervasive Eurocentric knowledge system and self-appointed epistemological authority, particularly in the disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, philosophy, linguistics, literary studies, and history. These sciences, with their incessant studying, translating, collecting, and seizing of cultural artifacts and practices, have discursively (and politically) colonized, marginalized, and appropriated entire cultures, languages, and geographies. This is the Foucauldian "will to truth"/knowledge, essentially a "will

to power,” with discourses of the academy and larger society operating as agencies of power (Foucault 1971, 10). From travelogues to scientific and pseudoscientific studies, European observers and academics established imaginaries of certain cultures that have become global myths, embedded in the semantics of exoticism, primitivism, and savagery. As Edward Said explains, “the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. [...] From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist’s work” (Said 1994, 73, 283). Likewise, Valentin Mudimbe argues that discourse and knowledge on Africa is fraught with continuing and pervasive exoticism, and Europe has invented the African, Native, Arabic, and Asian “savage” as representations of its own vilified and negated ‘double’ (Mudimbe 1994, xi-xii). Similarly, Europe has also invented the ‘Imaginary Indian’ in North America (Berkhofer 1978; Francis 1992; Momaday 1979).

Many postcolonial scholars from different regions point out similar colonial processes world-wide. For example, Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste holds that Western educational institutions have disclaimed Indigenous knowledges and nurtured the belief that non-Western cultures “contribute nothing to the development of knowledge,

humanities, arts, science, and technology;” she terms this attitude “cognitive imperialism” (2005). Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen argues in a similar way and notes that “the academy’s structures and discourses are built on the assumption that there only is one episteme, one ontology, one intellectual tradition on which to rely and from which to draw” (2007, 3). Hence, as Cree scholar Margaret Kovach makes clear, prioritized Western-based research practices and policies reproduce colonial relationships in the academy (2009, 28). There exists, furthermore, the pervasive Eurocentric idea that thought and philosophy is “a specifically Western affair” (Nigam 2013, 4; cf. Dabashi 2013). As a consequence, postcolonial and Indigenous academics around the world have called for decolonizing and “Indigenizing the academy”, for the equal inclusion of postcolonial and Indigenous epistemes, discourses, practices, and methodologies, and for interweaving Indigenous, postcolonial, and Western knowledges, education, cultural beliefs, and values in order to combine their respective competences (e.g., Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Mihesuha and Wilson 2004; Kuokkanen 2007; Wilson 2008; Kovach 2010; Gilliland 2009; Popova-Gosart 2009). But even this project is fraught with fallacies, such as the potential for appropriating, tokenizing, and exploiting such postcolonial knowledges—as can already be seen, for example, in the pharmaceutical industry. We also risk validating Indigenous knowledges and methodologies solely according to Western standards, further subjecting them to Western

control (Grenier 1998, 13, 55). If we cannot achieve a radical discursive shift, even the most liberal study in the name of cultural relativism will continue to use and reinforce categories and conceptual systems that are born in a Western epistemological order (cf. Mudimbe xv).

3. Decolonizing Strategies

Attempts to integrate Western and non-Western knowledge systems, or to recover postcolonial and Indigenous knowledges from the shadows of Western scientific discourses, are manifold. Worldwide, non-Western and Western scholars are producing alternative postcolonial visions of reality, embedded in their daily lives, ontologies, and philosophies. For example, the British theoretical physicist David Peat respectfully discusses integrated anthropology, history, metaphysics, cosmology, and quantum physics, arguing that Western ideas of quantum physics and Native American holism have more common premises and ideas than is generally assumed (1994). Gregory Cajete explores Native American science paradigms according to Western categories of knowledge: Indigenous philosophy, psychology, ecology, herbology, holistic health, relationships to land and animals, and astronomy. Richard Atleo (Umeek) develops an Indigenous philosophical theory integrating Nuu-chah-nulth and Western philosophies and knowledge practices (2004, 2011), while Cheikh Moctar Ba similarly compares Ancient Greek and African cosmologies in

order to crystallize philosophical structures of African oral cultures for their translation into print (2013, cf. Errington 2007). Jeannette Armstrong puts forth the Okanagan *Enowkinwixw* concept of governance and conflict settlement that might prove important for political science and law studies (2009). In South Africa, the Khoi-San concept of *ubuntu* is the basis for Desmond Tutu's endeavors to achieve reconciliation, healing, and renewal (Chakravarty 2014, 4). In the Himalayas, traditional practices for resource extraction and utilization are being scrutinized for their relevance as suitable technologies for natural resource management in particular climate and living conditions (Parihar et.al. 2014, 198 ff.), while in Hawai'i traditional ecological knowledge and land management practices are being re-applied as well (Gon III 2003). With the example of *Quechua yachay* (Quechua collective oral knowledge), Fernando Garcés V rearticulates the colonial idea of Indigenous languages being subordinate to Eurocentric languages and argues instead that subalternized languages indeed have epistemological power (Garcés V 2012, 86 ff.). Korsi Dogbe introduces Africa-centered perspectives on philosophy and the social sciences (Dogbe 2006, 115 ff.); and Gloria Emeagwali reviews African Indigenous knowledges, languages, scripts, history, mathematics and technologies and reintroduces them into academic discourses from where they were dismissed (Emeagwali 2006, 1 ff.). Some papers in this volume (e.g. Armstrong and Hayman) discuss similar concrete endeavors to decolonize

knowledge production, while others (e.g. Siriwardane-de Zoysa and Al-Janabi) outline examples to decolonize text and discourse production. “Decolonizing the academy” by including Indigenous, African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and other diverse epistememes, discourses, practices, and methodologies is central to postcolonial endeavors.

4. The Contributions to this Special Volume

The contributions in this edition discuss decolonial strategies that challenge neocolonial tendencies in institutions of knowledge production and probe the possibilities of integrating postcolonial knowledges into present popular and academic discourses. The contributions add to the many collaborations between postcolonial, Indigenous, and Western scientists and scholars already taking place, and their attempts to interlink these different knowledge systems, with a view to developing new ways of producing and disseminating knowledge and recognizing pluralistic and hybridized knowledge production. It is only by approaching our fields critically that we can work towards new decolonial methodological and theoretical approaches that contribute to decolonizing academia.

The question of whether we are past the point of studying the ‘other’ and are able to recognize pluralistic epistemologies is crucial to all of the contributions to this volume, and here we recast this question in light of col-

onization, neo/colonial knowledge production and connected policies. The first part of the volume, 'Towards Decolonizing Knowledge Production', outlines efforts to decolonize and reclaim traditional practices and language, and takes issue with the ways in which water and the sea as well as cultural geographies and stratification orders were epistemologically established and mapped from a Eurocentric perspective. The articles look at different geographical and cultural contexts and delineate strategies to delink, and possibly decolonize, knowledge practices, and thus engage in producing pluralistic knowledges².

Jeannette Armstrong, in the first article, describes several reasons for the threat of language loss in North America and illustrates how traditional Syilx knowledge is embedded in the Nsyilxcn language. She presents endeavors to revitalize her Syilx Okanagan culture and Nsyilxcn as decolonial strategies in order to recognize, preserve, and sustain Syilx Okanagan knowledge. These processes include reintroducing the traditional governance process *Enowkinwixw*, establishing the En'owkin Centre that facilitates cultural and language research and education, and promoting Nsyilxcn language use in governmental and everyday activities.

Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa critically discusses a Eurocentric genealogy of oceans, seas, and coastal spaces in post/colonial imaginaries of exploration, trade, and

conquest. She outlines the relation of the marine and maritime, and contests the constructed dichotomy between the terrestrial and marine realms, while providing readings of marine spaces from marginalized localized perspectives. With the example of Sri Lanka as an island hub, the article re-evaluates notions of islands, discusses oceans and coastal spaces as connecting spaces, and destabilizes established dichotomies of sea/land, the occidental/oriental, Nature/Culture, and the sedentary/the mobile.

Eleanor Hayman's article, written in collaboration with the Indigenous Tlingit researchers Colleen James and Mark Wedge, looks at Western understandings of water as a resource and materiality as opposed to Indigenous understandings of water as a sentient being and part of human life. The article introduces concepts of Tlingit and Tagish ontological water consciousness and practices of water management, which are embedded in oral narratives, toponyms, and cultural practices. The authors critically discuss what they call 'hydrological violence', which includes the appropriation of water resources, the erasure of Indigenous knowledge about water (e.g., by overwriting Indigenous place names), and the introduction of fracking for liquid gas in water sensitive areas, all seriously inhibiting local life based on water and water epistemologies. The article furthermore outlines decolonizing strategies, such as developing digital counter maps with reintroduced Indigenous geographies and

names of places and waters, applying for place name recognition with the Yukon government, developing Tlingit and Tagish water legislation, and launching a Water Sampling Initiative.

The second section, 'Knowledge Production in Colonial, Neo- and Postcolonial Processes', focuses on unpacking Eurocentric discourses and knowledges established during the era of colonization as well as during neocolonial processes. The articles offer a rejoinder to hegemonic knowledge production and ask to understand supremacist ways of appropriating non-Western knowledges as well as constructing and disseminating universalizing and orientalizing knowledges as 'standard' knowledges.

The first article by Detlev Quintern comprehensively outlines that European seafaring and colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia was facilitated by Arab-Islamic cartographical and astronomical knowledge, nautical sciences, and technical knowhow assimilated into Eurocentric discourses; in general, Western development and modernity to a large extent was possible because of knowledge, agricultural practices, and inventions that came from non-European cultures and epistemologies. Quintern also makes clear that the *Reconquista*, colonization of the Americas, and enslavement of African peoples saw the similar brutal measures Europeans used against non-Europeans. He sums up: "the knowl-

edge of the *conquistadores* is to be seen primarily in the fields of ruthless warfare, while their astronomical, cartographic and nautical knowledge clearly had Arabic-Islamic sources.”

In Elisabeth Reichel’s article on Margaret Mead’s poetical and ethnographic writing and plurimedial work, we learn that Mead understood alphabetic writing as a major step in the developmental trajectory of humanity and as marker of cultural and intellectual advancement. Despite the fact that she acknowledged a plurality of notation systems, Mead applied an evolutionist hierarchy to notation systems of encountered cultures that suggests linear development from no writing, to pictographic and ideographic symbols, to alphabetic writing as the most advanced stage. Also her poetry reveals such developmentalist notions, while Mead herself did not self-reflexively assess her own epistemic violence of studying and knowing the ‘other’ that cannot participate in the process that sustains her power position because it ‘lacks’ the very means that enable her to do so.

The last article, by Pierre-Héli Monot, outlines the discourse production of Romantic philosophers and writers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, critiques their ‘volubility’ and the centrality of ‘whiteness’ in the production of ‘meaning’, and attempts to unpack the discursive practices of *affirmation* and *assertion*. Focusing on

American Romanticism and texts by Edgar Allan Poe, Monot argues that the volubility of Romantic discourse produced and cemented white privilege and whiteness as social capital. With the example of Frederick Douglass's affirmative hermeneutics, the article shows how to destabilize such a circulation of racial capital, while further suggesting their potential for self-reflexive evaluation of academic discourse production proper.

Taken together, these interdisciplinary articles show how knowledge production can be self-reflexively researched and possibly gradually decolonized through a variety of theoretical and practical approaches in different postcolonial settings. This collection shows different ways of systemically challenging Eurocentric ways of creating and disseminating knowledge, highlighting Indigenous and postcolonial perspectives in research and discourses, and contributing towards pluralistic knowledge production.

Notes:

1. This special issue employs the terms 'Eurocentric' and 'Western' as denoting political, cultural, economic, and intellectual thought and practice with roots in European societies and knowledge traditions that spread throughout the world during the colonial era, and 'non-Europe-

an' and 'non-Western' as denoting thoughts and practices generated in cultures, societies, and knowledge traditions that were understood as 'other' to centralized European traditions. These concepts, however, cannot be clearly defined and become increasingly blurred through trans-cultural and transnational dynamics in present societies. At the same time, it is assumed that there are unified or homogenous 'Western', 'European' or 'non-Western' and 'non-European' understandings of knowledge and knowledge practices.

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