

ABSTRACTS

In the order in which they appear in the programme

RUKMINI SEN

Writing the Self, Walking with the Social: Feminist Reflections on Knowing and Knowledge

Writing the autobiography has been a feminist project towards being heard. Voicing the otherwise unheard or unwritten is one significant way towards decolonising codified knowledge. Writing the self is an exercise of writing about the times as well—it is about connecting the memory and immediate, public and private, self and other (Liz Stanley, 1993). By reading women's autobiographies from India which have been translated into English, and reflections written by feminist anthropologists of their field work in different locations in India, I propose to suggest that they were constructing the social/political histories through autobiographical journeys, challenging therefore the patriarchal knowledge that sociology/social anthropology otherwise was practising. These narratives of scripting the self were also about claiming a space in scholarship, in knowledge production and not only about reading/known women's lives. If the project of writing was about inscribing life-worlds into a phenomenology of everyday gendered living in various Indian contexts at the turn of the 20th century, the other moment is reclaiming the public space by young millennial women in the contemporary times. This is a moment being traced post the December 2012 gang rape and a protest performance titled Walk after the incident. Walk as performance (Maya Rao, 2013), reclaiming the night by doing night walks by groups of women and the pedagogy of walk-ing in the city that I practiced with a group of students while teaching on law, violence and intimacy are connected to co-constitute feminist self-consciousness. Walking involves seeing and sensing the social—the social life of the sites, sounds and people through whom and with whom the walk happens to generate a presence in the public space. Writing and walking are feminist methods to decolonise the written and the known. A decolonising project is on the one hand of interrogation and on the other of building solidarities. This paper by looking at autobiographies written by women in history and reflecting on walking practices by cotemporary young women aim to re-imagine how to remember the past and the ways of building the present.

AWINO OKECH

On African Feminist Epistemic Communities and Decoloniality

Like intersectionality, decolonisation has become a buzz word and place holder for everything and anything that runs contrary to orthodox positions. However, there is historicity to what we see today as “new demands” to decolonise knowledge. In Africa, this process can be signposted through four key moments. The first was marked by the immediate post-independence conversations on Africanization. The second coincides with democratisation movements with regime interests featuring strongly in the management of universities (See Zeleza, 2012; Mamdani, 2016). The third is marked by the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) by the Brettonwood Institutions, that resulted in the divestment of resources from higher education and the resultant decay of universities across African countries. The fourth moment has been re-ignited by student movements in South Africa across other African countries through debates on divestment in social sciences and humanities to a focus in Science Technology and Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as a driver of development in addition to the larger pressure to centre entrepreneurship therefore the market as a key site of training and research.

This presentation examines these debates by reflecting on emancipatory teaching and research praxis. It is framed by the foundational edited volume on *Engendering African Social Sciences in Africa* that situated the absence of gender analysis as fundamentally one about a struggle for resources and power (1997; See Lewis, 2007). The conversation about the centrality of feminist theory in social sciences was expanded years later in *Feminist Africa* (2007) through a two-part journal on *Rethinking Universities* that offered analysis how women as faculty and students navigated universities as institutions deeply invested in varied forms of masculinist cultures. I develop the notion of African feminist epistemic communities to examine what they can offer to ongoing decolonisation projects in the UK.

KAMYA CHOUDHARY, MARTA KOWALEWSKA AND CAT WAYLAND
Decolonising Research and Feminist Friendships: A Conversation Across Boundaries

Taking Tuck and Wang's timely reminder that decolonization is not a metaphor as our point of departure, in this collaborative piece we respond to some key questions about our positionalities and actions as researchers committed to decolonisation. Often when attempting to answer questions about decolonisation and coloniality, it is difficult to address the complex nuances adequately in isolation – even reflexive isolation. Therefore, we present this work as a conversation between three researchers in the social sciences, and three friends, to cover unique positions while grappling with common questions and themes. This format of conversing reflects the idea that learning arises through dialogue rather than through a single “all-knowing” voice as well as the role friendships play in facilitating that process within academia.

Specifically, we address the following conundrums. First, considering our differentiated positionalities in a Western academic institution and the acknowledgement that decolonisation requires the ceding of privilege and power, we ask, what challenges are we facing while trying to incorporate decolonisation as an active process in our research? Second, as feminist researchers, we consider how feminist thought has affected our understanding of decolonisation and the struggles or successes this conception can yield.

As we come from varied academic disciplines, we face distinct challenges within our projects in terms of the theoretical and empirical investigations we are pursuing. However, we face many similar questions with regard to how we challenge and sometimes replicate the power structures within academia. In addition, we will discuss how the conceptions of solidarity and coalitions within feminism have enabled us to tackle the impasse of decolonisation as metaphor and better negotiate the tensions inherent in our identities and positions within the institution.

ÓRLA MURRAY
Doing Feminist Decolonial Research Through Reflexivity and Accountability

This paper explores how to put do reflexivity and accountability in research in order to put into practice feminist decolonial principles. I explain my initial approach to doing feminist research, which involved a simplistic ‘confessional’ personal reflexivity and trying to research ‘people like me’ to avoid the complex ways in which structural inequality, coloniality, and power dynamics affect knowledge production. While there are very important and emotive issues around issues of representation and the role of research in colonialism, as discussed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Uma Narayan (2004), this does not mean that identity and positionality are

deterministic or blunt indicators of research quality or ethical approach. Taking an intersectional approach means considering similarity and difference across many axes of structural inequality and as Raju (2002), and many others, observe, even people with the same positionality representing 'their group' might focus on different things and come to different conclusions. Thus, the ethics and epistemological considerations around representation, power dynamics and accountability in research require consideration of positionality as an intersectional, situated, and relational dynamic alongside the broader framing and methods of research. In my own research focusing on feminist text analysis I have it useful to draw on more holistic discussions of reflexivity by Letherby (2003) and Mauthner & Doucet (2003), and accountability (Stanley & Wise, 1997; 2006). However, in order to take decolonise feminist practice, it is also important to consider the politics of citation (Ahmed, 2017) and beyond single research projects the broader project of decolonising the university as an institution (Bhambra et al., 2018) in order to transform research practice from individual academic practices to institutional processes.

SUPURNA BANERJEE

Interrogating Power Structures of Feminist Research: Towards Decolonizing Research Methods and Practices

In this paper I critically interrogate my personal journey as feminist academic. What are the implications of being trained in feminist research methods as a PhD student in a British university? Through my fieldwork in tea plantations of West Bengal, I reflect on whether the ethical standards set by the University Research Ethics Committee sets up a norm of ethnocentric universalism through which to encode and evaluate the cultural Other. Did ethics of feminist research provide us with tools to recognize and resist the colonizing tendencies in the act of research itself?

Working with various communities of marginalized women, their narratives revealed the inadequacy of squeezing their insights and life experiences into pre-existing social science categories through an academic discourse naturalized and embedded in the colonial legacy of English as taught research language. Critically reflecting on the relation between experiences (which are not mine) and social theorizing (on which I, the researcher, claim ownership) can only be possible if the latter is not disassociated from the former. I look at possibilities where ethnography can be not only about storing experiences but rather co-theorising with those whose narratives are at its core. I use my existing research to show the organic possibilities of co-constructing grounded theory with research participants.

Decolonizing research and teaching requires critical reflexivity. Being from India and researching on India, insider position as a researcher was easily accessible to me. This uncritical positioning (especially possible in an international context) conveniently hides my middle class, upper caste, majority community privileges and consequently the resultant appropriation this enables. I argue that only a radical decolonizing collaborative feminist intersectionality as inherent to research and teaching can challenge power structures maintained, produced, and reproduced within the hegemonic academic space.

MEGAN HARRINGTON

Western Eyes, Decolonial Glasses? Researching Malawi, Interrogating Western Feminist Knowledge Production on the Global South

The call for decolonisation has been felt across disciplines and area studies in academic research, including development studies. It can be argued that development studies is a colonised field, rooted in assumptions of 'progress' as the basis of cross-cultural comparison, and full of examples of homogenisations, simplifications, and misrepresentations about the Global South. Feminists have been at the forefront of challenging androcentric assumptions manifested in hegemonic development thinking for more than five decades. However, Western feminist critiques of development have been equally imbued with ethnocentrism, contributing to the reproduction of tropes such as 'women-as-oppressed', and the false construction of 'Third World Women' as a homogenous analytic group.

In this paper, I consider the extent to which applying decolonial thinking to Western feminist inquiry in the Global South has indeed served to disrupt a colonised knowledge production, in the context of my own research on agroindustrial development in Malawi's sugar industry. I reflect on the use of intersectionality as a critical methodology through which to analyse the ways in which gender- but also race, ethnicity, class, disability, age, and nationality- interact to shape relationships of power in the global capitalist system of corporate agriculture. I consider the challenges of producing knowledge which is nuanced and devoid of disempowering Western tropes, whilst also navigating powerful binaries such as capital/labour, women/men, developed/underdeveloped, North/South, and black/white, which dominate local discourses and Western scholarship on African plantation systems. I reflect on my own positionality as a white feminist scholar from the Global North, and the ways in which 'decolonial glasses' might be applied to subvert colonial processes imbued in feminist knowledge production; but likewise, consider the limitations of such approaches, given the realities of privilege and position imbued in a white Western body interacting in unequal racialised spaces, both within the field, and the academy.

AMÉLIE LE RENARD

Analysing Western/White Hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula: Reflections on Intersectionality, Postcoloniality and Knowledge Production

This paper discusses the importance, challenges and limits of studying Western/white residents in Southern countries as a strategy to address the conundrum of decolonising research. It is mainly based on my experience, as a French white researcher, of conducting fieldwork, presenting in various contexts, and teaching in Paris. While postcolonial feminist studies on the Middle East had been a crucial inspiration for my PhD on young Saudi women's lifestyles and access to public spaces in Riyadh, the Saudi capital (2009), the reactions to my research in France, as well as my own reflexivity on knowledge production, led me to head for a new project about the roles and impacts of Western/white residents first in Riyadh, then in Dubai. To make sense of a fieldwork in a multinational bank in Riyadh, where many male managers imposed a specific norm of modern femininity to Saudi employees, I used both postcolonial feminist studies of the Middle East – that have shown how the transformations of gender relations and ideologies were deeply affected by each society's experience of imperialism, nationalism, and capitalism – and intersectionality, a theory whose use is rare in research conducted in the Middle East. In the last years, I conducted research on Western privilege in Dubai (2019), using concepts that come from whiteness and masculinity studies, such as "structural advantages", as well as intersectionality. While my intention was to go beyond the usual dynamics of knowledge production on the Arabian Peninsula, such strategy presents limits, especially as it (re)centers white/Western lives (Ahmed, 2004). I argue that intersectionality as well as postcolonial feminism are useful to highlight the roles of Western/white people without centering them.

EMMA HILL

Borderlines: Reflections on Researching Displaced Migration in Scotland and the Decolonial Agenda

In this paper, I reflect upon what it means for me, as a white, feminist woman with British citizenship working within the Academy to do decolonial, feminist 'research' on the topic of displaced migration in the Global North. I place this discussion within the context of my work over the last five years, firstly, throughout my PhD, working with Somali-Scots who have experience of displaced migration and secondly, on the current project on which I am a Research Fellow, working on the 'integration' experiences of displaced migrants in Scotland.

Experiences of displaced migrants in the UK are impacted by knowledge produced about them either side of the UK border, both sites of which are shaped by the ongoing legacies of the British Empire. In the UK, (post)colonial legacies have shaped and continue to shape the UK's restrictive, securitised and racialised approach to displaced migration. Outside the UK, (post)colonial legacies of British Empire continue to impact a number of countries from which there are high numbers of asylum seekers. These legacies also travel in migration.

Work by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Safia Aidid (2015) and others has highlighted how 'research' is implicated perpetuating conditions of settler colonialism and imperialism. In this paper, I also discuss how 'research' is implicated in the (post)colonial conditions of the UK border, and what this means, first in the context of the Academy and second for my own research practices. In this paper, I therefore trace how my privileges of whiteness, citizenship and institutional placement in the Academy are complicit in many of the bordered conditions that I seek to critique, and discuss their methodological and ethical implications.

JANINE FRANCOIS

From Safe(r) Spaces to Brave(r) Spaces: A Black Feminist Responds

The concept of 'safe(r) spaces' has reached mainstream discussions with arguments for and against its use in higher education (Logan, 2017). With competing definitions in circulation, this paper will first situate what is a 'safe(r) spaces' and how they are employed within higher education, most often by student groups. I will ask who is 'safety' intended for and what are they seeking safety from? In particular as 'safety' is currently employed through the discourses of surveillance culture, 'terrorism,' immigration, citizenship and border control to protect the white-western neo-liberal-nation-state often from Black and Brown bodies. By adopting the lens of Sylvia Wynter (2003), I will position universities as contested spaces due to their historical and contemporary locations as sites of reinforcing enlightenment and 'white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchal' (hooks, 1994) epistemologies. I will critique universities through their textual, ontological and historical framings by connecting them to 'British' transnational, racial and colonial histories, which consequentially produces 'unsafe spaces' for Black and Brown bodies. This paper will propose 'brave(r)' spaces as a counter-position to 'safe(r) spaces,' as 'safety' is an apparatus of whiteness and because 'brave(r) spaces' is relatively an abstract concept. I will be re-contextualise 'brave(r) spaces' to consider current temporalities within teaching pedagogies like Black feminism, intersectionality and decoloniality, as ultimately there is no 'safe' in dismantling the master's house.

AYAZ QURESHI

Politics of Location: Reflections on Research and Teaching from Pakistan and the UK

In this paper, I discuss some of the challenges of teaching and researching on topics that are deemed as subversive or in conflict with the dominant social and cultural values in Pakistan. I take the decolonising agenda in a wider sense to be not just about readjusting our course reading lists in the attempt to redefine the canon but challenging all kinds of parochialism. I have taught in a number of public and private sector universities in Pakistan and have been intrigued by how the intensity and the nature of problems faced by faculty and students shifts between private and public sector universities. My particular focus in this paper will be an elite university in one of the urban centres of Pakistan which largely serves students from upper and upper middle-class families. The sensitive issues in this case are teaching and research on gender and practising gender equity on campus. I will contrast this with my insights on the nature of challenges in public sector universities. The paper argues that our location in the academy is inseparable from our (gender and class) location in society and the value that the society places on these categories. Nonetheless, it is possible to find creative ways of challenging dominant values even if it is sometimes very costly (life imprisonment or even death).

RADHIKA GOVINDA

“Mirror Mirror on the Wall...” The Promise and Perils of Decolonising Feminist Classrooms

This paper is a critical personal narrative reflecting on what it means for me, as a feminist academic of colour from the South, to participate in the project of decolonising the academy. The classroom is a key site for my de-colonial practice. I discuss the relevance and use of intersectional pedagogy in my attempts at questioning institutionalised white bias in the curriculum and decolonising what are pre-dominantly white feminist classrooms in which I am often the only obvious ‘other’. I delve into the dilemmas that I am confronted with while ‘teaching to transgress’ in this way to ‘Western eyes’, and the impact this has on my own sense of subjectivity in the academy. I locate this auto-ethnographic account in the ongoing global conceptual and political debates on interrogating epistemic privilege and on the neo-liberalisation of higher education.