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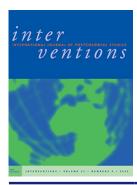
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INTRODUCTION

DECOLONIAL TRAJECTORIES: PRAXES AND CHALLENGES

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Activism scholarship

decolonial queerness

sexuality studies

In this special issue of Interventions, we consider the transnational articulations of the expansive site of decolonial studies. The disparate as well as interconnecting lines of reflection, traversing geopolitical and disciplinary borders, instructively allude to the trajectories of decolonial theorization. It is within these interstitial transnational sites that the Decolonizing Sexualities Network (DSN) emerged in the last decade by suturing queer of color critique to decolonial studies. Academic activism, political mobilization, transformational politics and praxes, critiques of global loci of power including heteropatriarchy, Islamophobia and racism among others defined the work of the collective, underpinning the urgency to think beyond single-issue politics of queerness. "Decolonial Trajectories" instantiates and extends such characteristic propelling of the interventions that reach beyond queerness without erasing its critical significance of radical critique of uneven relations of power.



Transnational critical theory in the last four decades has witnessed the proliferation of decolonial theorization in transdisciplinary and geographically disparate locations in the global Norths and Souths. Academic and activist conversations, critiques, polemics, and analyses have substantially enriched the pluriversal and decentring scope of the field, such that, multiple loci of enunciation have emerged. The critique of calcified colonialities in the works of Vine Victor Deloria Jr. (1995) and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1984) for Indigenous political movements, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) for reflection on borders, race and lesbianism/queerness, Enrique Dussel's (1993) challenge to Euro-American appropriations of narratives of modernity/coloniality, and Howard Winant's conceptualization of racial longue durée (1994) inter alia, instructively alludes to the myriad orientations of decoloniality and its extensive conceptual potentialities. As a theoretical field, decolonial studies establishes analytical frameworks, such as modernity/coloniality/colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007; Mignolo and Walsh 2018), the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007), delinking, epistemic disobedience, and the decolonial option (Mignolo 2007, 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018), colonial wound, decolonial healing, and decolonial aesthesis (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013), white innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012; Wekker 2016), and pluriversality (Escobar 2017), to name a few, which have materialized through engaging critical dialogues with non-Eurocentric and Euro-American academic philosophies. Addressing the systematic naturalization of Eurocentrism, the work of decoloniality has spawned multiple terrains of critical inquiry by interrogating capitalist, heteropatriarchal, racial, geographical and other orders. Patently, decolonial theory unhinges the claims to production of knowledge through forms of normative and normalizing reflective inquiries, which have entrenched narratives of Euro-American domination that emerge from histories of colonization, and military occupation of non-Euro-American spaces.

Trajectory of decolonial studies

Decoloniality foregrounds transnational peripheral knowledges as integral to knowledge systems. As Catherine Walsh (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 17) propounds, it advances "radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought." Ergo, contemporary proliferation of decolonial studies has witnessed an intrinsic enmeshment with Euro-American philosophical enquiries in all disciplines, which instantiates their position as co-constitutive formations or co-formations (Bacchetta 2015). Speaking to the

canonical authority of disciplines, resisting the demands of reproduction of the canon, and creating an "other" episteme characterizes decolonial world-making, thereby clearing space for the decolonial option of reemergence. Whilst the field of decolonial studies has allowed the terms "decolonial" and "decolonize" to become academic and activist catchphrases, perhaps not without reason, its multi-route trajectory has enriched peripheral knowledges through their visibilization and dissemination in transnational and transdisciplinary locations.

Implicating the Eurocentric rationalization of global domination, decolonial studies have orientated cross-disciplinary intellectual enquiry. Indigenous and Native Peoples' critical thinking has advanced the trajectory of decoloniality in novel ways whilst simultaneously anchoring them in land struggles (Tuck and Yang 2012), racialization of knowledge through exploitation of Indigenous Peoples (Tuhawai Smith 1999), and, more recently, exploration of interstices between decolonizing education and Indigenous pedagogies (Tuhawai Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2018). We note that from the moment a critical episteme is conceptualized, it takes a motion/an emotion even ("decolonial sensing") that allows it to develop in different contexts, possibly with uncertainty and shifting meanings. The trajectory of decolonial studies therefore is one of becoming comfortable with the uncertainties that it engenders and generates, Examples of the multi-directional ambit of decoloniality incorporates terrains as diverse as student-led activist initiatives, such as "Rhodes Must Fall" (http://jwtc.org. za/resources/docs/salon-volume-9/RMF_Combined.pdf), "Why is my Curriculum White?" (https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/), "Decolonise UKC" (Decolonize the University of Kent, www. decoloniseukc.org) to name a few, repatriation of museum artefacts to global Souths, especially in relation to France (see the Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy report, http://www.restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf), and in its symbiotic attachments to studies of globalization as instantiated in the recent collection titled Global Raciality: Empire, PostColoniality, DeColoniality (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2019). Highlighting tangible political demands of justice, such varied circulations of decoloniality inevitably enhance critical epistemologies.

The case for decolonial queerness

Despite the multifarious genealogy of queer of color critique (Muñoz 1999; Ferguson 2004; see also Ferguson 2018 for an up-to-date queer of color critique bibliography), the deliberate suturing of queerness to decoloniality remains comparatively recent, as signaled in our anthology *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions* (Bakshi, Jivraj, and Posocco 2016). Comprising a growing body of literature, decolonial queer

studies constitutes contributions from disparate transnational affiliations and locations, such as France and the United States (Bacchetta 2010, 2015), United Kingdom (Jivraj 2011), Germany (El-Tayeb 2011; Haritaworn 2015), Europe in general (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2019), India (Dutta and Roy 2016), Palestine (AlQaisiya, Hilal, and Maikey 2016), and Kashmir (Dar 2016). "Decolonial Trajectories: Praxes and Challenges" therefore brings together various strands of decolonial thought, underscoring the analysis of its current disorientations. Connecting creative delinking stances, academic conceptualization, and activist interventions, it participates in broadening discussion on decoloniality as a fertile ground for investigation of contemporary worlds.

Decoloniality as an analytical category relies on its co-production/co-constitution, to borrow from Bacchetta's (2015) critical vocabulary, within processes of decolonization resulting from independence movements in the second half of the twentieth century. Decolonization per se refers to the establishment of "sovereign nation-states ... out of the ruins of the colonies" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 125). Reflective of the disparate spatial and temporal aggregates, discourses of liberation from colonial empires produced differing narratives of power, including inegalitarian hierarchies of geopolitical domination. As Bacchetta, Maira, and Winant (2019, 14) aver, decoloniality and decolonial theory underscore the "continuities and after-effects that suffuse the post-independence situation". Recent political movements and social projects such as student-led calls to decolonize the curriculum (UK), Black and Indigenous Peoples mobilization (US), the Camp Décolonial d'Été (Decolonial Summer School, France), the Decolonial Summer School in Middelburg (Netherlands), and struggles for the global repatriation of colonial-era artefacts in museums across the global North, amongst several others, signal the diverse trajectories of decolonial resistance to imbalances of power within the Academy and in the body politic. The discussions inevitably draw attention towards the embedded Eurocentrism in all discourses. Eurocentrism, without being circumscribed with an explicit geographical space, refers to the permeating narratives of Euro-American domination in epistemic and aesthetic fields, producing/controlling knowledge that is self-referential and self-reproductive (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 125; see also Bakshi, Jivraj, and Posocco 2016, 4-5). In sum, the delinking from such traditions of Eurocentric thinking thus becomes the rationale for decoloniality.

Given the multitudinous orientations of the field of decolonial studies, the attempt to delineate decolonial queerness in an overt manner bears critical focus on the inter-implication of genders and sexualities in coloniality. In order to counter the absence of decolonial analyses of queerness, the visible connection of queer to decoloniality reveals the functioning of coloniality of power in intimate realms of identities such as genders and sexualities (AVANCSO 2015; Stoler 1995). Explicitly attaching queerness(-es) to

decoloniality appears as one strand of the decolonial option amongst many others that strive to delink from hegemonic commands to reproduce normative canons in all spheres. To clear space for decolonial queerness then becomes significant as a collective effort of participation in plural strategies of resistance to Eurocentric control over sexualities and gender boundaries.

Decolonial queerness implies the pursuit of social justice transnationally. Certainly, the encounter between queerness and justice is neither novel nor uncommon. Queer movements across the global North and global South emanate from the focus on addressing injustice. However, binding queerness to decoloniality sustains the notion of liberation not just from inequalities for queers in global heteropatriarchies, but also from systemic imbalances of power in the face of rising and resurgent racism, Islamophobia and far-right constituencies across the world. Decolonial queerness in this view attaches to all forms of justice and its attributes. Climate change, non-human animal protection, garment-factory workers' rights, Indigenous community selforganization and determination, critiques of ableism, independence movements from Kashmir to Palestine, and border injustice, to name a few, in the frame of decolonial queerness thus become enmeshed in gender and sexuality critiques. The overemphasis on equal rights, same-sex marriage and adoption/homo-parenting in mainstream queer movements has largely developed in an exclusive fold of homonormativity. Decolonial queerness departs from these narratives not as an attempt to sabotage equality or critique mainstream movements. Instead, it places the center of critical focus on movements for socioeconomic justice that are perhaps co-tangent to political demands of same-sex equality but are part of a wider network of decolonial resistance, globally. By positioning itself in this transnational frame, decolonial queerness inscribes political demands of queers alongside those of the disenfranchized and non-privileged communities and in this way goes beyond gender and sexuality debates. The sought outcome of these political demands remains within the ethical scope of an expansive and substantive notion of social justice.

Trajectories of the decolonizing sexualities network

Commencing in the early 2000s, the Decolonizing Sexualities Network (DSN) convened as an agglomerate of postgraduate students, early career academics, and activists working in diasporic and global South contexts. Our lives were always already inherently transnational and our movements across various boundaries and borders brought us into contact with each other, developing affective bonds that nurtured intellectual as well as other forms of survival and thriving. From 2008 to 2010 we organized to hold a workshop in Berlin, thanks to fragments of funds and enormous amounts of homely

support through accommodation, food, and shared-but-fractured experiences of living barely and otherwise. It is testimony to the strength of these kinds of grassroots movements that we then went on to build and "formalize" the DSN from this initial gathering, which had enabled us to share knowledge and experience from our different localities. The collaboration continued as part of informing our own work as well as for public dissemination, culminating in our book collection: Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions (2016), which is available online on a paywhat-you-can basis. We are cognizant that we have been able to undertake the most recent work of DSN as a result of access to and positionality within structures of power and privilege in the global North/Europe. Access to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Centre (AHRC) funds, for instance, resulted in an international workshop, roundtables, and activist events, particularly throughout 2013, which feature in the 2016 collection. In the following two years we engaged in promoting the work of the contributors in the book in various settings and contexts, such as at the Queer Week in Paris, France (2017), and at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain (2017). What has been so striking, sad, and yet also inspiring is the enduring, visceral need for projects like this to exist and be accessible and in dialogue with the increasing challenges facing people of color, transnationally. This comes at a time during 2018-2019 when the relative privilege afforded to some of us in academic institutions in the global North comes also with various binds and ethical contradictions. On the one hand, receiving recognition of the DSN work as outstanding and visionary, and yet concurrently non-fundable, labeled as not having enough impact since the bodies empowered are not the hardened ones of the colonial state, has serious implications for our project's ethical consideration of giving adequate due to activists and artists who do not possess financial safety nets. However, as Bacchetta, Maira, and Winant (2019, 14) remind us, "a key point of departure for decolonial theory is the resilience and independence of the colonized, the endurance and vitality of native culture. For all its horrors and predations, empire and colonization were not total." The fact of this non-totality as movement - affective and physical - has meant that we have been able, as our ancestors before us, to go back to collective organizing.

Consequently, the most recent DSN venture is a series of decolonial cafés bringing together peripheral perspectives within colonial centers. The underpinning ethos is to enact actively a reversal of the movement that has taken place through European (Christian)/civilizing missions from three erstwhile colonial centers (London, Paris and Madrid/Barcelona) to what they perceive as peripheries, both in the past and in current times. The aim is to co-implicate Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) artists, activists, and academics in conversation with each other through a series of readings, dialogues, poetry recitation, speeches, and performances. The plurality of formats reiterates

DSN's commitment to produce and archive multiple forms of knowledge, including what has been referred to as intangible cultural heritage that we have inherited and evolved through lived experience into contemporary formations/iterations.

The first decolonial Café (DC) came into existence in Paris in May 2019 at Chez Samir in Belleville, a migrant neighborhood that has been subjected to gentrification and increasing hyper-surveillance (after the most recent terrorist incidents beginning in 2015 in France). Opposite a closed-down anarchist library the event featured a conversation with Paris-based queer Morroccan writer and filmmaker Abdellah Taïa, film screenings by poets and filmmakers Tarek Lakhrissi (www.tareklakhrissi.com), and the US-based ethnicity studies scholar Xamuel Beñales, as well as other creative and non-fiction spokenword interventions. These moving and intense contributions elicited constant interaction, both supportive and challenging. The accounts of personal political tensions and violence in times and spaces (home, school, elsewhere) showed them to have been constantly marked by the racialized state. Many of the contributions from the DC have been archived in accessible format on the DSN platform (www.decolonizingsexualities.com), acting as a form of digitalized decolonial community (Emejulu and Sobande 2019). The DC attested to the constitution of what we term "disobedience existence" as resistance that can be built upon and mobilized. The DC format is an explicit methodological, intellectual, ethical, and emotional movement away from colonial modes of being, towards enacting re-existence (at least, its potentialities) through delinking.

Theorizing decolonial praxis: resistance to challenges/failures

Following on from the personal, emotional, and theoretical interlacing with decoloniality outlined above, we regard decoloniality as knowing, sensing, and doing in our own lives that are engaged in the cognate transnational contexts. Decoloniality, then, is a politics of seeking social justice, a praxis of existence. In accordance with Walsh (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 19), we conceive of praxis as the contextual and relational "making of decolonial paths." As she suggests,

Decoloniality, without a doubt, is also ... practice based, and lived. In addition, it is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and existentially entangled and interwoven. The concern ... is with the ongoing processes and practices, pedagogies and paths, projects and propositions that build, cultivate, enable, and engender decoloniality, this understood as a praxis – as a walking, asking, reflecting, analyzing, theorizing, and actioning – in continuous movement, contention, relation, and formation. (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 19)

Underscoring the analysis of its current (dis)orientations through practical politics, therefore, this special issue, "Decolonial Trajectories: Praxes and Challenges," connects creative delinking stances, academic conceptualization, and activist interventions. It participates in broadening discussion on the ongoing processes of decoloniality as a fertile ground for investigation of our contemporary worlds.

In our view, compelling questions that regulate our understanding of the processes of decoloniality stem from the most entrenched narratives of social injustice and coloniality of power. In other words, despite the gains in activism-based conceptualizing of knowledge, transnationally, social transformation of power relations remains a pressing concern. The shortcomings of political and social mobilization do not imply making movements of solidarity disappear. *Au contraire*, as we suggest, they should engage the politics of our times in novel ways, such that complaints can potentialize as political demands. The key questions that inform this special issue are the following:

- (1) What are the conditions of possibility of decolonizing anything? What is nested under the term "decolonial" as an epistemological or methodological tool?
- (2) How do/can we decolonize sexuality, sexual dissidence, and desire? What do decolonial and pluriversal analytics bring to queer/sexuality studies and activism/politics?
- (3) How can a rapprochement between modes of theorizing offer new insights for the contemporary times? What emerges through novel (dis)orientations brought on by, *inter alia*, engagements with critical pedagogy, or/and intersectional activism, and transnational feminist solidarities and complicities?
- (4) How is "the decolonial" or the potentialities inherent in decolonial thought and action understood and generated in specific times and places? How are different decolonial modalities and sensibilities tied to different sites of mobilization and reinvention? How is decoloniality activated and troubled in different sites and situated temporal multiplicities?
- (5) Since decoloniality is imagined as mobilization in different contexts, what are the problematics of disruption in a colonial context?

The essays in this special issue contribute to the consolidation of the field of decolonial scholarship by considering forms of decolonial praxis in and across a range of contexts. They address situated struggles over sexual rights and gender identity, reflecting on the limits and opportunities of forms of popular mobilization and the decolonial reframings of gender nonconformity and queerness vis-à-vis colonial gender systems (Upadhyay; Theumer), whilst being attuned to dynamics of co-optation and exclusionary nationalisms (Upadhyay; Abu-Assab, Nasser-Eddin and Seghaier). The analyses presented

here also experiment with decolonial diasporic and Indigenous lenses and analytics (Bakshi; Chivalan Carrillo and Posocco), and in turn, contributors explore contemporary activism, notably education (Jivraj; Bacchetta, Jivraj, and Bakshi); the law (Upadhyay; Theumer), the environmental struggles (Chivalan and Posocco), and the arts (Bakshi).

The first two essays explore the potential of decolonial analysis in relation to sexual politics and geopolitics at the intersections with caste, class, and the governing of sexual subjects. In this respect, Upadhyay argues that, in India, recent struggles for sexual rights and the decriminalization of homosexuality have been articulated against a backdrop dominated by growing "homohindunationalism", that is, a convergence of campaigns for the recognition of rights for sexually minoritized populations and Hindu nationalism. In this context, a decolonial perspective on the law and the state entails a commitment to confronting caste and brahminical notions of sexuality. Decolonial praxis in contemporary neoliberal India cannot rely on narratives centered on Hinduism's acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, as they necessarily occlude the brahminical casteist violence which underpins them. For Upadhyay, definitions of queerness or gender nonconformity through a nostalgic, Hindutya/Hindu nationalist lens is therefore problematic. A decolonial reimaging of a different kind of canon by queer and trans activism ought to challenge the nationalist framings deployed by the Hindu Right, whilst simultaneously working to dismantle caste and brahminical structures, as well as the legacies of colonialism in the present. Turning to an analysis of the sexual politics in the Middle East and North Africa, Abu-Assab, Nasser-Eddin, and Seghaier examine the growth of non-governmental organizations purporting to work on LGBTQ in the region. These NGOs increasingly rely on narratives of victimhood in order to justify and promote their operations. The authors argue the NGO-ization of sexual and gender dissidence, activism, and resistance has considerable implications for queer intersectional feminist organizing. They stress the importance of linking the discursive economies of victimhood to class and other global inequalities, whilst continuing to challenge colonial framings and interests in the region. Both essays grapple with the dilemmas that emerge out of processes of co-optation of activism and show that they are a key dimension of contemporary national and transnational sexual politics, as gender and sexual dissidence is folded into nationalist projects and structural exclusions. They examine the impact of dogmatic and romanticizing approaches to activism and offer incisive decolonizing analyses of framings of sexual and gender non-conforming visions of belonging predicated on nationalism and victimhood.

Theumer's contribution develops a decolonial perspective on gender and sexuality further, specifically in the context of Argentina, by crisscrossing decolonial, feminist, queer, and trans studies. Theumer focuses on legal reforms as a site of decolonial analysis and considers the passing of the

Gender Identity Law Number 26.743 in the country in 2012. This legislation is grounded in the Yogyakarta Principles and establishes the recognition of gender identity according to each person's own perception, allowing not only for a change of name and/or sex in civil registration, but also for access to comprehensive healthcare and medical technologies to affirm one's self-perceived gender identity. The law fosters the free development of gender identity expression for all, including minors and those of documented migrant status in the country. As such, it is taken to be a decriminalizing, depathologizing, and dejudicialyzing instrument which emerges out of a long history of activist struggles. Activist tactics and debates point to decolonizing practices (Cusicanqui 1984) as practice of dissent that include making a space for the irreducibility and pluriversality inherent in self-perceived gender identity, which cannot be reduced to liberal visions of a self-sovereign autonomously gendered subject or the binarism of the colonial gender system. Whilst Theumer's essay illustrates the problems and possibilities of activist engagements with legal apparatuses and the state and their normative assumptions and "benevolent violence", Chivalan and Posocco focus on the dilemmas and violence of contemporary enduring coloniality. In their contribution they develop a speculative analysis of the agential modalities connecting extractivism and the destruction of places of refuge for humans and nonhumans in Guatemala. The essay mobilizes technoscience, multispecies thinking, and Indigenous perspectives to develop a decolonial reading of structures of terror in the colonial order, and multispecies strategies against capture, and provide an analysis of the colonial matrix underpinning different planes and scales of extraction from territory, bodies, and substance. The authors argue contemporary forms of extraction are a manifestation of enduring colonial practices, which are continuously resisted by Indigenous, poor, and marginal constituencies. Theumer, Chivalan, and Posocco converge in examining the potential of activist practices to articulate decolonial response to colonial matrixes which fix bodies in taxonomical orders against the realities of multiplicity and complex relationalities which in fact sustain life against capture in spaces of refuge. In the subsequent contribution, Bakshi takes up the decolonial project further to explore what alternative and transformative meanings emerge in queer-of-color disidentificatory and diasporic practices. Recasting the question of resistance in the light of a reformulation and expansion of the notion of "decolonial queer diasporas", Bakshi foregrounds the relation between decolonial aesthesis and healing. Through an analysis of the work of the artist Raju Rage, and the writer Ocean Vuong, the essay sheds light on the enabling readings of decoloniality through their work on transgender/queer of color frames, diasporas, and colonial legacies, specifically linking theoretical conceptualization to forms of embodiment and inhabitation of queerness. Where Chivalan and Posocco envision spaces of refuge in the ruins of coloniality, Theumer and Bakshi point to the conditions of possibility and concrete manifestations of decolonial forms of world-making that emerge in embodied struggles and aesthetic practices.

The subsequent contribution to this collection tackles the challenges and opportunities of decolonial thinking and doing specifically in relation to pedagogy, learning, and the University. Jivraj focuses on analyses of "decolonizing the curriculum" activism in the United Kingdom and traces the residual coloniality that endures in these activist efforts. Jivraj argues many of those working to address calls to decolonize the curriculum are in fact positioned "between a rock and a hard place", that is, they are confronted with "asset based" pedagogical approaches which do little to shift structural and epistemic inequalities and, in fact, obscure critical approaches such as outsider jurisprudence, borderlands theory, critical race theory, and intersectional understandings of the complexity of student experience. Jivraj notes the difficulties in disturbing biopolitical policy-making and regulation whose metricbased approaches echo taxonomic methodologies of nineteenth-century racial science. In an institutional and political context in which there is insufficient acknowledgment of higher education institutions' role and responsibilities in the perpetuation of institutional racism generative of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) attainment gap discourses, students of color as well as staff become spectacles, but very few inequities are addressed or shift.

The roundtable forum with Paola Bacchetta in conversation with Jivraj and Bakshi closes the discussions in this special issue by bringing into focus the various strands of activism, political mobilization, critical theorization, and geopolitical borders, i.e. US, France, India, and Italy where Bacchetta actively contributed to movements of political organization. Foregrounding the discussion on decolonial queerness through an elaborate articulation of her experiences, Bacchetta offers a reflective analysis of co-formation and co-production of global relations of power, terms in decolonial theorization that she coined. Utilizing queerness as a pivot to deliberate upon oppression and global power imbalance, Bacchetta, akin to the contributions in this special issue, advocates for transformative praxes through interconnected and intertwining thinking on differential modalities of power. Queerness, Bacchetta suggests, cannot exist in a vacuum without acknowledging and striving to dismantle entrenched structural hierarchies.

Overall, the essays in this special issue address decolonial strategies across a range of contexts and domains. They open up the field of decolonial theory and praxis with a view to addressing the epistemological and political challenges that emerge in coloniality in relation to genders, (queer) sexualities, class, and caste; resistances to dispossession and expropriation; NGO-ization of activism; epistemologies and modes of cultural production, pedagogy, and political mobilization. The emphasis is on how to understand and theorize "the decolonial" – or the potentialities inherent in decolonial

thought and action – and how these are understood as tied to different sites of mobilization and reinvention.

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