



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

(De-/Post-)Coloniality in Anthropology

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Abstract: With our workshop, we want to open up a space to discuss and learn about coloniality within the discipline of anthropology and discuss various approaches to de- and postcolonial praxis. We will engage with the topic from various perspectives –be it theoretical engagement, methodological techniques or personal experience. In the course of doing fieldwork in rural Mexico for our master’s theses, we ourselves, as white students of anthropology, have recently been challenged to put to practice our theoretical knowledge about colonial power structures and decolonial methodologies. Therefore, and because our workshop ties in with current debates about (anti-)racism at the University of Vienna Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, we wish to organise this workshop to exchange ideas with like-minded young scholars.

In a round-table discussion, we want to include different views, approaches and struggles focusing on the attempt of doing de- and postcolonial fieldwork within colonial structures, but also offer space for general discussions around coloniality as well as our (and the discipline’s) role within it. The setting of the round-table allows for profound engagement and exchange of ideas at eye level –which is important in a discussion on (de-/post-)coloniality. Furthermore, the Young Scholar’s Forum at the VANDA Conference provides an opportunity to raise critical voices among the student body and open a stage for a crucial debate within and about our discipline. As experienced discussant, we are able to reckon on the support of Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Janina Kehr.

We look forward to a profound discussion with young scholars who have engaged with the coloniality of the discipline and/or ways to counter it –be it personally, practically or theoretically. We aim at including a wide range of perspectives, and therefore especially encourage BIPoC, first generation, queer, and FLINTA students to participate in our workshop.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 | Slot 5 | Room 1

Elisabeth Steiner, Julia Bernegger: In Search of a Decolonial Anthropological Practice

Vincent Kretschmer Calderón: Indigenous Universities as Public Anthropology: Decolonial practices of academic knowledge production

Hans Magnus Gielge: Challenging the Progress Narrative: An Analysis of Negotiations of Anti-/Racism by Student Unions at German-Speaking Anthropology Departments in Europe

Julia Verbeek: Decolonial research methodology in field research with Tibetan refugees

SESSION PAPERS

In Search of a Decolonial Anthropological Practice

Elisabeth Steiner, Julia Bernegger

In our contribution to this Young Scholar's Forum, we discuss our first attempt at doing decolonial anthropology in our recent fieldwork in an Indigenous community in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico. While researching for our master's theses, we, two white anthropology students, have been challenged to put to practice our theoretical awareness of colonial power structures and decolonial methodologies. We will discuss several questions we have stumbled upon: Based on our experiences, what are the most promising methods, biggest obstacles, and learnings from this first attempt? What are the possible benefits from and limitations to trying to do decolonial research as a non-Indigenous person? And, finally, within a colonial system of power, is it even possible for a non-Indigenous person to do ethically inoffensive research in an Indigenous community? Is there a truly decolonial anthropological practice?

We will engage with these questions in reflection of our three months of research experience. During preparatory classes on decolonial and Indigenous methodologies, we acquired an approach based on continuous self-reflection on positionality and hidden biases. We enable reflection on two levels using the following methods: First, in a participatory and dialogical ethnographic encounter based on feminist Grounded Theory. And, secondly, with intensive and ongoing collaboration between the two researchers, their teacher, and our on-site friends and research partners. In our contribution we wish to widen this reflective circle, discuss the questions mentioned above, talk about positionality, share experiences, and reflect critically on our research process.

Indigenous Universities as Public Anthropology: Decolonial practices of academic knowledge production

Vincent Kretschmer Calderón

In Latin America, the emergence of Indigenous Universities marks an historical step towards autonomous and alternative knowledge production through anticolonial resistance, and challenges Eurocentric notions of higher education. This paper parts from movements to decolonise Western Universities, interconnecting them with processes of racialisation, colonialisation, and patriarchisation, to, firstly, argue that epistemic racism constituted a foundational core to academic knowledge structures, and to discuss its implications for knowledge production within Anthropology and the Social Sciences. Secondly, it dives into the fieldwork on three different Indigenous University in Mexico, located in Jalisco, Puebla and Oaxaca. Contextualising their efforts with the

institutionalised Mexican higher education system permeated by colonial matrices of power, it shows how they navigate the coloniality of knowledge to practice epistemological resistance by constructing them around interculturality, *comunalidad* (communality), their fight for indigenous rights, territory and the recognition of ancestral and oral knowledge. Thirdly, it argues for understanding Indigenous Universities as public anthropology that put decoloniality into practice. Drawing on the pluritopic hermeneutics as a place of negotiation and dialogue between different forms of knowing, it highlights the necessity of epistemic humility in academic knowledge production and emphasises that recognising the practices of anticolonial movements as theories in their own right is crucial to engage with historically absent and invisible forms of knowledge within Anthropology. Lastly, this paper sets forth that taking the challenge of decolonising Anthropology seriously and by engaging in a dialogue with Indigenous Universities, the discipline can contribute to new forms of thinking and imagining academic knowledge production, and in broader terms, much-needed societal transformation.

Challenging the Progress Narrative: An Analysis of Negotiations of Anti-/Racism by Student Unions at German-Speaking Anthropology Departments in Europe

Hans Magnus Gielge

How is anthropology's colonial legacy understood by lecturers, and taught to students, in university settings? What is the discipline's future potential? How does this temporal framing shape discussions and evaluations of decolonial practice in anthropology departments? Drawing on semi-structured interviews with student representatives at German-speaking European anthropology departments, as well as autoethnographic data of my own experiences as a student representative, this presentation will highlight some of the dynamics which reproduce anthropology departments as white public space. Applying a decolonial perspective to analyse one department's efforts to diversify its compulsory reading list, I will argue that contemporaneous developments in anthropology are conceptually sorted into belonging to either the past, or the future of anthropology. Thus, experiences and indications of ongoing colonial and racist legacies in anthropology are flattened and reframed into a pervasive narrative of the discipline's progress and redemption. Reexamining the contradictory data in the project of decolonising the curriculum as belonging to anthropology's messy present, this presentation aims to complicate understandings of the discipline's challenges and potentials, and contribute to new perspectives into teaching anthropology that are decolonial in the present.

Decolonial research methodology in field research with Tibetan refugees

Julia Verbeek

In September 2023, I conducted field research in a Tibetan refugee camp in Darjeeling, India, as part of my master's thesis research. Decolonial research methods, based on the guidelines from the Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics, were put into practice. I shared reflections on my experiences and theoretical considerations in two international conferences: "Development, Democracy, and Citizenship: Decolonial Perspectives from the Global South" - Nelson Mandela Chair for Afro-Asian Studies and "Research and Orientation Workshop on Global Protection of Migrants and Refugees" – Calcutta

Research Group.

Questions arose for me here on two levels. What is my responsibility and role as a white, queer woman in decolonial research? And what significance does such research dynamics have for the research partners?

My work with Tibetans in India, a vulnerable group who find themselves in the middle of a highly politically sensitive field, has shown that the use of a methodology rooted in the decolonial project protects research participants in the sense of protecting their ownership of knowledge, dignity and humanity by allowing them to bring their ideas into the research space. Decolonial research also has the potential to prevent vulnerable groups from being re-victimized, to be able to position themselves and to give them the power to decide what “protection” means for them. In other words, autonomy is made possible.

Thematically, I can enrich the VANDA workshop through my engagement with decolonial research in the field of anthropology in terms of: ethical research in connection with available but not controlled guidelines, navigating the work with concepts such as “refugee” or “citizenship”, whose emic and etic meanings differ and the responsibility that the researcher has if they have to/want to position themselves in a politically charged field (and why this can be important).