



UNCATEGORIZED

FALL 2016 COLLOQUIUM: "COMPARATIVE COLONIAL, POSTCOLONIAL AND DECOLONIAL STUDIES: SOME MEDITATIONS"

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By: Penny Yeung

On Wednesday November 9, from 4:30 to 6 pm, we gathered in our new seminar room in the Academic Building to inaugurate this year's colloquium series. Titled "Comparative Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies: Some Meditations," the colloquium featured a panel of four student and faculty speakers—Annabel We, Enmanuel Martínez (En. Mar.), Rafael Vizcaíno, and Professor Anjali Nerlekar—all of whose work engage in dialogue with these theoretical frameworks.

Fourth-year student Annabel We outlined how postcolonial and decolonial theory inform the methodology of her inquiry, particularly in her interrogation of privileged forms of knowledge production resulting from histories of colonial subjugation. That decolonial thinking and decolonial agents have existed alongside hegemonic Western epistemologies led Annabel to propose a shifting of the geography of reason. This critical orientation runs through her research on Japanese settler colonialism in Korea in the early 20th century, indigeneity in East Asian contexts, and the engagement of post-Liberation South Korean intellectuals with decolonial thought as it proceeded from the 1955 Bandung Conference. In this regard, Annabel proposed that literary studies could helpfully draw from the methodologies of area studies, which have historically been more attentive to and embracing of non-Western scholarships and epistemic genealogies.

En. Mar., sixth year Ph.D. candidate working on colonial and queer theory, presented from his dissertation's second chapter, tentatively titled "Race, White Middle-class, Gay Male Desire and the Urban Archipelago of New York City in the 1970s". En. Mar. began by examining the rhetoric of modernity in President Obama's speech on June 24, 2016 naming the Stonewall National Monument to commemorate the modern gay civil rights movement in the US, and reading that alongside language that appears on the monument's website. Citing the integral role played by two transgendered women of color in gay rights activism of the 60s, En. Mar. argued that the rhetoric surrounding the monument, by reimagining the modern LGBT movement to begin and end with the Stonewall riots of 1969, reveals a coloniality at work which renders the participation of these gender non-conforming agents invisible. Moving on to a close reading of Andrew Holleran's 1978 novel *Dancer from the Dance*, En. Mar. looked at how a colonial logic underlies the problematic desire the novel's gay white male characters have for Puerto Rican males, exoticizing the latter's bodies through a gaze that operates through racial and class compartmentalization. He argued that from these popular and public accounts we continue to see the dark underside of colonial modernity, as per Walter Mignolo, in its failure to acknowledge queer people of color in historical representations of gay modernity.



Next, third-year student Rafael Vizcaíno, whose focus is on Latin-American and Caribbean studies, spoke about taking specific historical contexts such as the Haitian revolution and the Zapatistas struggles in Mexico as the locus of enunciation in his engagement with decolonial theory. As a theoretical framework emerging from material practices and which seeks to impact lived realities, decolonial thought, Rafael proposed, involves an actional aspect in its interrogation of systems of oppression set in place by colonial domination. This notion importantly informs his own research and teaching. A philosopher by his undergraduate training, Rafael discussed how the interdisciplinary nature of Comp Lit allows him to attempt a decolonial reading of philosophy, bringing Frantz Fanon into conversation with German critical theorists as Hegel; Walter Benjamin with feminists of color; as well as reading Caribbean writers Sylvia Wynter and Édouard Glissant for a productive blurring of philosophical and literary discourses in search of a better "beyond."

Finally, one of our faculty members, Professor Anjali Nerlekar, presented on her work which examines the formulations of the Indo-Caribbean in literary and non-literary texts, its claims on space and identity in Trinidad, and its trans-oceanic connections with the Indian subcontinent, Europe and North America. Taking the Caribbean as a point of departure, Anjali spoke about the ways colonial, postcolonial and decolonial studies figure specifically in the theoretical lineage of her project, but underlined how such neat divisions are necessarily complicated, for example, through her reading of Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1972). Anjali gave a brief historical overview of the complicity between British abolition of slavery and the emergence of a new form of indentured servitude which brought in poor, illiterate Indians from the subcontinent to serve as replacement labor. She outlined how these migratory trajectories resulted in a society of segregated cultures and its accompanying stereotypes: the recalcitrant, tradition-bound Indian vis-à-vis the upwardly mobile, Westernized Afro-Caribbean. Anjali highlighted how theorizing from the position of the novelist would allow us to see the critical import of both postcolonial and decolonial discourses upon the novel's concerns: while a linguistic analysis, harking to postcolonial studies, would show a Hindi-influenced creole that reinforces the Indian/Afro-Caribbean divide, the narrative is elsewhere critical of Indian traditions as an inadequate account of Indo-Caribbean reality. Thus both theoretical frameworks, emerging from different geographical loci of enunciation, are critical for addressing the questions of nationalism, citizenship, and indigeneity arising from geographically-specific patterns of migration.

Following the presentations, a short discussion was moderated by Professor Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel. As this first colloquium wrapped up, many of us continued our conversations and mid-semester catch-up over dinner from Delhi Garden.