Cosmovisions from the South. Decolonial epistemologies and the praxis of decolonization

Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

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Rationale. This course is built on the calls made from the Global South to engage with the Western theoretical critical traditions of historical materialism(s), post-structuralism(s), and postcolonialism(s). It does so by introducing the interpretative framework of decoloniality and practices of anti- and de-colonization. Decolonial theory proposes the modern/colonial world system as a colonial matrix of power with origins in 1492 during the Renaissance. By doing so, decolonial theory articulates its critiques of colonialism in an extended temporal depth and geographical scope that goes beyond the histories and geographies usually covered in postcolonial perspectives on colonialism. By integrating the material and symbolic dimensions of domination, decolonial thought focuses on the discourses, institutions, and social practices that enabled the construction of Western Europe’s geopolitical hegemony. To avoid the interpretation that the decolonial alternative consists of an essentialist move opposed to Western knowledge production or that the Global South has a privileged epistemic vantage point, the course also engages with the decolonization traditions that build more explicitly on “liberationist” modes of reasoning and practices than the decolonial turn originally allows.

Course Description. Overview

This course begins by mapping out the imperial/colonial capitalist system of exploitation and domination as it was often framed in the anti-colonial (Fanon, Césaire, Wynter) and the ethics of liberation tradition (Dussel). In this first part of the course, students will be able to identify the broad historical social forces and epistemological impulses behind the “coloniality of power” (Quijano).

In its second section, the course addresses the possibilities introduced by the decolonial turn (Mignolo) that attempts to theorize ways out of modern/colonial matrices of knowledge and power. Students will be asked to engage with the epistemological (e.g., attempts to eliminate Indigenous ways of knowing), ethical (e.g., hierarchy of relationships; the “great divide” between nature and culture (Latour)), and ontological (e.g., how to be in the world with the nonhuman) dimensions of the decolonial proposal.

In its third and final section, the course explores the ways in which the symbolic/epistemic dimensions of colonization are interconnected to material domination and exploitation and the attempted (and failed) invalidation and destruction of Indigenous knowledges and self-determination today. By exploring the incomplete reach and, ultimately, the failure of the totalizing effects of imperial/colonial projects, the course sets up the tensions between decoloniality’s hermeneutic calls for reinterpreting philosophical discourses that naturalize
Europe’s geopolitical and epistemological power (Mignolo, Dussel, Santos) and demands for liberatory practices of decolonization that centre around territories or land (Couthard, Gehl, Manuel & Derrickson, McAdam, Rivera Cusicanqui, Simpson A., Simpson K.).

Syllabus, theorists, texts to be studied (tentative).


