

## **DECOLONIZE THIS!?**

### **Call for Papers**

**A Special Collection of the transdisciplinary journal *Global Perspectives* on the positions, contributions, potentials and limitations of the decolonization debate in the social sciences and the humanities.**

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*Global Perspectives* offers a platform to debate important issues in trans-disciplinary and transnational research in the social sciences and humanities. In addition to substantive fields such as cultures, institutions, exchange systems, communication, technologies or international relations (which comprise the Journal's various sections), this includes inquiry into epistemological and methodological questions.

A particularly relevant current development is the rise of post-colonial approaches and quests for "decolonizing" the academy. Post-colonialism is both a political movement and an academic approach that seeks to challenge the social sciences and the humanities in their very foundations and does so across disciplines as well as fields of inquiry. It questions the legitimacy of the social sciences and the humanities in their present form to constitute *the* system of global knowledge and points to what are seen as inherent biases and inequities.

In our view, the contemporary debates on decolonization can be seen as a continuation of the great debates in the history of the social sciences. Where does knowledge originate? How do knowledge and power relate? What are the underlying assumptions of social science research, and what are both content and connotation of major concepts used in theories? How do we collect, organize, analyze information and disseminate research results? And, critically, who benefits?

*Global Perspectives* is devoted to open, critical and constructive dialogue. In this spirit, we embrace the current debate as a fundamental recasting of social scientific parameters, and in line with previous challenges: during the *Werturteilsstreit* (value judgement dispute) of the early 1900s, Max Weber and Werner Sombart advocated "value-free" research in the sense that researchers should refrain from making political judgments based on their findings. They were challenged by Gustav Schmollers and others as being politically naïve and part of the problem, not the solution in addressing the pressing issues of the time. During the *Positivismusstreit* (positivism dispute) of the 1960s, Karl Popper and other rationalists were this time accused of being naïve positivists by critical theorists like Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas. They challenged critical rationalism by pointing to the inherent biases of empirical social science, urging researchers to take political sides.

Both of these fundamental debates were about the role of the social science in shaping the social order. What kind of society would be 'good' or 'desirable'? What is the role of social scientists in

finding the answer to such questions? Politically, the debate of the early 1900s was largely about social ethics; the debate of 1960s about the New Left against the academic establishment. Today, the debate is about the epistemological and methodological foundations of the social sciences and the continued dominance of the Western academic system. Put differently, while the first debates were about social science and politics within the Western capitalist system, today's debate about post-colonialism and decolonization of the academy express persistent tensions between a colonial past and Western hegemony.

The project to “decolonize” the social sciences and the academy has exploded in recent years. Calls to decolonize the social sciences, the humanities, the university, the curriculum and knowledge more broadly proliferate alongside demands to decolonize the museum, the arts, education, the police, culture, law, and the mind. This begs questions about the shared or possibly divergent meanings of “decolonization” in these contexts, the promises and possibilities of the term “decolonize,” as well as its limitations and shortcomings.

The most standard referent for the term “decolonization” in these discussions is straightforward. Decolonization typically refers to the removal of formal imperial ties between Western powers and hundreds of Europe's former colonial possessions across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific. This was a massive round of territorial decolonization, preceded only by the independence movements of Spain's and Portugal's colonies in Latin America in the early nineteenth century. The post-WWII period of decolonization—and the Western response to it—generated the world order of nation-states that we live in today.

It was a political movement first and foremost: decolonization meant the exit of European empires from territories and the emergence, in their wake, of newly independent nation-states. But this historical process—and fears that many of the informal ties of empire still lingered—also brought with it a discourse of decolonizing that exceeded its narrower politico-territorial meaning. Writers, artists and intellectuals in the late colonial and postcolonial nations spoke of how political decolonization also required “Decolonising the Mind” (to refer to the title of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's seminal book on language in African literature). From an economic perspective, scholars posited that lingering economic inequalities and dependencies constituted a form of “neo-imperialism.”

Discussions of “decolonizing the university” or “decolonizing the arts” etc. in recent years summon this global political and intellectual history but also point to somewhat different units, processes, and temporalities. It has come to refer to processes within the former imperial metropole rather than to politico-territorial or cultural processes in the postcolonial world. And it refers to a wide range of practices, forms of thought and institutions. In this sense, it partially harkens back to the intellectual movements in the Northern academy of the 1980s and 1990s that typically went under the label “postcolonial studies” or “postcolonial theory.”

Rooted in metropolitan universities, and arguably marking the passage of postcolonial academics in the Global South to the academy of the North, this body of academic thought and writing conjured the term “decolonizing” to refer to the expansion of Western literature and academic thought and the subsequent inclusion of subjugated voices and ideas, typically from the ex-colonial world. For many, “postcolonial thought” thereby came to refer to a way of thinking, seeing and being that had finally excised the remnants and legacies of colonialism that persisted in the former imperial metropolises. For others, “postcolonial” became subsumed under other less critical concepts like “multicultural.” The current discussions on “decolonization” suggest that imperial settings still remain as strongly contested fields of tension and that we are not quite “post” the colonial setting, but still dealing with the process of decolonization.

Against this background, the Special Collection invites contributions addressing questions such as:

- **Terminologies.** What are the differences between “decolonize” and “decolonial”, and particularly “decoloniality” as a general ideational constellation, consciously positioned against “decolonization”, “postcolonialism” and “postmodernity”? When we speak of “decolonizing the social sciences,” “decolonizing knowledge” or “decolonizing museums”, or “decolonizing law” what exactly do we mean? Has “decolonizing” come to mean “de-westernization,” or something else?
- **The Movement.** What are the specific vectors and valences of the “decolonizing” movement today? Is it a matter of racial liberation, as when statutes of Confederate war generals in the US or Cecil Rhodes are removed, or does it encompass something more? And what exactly would it mean to “decolonize” as opposed to other possible processes?
- **Ideologies.** Does decolonization necessarily assume a critique of neoliberalism? In what ways can the concept of decolonization be co-opted by dominant ideologies and structures? Is there a teleological element to decolonization?
- **Key concepts.** What is the post-colonial concept of race, ethnicity and gender, civilization, religion and value systems, citizenship and democracy, or global governance for that matter; and what could be the potential contribution to our understanding once these terms are decolonized?
- **Limitations.** What are the dangers or limitations with the concept and project of “decolonizing”, as well as their positive potentialities?
- **Agency.** Who are the decolonizers? Who speaks for whom? Are we witnessing a mostly Western exercise in self-criticism or are formerly silenced voices actually stepping up to make their voices heard? How do these new debates appear in different disciplinary and regional perspectives? How do other academic “systems” relate, for example in China, Iran or Russia?
- **Institutions, Organizations, Relations.** How is decolonizing, decolonialization, decolonization manifested within the academy through organizations, institutions, relations? How is it resisted? How is it sustained? What would a decolonized academy look like?
- **Epistemology.** How do scholars rooted in postwar social science tradition of critical rationalism react to the direct challenges of decolonization? While it would be hard to argue that conventional social science approaches are value-neutral, it would be equally hard to argue that inferential reasoning or quantitative data necessarily require decolonization.
- **Contributions.** By way of a summary assessment, what have been the main insights of decolonized social science and humanities that go beyond a critique of the status quo of the academy?

Send inquiries, suggestions and proposals to [gpjournal@luskin.ucla.edu](mailto:gpjournal@luskin.ucla.edu).

For guidelines on types of contributions (papers, commentaries, essays) and how to submit, visit the Journal’s website at <https://online.ucpress.edu/gp>.