

Le deuxième colloque de la SEPC (Société d'Étude des Pays du Commonwealth) aura lieu à l'Université d'Orléans LLSH (Hôtel Dupanloup) les 28 et 29 janvier 2021.

Les communications se feront en anglais ou en français.

The second international conference under the aegis of the French Society for Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies (SEPC) will take place at the Université d'Orléans LLSH (Hotel Dupanloup) on 28th and 29th January, 2021.

Name of a Discipline: Where are 'postcolonial' theories and practices going, and what can we call them?

Organisers: Sandeep Bakshi (LARCA, Université de Paris), Claire Gallien (Université Paul Valéry - Montpellier 3), Christine Lorre-Johnston (THALIM, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), Kerry-Jane Wallart (REMELICE, Université d'Orléans)

Confirmed Speakers: Dr Priyamvada Gopal (Reader in English Literature, University of Cambridge, UK - via zoom), Dr Ananya Jahanara Kabir (Professor of English Literature, King's College London, UK), Ari Gautier (Writer, Pondicherry, India and Oslo, Norway).

In a twist of Spivak's resonantly accusatory reflection on the 'death of a discipline' (2003), we wish to re-assess the academic landscape formed by 'postcolonial' critiques, discourses and enunciations through interrogating the 'name of a discipline'. Our point of departure is the difficulty we routinely encounter in re-naming our own society, the SEPC (Société d'Étude des Pays du Commonwealth), where the reference to 'Commonwealth' appears outdated and generally problematic, imbued as it is with what Gilroy has described as the 'melancholia' of a lost British Empire. The key question that impels our reflections concerns the availability of the other options: How do we extend, inherit, revisit, renounce or betray the legacy of the 'postcolonial' as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century?

The term 'postcolonial' stems from a dissatisfaction with its hyphenated form, one suspected of conveying colonial hegemony and of limiting scholarly timelines to after the independences, whereas resistance to European structures of thought and power had already taken shape politically and poetically. In turn, the category of the 'postcolonial' has immediately been under attack for a number of disciplinary, institutional, geopolitical and

ethical reasons. If the term 'postcolonial' foregrounds the colonial experience, and considers the encounter with Europe as a beginning rather than an event among others, it has been seen as 'dangerous' (Chennells, 109) because of its suggestion that epistemologies and experiences are solely or at least primarily defined by a relation to European conquest and plunder (McClintock). As a result, we find it problematic, as academics and teachers, to designate our own research on a larger scale than the proliferation of 'studies' and 'turns' which has been witnessed recently. It seems that poststructuralist studies concerned with the reverberations of power relations in a wide range of contexts and texts are evolving towards ever newer nomenclatures and labels. The 'postcolonial' might not be dead of course, as Stuart Hall insists: 'it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new' (Drew, 189). As Priyamvada Gopal and Neil Lazarus suggest, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 produced 'a fundamental change in the framing assumptions, organising principles and intellectual habits of the field' (1). It has, however, been called into question as a label and practice by a number of scholars over the last three decades. The extensive 'postcolonial' focus has branched out into a wide array of categories, so that the decolonial imperative to 'de-link' has already been implemented to some extent: migration studies, diasporic studies, transculturalism and transnationalism, including 'minor' ones (Lionnet and Shih) – fields and names which are necessary, but whose diversity we would like to connect, without lumping them together sketchily either.

As such, the eruption and disruption enacted by decolonial thinking in much critical thought has deflected from the claim of postcolonial theory to intervene in unsettling power imbalance. Concepts of eurocentrism and transmodernity (Dussel), the colonial wound (Mignolo), modernity and coloniality of power (Mignolo and Quijano), border thinking (Anzaldúa), epistemologies of the South (de Sousa Santos) *inter alia* have gained prominence in the last forty years. These novel conceptualizations have re-imagined global and local contexts in the postcolonial worlds. They have also enriched debates in postcolonial studies by not only providing a critique of colonial modernity, past and present, but also by opening onto other (often suppressed, silenced, and invisibilised) epistemic models and restoring a sense of 'pluriversality' (Mignolo) in modes of life and debates of ideas. Although this prolific onomastic activity cannot be reduced to a scramble for

the next buzzword, it does bespeak a certain difficulty to teach a theory class, even at a post-graduate level.

It is a fact that our objects of research are ever more centripetal. It has become unclear whether the study of the 'postcolonial' can still be limited to the second twentieth century, for instance. In a reflection upon the institutional fate and future of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* which very much echoes our current predicament, Boehmer and Tickell analyse the decade of the 1990s as 'increasingly postcolonial', which would leave us with the imperative to turn our backs to the term 'Commonwealth'. 'Postcolonial' has been found to be unsatisfactory because of the geographical uniformity it performs; conversely, 'area studies' (called for by a number of critics in the name of local specificities in relation to the colonial presence, see Slemon) have appeared to thrive. The problem arising from a need to reactivate our tools, and to narrow down our spatial scopes, is that canonical and recognized writers like Salman Rushdie, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nam Le, Jhumpa Lahiri, Dinaw Mengestu, Caryl Phillips, Dionne Brand, J.M. Coetzee, Maxine Beneba Clarke, blur all such borders, and also that area studies replicates the type of bordered thinking that postcolonial critics push against. The very concept of 'cosmopolitanism' (see criticism in Brennan) proves equally limited and it has drifted in a number of directions, 'Afropolitanism' (Selasi, Mbembe), a retrospective 'Tropicopolitanism' (Aravamudan), 'cosmopolitanism of the poor' (Santiago). We could also mention the newly recognized prevalence of 'oceanic studies' as an element which limits the possibility for us to work with(in) the labels offered by continental spatialities and which imposes the norms of endless fluidity, while 'indigenous studies' trespass 'area studies' and even 'hemispheric turns' in order to connect cultures that have survived social extinction and cultural erasure in such diverse places as Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, the United States, and parts of Africa. We certainly have veered safely away from essentialism and even binarism, and the loose bag of 'postcolonialism' has been filled with a vast number of useful and legitimate tags. The temptation remains to find an inclusive denomination for the curriculum and syllabus which remains the bulk of non-British and non-US social sciences, literatures and arts in the Anglophone worlds.

This conference is devised as an occasion to reflect upon the numerous names given to corners and modalities of a wider discipline which can still provisionally be called 'postcolonialism'; 'postcolonial' still designates the

respective directions taken in order to analyse artistic practices and militant interventions stemming from experiences of colonial oppression, diasporic lives, solidarity struggles, ethnic discrimination and the silencing of subalternized voices, including the voice and creation of persons undergoing forced and distressed displacement, on the global scale of neo-liberal capitalism. However, its interaction with decolonisation and anticolonial thinking needs further critical focus.

In ways that we find crucial, this conference picks up from where the previous SEPC conference had concluded, in Lille in early February 2019: a need for dissensus. The 2021 conference is conceived as an examination of the culture wars that have been waged around the borders, role, and continued relevance of the 'postcolonial'. In order to move on (and possibly away) from there, one must ask in earnest of what the postcolonial is the name, and how the deriving and often overlapping frameworks which are radiating from it might be adapted to our troubled times of social, cultural, economic, health crises and upheavals.

2020-2021 seems to us an important date at which to take stock of the evolutions of the field, and of the nuances, variations, neologisms and labels which have been coined to follow such evolutions. Our aim is not necessarily to find an artificial unity; on the contrary, we believe that clarity will emerge precisely from a steady look at the culture wars which have raged among scholars over the past two or three decades. However, it sometimes seems that a growing compartmentalization away from the postcolonial can also prevent us from thinking together. This retrospective gaze will hopefully also outline future paths to tread, as well as ways to signpost them. We want to convene a conference concerned with who we are, with what we do, with why we do it, and with how we will be doing it, and therefore, labelling it.

Proposals for papers which reflect upon the disciplinary contours taken up by what is/used to be called 'postcolonial' societies, poetics, epistemologies and politics, are therefore particularly welcome, as are proposals which consider the ways in which re-branding turns, theories and 'studies' in the poststructuralist ambit have modified the articulation between social sciences, aesthetics and politics. Branching out from these questions, one might also consider the ways in which social sciences and humanities are inherently calling themselves for reconfigurations and displacements in terms

of reception, and teaching. Possible topics or approaches may include decolonial theory, ecocriticism, queer and gender studies, diasporic studies, transnational and transcultural theory, critical race studies, World Literature approaches. A focus on postcolonial / decolonial / anticolonial pedagogical issues will be particularly appreciated, as they not only address questions of corpuses but also fundamentally engage academic and teaching practices. How and where do we (re)invent these practices when academia, critical thinking, and dissensus are placed under such duress, especially in times of crises?

Please submit an abstract of 300 words to nameofadiscipline@gmail.com

Given the current climate of uncertainty, we feel the need to add the following. Should some speakers be held back in their country of residence in January next year due to travelling restrictions, we would arrange for video-conferencing so they could still participate from a distance. And, should we have to cancel the conference for public health reasons, we will still pursue the project and turn it into a publication.

Information:

Deadline for abstracts: 30th September 2020.

Notification of acceptance: 15th October 2020.

The full programme will be issued by 30th October 2020.

Registration fees: 40 euros (covers annual SEPC subscription – participants will become de facto members of the society).

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Avec le soutien de l'Institut Universitaire de France, du laboratoire REMELICE (Université d'Orléans), du laboratoire CECILLE (Université de Lille), du laboratoire THALIM (Sorbonne Nouvelle) et du LARCA (Université de Paris).

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