

ACTIVIST REPORT

CONFERENCE REPORT GLOBAL CHALLENGES: BORDERS, POPULISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION 14-16 June, 2018, Linnaeus University, Växjö (Sweden)

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The *Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, established at Linnaeus University in Växjö, 'has ambition to reconstruct the past and analyse the present based on postcolonial theories that take into account several observers and new angles, all to make sure that we are presented with a multifaceted and nuanced understanding of history as well as of the present'.¹ This self-description of the study group lay ground for broad geographical and disciplinary perspectives. Besides research and teaching, this group organizes annual conferences to discuss current scientific issues from postcolonial perspectives.

Participating in this year's Conference I not only got very good insight into the work of this study group but also learned more about the special location of the university. The conference was held at Linnaeus University in Växjö, which is located in the southern part of Sweden and is situated near two big lakes, which makes the university campus a rather unique place.

The three-day international and transdisciplinary conference was based on keynote lectures and panel discussions. The contributors addressed questions of knowledge and knowledge productions from different perspectives and academic hierarchies. Each day started with keynote lectures

¹ Booklet Linnaeus University, 2018

of well-known researchers. In the following panel discussions, young scholars and doctoral students presented various case-studies on the topics of the keynote lectures. The variety of the presentations went from topics like *Imagining Ethiopia: Challenging Mainstream Postcolonial Approaches to Colonialism* (Juweri Ali) to *On Dying Colonialism and Postcolonial Phantasies in Recent Spanish Cinema* (Michelle Murray) and *Mayaland: Colonial Legacies, Urbanization, and the Unfolding of Global Capitalism in Yucatan* (Claudia Fonseca Alfaro).

The first day was about *Colonial legacies and postcolonial continuities*. In her contribution, Gurminder Bhambra (University of Sussex) put her focus on *Migrations from Nations to Empire (and Back Again?)*. Departing from current discourses about migration Bhambra analyzed European (Self)-Narrations to demonstrate that our knowledge of the past is framed by national terms and reproduced by methodological nationalism. In her analysis, Bhambra re-contextualized the history of the European Empire in unveiling the ideological frame of the discourse. Concluding with the idea of ‘shared histories’, she asks how can we overcome the distinction between ‘our history’ and ‘their history’ and how (Self)-Narrations can become shared histories. The panel discussion on *Postcolonial Europe – Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Continuities* dealt with ‘politics of location’ and insights into the perspectives on postcolonial Europe.

The case studies from Iceland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Denmark focused on racism and processes of racialization in different societal areas. With the keynote lecture *What use are the Humanities provided* by Dominick LaCapra (Cornell University) the first day of the conference came to an end. You can listen to the keynote lecture here, https://play.lnu.se/media/t/0_05c3dsx3

The second day offered sessions on *European Migration, Migration, Colonialism and Cinema across the Globe, Strategies of Bordering or Past and Present Colonial Perspectives in Literature*. Kirsten Husung (Linnaeus University) presented a case study about *The heritage of the Algerian Independence war: a Harki’s family history in L’art de perdre of Alice Zeniter*. Focusing on questions of identity, Husung used the concept of hybridity to deconstruct the recurring dichotomy of ‘use’ and ‘them’ in Western literature. Whereas Husung focused on

identity, Yu Huang raised the question of representation in her contribution *Imagining Trans-Asian Chineseness: the Sinophone writes back?* She used the concept of 'situated literature' and the concept of 'worlding' to challenge the dominant discourse in Western literature.

In her contribution the cultural theorist and video artist, Mieke Bal focused on the concept of migratory aesthetics, understood as 'performance of contact'. In her videos, she experiments with 'empathic unsettlement. Instead of simply recording the lives of others the three films *Close Encounters* shown at the beginning of the lecture are based on encounter and intimacy. The films, thus, all document both the situations they address and their own ethical predicament of the need for modesty and the need for knowledge.² Overcoming the dichotomy of cultural subject and cultural object, Bal talks about 'performance of contact' where knowledge is produced. Her films 'document both the situations they address and their own ethical predicament of the need for modesty and the need for knowledge.'

On the third day on the panel discussion on *Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Welfare State*, colonial and racial origins of European welfare states were addressed. European colonialism is strongly linked with the development of welfare states especially with the politics of inclusion and exclusion which themselves are based on racialization. Peo Hansen (Linköping University) rose the important issue of refugee reception and welfare politics in Sweden. In his analysis, he used Modern Monetary Theory to develop a kind of 'Refugee Keynesianism'. Using Sweden as case study he showed, that refugee integration in small and middle-sized municipalities increased monetary transfers. This is a real chance to change the public perception that migrants are always only a budgetary burden. Read more: <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/11/01/the-accidental-keynesian-how-refugee-spending-in-sweden-challenged-austerity-put-the-local-fiscal-houses-in-order-and-proved-beneficial-to-all/>

The conference program provided various current transdisciplinary postcolonial discourses. As a social scientist,

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I got insights into current theoretical debates. On the broad variety of issues was interesting. On the other hand the question arose if everything is labeled “postcolonial” these days. What does postcolonial actually mean? If every current critical knowledge production is labeled as postcolonial, there is a danger of the term becoming an ‘empty signifier’. We cannot take refuge in the so-called “right or final position” but we have to build upon the dynamics of critical thinking. (“Achse der fragenden Bewegung”)³

³ Chambers Iain. 1996. Migration, Culture, Identity (Migration, Kultur, Identität). Tübingen: Stauffenberg