



Inter-Disciplinary Conference
**“DECOLONISING POLITICAL
CONCEPTS”**

THURSDAY 19TH AND FRIDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER 2019

**HOSTED BY THE CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP, CIVIL SOCIETY AND
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UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND

Topic

Postcolonial and decolonial thinkers and activists have spent the last decades unravelling the intellectual, political and structural legacies of colonialism and ongoing coloniality in our contemporary world. Political concepts are part of these legacies. The way academics define and use them is generally mediated by traditions of political thought marked by and even framed by coloniality. However, and despite the increasing and far-reaching work of postcolonial and decolonial research, this aspect of political concepts is still too often silenced or ignored in some academic settings.

Throughout this conference, we aim to engage with the coloniality of political concepts, and with how ontological, epistemological and political closures and exclusions are reproduced through their use. Besides, we seek to open up collective and collaborative reflections on how to expose, challenge and overcome the colonialities still permeating ideas and research by questioning the tools that political concepts are. We aim to engage with non-Western and indigenous political thought and experiences, exploring alternative uses and what decolonised political concepts might look like. We see such dialogues as necessary in order to find ways of living together that acknowledge and respect plurality and allow for genuinely “postcolonial” academic and political contexts.

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

THURSDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER

09.40 – 11.10 Session 1: **Decolonial Horizons – Revealing the Coloniality of Knowledge and Power**

“History and Universal Politics”

Karim Barakat (American University of Beirut)

This paper will offer an account of the role historical analysis can play in decolonizing existing political frameworks in political philosophy. In contrast to generally accepted universal notions in political philosophy, history can offer a local analysis of the appearance of specific political concepts. Accordingly, pursuing a historical method allows for putting forward a basis of how critique ought to be conducted without beginning from assuming an ideal condition of a political state.

This form of non-ideal political theorizing, however, encounters two main problems. On the one hand, placing too much emphasis on the local nature of historical analysis runs the risk of rejecting critique altogether and slipping into a pernicious relativism. In the absence of some universal framework, critique can no longer be grounded in a rational capacity that is able to transcend differences. Accordingly, for political critique to be possible, one has to recognize some generality to the political condition, which can be used as a basis for criticizing present practices. On the other hand, a non-ideal approach, whether historically grounded or otherwise, seems to be susceptible to a problem first raised by John Simmons, namely that a descriptive analysis cannot offer a direction for how practices ought to be transformed. If examining history offers an account of the set of conditions that lead to the emergence of certain problems and phenomena, it seems we are still left uninformed of what practices ought to be endorsed and adopted. In the absence of an ideal account that arises independently of descriptive theorizing, historical or otherwise, we encounter a kind of paralysis with respect to how we should transform the present. Problematically, this would justify endorsing a form of conservatism that rejects transformation in the absence of an ideal theoretical basis.

This paper, therefore, will deal with both of these problems. I offer a reading of the role of historical analysis that specifies how history can offer the means for deriving general descriptive statements, while rejecting universalism. Moreover, I argue for a gradualist approach to politics that would render deriving statements of how things ought to be without subscribing to an ideal view of politics.

“Achieving Global Justice through Decolonising Human Dignity”

Chika Mba (University of Ghana)

(Human) dignity is or should be at the heart of global justice discourses. This is because dignity underpins theories of justice in the global north and is equally fundamental in practices and imaginings of social cooperation elsewhere in the world. Dignity is simultaneously a fundamental driver and an intrinsic end of justice. The problem, however, is that dignity as it appears in the writings of major scholars in the global north is a colonial concept, and as Martha Nussbaum admits, dignity is by no means easy to define. The coloniality of dignity in turn leads to the erroneous view that global justice or human rights is something to be bequeathed, in Mahmood Mamdani’s wording, by “saviors” from the global north to others, Africans in particular. But human rights are not exactly what scholars like Thomas Pogge and Charles Beitz, and those in the “hallowed portals” of London School of Economics would say; neither does Pax Americana foreground all of what human rights entail, especially for those outside the centre. The greater problem, Adam Branch argues, is that “...although the category of humanity provides a supposed foundation for Western identification and commiseration with Africa [for example] and claims to grant dignity, respect, and equality to Africans, it fails to provide any

foundation in Western imagination for agency or action by the African ‘victim’ –he or she is seen as the helpless child, the despairing woman....”

Thus, to decolonise dignity, in order to create an important conceptual leeway to achieving global justice, as this paper attempts, entails, at first, the recognition that justice or human rights is an *actional* right to dignity and the basis for individual self-respect and communal pride. Decolonial dignity hopes to actualise the total fulfilment of *all* rights to dignity, the right to basic necessities like clean water, shelter, food and sanitation; as well as environmental protection and trans-generational justice. And these basic necessities can, in many cases, *contra* Western ideals, assume an equal or even a higher value than civil liberties. To talk about decolonial (human) dignity, is to pay attention to the multilayered struggles to end injustice and oppression by peoples and groups outside the global centre. In this way, defending or conceptualising dignity must account for the intersectional struggles of Women’s rights movements, the multilayered and expanding battles of Black women, Dalit women, women with disabilities, and women with diverse sexualities in their brave pursuit of dignity and equality, in the face of historic injustice and oppression. In all, this study follows Frantz Fanon to assert that decolonial dignity begins from a politics of recognition, and, finds its highest fulfilment in the right to a means of livelihood. For Fanon, there can be no dignity without a stable sense of identity, a sense of a ‘we’ that have roots in the struggle for emancipation. It is precisely this sense of decolonial dignity that every discourse on global justice must aspire.

“Selected knowing and the privileged ignorance”

Minoo Alinia (Södertörn University)

This paper discusses the Swedish government’s policy document and its national strategy on preventing men’s violence against women. Something that stands out strongly in this document is that people with a migrant background and the suburbs inhabited by them are consistently and systematically dissociated and treated differently. Based on a strongly dominant culturalist and racializing approach in Sweden, so called honour thinking is ascribed categorically to people with migrant backgrounds, the majority of whom reside in socio-economically marginalized urban suburbs. As a source of knowledge and a guidance this document will supply knowledge and frameworks for policy and practice for the main institutions and agencies. Moreover it will frame and guide education of civil servants and by the state funded women organisations and activists.

The paper will investigate the knowledge produced in this document by examining the content and meaning of both what is said and what is kept silent and the interconnectedness of knowing and non-knowing in this process. For this the concept of “white ignorance” developed and outlined by Charles Wade Mills (2007) will be used. This ignorance is, as Mills puts it about “the idea of ... a non-knowing ... in which race -... white racial domination and their ramifications -plays a crucial causal role.”(Ibid.: 20). “White ignorance” defined by Mills refers to an epistemic position and a cognitive phenomenon that according to him has to be clearly historicized. The concept as Steinberg (2018: 543) notes has to do with centuries of conquest, colonization, and slavery ... And its epistemological foundation is as Mills describe it “to evade and to elide and to gloss over”.

The Swedish government’s policy document demonstrates what Mills calls an epistemology of ignorance and a selective knowing as it systematically and consistently excludes experiences of racism and the body of solid academic research that question the taken for granted racialized beliefs and biases. The document’s systematic and consistent exclusion of race/ethnicity and detaching them from power, produces what Fricker (2007) calls “epistemic injustice”. It makes the impact of these power structures on people invisible and in this way normalises unequal social relations based on them. In the name of gender equality and women’s rights it reproduces, legitimises and normalises social inequality and racial otherness. However, this is not new, but as Arruzza et al. (2019) suggest “the history of feminism when it comes to the issue of race is not uplifting” (ibid.: 52). It is one good example of how western colonial heritage together with white feminist ignorance “influences the production of feminist theory and praxis” (Shollock2012: 701)

“Decolonizing sexuality, disrupting epistemologies, shattering the subject”

Rachel Spronk (University of Amsterdam)

In discussions about decolonization it is often implicated that the panacea to the flawed production of knowledge is the disentanglement between global Southern scholarship and global Western scholarship. Furthermore, the disruption of the hegemonic epistemology will clear the way for the decolonized production of knowledge. In this paper I investigate how this process develops in relation to sexuality, particularly regarding the notion of the sexual subject. I focus on the production of knowledge about sexuality in/on African societies and the role of the (global) discourse of human rights and with that, the fight for justice with regard to gender and sexual minorities. As Michel Foucault famously stated, “sexuality” is the product of the specific European cultural history: it is not only a specific power/knowledge regime that regulates sex but also its main product or outcome. In other words, it produces subjects for whom “sexuality” constitutes the essential core of their inner self. In contrast, in Africanist scholarship the distinction between sexual *practices* and *identities* is often studied, suggesting a foundation for a new epistemology for theorizing sexuality beyond the subject. At the same time, the framework of LGBTI+ rights is also a crucial engine for the much needed research on queer sexualities, which implicates both a continuing hegemony as well as the entanglement of global Southern and Western sensibilities. Decolonizing sexuality thus presents us with a series of questions and dilemmas rather than straightforward solutions that I would like to bring into view for further reflection inspired by authors such as Stella Nyanzi, Elicio Macamo, Gathseni Ndlovu, SN Nyeck.

“Enfleshed Political Violences. Rethinking Sexual Violence from a Postcolonial Critique”

Cecilia Cienfuegos (Universidad Carlos III)

This paper aims to address a critical reconceptualization of sexual violence, understood as a form of political violence which effects cannot be separated from the historical organizations of power and bodies in which it is inscribed. Even more: sexual violence will be presented as one of the “privileged forms of violence” in the imposition of gendered and racialized orders of power that define the contemporary world.

Taking as starting point poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to the study of rape (Marcus 1992, Mason 2003, Segato 2003, Gunne and Thomson 2010) this paper will argue that sexual violence is not the imposition of “the” masculine power over “the” feminized body, but the active construction of gendered and racialized distinctions that are not susceptible to universalization under the paradigm of sexual difference. Hence, any reflection on sexual violence requires a postcolonial and intersectional approach capable of addressing the many variables that come into play in the grammatical construction of the language of violence. To do so, the present paper will start from the exploration of the differences between the notions of body and flesh as articulated by Hortense Spillers (1987) and reconceptualized by Alexander Weheliye (2014), to apply the conceptual apparatus that comes out from this distinction to a critical study of sexual violence—and, as a consequence, to a critical approach to how political violence is defined, and to how and why sexual violence is systematically expelled from this category.

Some of the central questions that will articulate this paper are: How does sexual violence participate in the “making” of the colonial, gendered, and racialized orders of bodies and flesh? That is: on the one hand, which violent organizations come to organize this distinction? And, on the other hand, how does sexual violence in particular participate in this differential construction? And, finally, what does it mean to think sexual violence as political violence and how these considerations on the differential orders of bodies and flesh transform the very definition of the political?

Different frameworks “mark” different bodies and make them subjective to particular forms of violence that would be unthinkable in bodies that are framed by other variables in terms of race, gender, class or sexuality. Hence, a first introductory thesis to this paper is that to define rape as a sort of

“universal female experience” is just another act of misrecognition of the particular processes of enfleshment that have historically characterized the construction of the female racialized body. However, the ultimate proposal of this paper is to interrogate the encounter between gender and postcolonial critiques in the study of sexual violence –with the goal of defining some of the political limits in the thinking of this form of violence, as well as the political implications of these limitations.

“Decolonising Agency”

Henrike Kohpeiß (Free University Berlin)

Theories on the political imply assumptions about subjects and their ways to act. What can be framed as the “western” perspective on the subject is informed by its formation in the European Enlightenment and attributed with autonomy, self-determination and independence. Feminist as well as decolonial theories have questioned this conception by emphasizing the co-dependency of human beings and the prevalence of power structures for the development of subjectivity. Entering the political sphere, the understanding of an individual subject is crucial in order to determine potentials for individual intervention and agency. If subjects are constrained by the power structures that shape them, how can they act, engage and change the conditions of their lives? Clearly, these questions are less linked to individual capacities than to conditions and constraints encountered by the individual. Decolonising agency begins with the observation that agency –for non-bourgeois subjects -does not constitute a space of voluntary action following free will, but rather of strategic navigation within impossibilities.

Saidiya Hartman points to that by asking for agency in the context of enslavement: *How is it possible to think “agency” when the slave’s very condition of being or social existence is defined as a state of determinate negation? In other words, what are the constituents of agency when one’s social condition is defined by negation and personhood refigured in the fetishized and fungible terms of object of property? (Hartman 1997: 52)* I would like to offer a sketch of how agency can be reconceptualised by examining decolonial concepts of action that take into account constraint but simultaneously focus on potentials of acting differently within it. That does not only imply occurrences of resistance against the oppressing structures and figures but also findings paces and practices within them, that allow temporary relief and escape of the burden. Examples like the social practices of the Black Panther Party or what has been theorized by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney as *The Undercommons* resonate with Saidiya Hartman’s interest in the possibilities of *slave agency* (Hartman 1997:54): *Practice is, to use Michel de Certeau’s phrase, “a way of operating” defined by “the non-autonomy of its field of action,” internal manipulation of the established order, and ephemeral victories. (Hartman 1997:50)*

The conceptual task here is to shift what qualifies as an action. This regards visibility as well as underlying assumptions of autonomy and clearly identifiable, goal-oriented intentionality that often accompany the “western” image of what an action is. In my paper I want to present how Saidiya Hartman reconfigures action in the historical context of slavery in order to open the concept of agency for very different agents to be implied in it.

13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 15.20 Keynote: **“The Universal Subject of Precarity: A Decolonial Reading”** by [Ritu Vij](#)

15.20 – 16.20 Session 3: **Religion and Politics – A Colonial Dualism?**

“Coloniality of “Politics”: The US-Japan Relations since 1853”

Mitsutoshi Horii (Shumei University & Chaucer College)

This paper critically examines the idea of ‘politics’, within the historical context of the US-Japan relations. In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy sailed to Japan, and he managed to “open” Japan to the US. In this process, Perry projected the notion of “political power” upon the Shogun, but

not upon the Emperor. This was also the first time for the Japanese to encounter the modern Western idea of 'politics'. Perry's arrival triggered the fear in Japan of being colonised. It was this sense of crisis that motivated Japan's elites to rapidly westernize the nation, especially since 1868, by establishing a nation-state and by intensely learning Western knowledge and concepts such as 'politics' and 'religion'. Modelling the modern Western statecraft, by the late nineteenth century, Japan constructed 'politics' in the sense of a civil government as distinguished from 'religion'. In contrast, the US and other Western powers categorised the Japanese state as an 'absolute monarchy' and its 'politics' as something more akin to 'religion'. After Japan's defeat in the Second World War in 1945, the US post-surrender policies for Japan insisted that ostensibly "feudal and authoritarian tendencies" of pre-war Japanese 'politics' must be replaced by the "desire for individual liberties and democratic process". This epistemology enshrines modern Western democracies as the highest human achievement. As part of this project, the US-led Allied authority redefined pre-war Japanese state orthodoxy and institutions as 'religion', in order to eliminate them from the post-war Japanese 'politics'. Importantly, the critique of 'politics' in the US-Japan relations, as demonstrated in this paper, does not justify the state violence committed by Japan. Rather, its aim is to interrogate the universalisation of modern Western 'politics', in which coloniality – the darker side of modernity – is justified by the triumphant narratives on the ostensibly inferior non-Western forms of 'politics'.

"The Religiosity of Secularism and the Political form of Faith"

Anthony Zirpoli (University of Aberdeen)

Most Western Nation-States and cultures consider secularism, particularly in governmental and legal matters, to be a fundamental aspect of modern, 'civilized' society. The defense of secularism comes from across the political spectrum, on both the 'right' and the 'left,' and is often considered to be one of the foundational cornerstones of any 'modern' Nation-State, Globalism, Multi-Culturalism, and Neo-Liberal society. Nation-States that do not adhere to the principal of secularism in their governing and law making are often demonized and criticized for codifying what are considered non-political religious norms into law, as are those in 'Western' states whom push for legal codification of religious norms.

Yet, secularism as a concept fundamentally misinterprets the role and function of religion and faith in society, particularly for former colonial states and those peoples still living under the rule of Settler Colonial states. It presupposes, first and foremost, that religion is inherently apolitical, that it is removed from the political structure and function of the body politic into the realm of the personal. This presupposition, though, is unjustified, both historically in the function of religion and faith in structuring society and contemporarily in terms of the function of so-called 'secular' Nation-States. The correction of this misunderstanding is of particular importance for those people working to resist the rule of Settler Colonial nations, such as First Nation Peoples and Native Americans in the United States and Canada.

This presentation, then, will have two main aims: to correct the misinterpretation of the relationship between religion and political structures, through which the true religious nature of secularism will be examined; and to examine how religion and faith actually operate in terms of social formation through an examination of the function of religion and faith in the push against Settler Colonialism. Therefore, this talk will have two portions: the first half of the talk will be an examination of the relationship between religion and political structures, and how secularism is, in itself, an aspect of the function of religion and faith in society, drawing on the works of Ernst Cassirer, Spinoza, Jan Assmann, and the contemporary discussion of the function of myth in society; the second half of the talk will examine the role of religion and faith in the Indigenous movements against Settler Colonialism in Canada and the United States, operating as both a case study and an alternative examination of the relationship between religion and faith to political structures.

16.20 – 16.40 Coffee Break

- 16.40 – 18.00 Keynote: "**Funk Manifesto for a Decolonised Image (With a Plea for a Decolonial International)**" by [Oscar Guardiola-Rivera](#)
- 18.30 Conference Dinner

FRIDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER

- 09.30 – 10.30 Session 4: **Subverting Coloniality - Decolonising the Language of Resistance**

"Decolonizing Anarchism: Experiences from the South of the Mediterranean"
Laura Galian Hernandez (Universidad de Granada)

The practice of anarchism as prefigurative politics has influenced a whole generation of young activists and has expressed the most profound libertarian desire of the Southern Mediterranean societies. If the Islamist agenda or a supposed "authoritarianism", endemic to the Arab societies, marked the sociopolitical agenda until 2011, the emergence of the Black Bloc and other anarchist groups and antiauthoritarian repertoires of collective actions from Morocco to Palestine going through Algeria, Tunis, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan, have changed the focus of our attention and have attracted a great deal of interest in the academic, journalist and activist spheres. Despite all of that, and despite the archival evidence of the existence of anarchist movements, groups and thought in the Arab World since the end of the 19th century, as well as a growing literature about this anti-authoritarian and transnational history, the voices of these forgotten activists are still missing from the history of ideas and the history of anarchism.

The unfinished decolonization of anarchism has led the anarchist canon—mostly composed of European white male representatives—to ignore the anti-authoritarian and anarchist narratives of non-Western contexts, which are not always and not only enunciated as a self-declared ideology. Hence, the libertarian, anti-authoritarian and decentralized emancipation projects that arise in the Arab societies of the South of the Mediterranean have not been integrated into the histories of anarchism, despite sharing the variables that articulates this political philosophy in the European core. The anti-authoritarian experiences presented in paper that go from 1860 to 2016, are multiple, diverse in form and content and most of them "glocal". All of them emphasize the form as political praxis, compete and condition the tendencies of the party left to the extent that, in many cases, have been and are the alternative to Arab Marxism; and are built in rhizomatic networks. These projects become political proposals and contribute to rethink, again, the main thesis of this proposal: Anarchism still needs to be decolonized from its white-hetero-normative episteme.

The goal of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, to critically review the anti-authoritarian geographies in the South of the Mediterranean, from Morocco to Palestine and, on the other, to rethink the postcolonial condition of these emancipatory projects, such as anarchism, which is still enunciated in many cases from a white-privilege hetero-normative epistemic position and reproduces the colonial power relations.

"Fascism, Communalism and Resistance: Speaking Muslim in India"
Sheheen Kattiparambil (University of Leeds)

This paper interrogates the erasure of Muslim agency in acts of resistance by looking at the mobilization of two political concepts namely fascism and communalism in India. Drawing parallels with resistance mounted against the rise of right-wing ethnic groups in Europe, Indian academics and activists from the left and secular movements have borrowed these concepts from the Eurocentric

lexicon to counter the rise of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The first part of the paper explores the fallibility of the universal applicability of such concepts and by looking at India as a case study examines how such universality negates Muslim political subjectivity. Following on from classical Marxist tradition, fascism described basically as 'bad capitalism' animates the language of resistance and claiming neutrality Marxist theorizations of fascism attempts to factor in a Muslim fascist to maintain balance with their notion of Hindu fascism. Hand in hand with fascism, communalism as a concept is positioned to mark any forms of assertion of religious identity. By disciplining subjectivities, the positivist position ascribed to the secular narrative grants itself the moral high ground by equating violence with the general category religion, oblivious to the existing stark asymmetry between these religious groups (Hindu and Muslim).

The second part of the paper analyses the institutionalization of resistance signaling the alterity of the Muslim identity and subsequent loss of language for Muslims rendering them incapable to speak politics or to frame resistance in their own language. This paper argues that for resistance to be made meaningful, it needs to recognize articulations of Muslim agency and by examining the works of Abul Ala Maududi will look at Muslim attempts at formulating their own language. Conceiving Islam as a language and transforming words into concepts enabled Maududi to theorize and dream of a possible decolonial future. By questioning the Eurocentric nature of concepts like fascism and the inherent positivism of communalism, this paper falls within the ambit of Critical Muslim Studies.

10.30 – 11.30 Session 5: **Indigenous Conceptualisations – Articulations, Deployments and Negotiations**

“Tino Rangatiratanga: A Decolonial Māori Politics of Sovereignty” *Valentin Clavé-Mercier (University of Aberdeen)*

For centuries, indigenous sovereignty has been a steady claim in settler colonial countries and is still a central idea in contemporary indigenous discourses and practices. Although this now contentious assertion has been passed down from generation to generation since before colonisation, it has especially come to the fore with the 60's and 70's global indigenous protest movements. This point in time marks the beginning of a renewed engagement from indigenous peoples in what Raia Prokhovnik has called the “politics of sovereignty”. Emphasising its contested nature, both in theoretical definitions and in practical applications, Prokhovnik argues that the sovereignty concept is highly politicised. Numerous commentators – from academia, politics, activism, and elsewhere – deploy multiple and evolving competing conceptions, which are intimately linked to political stances, aspirations and implications. By engaging in what Māori academic Peter Cleave also calls the “sovereignty game”, indigenous peoples have turned discourses and practices of sovereignty in a key terrain of contestation.

In this paper, the indigenous peoples' participation in this politics of sovereignty will be approached through the case study of contemporary Māori politics and activism. By building mainly on Karena Shaw's accounts of the workings of sovereignty and on Nelson Maldonado-Torres' analysis of coloniality and decoloniality, this piece will explore the continuous coloniality of settler sovereignty and the possibility of articulating a decolonial politics of sovereignty. In order to illustrate both these points, examples will be drawn from the Aotearoa/New Zealand case and the experiences and struggles of the Māori people. The paper will start by tracing the role of discourses and practices of sovereignty in establishing and reproducing coloniality through historical and contemporary events that have marked the indigenous-settler relationships in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This will also allow us to discern how the predominant Western conceptualisation of sovereignty is intrinsically connected to the modern/colonial paradigm to the detriment of indigenous peoples. In a second part, tino rangatiratanga or “Māori sovereignty” will be addressed as an alternative set of discourses and practices of sovereignty. By approaching it as both a counter-thinking about what sovereignty means and as a series of contemporary practices of protest and transformation, tino rangatiratanga will be presented as a decolonial politics of sovereignty. Overall, this paper aims to engage with indigenous deployments and rearticulations of Western classical political concepts, and argues that the alternative

conceptualisations and practices they provide are opening paths towards genuinely decolonial landscapes.

“The Political Discourse and Diverse Dimensions of Native American Citizenship”

Paul Rosier (Villanova University)

My current book project—entitled “Citizens of the World: American Indians’ Experience with Citizenship, 1776-present” (under contract with Cambridge University Press)—examines the multiple dimensions of American Indian citizenship from the colonial era to the contemporary via a range of disciplinary angles. The project’s title comes from a statement by Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca anthropologist who helped found the Society of American Indians (SAI), a Progressive-era pan-tribal organization that championed American Indians’ integration into American society as equal citizens. SAI leaders’ ambivalence about joining mainstream society reflected their belief that American Indians had to make progress as a race via national citizenship in order to survive in an industrializing and urbanizing America. But they also believed that becoming citizens represented an opportunity to serve that society by shaping it with Indian values.

Analysis of Native people’s resistance to and reach for American citizenship offers insights into the troubled trajectory of nation-building in an imperial age, how racism became embedded in legal structures, cultural discourse, civic practices and government policies, and the different ways in which people of color mobilized for and valorized citizenship. My paper will add to the Decolonising Political Concepts Conference a consideration of how Native people have negotiated the pressures and possibilities of American, state, tribal, and Indigenous citizenship on their terms, seeking to complicate a citizenship model employing exclusionary and discriminatory practices while claiming fealty to Western conceptions of equality and inclusion. They have done so in part by using a derivative discourse linked to international legal agreements called treaties and have worked toward expanding the concept of citizenship by challenging what Sheryl Lightfoot calls “the dominant narrative of territorially bounded state citizenship,” campaigns which have strengthened Native sovereignty, forced U.S. authorities to reckon with the nation’s colonial past, and revealed the transnational identities of citizens of Native nations in the United States.

11.30 – 11.50 Coffee Break

11.50 – 13.20 Session 6: **Beyond Borders – Migration and Re-thinking**

Citizenship

“The Coloniality of Citizenship: Recovering Claudia Jones, Anticolonial Imaginations and Lost Thinking beyond the Nation State”

Ricarda Hammer (Brown University)

This paper proposes that the position of the colonial subject offers analytical insights into the hegemonic operation of citizenship regimes. Since the French Revolution, the social sciences have assumed a congruency between the nation state and citizenship and have positioned the nation state as the container for political life. Moreover, in our sociological and political analyses we assume the nation state as the unquestioned unit of analysis, reproducing what Wimmer and Glick-Schiller have called methodological nationalism (2002). Yet, most European nation states at the time were also empires, imposing its sphere of influence on colonized subjects worldwide, while systematically erasing them from our histories of nation formation. Citizenship regimes are assumed to have “always already existed,” but they were historically created in order to exclude colonial subjects.

In this paper, I tell the story of English citizenship formation in the mid-20th century, focusing on two distinct knowledge cultures. On the one hand, I analyze the rise of migration studies during and after decolonization, tracing how social scientists gave meaning to the supposed break between imperial Britain and its national present. They did so by positioning the racialized body outside its sphere of belonging, in effect inventing the figure of the “immigrant” even if colonized subjects had always already been part of Britain. In perpetrating imperial aphasia, migration scholarship contributed the expertise to displace the former colonial populations and the colonized find themselves subjected to dominant regimes of representation that normalize their position of inferiority.

On the other hand, I investigate newspaper productions by (former) colonial subjects, creating a subversive sphere that allowed colonial subjects to express their claims for belonging. Building on the work of Trinidadian anticolonial activist Claudia Jones and the Jamaican diasporic intellectual Stuart Hall, this paper recuperates a strand of anticolonial thought that imagined politics beyond the nation state container. In her writings and newspaper productions, Jones reiterated the anticolonial solidarities between West Indian colonial subjects in Britain and colonized subjects elsewhere, placing local news in context of world political anticolonial politics. Hall similarly pointed to the “fateful triangle” of race, ethnicity and nation by re-centering displacement as the paradigmatic modern experience. Recuperating political categories that deal with imperial legacies and start from the epistemic perspective of the colonial subject, this paper aims to forge a road not taken in the social sciences.

“The Idealised Subject of Freedom and the Refugee”

Shahin Nasiri (University of Amsterdam)

As with terms such as ‘human rights’, ‘democracy’, and ‘equality’, the notion of ‘freedom’ has an emblematic character with highly normative overtones. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) considers freedom both as a universal right and one of its founding principles. Notable liberal theorists (such as Hayek and Berlin) have even claimed that there is only one valid concept of freedom with social and political relevance. This prevailing approach seems to suggest that the idea and concept of freedom has, socially and politically, been available to all human societies in the same manner. Still, in social-historical contexts, in which the question of freedom emerged as an important language-game (to use Wittgenstein’s terminology), this question was raised, articulated and elaborated in heterogeneous ways, resonating the ontological dynamism of forms of life.

After the official abolition of slavery, recognition of equal rights of women, one might argue that freedom is -at least formally- a universal entitlement belonging to every human being. Yet, once we turn the arrow of our analytical apparatus to the perspective of the refugee, we realise immediately that this thesis is untenable. In this paper, the figure of refugee will be introduced as an anomaly to the citizen-oriented discourse of freedom, which is framed in the nation-state paradigm. Within this paradigm, the (national) citizen is regarded as the idealised subject of freedom, whereas the refugee is considered as an anomalous political phenomenon that jeopardises the unity of nation, state, and territory. In spite of apparent universalisation of the idea of freedom, the categorisation of this political signifier is determined by the principles of “nativity” (ethnicity) and “territoriality”. This claim will be substantiated through an analysis of the legal mechanisms of naturalisation and repatriation.

The exponential growth of refugee population across the globe has transformed this anomaly into an all-encompassing crisis on both practical and theoretical level. This paper examines in what way the condition of refugeehood unsettles and disrupts the mythical nexus of nation, state, and territory; a fundamental premise that underlies the modern logic of freedom. The figure of refugee allows us to rethink the notion of freedom from the perspective of those who are juridicopolitically excluded from the realm of freedom, yet capable of experiencing, exercising, defining and designating it in their own way.

“(In)hospitality in Modernist Thought: Rethinking Hospitality through Decolonial Political Theology”

Jasmine Gani (University of St Andrews)

The displacement of civilian populations due to conflict and persecution; intensified hostility towards migrants (in both the West and the global south); the rise of supremacist-nationalist parties and leaders; increased racial intolerance; and securitised borders, have all exposed the need to interrogate existing theories of hospitality. Recent international and domestic trends demonstrate that a neo-Kantian practices of hospitality that only confront and critique nationalism for its illiberalism, but not its racialised, modernist foundations, is liable to eventually produce the same results. What, then, is the contemporary utility of hospitality theory in the face of inhospitable state policies and populist nationalism? What fresh, under-explored, perspectives can be brought to bear on theories of hospitality, to restore its relevance in academic thought? Is it possible to develop a framework of hospitality that encompasses traditions of those suffering most from its absence?

In response to these questions I call for an excavation of non-modernist knowledges and practices of hospitality. In searching for these non-modernist traditions, I draw upon the literature on religion in IR that has grown in recent years (Mavelli & Petito, 2014; Kubalkova, 2013), which confronts the neglect of religious subject matter in formulating IR theory. The field of hospitality has been no different, in part thanks to cosmopolitans who have interpreted Kant's work as a major contributor to, and endorsement of, the secular turn in hospitality (Molloy, 2017), an approach which remains dominant today. Notably, much of the literature on religion omit the decolonial potential of a theological turn in IR. Using the work of critical IR theorists and anthropologists who have engaged with religion more broadly such as Talal Asad and Ramon Grosfoguel, I will consider the ways in which a decolonial political theology can reinvigorate the relevance and universality of theories of hospitality. Specifically, I aim to explore the potential contribution of Islamic traditions of hospitality to political theory, to reconnect the notion of hospitality to its (now sidelined) theological roots.

A few studies that address Islamic notions of hospitality do exist: Tahir Zaman's anthropological/geographical study of Iraqi and Syrian refugees builds upon understandings of Islamic traditions of refuge (2016); Dawn Chatty in Migration Studies (2018) integrates such studies into her work; while Tweed (2006) and Zaat (2007) limit their works to textual and legal approaches respectively. I suggest taking this work further by (1) initiating a genealogy of Islamic hospitality, combining textual evidence with historical practice - not just from the Middle East, but incorporating hospitable customs along routes of pilgrimage, education and trade between the Middle East, Central and South Asia. (2) This will enable Islamic conceptualisations of hospitality to be brought into dialogue with political theory and decolonial studies to explore the possibility of a nonmodernist framework of hospitality. In these ways this paper aims to point the discourse towards a more global understanding of hospitality, that bridges secular and spiritual spheres, rather than the Eurocentric and non-representative academic concepts used today.

13.20 – 14.20 Lunch

14.20 – 15.50 Workshop: “**Decolonising the Westernised University**”, led by [Julie Cupples](#)

15.50 – 16.10 Coffee Break

16.10 – 17.00 Closing Discussion