

To heal the colonial wound: Towards decolonial practice of storytelling

A workshop/laboratory at EUROSEAS 2022

Organizers:

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Brief description:

Recent years have seen increasing enthusiasm amongst young scholars from the global south contemplating the colonial imbrications of (Western) academic praxis. Their encounters with the works of influential Southeast Asian scholars bring to the fore questions about the politics of knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences, stoking earnest discussions particularly in informal settings. Foundational matters are discussed: the influence of positionality on narratives told by academics based in northern countries and studying people in Southeast Asia. Or narrative approaches that unintentionally utilise techniques of distancing, both spatial and temporal, while these have been discussed as ethical conundrums, such as the dynamic of the knowing-observer focused on academic career advancement and their interlocutors who remain as bystanders in the circuit of knowledge production. This observation has sometimes brought about a sense of déjà-vu in the gut feeling of young Southeast Asian scholars that the colonial wound is still ongoing, given the persisting inequality in knowledge production and inadequate representation from the region.

This workshop/laboratory is inspired by Walter Mignolo's reminder that "knowing what we want to know is about healing the colonial wound" and his proposition that the transformation of the self is imperative in doing decolonial work. Therefore, it will provide a forum to share the emotional and lively experiences of diasporic scholars from Southeast Asia on the ongoing colonial wound they face and to imagine the different ways narratives about Southeast Asia need to be told. A decolonial practice of storytelling would be attentive to the situatedness of genres and forms through which stories are told and the implications

they bring. With facilitation from decolonial scholars and healing practitioners, this workshop would lead young scholars to share their problems and encounters with the still-existing coloniality of academia and beyond, as well as in their collective life projects, in claiming more space for a decolonial becoming within and beyond academia.

Plans for discussion and collaboration:

This workshop/laboratory would serve as a catalyst for future collaboration between the participants, organizers, and facilitators. Each participant would be expected to share decolonial storytelling projects and circulate brief descriptions of the projects and how they are linked to the workshop's agendas beforehand. The works are not limited to academic texts, but also written reflections, book projects, artworks, and other forms of representation. The workshop has two main agendas. First, to ground the politics of scholarly knowledge contributions in the lived experiences of early career scholars finding their way through theory, teaching, and practice: focusing on senses, affects, and bodies. Second, to trace and co-create a discursive foundation for alternative genealogies of thought. This has been more available in the Latin American context but missing in Southeast Asian contributions and collegial, or comradely, discussions. This will set the basis for a potential follow-up online forum held regularly to continue where this laboratory ends, casting a wider net to identify and re-cognise new framings to accepted narratives.

The aim of this workshop/laboratory in the long run is to transform the discussion on Southeast Asia through attentiveness to the point-of-view of Southeast Asian scholars speaking, writing and reading for themselves.

An open call for participation would be circulated prior to the workshop, to make up a public workshop including the organisers and invited contributors. The call will invite participants to bring a written experience of unease, discomfort, or misrecognition, in their encounter with mainstream academic works on Southeast Asia to the workshop, to be shared prior to the session only for the workshop. With the goal of building a solidarity-based academia, the workshop/laboratory will include 3 components that point to our vision of a less competitive, individualistic, and extractivist practice of knowledge production. The workshop/laboratory will last for half a day or two days as a closed meeting to provide a safe space to share and have a deep talk on what could be a sensitive topic.

Proposed Workshop/laboratory Format:

Confirmed invited contributors (in-person):

The Forest Curriculum (Abhijan Toto and Pujita Guha), Bangkok/US

Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo, Humboldt University Berlin

3-4 hours

- Short introductions by organisers
- Quick introductions by each person
- Group activity 1: Discomfort. On affect and body senses.
- Discussion: Solidarities
- Group activity 2: Recognition. On recognising coloniality
- Discussion: Talk back?
- Group activity 3: Unlearning and Relearning. On the ease of replicating coloniality and towards a decolonial learning assemblage for narrative transformation
- Discussion: Trust and guilt, collective knowledge production, and shared attention.