

Situating the past in the present: contested cultural heritage, symbolic reparations, and spaces of healing in cities

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This session is interested in articulating the colonial past and the present in cities. Recent theoretical contributions that seek to connect the colonial past and present typically challenge linear representations of time (Houssay-Holzschuch 2021). The temporal turn in social science is a valuable input in this regard. The term coloniality has been introduced by decolonial scholars in Latin America, and the concept has been taken up for discussing other contexts, such as settler colonial societies of the Global North (Naylor et al. 2019) and European metropolitan contexts (Zwischenraum Kollektiv 2017) as well as in the context of Black Geographies (McKittrick 2011). Coloniality points out continuities in epistemic and economic power relations and explores how the roots and structures of contemporary racism connect to the development of capitalism, to colonial power relations and knowledge production. These connections between racism, capitalism and colonialism are important when thinking about how the past is situated in the present within urban contexts.

Decolonial approaches bring into view spatial entanglements and relationships that have been erased from public memory. Processes of de-colonisation entail the undoing of asymmetric power relations that are characteristic of the coloniality of power. Acknowledging the violence of colonialism is an urgent and troubling process, yet at the same time, it is not enough. Working towards decolonial futures asks what it means to create relations based on dignity, equality, reciprocity, and interconnectedness. Reckoning with past and present structures of violence, there is an emphasis on identifying “opportunities and openings for responsible, context-specific collective experiments that enact different kinds of relationships, and different possibilities for (co)existence, without guarantees” (Stein et al. 2020: 45).

Much of the harm done is beyond repair, and yet: movements for reparative justice stress the need to reckon with the past to work towards healing, restoration and dignified futures. What does healing mean in the context of urban space? What role do concepts like truth, justice, dignity, to name but a few, have in this process? If “freedom is a place” as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2017) asserts, in which urban spaces can this freedom and healing take place?

Cities function as archives (Bacchetta et al. 2017), where colonial history manifests itself materially e.g. through statues, gable stones, paintings and objects in houses, museums, and other institutions. Through these objects, cities produce a certain kind of narrative, based on e.g. nationalist and racialised representations of citizenship (Thompson and Zablotsky

2017). However, cities are simultaneously spaces of counter-archiving practices, with a focus on perseverance, survival and resistance (Haritaworn et al. 2017).

The material objects of colonial discourse have become targets of struggle in the Black Lives Matter movement globally, also in countries without (former) colonies, such as Switzerland. The visible contestation and in some cases destruction of monuments that glorified persons who profited from, helped to support and build systems of slavery and colonialism should be understood as a means to challenge hegemonic narratives. The calls to remove these monuments from public space, and to make space for the narratives of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, whose (hi)stories continue to be invisibilized and silenced, aim to create a more inclusive space where wider publics can belong.

We are interested in struggles about removing, engaging with or replacing problematic objects in public space. We are looking for interventions in spaces that prefigure decolonial futures. We can think for example of subaltern forms of placemaking that carve out spaces for community formation, translocal solidarities, for healing and for developing diasporic identities. We also look for inputs from artists and artistic researchers who individually or collectively engage with colonial archives, lived experience, and the creation of objects that visualize new narratives (Virgin Islands Studies Collective 2019).

An inquiry into decolonial futures requires a reflection on decolonizing methodologies (Dijkema 2021, Tuhiwai Smith 1999, Vorbrugg et al. 2021) and an active engagement with questions around the type of relationships researchers can and want to build with the people who participate in knowledge production. Principles like reciprocity, collective ownership, and collaborative elaboration of research questions take time and often conflict with academic funding schemes and practices around authorship. It would therefore also be a valuable input if papers could address how researchers navigate these tensions.

Questions this session is interested in:

- How is change and permanence discussed in former colonial metropolises and settler colonial cities?
- Where and how is material cultural heritage problematized and how is it contested?
- What are connections that can be made between challenging and engaging with objects in public space and concepts like pain, hurt, (in)justice, healing, reparations, restitution, and reconciliation?
- Where and how are decolonial futures preconfigured, imagined, created?
- What are possible and appropriate methods for decolonial explorations of cities, how can collaborative and creative work be made possible (e.g. of artists and researchers, artistic researchers, activists and other actors)?
- What are the possibilities and the limitations of focusing on urban public space?

If you are interested in participating in this **hybrid** session, please submit a 250 word abstract by **November 10, 2022**. Please also indicate whether you intend to participate in-person or virtually.

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