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E-Seminar 65
Decoloniality and Extreme Speech

by
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Sindre Bangstad (sindre.bangstad@kifo.no)   **16 Jun 2020**

Dear all,

I am grateful for this opportunity to comment on LMU Prof Sahana Udupa's highly original and richly suggestive paper "Decoloniality and Extreme Speech" for EASA's Media Anthropology Network.

It should come as little surprise to anyone that I happen to share the undergirding normative and methodological point raised in this paper. Namely that we need to see the online vitriol and disinformation embodied in extreme speech as a global conjuncture (Udupa 2020: 6) in which participation more than anything reflects affective investments (ibidem). And that decolonial perspectives offer us a form of generative critique (Udupa op.cit: 18) of classical Western post-Enlightenment liberal assumptions (whatever that means or is taken to mean, given that liberalism has hardly ever represented a unified body of thought) about the role of rational arguments vs. affects and emotions in the public sphere that may enable a close and deep contextualization (ibidem) so central to anthropological practice and thought.

I would perhaps go even further than Udupa does in this paper. In the context of the current wave of popular mobilizations in protest against police violence and structural racism and in support of Black Lives Matter in the USA (which to the surprise of quite a few, has seen solidarity mobilizations in a number of European countries on an almost unprecedented scale

when we talk of anti-racist mobilizations), I have revisited some of the most famous speeches by African-American civil rights activists from the 1950s and 1960s, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Now, we do of course know that the influential work of liberal and secularist philosophers such as Germany's Jürgen Habermas (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, first published in German in 1962) on the public sphere has long been (and appropriately so) critizised for leaving out women, the working class and minorities (see *inter alia* the work of Eley 2002, Fraser 1990 and Warner 2002 for this). Leaving aside the fundamental question as to whether it is reasonable to treat Habermas' original conceptualization of the public sphere as applicable to the contemporary era when Habermas himself was quite explicit about the fact that his was an ideal model in the Weberian sense, and only meant to apply to the particular case of the liberal bourgeois public sphere that developed in Germany, France and the UK in the 18th and 19th century, revisiting the seminal speeches of Dr King Jr. and Malcolm X for me raises the classical question as to whether it was ever the case that the public sphere was an era for "reason alone" rather than "affects and emotions." "Liberalism is also a fighting creed", the philosopher Charles Taylor once quipped (Taylor 1992). And if the groundbreaking work of anthropological scholars such as Talal Asad (Asad 2003) should have taught us anything about so-called liberal-secular formations (in which liberalism and secularism are also easily conflated, though they are not identical, see Bangstad 2009) in Western societies in the modern era, it must be that liberalism and secularism come with their own sets of normative assumptions and resulting affects and emotions directed at those it deems to be "alien intruders" in its midst. As a case in point, some of the most extreme forms of online and other public vitriol in many liberal and secular Western societies – including in my native Norway – have in recent decades been directed at hijab-wearing Muslim females. Though often couched in a language of femo-nationalism (Farris 2018), in which hijab-wearing Muslim females are cast as dire threats against gender equality, the vitriol often seen in such cases have precious little to do with rational modes of argumentation. In as much as Udupa's paper for me also has the potential of deepening and extending the critique of the liberal and secularist assumptions inherent in the work of Habermas and other canonized liberal Western philosophers, I would personally suggest that this critique be made even more explicit than is the case in Udupa's paper as it now stands.

We are at the present global conjuncture far beyond what Udupa correctly identifies as the historical schema of the liberal center of supposedly calm rationality (of the West) versus the supposed irrational and impassionate publics of the Global South (Udupa 2020: 6). And Udupa's skillfull interweaving of examples drawn from the case of right-wing male "Internet Hindus" in India through far-right activists in Germany and liberal elite exclusionary nativists in Denmark permits us to see this clearly. I also welcomes her subtle and nuanced critique of certain strands of Western left intellectualism – here represented by Wendy Brown's work – that would have us reduce the present global conjuncture and the targeting of racialized minorities globally to an effect of neoliberalism.

On p. 7 of her paper, Udupa refers to an ethnographic encounter with a German far-right activist who advocates ethnopluralism. Given that this is a concept with a very particular intellectual genealogy in far-right identitarianism (in which it has since it was first introduced

by French identitarian thinkers aligned with the so-called Nouvelle Droite in the 1970s served the function of a distancing from more overt and obvious forms of racism through rhetorical means), I think it would merit reference to the important work on identitarianism of scholars such as José Pedro Zúquete (Zúquete 2018) and/or Tamir Bar-On (Bar-On 2013).

One welcome argument in Udupa's article that I think she could have dedicated more attention to teasing out, is what Nicholas de Genova has referred to as "postcolonial metastasis" – which Udupa renders as "a sense of dethronement" on the part of certain sections of the population of Western countries currently attracted to various forms of nativism and xenophobia in particular. In his seminal 2017 *Critique of Black Reason*, Prof Achille Mbembe writes that "Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world. This is the significant event, the fundamental experience, of our era." (Mbembe 2017: 1). There is for me something very suggestive about the kinds of affects and emotions – or perhaps more accurately – resentments – generative of all kinds of popular support for bordering, minoritization and exclusion processes in the dark times we live in throughout the Western world right now in these formulations.

But all in all, Udupa's paper is a welcome and original addition to her already seminal and important work on extreme speech, and a paper I am looking forward to seeing in print in its final version.

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Sindre Bangstad, Research Professor, KIFO (Institute for Church, Religion and Worldview Research), Oslo, Norway, June 16 2020.

Veronica Barassi (veronica.barassi@unisg.ch)	**16 Jun 2020**

Dear All,
I am very pleased to let you know that our 65th E-seminar is now Open!!

The paper that we will be discussing is titled: 'Decoloniality and Extreme Speech', and has been written by Professor Sahana Udupa (LMU Munich).

Abstract:
This paper offers preliminary arguments for a decolonial critique of vitriol and disinformation circulating on online media – a phenomenon that has raised moral panic among liberal minded critics. The decolonial critique developed here probes the roots of this moral panic and considers the limits of analysis arising out of such a panic. Rather than viewing this moral panic as an expected reaction to a crisis produced by digital communication, I emphasize the need for historical sensibility and argue that information disorder and hate speech are part of the global process of racialized colonialism that is now increasingly funneling affective infrastructures of the digital in its further perpetuation.

Keywords: Extreme speech, hate speech, online media, decoloniality, right-wing populism

Dr Sindre Bangstad (KIFO, Oslo, Norway) and Dr Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan (Goldsmiths, University of London) have kindly agreed to act as discussant.

Here below you will find the response by Dr Sindre Bangstad, which was sent earlier to the list.

Dr Dattatreyan will follow with his comments.

I will give Prof. Udupa a couple of days to respond to the comments, and once she has I will open the discussion to all.

If you haven't had the time yet to read the paper you can find it here
https://easaonline.org/networks/media/eseminars

I am looking forward to a lively and engaging discussion.

all best
Veronica

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Gabriel Dattatreyan (G.Dattatreyan@gold.ac.uk)   16 Jun 2020

Dear all,

Thank you for inviting me to be a discussant for Professor Udupa's paper titled "Decoloniality and Extreme Speech". The paper productively and provocatively opens up several questions regarding semiotic circulations (including but not limited to "extreme" speech) in the age of social media, questions that, in my opinion, push us to think how we as (media) anthropologists might engage with history as method in our analysis of the present. My comments below focus on Prof. Udupa's use of decoloniality as a concept that enables particular spatial and temporal attentions, analyses, and critiques. For Prof. Udupa a decolonial approach becomes an entry point to thinking about our shared colonial (and imperial) inheritance and the ways in which they shape contemporary relations within nation-state contexts and across them. A decolonial approach, she argues, draws our attention to how the long durée is erased in public discourse and scholarship so that there is a tendency to view extreme speech as exceptional and emblematic of immediate crisis, rather than an unfolding of historical processes tied to western colonial and imperial domination that continue to animate, inform, and shape racial relations, normative understandings of bordered geographies, and taken for granted market relations.

As I write these comments colonial and imperial histories are being reckoned with across the globe. This reckoning was sparked by the murder of George Floyd in the US at the hands of the state. #Blacklivesmatter. There has already been a tendency in popular discourse and in some academic circuits to analyze the unfolding events we are witnessing as signs of rupture whose origins are in the near past and legible solely within a nation-state framework – even though circulating digital content tells us otherwise. How does Udupa's decolonial approach, which foregrounds extreme speech and its affects as they are linked to a colonial temporality (and spatiality), help us to think through what's at stake when we, for instance, collectively witness a slaver's statue find itself deep in Bristol's harbor as part and parcel of a response to anti-black violence in the US? What becomes visible if we trace the effects of this baptism in online spaces that crosscut borders? What are the limits to the approach Udupa offers and how might we deepen and extend her important provocations?

(De)coloniality, as Udupa notes, has been fruitfully engaged with by various scholars to think

through the unfinished business of sovereignty since the anticolonial struggles of the 20th century. She draws from the Latin American (Mignolo and Quijano, this paper) and European post-Soviet readings of the concept (Stefanescu, this paper) to animate her use of the decoloniality as a "paradigm of collective subordination that covers the broadest spectrum of subtypes and historical variations" (Stefanescu in Udupa, this paper: 3). While Udupa nods to a broader literature that has engaged with decoloniality before delimiting her engagement with the concept to the "types of relations that western colonialism has canonized and institutionalized on a global scale," I believe it's important to linger with these other mobilizations of decoloniality as they shed light on the possibility and limits of Udupa's approach (3).

First, we might consider the ways in which decoloniality has also been thought through and activated as a political call to action within settler colonial contexts – the United States, Canada, and Australia. Amongst First Nation, indigenous, aboriginal, and native American groups, decolonisation is a material and legal struggle that seeks to bring about "a repatriation of land and life" (Yang and Tuck, 2012: 1). Yang and Tuck, in no uncertain terms, critique the use of decolonization as a metaphor (a paradigm?). They argue that a loose use of the term in scholarly circles – particularly to engage with projects of recognition within settler colonial nation-states or with processes underway to improve education, displace contemporary struggles for self-determination and autonomy amongst indigenous groups and erase the violent, genocidal history of settlement. History (and geography), if we take Yang and Tuck (2012) seriously, matter when we discuss decoloniality, decolonisation, and decolonising. But they matter only insofar as we invest in a deeper understanding of how the past shapes contemporary legal, juridical, and discursive structures that mediate engagements between settler and indigenous worlds. These histories, as they manifest the present, are the site of struggle for indigenous peoples and, as we have learned from Prof. Faye Ginsburg and others, media plays a key site in these struggles, both as a space to reclaim representation and as means to create cross (settler) border solidarities. Scholarly attentions to persistent forms of coloniality as they link contexts, as indigenous scholars point out, should push us towards decolonizing who gets to anthropologize and what the role of anthropology might be in relating and linking these struggles and their politics of refusal in our late capitalist/late liberal moment (see Simpson, 2014).

We must also consider anthropologists of the African diaspora, in their engagements with decoloniality as method, concept, and ethic, and the impacts they have had on academic anthropology. Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson (2016) specifically argue for an attention to the work that "the cohort of Black, allied antiracist, feminist, and political economy-oriented scholars that gave rise to the land-mark volume *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*" (See Harrison 1997c). Allen and Jobson (2016) remind us that this generation of scholars offered "new optics to combat an ossifying ethnographic gaze through renewed attention to centuries-long processes of global interconnection glossed over by facile invocations of globalization in the late twentieth century" (131). They draw our attention to when and why the decolonization generation came into being, pointing out that their interventions came in a historical moment where the excitement and hopefulness of the anti-colonial (and civil rights struggle) gave way to a

"postcolonial melancholia" that emerged in wake of the fall of the Soviet bloc. Their politics and scholarship sought to remake the discipline in this moment, which was, as we know, struggling with its own historical crisis of representation, by making the discipline relevant and useful to their (our) interlocutors, particularly those explicitly engaging in political projects towards defining their own conditions of possibility.

Why do I rehearse this disciplinary history (and present)? In part, I do it to offer a thicker and more contextualized reading of decolonial thought in relationship to (media) anthropology – towards understanding what the stakes of a historical analysis of media forms and their circulations might be. As decoloniality as a concept gains faddish traction in academic circles, it's important to keep these critiques, correctives, and articulated potentialities in mind. But the other goal I have in evoking these literatures and interventions, particularly that of the decolonizing generation, is that it helps us locate Udupa's arguments in historical time such that it is linked to previous moments and to contemporary projects where the impulse has been to decolonise (our being, our discipline, our world). What is it about this moment that urges us to think carefully and critique coloniality in the present? How does Udupa help us to develop, through her attention to digital forms of circulation, a way forward? What, again, are the limits of this approach?

Udupa's analysis of extreme speech stretches across historical contexts, including India and the US, as she fleshes out two key concepts, the participatory condition and data colonialism. I will engage briefly with Udupa's theorization of the participatory condition to attempt to: 1. Tease out the relationship between this concept and decoloniality in the present moment 2. Discuss its methodological possibilities and limits. 3. Touch upon how the decolonizing literatures that I have evoked above urge us towards extending the arguments that Udupa has put forward.

The participatory condition, writes Udupa, is "an affective investment in the sign holding the collective" (6). Here Udupa pushes against Mazzarella's reading of Durkheim, which fails to locate, in any sort of precise way, the loci of collective effervescence and their historical antecedents. By drawing our attention to the sign or signs, more broadly, she opens up a space for analysis and intervention that takes the semiotic material embedded in media circulations as a starting point for tracing and tracking histories of the present (this methodological approach has been developed quite rigorously by those steeped in the traditions of linguistic anthropology, see Bonilla and Rosa, 2016, for instance, for a theorization of hashtag ethnography in relationship to settler and anti-black violence). Udupa, in her reading of the participatory condition, invites us to consider what she calls "the historical conditions and accompanying economic transformations that give affect its specific tenor and target" (6). We can see, in this evocation, a return to her overarching arguments in this essay regarding history and the way in which it presses on the present and orchestrates feeling and in and through specific semiotic formations. She then turns to Wendy Brown, to critique her analysis of right wing and white supremacist movements in the U.S. Udupa suggests, by way of Hervik's work on elite Danes, that we should reconsider the class based critique that Wendy Brown offers and, rather play close attention how these movements rely on enduring ideas of racial hierarchy and white supremacy that were articulated, refined and

made a strategy for governance during the colonial and imperial periods. She argues that these discourses animate actions "past and present – that are orchestrated, directed, and economic as much as they are helpless reactions of backbiting revenge" (9).

Udupa's critiques are important, even crucial, but I think the speed in which she moves from her theorization of the participatory condition to her critique of Brown's work runs the danger of losing some important nuance and, therefore, the potential for what a decolonial approach might offer media anthropology. Udupa's point regarding specificity of signs as they organize and channel affect, for instance, is quite important and requires a more careful engagement. How might a sign that travels in online circuits – a statue of a slaver toppling, for instance – open up a way to engage with coloniality as it is understood and affectively felt across geographies? Just today I read about the push to remove M.K Gandhi's statue in various locations in the UK and across East Africa in the wake of the toppling of confederate, slavers, and imperialists statues across the globe. Statues, it seems, are the sign of the moment as they retrieve the textured, uneven pasts of subordination and racial hierarchy and link them with present conditions of inequality. What sorts of productive historical analysis of coloniality is made possible by following the sign (of the statue, in this case) and its affects across geographies? What sorts of complicated histories emerge when we put these signs and the speech acts that surround them in conversation with each other? My recent work theorising the (globally) familiar, where I track how signs fashioned by contemporary African diaspora in the wake of Atlantic world tragedies travel in online media worlds to urban India and get picked up by actors on the margins to describe their existing social realities created by global capitalism while creating new ones, point to the potential of thinking quite specifically about semiotic movement in the 21st century and the ways in which particular (settler) colonial pasts shape futures elsewhere (Dattatreyan, 2020). But can this move to engage in a rigorous (historical) analysis of signs and their circulations in and through media be considered decolonial?

Another way to phrase the question: is it the subject of analysis or the method and conceptual rigor one brings to table what animates a decolonial approach to anthropology in the present moment? Can we separate the two? Here Udupa's critique of Wendy Brown's work is instructive. Udupa focuses on the limits of Brown's analysis of revanchist white supremacist resurgence in the U.S. in classed terms, calling for a more historically grounded approach that recognizes how enduring racism animates the politics of the present. In this case, the subject of Brown's analysis – the rise of a visible white supremacist movement evidenced in particular forms and forums of speech – requires an attention to colonial history. Yet, Brown sticks to a near past reading of the situation and, it seems, clings to a methodological nationalism which doesn't allow her analysis to link across contexts. As such, it seems Wendy Brown's reading necessitates a decolonial critique. How might Udupa's earlier call to engage with signs as they organize participation and affect help us to tease out the historical specificities (and cross border commonalities) of Wendy Brown's argument, which amounts to a common (ahistorical) refrain I hear quite often in the UK from some of my British colleagues – it's about class, not race!?

Here I think it is important to recognize that centring colonialism as "types of relations"

might offer an opportunity to engage across socio-historical contexts in comparative analysis that doesn't take away from the need interrogate the specific socio-historical context that produces this sort of aporia. Wendy Brown's arguments, as rehearsed by Udupa, follow and attempt to disrupt a line of thought that is deeply American in its exceptionality. Her attempt to place class as the explanatory ground is an attempt to unsettle hyper-individualist bootstrap arguments that obscure class struggle in the US, and to link class unrest and white supremacy to the age of Trump. But, in so doing, she seemingly misses out on the historical and transborder entanglements between class and race. In the US this has played out such that, as W.E.B Dubois (1935) pointed out, creates the category of the "white" working class, where whiteness becomes a sign of value, a lever to pull when there is a threat to the racial capitalist order (See also, Tu & Singh, 2018). That Udupa is able to point out this gap in Brown's argumentation is insightful. But I think if Udupa takes up the arguments she presents under the rubric of the participatory condition more carefully, more could be done to animate how a decolonial approach to extreme speech (and indeed semiotic circulations of all kinds) allow us to develop a means to track 1. Enduring colonialities across contexts 2. Enable a deeper dive into specific histories of subordination.

Thank you again for offering me an opportunity to engage with Udupa's important work. I look forward to following the discussion.

Best,

E. Gabriel Dattatreyan
Goldsmiths, University of London

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Veronica Barassi (veronica.barassi@unisg.ch)   **18 Jun 2020**

Dear All,

Thank you to Prof. Udupa for her fascinating and timely paper, and to the discussants for their engaged and thought-provoking responses.

I am now opening the discussion to all. We are looking forward to receiving your comments, questions and ideas.

all best
Veronica

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Sahana Udupa (sahana.udupa@lmu.de)   **18 Jun 2020**

Dear all

I thank Prof Veronica Barassi, Dr Philipp Budka and Dr Nina Grønlykke Mollerup for facilitating this e-seminar, and Prof Sindre Bangstad and Prof Gabriel Dattatreayan for their extremely helpful comments and suggestions.

Prof Bangstad's work has been an inspiration to scholars researching the right-wing, not only in advancing ethnographic research into difficult topics at a time when right wing actors have declared their hostility towards academic knowledge in no uncertain terms, but also in pushing for public scholarship against exclusionary politics. I have found decoloniality as a generative critique precisely because of its potentiality to combine critical scholarship with

public outreach, foremost by upturning prevailing schemas that explain online aggression as an aberration to the calm rationality of the liberal center or an inevitable outcome of the neoliberal consensus. For these reasons, I consider Bangstad's invitation to further expand the critique of liberal-secularist assumptions of Western philosophers important. Thanks also for alerting me on the "thick" theories of ethnopluralism. I was intrigued by the finesse with which our far-right interlocutor presented this theory during our ethnographic encounter. I was even more intrigued when he flourished it with references to Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. These evocations definitely need to be understood as a part of a longer intellectual trajectory.

Bangstad is right that there is something specific about affective energies that travel and touch subjects in the way we see today. In part, it has to do with a sense of dethronement articulated within various relations of hierarchy. But in large part, it is a continuation of the colonial logics of racialized relations that are imbued with meaning within nation-state formations (as inside/outside; minority/majority) – relations that global data markets are happy to turn away from, unless they disrupt their daily pipeline of user data (in the form of user disengagement or regulatory action).

Prof Dattatreyan has elegantly placed this discussion in the context of two major strands of decolonial thought within anthropology. His attention to semiotic formations is highly insightful, but I would hasten to clarify that a decolonial critique developed here is not concerned with the border crossing potentiality of semiotic formations of any kind, but of a particular kind – vitriolic speech acts that push the boundaries of legitimate speech along the twin axes of truth/falsity and civility/incivility. Collapsing extreme speech to an encompassing category of semiotic forms runs the risk of glossing over the specificities of the digital participatory condition that allow people to say what they would hesitate to say in other contexts and peddle exclusion within evolving forms of online exchange. The focus here is not a general semiotics theory of affect, but the politics of affect as manifest in the current conjuncture of extreme speech. The participatory condition of the digital is important because it provides specific enabling infrastructures to the conjuncture. This is evident, for instance, in the affective meta-practice of fun. But the participatory condition of the digital unfolds always, I suggest, in relation to sets of relations that colonialism has canonized, normalized and institutionalized. The very rendition of participation as a normative and environmental condition has emerged within market, nation-state and racialized relations of coloniality, with far-reaching consequences for what kinds of speech acts gain momentum on online media. Therefore, on the one hand, my interest is in highlighting some of the limits of prevailing explanations of online vitriolic exchange by drawing attention to longer histories (that both Bangstad and Dattatreyan reiterate) and on the other hand, to locate the specificities of online practice and circulation under current conditions of digital capitalism. That semiotic formations emerge within and stir up digitally enabled affective flows is an entry point rather than the end point of this argument. Moreover, following Sara Ahmed's (2004) formulation, they might be regarded as affective economy rather than as specific signs holding affective value. Semiotic formations then do not render themselves as a canvas of comparable or incompatible signs; rather, they are evolving constellations of power, each of which needs a distinct line of inquiry attentive to the content, participatory energies and

particular histories it evokes and disrupts. A decolonial path in each case is to be charted, explored and expanded. I would hence regard decoloniality as a generative critique because it opens up longer histories in relation to affective flows of particular kinds.

I do acknowledge that there is the risk of losing nuance in terms of ethnographic specificities in any effort at highlighting historical continuities connecting contexts. However, to formulate the problem differently, nuance might be best seen as attention to details on particular ethnographic locations – the very crux of anthropological ethnography – but it might also be seen as navigating between different orders of analysis – from close contextualization to deep contextualization, from proximate worlds of experience to broader structural and historical forces (Abu-Lughod 2005; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). This tension is not new in anthropology. One common resolution is to maintain close ethnographic connections with particular locations and writings that emerge out of them, and to simultaneously invest in theorizing broader frameworks that can connect and curate ethnographic studies with similar commitments (in our case, "extreme speech" as a broader framework rooted in historical sensibility while approaching the specificities of subordination as nested inequalities (Haynes 2019); neoracism (Hervik 2019); religious nationalism (Udupa 2019) and other formations).

Anthropological attention to details could be the ground to envision a comparative dialogue, and the call for ethnographic specificities might not become a barrier for broader engagements around topics as vexing as exclusionary speech cultures. In this regard, foregrounding relations of coloniality within contemporary digital environments is an area of needed focus, but it is only a small step towards the larger political project of decolonization.

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Sahana, thanks for such a thoughtful super-important paper with much needed work for a decolonial, de-Eurocentric, truly global, approach and using vitriol and disinformation as its focus.

The counterargument to Wendy Brown's suggestion that there is a neoliberal reason for making white working and middle class inhabitants "angry" has already been made by the first commentators. But there is more to be said. First of all, such reasoning is not reserved for the "whites" or "middle class", is it? As a matter of fact, who doesn't get "angry" out of neoliberal reasons, except the money-winners? There are many other views on the role of anger, including "White Rage" (Carol Anderson) as a perceptive shift of focus away from the often used irrational "Black rage", and including work on "moral outrage" emerging in peace and conflict anthropology that help to capture how psychological violence becomes physical and deadly. Secondly, however important it is to critique liberalism and neo-liberalism, the critique hardly ever takes off – or changes neo-liberalism – probably due to the amoebic character of liberalism.

Sahana: is there really a real crisis in liberalism..? (p 2 for starters). Isn't it rather that liberalism is stronger than ever – part of its nature *is* to thrive on crisis and contradiction? My third and related intervention goes via literature. No one to my knowledge is treating liberalism and the racial injustice better and more in depth than Charles Mills. In short, he argues, liberalism in the contemporary world fails to handle racial injustice. Wonderfully simple. Why? Probably because liberalists have usually been complicit with white supremacy, colonialism and slavery (his analysis included Hume, Locke, Kant, Hegel, S. Mills). Today, he argues, the ideology of individualism, equality, individual rights have been racialized by (neo)liberalism. Doesn't Christian Fuchs (along similar lines) have a point when he during the Corona crisis finds that neoliberal crisis action tolerates an increase of poverty, misery, debt, precarity, homelessness, and unemployment? There is zero responsibility. In fact, avoiding responsibility pushes attention away from the toughest of questions. An example. A few nights ago, on Danish public television, the conservative political leader, former minister of Justice, said "slavery was undemocratic" and "sure, mistakes were made back then." Blaming and ignoring this part of history is the easiest thing to do and it works in the news media and social media.

One more thing. "Racial relations" and "Nation-state relations" – in the three decolonial relations highlighted in the paper – need also be treated as phenomena in their own right. Although, most often inseparable, they are both capable of becoming how people have the primary way of perceiving the world. Methodologically and – epistemologically, we should therefore include the cognitive apparatus with its motivational emotional force that is used to see, perceive and act in the world.

Regards,

Peter Hervik
Aarhus University

John Postill (john.postill@rmit.edu.au)   **25 Jun 2020**

Thanks for a timely paper on decoloniality and extreme speech, Sahana. Lots to think about and discuss.

Decoloniality strikes me as one of those macro-historical mouthfuls (like mediatization) that tries to impose order upon an incredibly messy, unruly world (the kind of world we ethnographers love to (mis)interpret), but can only do so by overgeneralising, e.g. by explaining everything by reference to European colonialism.

Unlike mediatization, though, decoloniality comes with heavy ideological baggage, as it's inextricable from 'woke' ideas of whiteness, white fragility, structural racism, intersectionality, decolonising knowledge, white science, etc. (See critiques by Helen Pluckrose, James Lindsay, Peter Boghossian, and others). The sort of ideas that have just mainstreamed now, in June 2020, around the Anglosphere in the wake of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis.

For both reasons -- overgeneralisation and ideological bias -- I'm sceptical of this approach, especially when it comes to ethnographic and ethnohistorical research.

Do we really need the concept of decoloniality to shed light on, for instance, the rise of neo-Hinduism in India since the 1990s and its current remediations? Doesn't it turn historical actors on all sides of the political divide into mere postcolonial puppets bereft of agency?

John

Sahana Udupa (sahana.udupa@lmu.de)   **25 Jun 2020**

Thanks, Peter, for your thoughtful comments and suggestions.

Your question on liberalism is interesting because I had just stayed with the phrase, "perceived crisis in the liberal order" in the first draft and my colleague who read the draft argued it should also be seen as a real crisis. In suggesting this change, he was referring to the journalist's comment on how the world of truth and objectivity was falling apart because of digital revolution. So, my reference to the "crisis" was meant be in the limited sense of liberal communicational norms institutionalized by journalism as under some kind of threat. For instance, how clickbait media have forced "legacy news organizations [to] compete with low-cost, zero credibility upstarts who attract large number of viewers" (Freelon and Wells 2020, p 148). Thanks for pointing out that there might not be a "real crisis". Your thoughts on how liberalism thrives on crisis and contradiction connect with critical studies on digital communication and neoliberalism (Fuchs 2019), which I believe would be very relevant in this discussion. I would also take your suggestions on rage and explore further.

Best wishes
Sahana

Sahana Udupa (sahana.udupa@lmu.de)   **25 Jun 2020**

Thanks for your helpful comments, John. While you see decoloniality as a macro-historical mouthful, I have noticed that decoloniality is taken as a trigger word. Either one quickly sidesteps the term or intensely embraces it. But invariably, in all cases (including myself), it appears to cause some anxiety. To me, on one level, this discomfort itself is generative. It allows us to more reflexively engage with our ethnographic locations. It also shows the limits of our engagement. My own engagement in this paper is limited to discussing coloniality as a set of relations that are reproduced and rearticulated within current conditions of digital circulation.

Analytically, rather than seeing decoloniality as an overarching framework that can explain everything to the last detail, I see it is a generative critique that places ongoing processes in a longer history of exclusion and exploitation. It opens up connections and continuities across contexts. Far from reducing everything to European colonialism, it reminds us that for many communities around the world, this colonial history is very much part of "ethnohistory". Within particular contexts, the emphasis on intersectional analysis brings out the entanglement between different orders of lived realities and specific conditions of subordination – the very crux of ethnography.

The question on agency goes back to the fundamental structure/agency debate. If decoloniality were to render people as postcolonial puppets, so would any history – would people be puppets of history of any kind? I would see practice theory as instructive: "a focus on the actual ways people produce these practices and discourses within socio-cultural constraints which themselves are subject to reproduction and change through such human activities" (Holland & Skinner, 1996, p. 193; also Brauchler and Postill 2010).

I also acknowledge the different ways in which concepts become caught up in messy clashes (the names you mention and several more). But the response might not be to abandon the concept or leave it to the forces that caricaturize anything that invokes troubling histories.

Best wishes
Sahana

Veronica Barassi (veronica.barassi@unisg.ch)   **03 Jul 2020**

Dear All,

I would like to thank Professor Udupa for the thought-provoking paper, the discussants for their comments, and those of you who managed to participate for your questions and ideas, despite the difficult times.

The seminar is now closed. During the seminar there was an incident that made us feel that it is of central importance to reinstate the following points:

1. E-seminar discussions should always take place on the list; list members should not write directly to the authors to discuss the topics of the seminar.

2. All members need to make sure that they use language that cannot, at anytime, be perceived as offensive; otherwise they will be removed from the list.

3. Messages and comments on the Media Anthropology Network seminars represent the view of the participants who share them. They are not reviewed or endorsed by the convenors of the e-seminars and the EASA Media Anthropology Network.

4. The EASA Media Anthropology Network does not, at anytime, support views that justify any form of oppression or exclusion of marginalised communities.

Thank you and all the best,

Veronica

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