

4th Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshop
Minorities and the Making of Post-Colonial Europe
May 6th-7th, IHEID, Geneva

Organisers:

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Final Report

Introduction

The 4th Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshop, titled '*Minorities and the Making of Postcolonial Europe*', took place on May 6th-7th 2024 at the Geneva Graduate Institute. The event's main goal was to stimulate interdisciplinary intellectual debate regarding minorities and colonialism, and it sought to address an overarching question: is present-day Europe really postcolonial?

The workshop's scientific innovation was conveyed by its underlying geographic and temporal coordinates. Over the past four decades, postcolonial academic literature has oriented itself mostly toward the three main areas: Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These foci, which aim to understand postcolonial historical phenomena in ex-colonies, ignore the repercussions of the end of colonial periods on European colonial powers and societies. The workshop intended to disrupt this long-established 'tricontinental' theoretical dogma by bringing the geography of postcolonialism to Europe itself. Second, the workshop bridged two historical periods: the postcolonial moment and the imperial historical experience. Although in direct continuation with one another, the associated research often develops in separate disciplines with the consequence of creating an artificial demarcation between colonial and postcolonial eras. By focusing on minorities and their resettlement in former European colonial centres as a central concept, the workshop put colonisers' governmental practices of immigration and integration in direct communication with the memories of colonised subjects.

The importance of this endeavour is made evident by the so-called migration crisis affecting Europe and the fervent debates on integration and immigration-related legislative reforms that are ramped up every electoral cycle in European countries. More so, the recent events in Gaza and Israel and the related protest movements sweeping far and wide in Europe prove the relevance of the workshop. For the first time in European's history, second-generation immigrant youths are key players in mainstream youth political commitment and in denouncing colonial heritages in Europe. Other than voicing commitments, self-positioning, or political slogans, these parades made evident the failures, not in giving answers or solutions, but in addressing questions. How did state practices of decolonisation influence minorities' trajectories of settlement? How did the latter react in turn? In what ways has the perpetual conversation between the colonisers and the colonised impacted present-day Europe? And most importantly, what does 'decolonising academia' -- a recurring though poorly studied phrase present in European universities -- mean exactly, and how can we study it? These questions were all part of the 4th Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshop.

Description of the Event

The event opened with Emmanuel Delle Mulle's (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) keynote, titled '*From Plurality to Homogeneity and Beyond: Minorities, Majorities, and Shifting Understandings of Diversity from the Late 18th to the Mid-20th Century*'. This presentation acted as a prequel to our panels as it introduced participants and the audience to the concept of 'minorities' and how it changed in its meanings and practices until the mid-20th century. Our three panels were all chronologically set in the second half of the 20th century and one of their central aims was to analyse how this notion changed with respect to antecedent iterations. The second aim was to explore all the power relations between colonisers and colonised encapsulated by these changing conceptualisations. The first panel, chaired by Ian Sanjay Patel (Birkbeck, University of London), and titled '*Post-War (De)colonisation: State Practices of Colonial Reproductions*' brought together Ana Guardião (University of Coimbra and University of Florence), Abha Calindi (Geneva Graduate Institute), Eleonora Cappa (University of Genoa and University of Turin) and Gauri Saxena (Geneva Graduate Institute). Their presentations analysed different shapes of state practices of decolonisation, ranging from the UK to France passing through Portugal and the European Union. Together, these papers aimed to explore a top-down link between state institutions and minorities to understand how the former constricted or opened space to migrant communities for resettlement.

The second panel '*Rebelling against Coloniality*', which was chaired by Emmanuel Delle Mulle, logically proceeded the other way around and wished to see how immigrant communities protested against state's practices to carve out, successfully or not, a more suitable habitat for permanent resettlement. Federica Stagni (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa), Florian Carl (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa) and Michele Benazzo (Geneva Graduate Institute) explored bottom-up power relations between minorities and state institutions in different shapes ranging from anti-racism to environmental activism and colonial memories' influence over present-day protests. Finally, the third panel, with the title '*Reshaping Colonial Identities: Minorities and Belonging*' and chaired by Elizabeth Buettner (University of Amsterdam), analysed horizontal power relationships among minorities themselves in the hope of understanding how immigrants' identities collectively change inside those spaces, granted by states or secured by protests, analysed in the first two panels. Can Haldenbilen (University of Basel), Martina Moretti (University of Tuscia) and Simone Cerulli (University of Milan), tracked different experiences in Switzerland, Portugal and Italy and emphasised transnational connections in determining trajectories of belonging in different forms of migration: economic migrants, asylum seekers, and ex-colonial citizens.

Two further sessions completed the workshop. The first was a guest experts' roundtable and the second a final session dedicated solely to PhDs and early-career scholars. If panels centred on empirical studies and ongoing research, the roundtable titled '*Questioning the Interdisciplinary 'Minorities': Theory and the Politics of Academia*' sought to create open discussion in the fields of epistemology and politics of Academia. This moment had a double purpose: first, to stimulate debate not on empirical evidence but on how we study it through conceptual categories, intellectual approaches and meanings of disciplines. Our idea was to tackle the topic of 'decolonising academia' by forcing a discussion back to the basics of these notions which, although important, are opaque and easily derailed in the guise of political sloganeering rather than of problematised scientific categories. Second, the roundtable served the more practical scope of giving participants and audience insights on academic careers and how the current academic landscapes shape opportunities for young scholars. In particular, the central debate developed along the theme of interdisciplinarity which, based on the discussion, turned out to be a double-edged sword: greatly encouraged in funding opportunities and scientific publications but also dangerous for young researchers as it goes against conventional departmental structures through which career opportunities are normally designed. Thanks to personal memories and knowledge of different national systems, our guest experts Ian Sanjay Patel, Elizabeth Buettner, Emmanuel Delle Mulle, Gopalan Balachandran (Geneva Graduate Institute), and Graziella Moraes da Silva (Geneva Graduate Institute), gave the audience valuable inputs on

how to square this circle and be aware of the great chances that interdisciplinarity still affords to young scholars.

Finally, the workshop concluded with a session on PhDs' needs, which was specifically designed for participants to share their experiences in different professional settings. This moment was rather experimental: to the organisers' knowledge, no antecedent events attempted to have such a session. Therefore, the outcomes and utility for participants were unknown as the diverse professional trajectories of participants could have made the conversation too broad and heterogeneous to form meaningful conclusions. On the contrary, it proved to be a rewarding exercise. Chaired by the two organisers, Gauri Saxena and Michele Benazzo, the discussion proceeded smoothly with contributions from all participants. The themes discussed included: interdisciplinarity; in particular, the gap between the frequency with which young scholars are requested to 'be interdisciplinary' and the lack of clear discussion on the topic in classes or seminars. This turned out to be a rather pressing feeling in many different national experiences which was felt most acutely when it comes to crafting grant proposals. Second, the topic of international mobility: participants shared their experiences -- although very different with respect to national systems -- about how on one hand mobility is heavily encouraged for maximising career opportunities but on the other, this practice also entails losing knowledge of internal mechanisms which are equally meaningful with respect to professional patterns. Mindful of their youth and limited experiences, the participants did not aim for concrete solutions or to suggest directions, but simply to collectively raise awareness among themselves -- one that was well achieved given the numerous comments from participants expressing their desire to talk with respective supervisors on these themes.

The relevance of the discussion of the last two days was reflected in this last session as most of the interventions referenced the roundtable and the panel sessions. Students in Masters programs at the Institute, who were interested in pursuing PhDs, also showed up to ask questions and communicate their opinions. Thus, not only was the PhDs' session meaningful, especially to conclude the event, but also the broad-based interest in the topics of discussion and the excellent turnout throughout the two days demonstrated a promising area for future research, collaborations and events.

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