

The Centre for Culture, Identity and Education (CCIE)
&
The Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies (PWIAS)

Present

**DECOLONIZE THIS!
INTERNATIONAL THEORIZING
AND
PRAXIS OF DECOLONIZATION**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: UCHENNA OKEJA

Date: 26 November 2018
Time: 9:30 am to 3:30 pm
Location: Seminar Room,
Peter Wall Institute
for Advanced Studies

This Symposium brings together faculty and graduate students from Rhodes University, UBC, and OISE-UT who work in the area of decolonizing in the fields of the arts, community building, and higher education nationally and internationally. The presentations interrogate the myths and realities underpinning decolonial theory and praxis and articulate more context specific approaches in social justice projects from decolonizing the university in South Africa, Palestine and Canada through performing decolonization through dance in Latin America and examination of everyday cultural practice in China to a transnational rejection of the modern/colonial imaginary and the gesturing toward a decolonial approach to equity education.

EVENT PROGRAM

9:30am to 10:00am - Coffee, Tea, Intermingling

10:00am to 10:10am - Welcome & Opening Statements
(Philippe Tortell- Director, Peter Wall Institute for
Advanced Studies; Blye Frank- Dean, Faculty of Education)

10:10am to 11:00am - Keynote Session
- “Decolonization: Myth and Reality” by Uchenna Okeja
-(Handel Kashope Wright, discussant)

11:00am to 12:30pm - Panel I: Performing Decolonization
Internationally

- “Look! Listen! Speak! Eat!: Chinese Pride on the Table”
by Yao Xiao
- “Choreographing Palestine” by Lucy El-Sherif
- “Dancing (De)Coloniality: An Embodied Latina Diaspora
Perspective” by Sonia Medel
- (André Elias Mazawi, discussant)

12:30pm to 1:30pm - Lunch

1:30pm to 3:00pm - Panel II: Decolonizing Higher Education
Internationally

- “The enduring educational challenges of setting horizons of
hope beyond modern-colonial imaginaries” by Vanessa
de Oliveira Andreotti (UBC)
- “What Does it Take to Decolonize Palestinian Higher
Education?” by André Elias Mazawi
- “Youth Activism and Academia as Public Sphere” by Handel
Kashope Wright.

3:00pm to 3:30pm - Concluding Thoughts (Presenters,
Audience)

AUTHORS AND PRESENTATIONS (IN PRESENTATION ORDER)

Uchenna Okeja (Rhodes University, South Africa)

Title: **“Decolonization: Myth and Reality”**

Abstract: Theories and practices of decolonization vary across the world. The meaning of the concept is also a matter of contestation. To get to the core of the phenomenon, I propose to consider it as both myth and reality. In this lecture, I examine the ways theories and practices of decolonization across the world are both myth and reality. The argument I make is that the theories and practices of decolonization must cut through their myth to get to the reality they seek. Drawing on the example of South Africa, I conclude with a brief reflection on how this goal can be achieved.

Yao Xiao (UBC)

Title: **“Look! Listen! Speak! Eat!: Chinese Pride on the Table”**

Abstract: I take this presentation as an opportunity to share with you how “decolonization” might be Sinicized, and how a Chinese subject like myself might engage with decolonization differently. Based on autobiographical stories, research projects, and informal conversations with community friends, I unpack the affect of Chinese pride for its decolonial relevance in at least two landscapes: (1) in a landscape of international intellectual work, the anxiously ascending Sinophone interests in dealing with/learning beyond Euro-American academic influences; (2) in a landscape of grassroots lives and activism, the mixed compassion, commitment, as well as confusion in speaking with/learning from people who situate and still struggle in webs of metropolises and margins.

Lucy El-Sherif (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto).

Title: **“Choreographing Palestine”**

Abstract: In this paper, I deal with the social, cultural and political history of dabke as a form of decolonial cultural production. What are the ways in which the dance serves as a site at which tensions of race, class, gender, and national identity collide? In tracing the histories of dabke, I focus on processes that shape cultural production. I examine the ways in which those who organize, direct, choreograph and dance dabke construct a commentary of dabke in diasporic and transnational ways as a living tradition. I identify the conditions of both oppression and resistance that come together in the dance. Evocative as much of a relationship to land as a relationship to nation, the dance offers a dialectic of belonging. As a form of resistance, dabke is a yearning for, orienting towards, stomping proclamation of Palestine, transgressing boundaries of political belonging and exile. In situating dabke within a larger diasporic and transnational context, I position it as a site of decolonial embodied learning and identity construction. This paper is part of a larger study that is a critical performance ethnography of dabke on Turtle Island.

Sonia Medel (UBC)

Title: **“Dancing (De)Coloniality- An Embodied Latina Diaspora Perspective”**

Abstract: My presentation is grounded in my experiences with the power of dance, primarily Latin American dance traditions, to prompt embodied learning and also my growing awareness of how access to particular dance forms reflects the active deployment of boundaries between social groups. I draw from the belief that dance has the potential for socio-political transformation, but also the colonization of the life-worlds of citizens, particularly of marginalized-minoritized groups. I explore and seek to foster dialogue around—what is the (de)colonial power of dance and its possibilities for (un)doing intersecting forms of oppression at the individual, collective, and city arts and culture policy-making levels within the context of a multicultural and diverse society like Vancouver, British Columbia?

Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti (UBC)

Title: **“The Enduring Educational Challenges of Setting Horizons of Hope Beyond Modern-Colonial Imaginaries”**

Abstract: As societies face unprecedented challenges that are global in scope and “wicked” in nature, the usual educational response has been to emphasize the need for more knowledge, better policies, and more compelling arguments, in order to effectively convince more people to change their convictions, and, as a consequence, their behaviour. My research collective has been experimenting with a different educational orientation that does not see the problems of the present primarily as rooted in a methodological challenge of better strategies (i.e. the call for more effective policies and communications), nor an epistemological challenge of knowing (i.e. the call for more data, information or perspectives). Rather, we propose that the problems are rooted in an ontological challenge of being (i.e. the call to address how we exist in relation to each other and the planet). From this educational orientation, the problems lie in the universalization of a modern/colonial imaginary that creates intellectual, affective and relational economies that invisibilize the violences that subsidize modern/colonial systems, thus hiding their inherent unsustainability. The modern/colonial approach to education has left us unprepared and unwilling to address our complicity in systemic social and ecological harm, and to set our horizons of hope beyond what is intelligible and desirable within it. My contribution to the panel will outline some of the social cartographies, analyses and experiments of the “Gesturing towards decolonial futures” collective and the “In Earth’s CARE” network of social-ecological innovations that focus on transformative justice.

André Elias Mazawi (CCIE/UBC)

Title: **“What Does it Take to Decolonize Palestinian Higher Education?”**

Abstract: The presentation problematizes the stratificational, ideological, colonial, and geopolitical entanglements in which Palestinian institutions of higher education continue to operate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since their foundation during the second

half of the twentieth century under an ongoing Israeli occupation and colonization. The presentation considers the implications of these entanglements for viable projects of decolonization, in terms of higher education governance, research and knowledge generation, and community engagement.

Handel Kashope Wright (CCIE/UBC)

Title: “**Youth Activism and Academia as Public Sphere**”

Abstract: In this paper I juxtapose Canadian and South African examples to explore youth identity politics, agency and (dis)empowerment in academic contexts reconceptualized as part of the public sphere. In Canada, decolonization has mostly been limited to the discursive and it is the politics of “academic freedom” and “freedom of expression” that probably best frame the example of youths’ supposedly limited agency. In South Africa, where decolonization is not only ubiquitous and pressing but a student led movement, the task might well be to mitigate expectations of the fetishized project of decolonizing the university. The role of identity and identification in both projects underscores the difference that difference makes in the praxis of decolonization and the perennial struggle for representation and equity in the academy.

PRESENTERS’ BIOS

Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti holds a Canada Research Chair in Race, Inequalities and Global Change, at the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She has extensive experience working across sectors internationally in areas of education related to global justice, community engagement, Indigenous knowledge systems and internationalization. Her research focuses on analyses of historical and systemic patterns of reproduction of knowledge and inequalities and how these mobilize global imaginaries that limit or enable different possibilities for (co)existence and global change. She is currently directing research projects and teaching initiatives related to social innovation oriented towards decolonial futures (decolonialfutures.net and blogs.ubc.ca/earthcare).

Lucy El-Sherif is a PhD candidate, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She is an Arab Muslim immigrant to the settler state of Canada and she is interested in themes of citizenship, (un)belonging, and interlocking oppression. Her research focuses on how immigrants learn constructs of settler futurity, the socio-spatial production of outsider subjectivities and (non)-normative citizens, and narratives of citizenship for Muslim and Arab communities. Her motivation comes from being a parent of three children, and her pursuit of a belonging to Turtle Island that is not subsumed under white liberalism, one that also recognizes the context of precarious belonging and citizenship for Muslim and/or Arabs living in North America. She recently co-created the short documentary “Muslim Ban: Nothing New” to disseminate critical socio-political, historical and philosophical understandings of this ban. Her writing can be found at MuslimGirl.com and the *Huffington Post Canada*. Lucy’s academic writing

has been published in *Curriculum Inquiry* and *Comparative and International Education/Éducation Comparée et Internationale*.

André Elias Mazawi is Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. A sociologist of education, he is interested in understanding how state policies, geopolitics, and popular culture contribute to the construction of imaginaries of schooling and higher education and their effects on the articulation of governance regimes, policyscapes, and teacher/faculty activism in deeply-divided societies. He has published widely on these issues, with particular reference to Mediterranean and Middle East societies. He is also Affiliate Professor with the Euro-Mediterranean Centre of Educational Research at the University of Malta, Associated Researcher with the Équipe de Recherche Dimensions Internationales de l'Éducation at the University of Geneva, and serves on the Advisory Editorial Board of *Postcolonial Directions in Education*.

Sonia Medel is a Vancouver-based researcher-educator-activist and UBC Public Scholar completing a PhD in Educational Studies. For the past decade, Sonia's focus has been on promoting critical engagement with the arts and highlighting the transformative and (de)colonial potential of traditional and popular Latin American cultural practices. Sonia's doctoral research centers the experiences of racialized women dancers in Vancouver, bridging the fields of arts and policy for socio-political transformation. She is an Instructor at Langara College and UBC; and forms a long-time part of the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, currently serving as Coordinator of Community Partnerships and Programmer of Indigenous Films. Sonia has also published on the pedagogical power of film and festival spaces and served as DOXA 2018 Short Documentary Award Jury Member. A proud Spanglish speaker, Quechua learner, and daughter of Peruvian and Chilean parents, Sonia is grateful to Coast Salish Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples and lands on which she was born and is able to carry out her work.

Uchenna Okeja is Associate Professor of philosophy at Rhodes University and *Iso Lomso* Fellow at Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study. He works mainly in the areas of critical theory, political philosophy, ethics and African philosophy. His most recent works are: *Religion, Politics and Postsecularism*, ed. (Routledge), *African philosophy and global justice*, ed. (Routledge), *War by Agreement: On the Nature and Justification of Just War (Journal of Military Ethics)*; and "Palaver and Consensus as Metaphors for the Public Sphere" in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory* (Oxford University Press). His monographs *Deliberation: Foundation for a Modern African Political Philosophy* and *Global Africana Thought – Critique of Humiliation* will be published next year. Prior to Rhodes, he taught philosophy for many years at Goethe University, Frankfurt. He has held visiting positions at Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, *Forschungskolleg* Bad Homburg and *Iustitia Amplificata* Center for Advanced Study at Goethe University Frankfurt, The University of Chicago

and Harvard University. He is currently a visiting fellow at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at UBC.

Handel Kashope Wright is Professor of Educational Studies and Director of the Centre for Culture, Identity and Education, University of British Columbia and Senior Research Associate, Department of Communication Studies, University of Johannesburg. He is co-editor of the book series *African and Diasporic Cultural Studies* (University of Toronto Press) and Associate Editor of the journal *Critical Arts*. He serves on the editorial board of several cultural studies and education journals and book series including the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* and *Postcolonial Studies in Education*, the University of East London's book series *Radical Cultural Studies* and Cardiff University's book series *Critical Perspectives on Theory, Culture and Politics* (both Rowan and Littlefield). Prof. Wright has published extensively on continental and diasporic African cultural studies, cultural studies of education, critical multiculturalism and its alternatives, qualitative research and curriculum theorizing, including recently, the co-edited books *Transnationalism and Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 2012); *Prekarious International Multicultural Education* (Sense, 2012); *The dialectics of African Education and Western Discourses* (Peter Lang, 2012); *The Promised Land: History and Historiography of the Black Experience in Chatham-Kent and Beyond* (University of Toronto, 2014) and edited journal issues on "The Worldliness of Stuart Hall" (*International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2016) and on "Contemporary African Cultural Studies" (*Critical Arts*, 2017). His work in progress includes two co-edited books on *Black British Columbia* (Fernwood) and *The Nuances of Blackness and the Canadian Academy* (University of Toronto Press)

Yao Xiao is a migrant, a poet, and has earned his Ph.D. with a project titled *Chinese pride? Searching between gendered diasporas and multicultural states*. He has worked with migrant communities in Guangdong's metropolises and Vancouver's Chinatown, critically engaging with old and new tensions of labour migration, intergenerational learning, and cross-cultural dialogues. He has published in international journals such as *Cultural Studies*, and has taught in The Department of Educational Studies and The Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice at UBC. Personally and intellectually he is interested in Cantonese identities, global Sinophone cultures, and non-Western-centric knowledge and alternative worldviews.