Forschung und Lehre

Principles of Critical Development Studies: A Minifesto

Martina Padmanabhan, Samia Dinkelaker, Mareike Hoffmann, Dimas Laksmana, Siti Maimunah, Elena Rudakova, Enid Still, and Friederike Trotier

University of Passau

Why we want to become the chair of "Critical Development Studies—Southeast Asia"

Renaming the chair of "Comparative development and Cultural studies with a focus on Southeast Asia" to "Critical Development Studies—Southeast Asia" is the outcome of an intense intellectual, political and yet intimate process over the last three years. In autumn 2019 a group of international students from the MA Development Studies program reported the shock of experiencing racism in study groups and when looking for shared housing. While confined to online teaching, during class one student found the courage to share their experience of a racist incident on public transport in Passau, the perpetrator humiliating him before vanishing into anonymity.

These distressing and painful aggressions urged us to start reflecting on our responsibilities and capabilities, as a chair at the university, to act upon discrimination and racism which still permeate higher education, and the field we teach - development practice. During regular research labs over the last year, we read and discussed texts and debates from critical theory and perspectives from fields such as feminist political ecology (FPE), post-development, decolonial theory and new area studies. This process of learning, unlearning and relearning built up to this minifesto. Following Kallis (2018), we call this a minifesto because unlike a *manifesto,* which would present our grand theory or idea, we present here a collection of small but significant ideas. We believe these ideas and the commitment to pluralism will help shape the teaching practice and learning environment at the chair.

Through this process, we have come to the understanding of "Critical Development Studies" as a way of recognizing development studies and development practice

itself, as a power-laden field of knowledge production. As a collection of diverse practices, development is temporally and spatially situated, and is rooted in colonialism, mirroring histories in higher education institutions Acknowledging these tensions we intend to keep the chair's origin in Southeast Asian Studies and yet work with critical academic perspectives in different social science disciplines to transform it into meaningful university research and teaching in the 21st century. The following sections outline the principles and epistemological communities which inform our teaching, research, and public engagement of critical development studies.

Addressing intersectional inequalities at the university and in development cooperation

Oppressive structures are seldom one-dimensional. On the contrary, intersectionality suggests social identities are formed by various intersecting dimensions of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw 1991). Therefore, an intersectional approach allows us to understand the interlinkages between different forms of discrimination (Hoffmann 2021), enabling researchers to shed light on how different forms of inequality interact and may exacerbate each other. Furthermore, this approach does not understand inequalities as only accumulative but also co-constituting particular experiences of oppression (Crenshaw 1991; Mollett and Faria 2018). We believe that we need to address structural, political, and representational intersectionality in academia and development studies to realize the different potentials of both fields (Carastathis 2014). This involves raising awareness of the interconnection and co-constitution of different dimensions of discrimination based on race, class, gender, caste, sexuality, religion, ability, physical appearance, language etc., instead of treating them separately. Universities can play a significant role in reinforcing such structures if they are ignored or not sufficiently addressed. At the same time, this pivotal role carries great potential to drive social change.

We recognize the responsibility of the university to position itself in ongoing debates around power, privilege and intersectionality in the academic context and to act accordingly. Therefore, we seek to deconstruct social and cultural forms of power to reveal discrimination and privilege that are often not addressed in mainstream education and challenge them through research, teaching and public engagement. For instance, we support safe spaces for students to talk about racism and the university's ongoing anti-racism work (Laksmana, Still and Padmanabhan 2021). Concrete activities include creating platforms for current debates in our weekly research colloquium and continuously developing our reading list to reflect plural epistemological approach to teaching. Furthermore, we offer an annual seminar introducing intersectionality and decoloniality, exploring what they mean in the context of higher education. These different activities are designed to

encourage critical reflections on power and intersectionality in our seminars and beyond.

Why we promote a relational approach to the social, political, and the ecological

One of our aims is a critical reflection on various inequalities in development practices and scholarship. The metrices of development that delimit the 'developed' and 'developing' were established in the post-second world period, after the collapse of European empires (Escobar 1994). Despite the success of decolonization movements across the world, the new geopolitical order was rooted in existing colonial power structures. These historical underpinnings create imbalances between so-called developed and developing countries that are now being recognized and critically addressed. Such economic and political power imbalances, which manifest in multiple ways, create a culture and system of dominance and oppression that allows those members of society holding a dominant position to reap the benefits of the system, independent of whether they are supportive of it or not. This system of privilege is often referred to as invisible power or assets, as it often remains unacknowledged and obscured by institutional structures (Bhopal 2018). These systemic conditions are further obscured when experiences of inequality are presented as individual incidents instead of structural. Being able to overlook discriminatory patterns and systems of oppression is only possible from a position of privilege, therefore reflecting on positionality is essential to undoing these systemic inequalities (Idahosa and Bradbury 2020; Sultana 2007).

We therefore aim at learning and teaching about different ways of seeing that allows us to realize the links between location, positionality and intersectionality, and takes into account the relationality of our knowledge and experience (Padmanabhan 2022). Relationality assumes that the "meaning of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection" (Rowe 2005: 25). This being-in-relation points to understanding subjectivities as *starting from* the social relations which constitute our everyday life (Nightingale 2011). A politics of relation therefore centers belonging as a place to think from—to *critically* understand situatedness, positionality and intersectionality. To interrogate these different ways of seeing in the contexts of the university, we need to look at the relational conditions out of which our seeing arises.

There are many critical theoretical and methodological contributions which can be drawn on for this purpose. Feminist political ecology (FPE) seeks to understand how power operates within socio-ecological relations, focusing on intersectional perspectives that highlight everyday and marginalized experiences, such as multi-species caring practices and the co-constitution of human and non-human political subjectivities (Nightingale, 2013; Singh, 2013; Desai and Smith, 2018; Leder *et al.*,

2019; Sato and Soto Alarcón, 2019; Elmhirst, 2020; Harcourt, 2021; Sultana, 2021) This lens and the work by FPE enables us to understand what is meant by relationality in its most simple sense—experience as primarily *relational*, rather than through the prism of the individual (Rocheleau and Roth, 2007; Nightingale, 2011; Bawaka Country *et al.*, 2013; Padmanabhan 2022). This enables us to disrupt colonial ways of seeing that reduce complex relations to binaries and produce hierarchies based upon narrowly defined concepts of what it means to be human, such as heteronormativity, gender hierarchies, racial hierarchies, knowledge hierarchies. At the chair we therefore want to incorporate critical theory and method, such as FPE, that explicitly complicates the way in which human and more-than-human relations are represented and reproduced in the academic environment into our teaching syllabi and research.

Bringing area studies into conversation with critical development studies

With its regional focus on Southeast Asia, the chair is committed to engaging with area studies and, in particular, to contributing to debates on decoloniality in the discipline. This includes the ethics of how we conduct research in Southeast Asia, the way we cooperate with partners and how international power structures in academia collide with approaches like transdisciplinarity (Padmanabhan 2018).

The University of Passau looks back on a long history of Southeast Asian Studies. In 1984, the University of Passau was the first German university to establish a chair in Southeast Asian Studies. Bernhard Dahm, the first chair to be appointed, shaped the character of Southeast Asian Studies at the university, focusing on the legacy of pre-colonial cultural traditions and its effect on countries in the post-colonial era. Courses on a range of topics, such as modern history, languages and literature, anthropology, urbanism and environment have been offered throughout the years. From the start, the syllabus of the chair included Southeast Asian language courses with close relationships to research and teaching agendas.

We are aware of this important heritage and intend to build on and continue our involvement in the field. The chair has developed strong networks inside and outside of academia with partners in Southeast Asia, in other Asian countries and in Europe, and continues to strengthen these collaborations through joint research and exchange. Currently, the research and teaching of the chair focuses on socially relevant issues in Southeast Asia including the analysis of development and transformation processes in urban and rural settings (Trotier 2021, Padmanabhan 2020), social-ecological research towards sustainable society-nature relations (Rudokova 2020, Keilbart this volume), intersectionality, gender inequality and decoloniality (Maimunah this volume). The aim to make situated knowledge on these topics visible and relevant in global debates motivates our engagement in research projects and classroom teaching alike.

Within the environment of the university, the chair aims to strengthen networks between different area studies and to elicit debates on diverse topics such as the role of area studies at (German) universities, fruitful cooperation between language training and lectures/seminars, and possibilities to advance the undergraduate International Cultural and Business Studies program.

The knowledge we consume, produce, and teach is "situated knowledge"

The chair's historical roots in Southeast Asian studies inform our thinking on the interlinkages between positionality, politics of representation, and reading lists (including citation practice) in academia. As scholars and scholar-activists as part of an institution of higher education, we represent "others," but also "us," through our research, writing, and teaching (Millora et al. 2019). These processes are central in knowledge production (Chua and Mathur 2018), but also in how we relate to and interact with other human and non-human existence. As co-constitution of margins and centers is embedded in academic practices, we emphasise how marginalization is reproduced in relation to the situatedness of knowledge claims (Sultana 2020). The shared concern in "research and practice that empowers and promotes social and ecological transformation for women and other marginalized groups" (Elmhirst 2020) in FPE informs this thinking (Still this volume, Maimunah this volume).

We acknowledge that where we speak from is a composition of our disciplinary backgrounds and positionality. The former are tightly linked to particular bodies of literature, while the latter is bound to particular culture and relations of power. These aspects have implications on the centering and marginalization of different ways of knowing and doing. Nevertheless, as a way to cultivate plurality of knowledge and avoid canonization, we investigate development studies using sets of concepts and practices instead of sets of texts and scholars. The choice of reading list and citation practice matter (see Mills 2021).

In addition, we are aware of how knowledge production in academia is shaped by broader political economy, which has implications on who is represented by whom, through what means, and whose knowledge counts. Therefore, in our international research collaborations and teaching, we recognize the precarity and the differentiated material conditions of other scholars and students (see for example Fernandez et al. 2018).

Knowledge only exists in plural

Colonial ways of knowing and seeing have sought to reduce the multiplicity of ways of being in the world. Logics of civilization and progress, which fueled practices of exploitation and capital accumulation, were foundational to the colonial project. They continue to shape contemporary global processes such as

food production and consumption, knowledge production and extractivism. The moral, political, economic and social dimensions of these processes have become embedded in capitalist societies (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021).The capitalist organization, for instance, of globalized food consumption, fossil fuel consumption, and international development practice has become normalized to the extent that the violence involved in capitalist modes of production and reproduction has become invisible.   Assumptions about the supremacy of a particular type of scientific knowledge and accompanying ideologies of economic progress and growth reinforce this concealment of violence. The normalization of these practices and narratives, leaves little room for the multiplicity of knowledge and ways of being that inform and shape people's lives and their environments (Chakrabarty 2000).

These hegemonic ways of seeing and knowing in the field of development have their roots in the university and have been critiqued by anti-colonial thinking and practice in the Global South, as well as by other oppressed groups in the Global North, since pre-independence times (see for example, Cooper 1892; Kumarappa 1984). Whilst decoloniality as a political process has been historically related to the reclaiming of land, livelihood and self-governance (Tuck and Yang 2012), scholars have more recently been calling for a decolonization of the academe and knowledge production, as a key site of colonial control that has continuities in relation to how knowledge is produced and taught today (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu 2018). The decolonization of knowledge enables inquiry into the ways colonialism functioned in parts of the world where settler colonialism didn't occur such as in Southeast Asia (Bhambra et al. 2018). Post-colonial scholarship, unravels and contests the ways in which colonization occurs not only through the dispossession of land of indigenous communities, but also through knowledge production processes, cultural manipulation or appropriation, discourse or other forms of representation. This is integral to an understanding of the coloniality of knowledge (Spivak 1990, Mohanty 1984, Said 2016, see also Bhambra 2014).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, 2) argues that the epistemologies of the south have been made absent through post-colonial unequal relations of power. These epistemologies "...necessarily invoke other ontologies (disclosing modes of being otherwise, those of the oppressed and silenced peoples, peoples that have been radically excluded from the dominant modes of being and knowing)." We agree with de Sousa Santos that "redeeming them is an eminently political gesture" (ibid, pp.3) and one that is necessary for us as actors within the university, an institution involved in hegemonic knowledge production. Rather than contribute to the silencing, we want to explore the possibilities to change the conditions that maintain silences in the knowledge we draw upon for our teaching, research and public engagement. This position of relative power within the knowledge production process means that there is a possibility, through careful and creative inquiry and praxis (Laksmana forthcoming), to not only make visible the epistemologies that have been silenced or obscured but to engage with them in our

own practices of research, teaching and public engagement at the university. For example, in development studies we aim to bring into the curriculum and work with activist knowledge and experience that often contradicts conventional developmentalist thinking. Furthermore, as a chair with a focus on Southeast Asia, we believe it is important to consciously involve scholars from Southeast Asia who critically address issues of development and transformation, sustainable society-nature relations, as well as intersectional relations of power in all areas of our work—research, teaching and public engagement. We recognize these commitments to pluralizing knowledge production as an important act within a broader project of decolonizing the university.

We need to unlearn universities as centers in the "colonial matrix of power"

Tracing the university's colonial continuities is not a very difficult task. Coloniality is embedded in its materiality and memorialization practices, its economic foundations, the hegemony of scientific knowledge, and the Euro-American bias and whiteness of the curriculum. We can therefore "see" colonialism in both material things and immaterial practices at the university.

Materiality of colonialism in universities

The coloniality of educational institutions is perhaps most visible in countries such as the UK, where the materiality of those institutions still embodies the colonialists themselves and their practices of "collection" of artefacts, culture and ethnographic data. This is evident in libraries, museums and statues that serve as a constant reminder (more often than not, a celebratory one) of the colonial histories that still condition everyday life in and outside the university. In Germany, controversies around the Berlin Humboldt Forum triggered a debate on the colonial amnesia of the German public and political leaders. In September 2021, the museum opened in the replica of the former Hohenzollern royal palace. Art pieces appropriated and plundered by German colonizers were relocated from Berlin Dahlem to the Humboldt Forum, despite longstanding repatriation demands, for example by the government of Nigeria.

Universities have also been sites of resistance against such colonial amnesia. The Rhodes Must Fall movement, which began at the University of Cape Town and later spread to universities across the African Continent, the UK and the US, called for a decolonization of university spaces and curricula (Bhambra et al. 2018). In removing the statue of Cecil Rhodes, they challenged the uncritical and often celebratory memorialization of Rhodes and drew attention to the multiple ways in which the university institution remained a colonial institution, overshadowed by statues of various colonial figures (Gebrial 2018).

Immateriality of colonialism in universities

The symbolism of this acquired wealth is not only found in statues but also in the *types* of knowledge that are taught and *whose* knowledge(s) are given space in the curriculum. The collective colonial mindset, developed through an ideology of empire and white supremacy and inculcated through educational institutions (Horn 1988; Linne 2017), worked in tandem with extractive and exploitative economic policies and practices that reaffirmed the power of the colonial metropoles and their capitalist elite. Reflecting this system of oppression, universities today, founded with colonial wealth, maintain global social and economic hierarchies that were established during colonial rule, through homogenous curriculums that do not engage with knowledges outside the established norms of "the scientific," and by working predominantly with scholarship from European or North American Institutions.

In German universities, whilst the materiality of colonial histories is less visible in statues and memorialization, the colonial continuities become apparent when students and institutions choose to investigate and reflect on their colonial past. At the chair, we are engaging with the history of former colonial schools whose successor institutions turned into sites of development studies. In North Hesse's Witzenhausen, members of the chair have been learning how such an institution addresses the legacy of the "Colonial School for Agriculture, Trade and Industry," which at the turn of the 20th century was established to educate young German men who were going to work as agricultural professionals in the former German colonies. Given the permeation of coloniality through institutions all over Germany, we welcome any collaboration with initiatives that seek to uncover the traces of colonial history in Passau. Such traces can, for instance, be found at the "Africa museum" in the Schweiklberg monastery Vilshofen, which exhibits artefacts and culture brought by missionaries to the district of Passau.

The historically engrained and interwoven power dynamics, or what Quijano (2000) more succinctly refers to as a "colonial matrix of power," will continue to be maintained unless scholars and universities actively attempt to unlearn these normative practices and actively make space for other epistemologies and ontologies to inform teaching, research and public engagement.

Principles of Critical Development Studies at the University of Passau

- Address intersectional inequalities at the university and in development cooperation
- Promote a relational approach to the social, political, and the ecological
- Bring area studies Southeast Asia into conversation with critical development studies

- Recognize the knowledge we consume, produce, and teach as "situated knowledge"
- Acknowledge and engage with a plurality of knowledge(s)
- Interrogate the role of universities in the "colonial matrix of power"
- Problematize the materiality and immateriality of colonialism in universities

The outlined principles are the results of an ongoing process of discussion. We invite students, researchers, activists, and practitioners to join the discussion. We welcome you to shape curricula, craft research, and create spaces with us where we can reflect together on "Critical Development Studies." To get in touch, contact Prof Padmanabhan: martina.padmanabhan@uni-passau.de.

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