The International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies

RINGS Conference and Annual Meeting 2022

Decolonising Feminisms

26th & 27th October 2022, Durban, South Africa

Call for Papers

Feminist scholarship, in its many different forms, seeks to problematise and destabilise the universalising structure of dominant Western ways of thinking, through which the (white) man of reason is posited at the centre of a world history that unfolds progressively through the transcendence, control and extraction of the natural, corporeal, and feminine. This "sacrificial logic" (Caldwell 2002) of modern Western thought leads not only to the symbolic erasure of woman (Cavarero 1995; Irigaray 1985) but also founds and justifies colonial conquest (Fanon 1961; Mbembe 2001), as well as environmental destruction and relentless capitalist expansion (Yusoff, 2019).

Feminist and gender studies therefore hold unique potential to work across causes to challenge the global problems of colonial dispossession, the ascendency of whiteness, and environmental destruction in their mutually constitutive entanglement with heteropatriarchy. However, more often than not, feminism is criticised for doing the opposite, namely repeating or reasserting the universalising structure of modern liberal thought. This happens specifically when "whitestream" feminisms (Arvin et al. 2013) accept heteropatriarchy as an ahistorical framework of analysis in terms of which gender and sexuality become central to feminist theory and practice without taking seriously the ways in which heterosexuality, capitalism and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other (Lugones 2010). Rauna Kuokkanen explains that in the Nordic context, for example, "when Sami women talk about reindeer herding laws, global capital encroaching on their traditional territories, or the ability to teach the Sami language to their children, these are not seen or understood as feminist concerns" (Knobblock & Kuokkanen 2015: 278).

Indigenous and decolonial feminists have been showing in many different ways how the naturalisation of heteropatriarchy (for example, through the imposition of a "modern", "civilised" sexuality in the form of the nuclear family with its gendered division of labour) is at the centre of the devastating effects of settler colonialism on indigenous communities (Oyěwùmí 1997; Nzegwu 2012; Gqola 2015) and how the enforcement of "proper" gender roles is utilised in attempts of the coloniser to control the claims to land made by colonised people (Arvin et al. 2013: 15). When whitestream feminism assumes that woman is defined by her gender first, prior to racial and indigenous identities, it fails to understand how race is made through gender and vice versa, so that struggles against patriarchal oppression cannot be understood separately from struggles against colonial or racial domination (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Arvin et al. 2013; Lugones 2010; Oyěwùmí 1997).

Another manifestation of whitestream feminism's reliance on Eurocentric or Westerncentric universalisation is the way in which women's and feminist history is presented as a teleological unfolding of a singular conception of woman's freedom. It neglects to engage with and take seriously the long rich histories of women's activism and feminist theorising

taking place outside of the dominant renderings of “Western” history, and often as part of struggles against racial oppression and environmental devastation in the face of Empire (Lukose 2018: 42; Arvin et al. 2013). In this way, whitestream feminist and gender studies repeat the centring of the white subject, the naturalisation of settler colonialism and the maintenance of the gender script that infuses colonial race technologies.

For this conference we invite contributions engaging with the project of decolonising feminist scholarship and activism, not merely in symbolic and metaphorical ways, but with a commitment to material, structural change in the world. Such contributions could explore any of the following topics (but need not be limited to them):

- Shifts away from the multiple imperial contexts and colonial models of knowledge extraction in our feminist scholarship
- The forces through which Indigenous women and Native feminist theories have been invisibilised within whitestream women’s studies
- Challenging white dominated research and pedagogical models
- Unmasking and dismantling epistemic privilege attached to geopolitical positioning
- The “denaturalisation of the national” (Lukose 2018: 44) as a site of feminist theory and practice
- Exposing the persistent structures of settler colonisation and its effects on Indigenous peoples and others
- Developing and incorporating multilingualism into our research as a way of undermining the hegemony of English as colonial imposition
- Forging feminist alliances in which issues of race and land are not erased for the sake of solidarity
- The complicity of feminist scholarship in the maintenance and invisibilisation of colonial structures and the dispossession of Indigenous people

Formats other than presentations, particularly more interactive formats (such as panels, roundtables or more experimental modalities) are welcome.

The keynote lecture will be presented by Dr Danai Mupotsa who is a lecturer in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). Her research is oriented towards reading everyday intimacies with a commitment to feminist, queer, antiracist political and pedagogical praxis. In 2018, she published her first collection of poetry titled *Feeling and Ugly* (Impepho Press).

This call is directed to RINGS members, but non-members can also submit abstracts. However, member organisations are encouraged to invite others towards extending membership, with particular emphasis on strengthening the participation of those from countries in the Global South. RINGS, the International Research Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies (ringsgender.org), is a global association of centres of advanced gender studies. The participating centres span Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas. Five RINGS assembly meetings and conferences have been held since the inauguration of RINGS in October 2014 at Örebro University: Prague (2015), Cape Town (2016), Reykjavik (2017), Lisbon (2018) and Tallinn (2019). The sixth RINGS annual meeting and conference will be hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa.

Practical information

Host organisation: University of KwaZulu-Natal

Venue: Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani Hotel, 63 Snell Parade, Durban, 4001, KwaZulu-Natal

Registration fee: A minimum of 100 euros or R1700 per individual attendee/participant variable by location. The fee will support RINGS solidarity fund. Members from lower income countries can apply for funding from the solidarity fund to offset participation costs. Assistance from the solidarity fund is subject to sufficient availability of funds. Please contact Beth Gum bethanygracegum@gmail.com for possible assistance.

Accommodation and travel: Accommodation and travel costs are to be covered by the participants. The hosts will suggest accommodation options and arrange reduced prices.

Deadlines and important dates:

- Abstracts of a maximum of 350 words are to be submitted by 14th June 2022 to Beth Gum at bethanygracegum@gmail.com, with the subject line "RINGS abstract". Please also indicate at the end of your abstract whether you will be attending the conference in person or virtually.
- Acceptance notifications will be issued by 14th August 2022.
- Conference registration will open on 17th August 2022.

Contact for inquiries: Beth Gum (bethanygracegum@gmail.com)

Conference Committee

Local organising committee:

- Deevia Bhana, Professor, University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Floretta Boonzaier, Professor, University of Cape Town
- Beth Gum, RINGS Associate
- Amanda Gouws, Professor, Stellenbosch University
- Tamara Shefer, Professor, University of Western Cape
- Chenay Singh, Research Assistant

International advisory committee:

- Deevia Bhana, Professor, University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Amanda Gouws, Professor, Stellenbosch University
- Floretta Boonzaaier, Professor, University of Cape Town
- Jeff Hearn, Professor Emeritus, Hanken School of Economics
- Tamara Shefer, Professor of Women and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape
- Annette von Alemann, Professor of Social Inequality and Gender Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen and Paderborn University

- Kadri Aavik, Associate Professor of Gender Studies, Tallinn University
- Jasmina Lukic, Professor, Central European University
- Erzsébet Barát, Associate Professor, Central European University

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