



The Ruins of Empire: Postcolonial Hauntings

Extended Deadline: May 30, 2024

The notion of ‘haunting’ connotes windswept houses tormented by ghosts and specters, forging a connection between an unresolved past, the troubled present, and imagined futures. With Derrida’s coinage of the French neologism *l’hantologie* (hauntology), the figure of the specter became a byword for the “disjunction in the presence of being” (Goellner 5), pointing to the conflicting connection between the present and the past. Indeed, “[i]nstead of demanding a distancing, the twists and turns of haunting manifest as a thinking against or after” (Blanco and Peeren 32). While haunted houses and ghosts are the most classic exponents of hauntings, the postcolonial often engages with other sites of haunting: borders and liminal spaces, spaces of violent suppression, and communities themselves have been haunted by their colonial histories and its legacies, often as metaphoric “specters raised by colonial violence, trauma, atrocities, control, dispossession, dehumanization, . . . disease” (Goellner 3) as well as environmental destruction.

The conference theme invokes the duality of both being haunted and active haunting to interrogate and complicate the ambivalences in and multiplicity of the field of postcolonial studies in the current moment. On the one hand, we encourage thematic engagements with the trope of haunting: specters, witches, vampires, spirits as well as super- and supranatural presences or forces, both benign and malignant. Such manifestations of hauntings and haunting presences often pose a threat to the status quo, potentially evoking unpleasant, at times even harmful, experiences—they disrupt, they interrogate, they challenge. According to Cameron, “ghosts have a politics and it should come as no surprise . . . that they have occupied the minds of those who aim to trouble, uncover and interrogate the colonial past in this ongoing colonial present” (383). Figuring in what Sarah Ahmed refers to as ‘postcolonial white guilt’ (112), ghosts and specters, proper or conceptual metaphors thereof (Blanco and Peeren 1), act as instigators and driving forces of the postcolonial and decolonial debate on the economic, social, and cultural ruins in the wake of imperialism. As such, ghosts can have emancipatory and liberating potentials, for instance, when “conjured up voluntarily by the postcolonial subject who wishes to exorcise past evils” (Joseph-Vilain and Misrahi-Barak 17) or taking shape in suppressed voices refusing to be forgotten or unheard/silenced.

On the other hand, the notion of haunting opens interpretive space to critically engage with the broader field of postcolonial studies as it intersects and, at times, stands in tension with other approaches. In recent years, the field has been met with critique for its geographic and historic limitations that privileges the anglophone, as voiced, for instance, by Ramón Grosfoguel, who posits “the need to decolonize post-colonial studies and move beyond the ‘imperialism’ of English-centered postcolonial literature towards an epistemic diversity of world decolonial interventions” (Grosfoguel 142). The geographic centering of specific spaces marginalizes voices and communities, such as small island nations, and runs the risk of neglecting manifestations of neo-colonialism in an era that is conceptualized as *postcolonial*.

Bearing such critiques in mind, we want to question how the postcolonial field may indeed still be *haunted* by its colonial legacies. This includes, but is not limited to, the continuance of Eurocentrism and the dominance of the West and its academic institutions in the production of knowledge as well as the perseverance of dichotomies such as margins/center that neglect experiences outside such binaries. We want to ask: How can we, as emerging scholars, productively work within a postcolonial framework going forward? More importantly, (how) can we change, evade, or circumvent such systems of knowledge production by drawing, for instance, on digital spaces not confined and hidden away behind paywalls?

We encourage research that broadens the scope beyond the literary to include wider popular cultural productions, such as film, tv series, popular fiction, comics, and video games. Moreover, while presentations will be held in English, we want to also encourage submissions that feature research engaging with material beyond the Anglophone. In doing so, we hope to spark conversations across generic, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries to highlight the ways in which materials from *all* regions of the world engage with the *haunting* presence of (settler) colonialism and imperialism. We welcome papers both on and beyond the following topics:

- haunted communities, spaces, and landscapes
- temporal distortions, including time travel, memory displacement, or consideration of the haunting in the past, present, and future
- (collective) memory, postmemory and trauma
- the Gothic
- ecogothic and environmental hauntings
- queer hauntings
- embodiment, corporality, and spectrality
- the uncanny and the weird
- life, death, and undeath
- spiritual, mythological, and magical hauntings
- sociological hauntings (e.g., class, gender, racial inequalities)
- colonial and imperial hauntings

Interested postgraduate students and early career researchers are encouraged to send abstracts for 20-minute-long presentations (ca. 300 words + 5 keywords) and a short bio note (ca. 100-150

words) to postcolonialnarrations@g-a-p-s.net by May 30, 2024. We will send out acceptance emails and further info by the end of June.

The conference, organized by Nadine Ellinger, Danica Stojanovic and Corvin Bittner will be held in person at the University of Augsburg, Germany, on September 6-7, 2024. Single events or panels may be held in a hybrid form if necessary. The conference will include a keynote by Dr. Peter Maurits (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) and a workshop on the topic of "Boosting Career Prospects of Early Stage Researchers."

Works Cited:

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Cameron, Emilie. "Indigenous Spectrality and the Politics of Postcolonial Ghost Stories." *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2008, pp. 383-93.

Goellner, Sage. *French Orientalist Literature in Algeria – Colonial Hauntings*. Lexington, 2018.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. "Preface." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2006, pp. 141-42.

Joseph-Vilain, Mélanie, and Judith Misrahi-Barak. Introduction. *Postcolonial Ghosts / Fantômes post-coloniaux*, edited by Mélanie Joseph-Vilain and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2009, pp. 13-26.