

Workshop Series:

***Decolonisation Now:
Histories, Politics, and
Possibilities***

Organisers:

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In collaboration with the
Department of International
History and Politics



Part 1:

11-12 November, 2024

**Counter-Archiving
Decolonisation:
*Methods, Modes, Narrations***

In memory of Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou

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Venue:
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The accompanying images collectively evoke the politics, practices, and audiences at the heart of our opening workshop on anti-colonial archives and counter-archiving decolonisation, which inaugurates our workshop series titled *Decolonisation Now: Histories, Politics, Possibilities*. Curated from locations spread across the Jordan Valley, Delhi, Geneva, and the digital realm, they span themes of collective memories, Third World internationalisms, developmental thinking, and the democratising of anti-colonial resources.

We view these themes with an eye on the compendium of potential stories, methods and hopes that the concepts of the anti-colonial archives might harbour, being more than a simple repository of documents and public artefacts. We do so in a moment when structures of erasure expand violently against peoples' bodies, minds, lands, memories, and aspirations of liberated, decolonized futures. Against this violent erasure — which encompasses hierarchies of settler-colonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and racism — a critical examination of archives and archival discourse becomes more than a pedagogical endeavour of studying the past, but also a political strive to reimagine the future.

By figuring the archive in this manner, our approach builds on and resonates with the increasing attention given to an archival discourse over the last few decades across the various academic disciplines. Following a range of critical interventions, scholarship has moved beyond understanding the archive as a single, coherent, self-inhering space. Problematizing the ontological stability of the archive, scholars and practitioners have deftly interrogated the practices and processes of collection, classification, and violence through which the archive — as institution, practice, and status — orders categories of thought, knowledge, and representability.



In the field of postcolonial historiography, this archival discourse has generated a renewed reckoning with the colonial archive. Reading colonial documents, records, images, censuses, reports, and other artefacts against the grain, a generation of scholars have been recuperating histories of colonial and settler-colonial governmentality, violence, labour, language, body, sexuality, and subaltern agency. And yet, even as this scholarship highlights and traces the multitudinous dimensions of the colonial experience, it has often run the risk of overly centering colonial archives and the overarching state institutions that store them. Put otherwise, what potentially gets effaced by a singular focus on the colonial archive are the varied (after)lives of the archive as states and peoples moved towards ostensibly new, postcolonial forms of belonging and recording. Far from a seamless transfer of institutional and legal control from colonial to postcolonial archives, the demands of imagining anti-colonial, de-colonised futures put into place new modes of thinking, institutionalising, and categorising the past.



Top right: The vegetable market in 'Aqbat Jaber camp for the Palestine refugees in the Jordan Valley, 1956 (Source: UNRWA Film and Photo Archive, photographer unknown).
Bottom left: Students Prosper Anani (Togo), Pierre Loleta (?), unnamed (Yvory Coast), André César (Mauritius), Edouard Ntakiyica (Burundi) in conversation during the inauguration of the library of the Institut Africain de Genève in 1962 (Source: Geneva Graduate Institute Archives, Fonds IUED 651/1).

Thus, moving beyond either static spatial or temporal frames, scholars have turned towards locating and curating other repositories of anti- and de-colonial resistances and memorialisation. Straddling the boundaries between the public/private, national/international, and the textual/visual, these repositories reveal the heterogenous practices of archiving the past that continue to emerge in postcolonial realities. Drawing on archives encompassing films, photographs, oral testimonies, conference documents, poems, posters, and murals, they capture the material imprints and traces of the hopes, anxieties, memories, aspirations, and possibilities which are necessary for imagining transformative, liberated futures.

Building on these ideas, our workshop aims to collaboratively envision — through presentations, film screening, and critical discussions — the methods, modes, and narrations that different archival stories and methodologies engender, especially in relation to the rich and creative legacies of anti- and de-colonial thought and practice that spanned the 20th century and continue to inform our contemporary presents. Bringing together scholars working across different geographical regions and through various methods, this workshop asks three sets of questions pertaining to anti-colonial archives and to the process of counter-archiving de-colonization:



On meaning, what are “anti-colonial archives”? Where can they be found? Which historical conditions and possibilities shape and determine such archives? And how might they be re-examined outside their dominant frames of understanding?

On methods, what are the methods via which one can create an anti-colonial archive, or a counter-archive of decolonisation? How do new digital technologies re-configure the relation between the past and the present? What about voices hitherto obscured by settler-colonial, imperial, patriarchal, or racist paradigms? Can they be recovered within the confines of disciplinary history, or do they require new horizons and imaginative, artistic labours outside the academia?

On politics, what is the purpose of returning to or creating/curating these archives? How can the anti-colonial archive politically intervene in present moments of social, political, and intellectual decolonisation, liberation, and emancipation? How do we escape a sense of nostalgia, melancholy, or over-romanticism when revisiting these archives? and what are the ethical concerns in attempting to imagine and curate repositories of decolonization?



Top right: Paper boats inscribed with lines from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "Hum Dekhenge" (We Shall See) Anti-CAA Protests, New Delhi, India, (Source: Wikimedia Commons).
Bottom left: The homepage of *Maktabat Sabil* (Sabil Library), a Palestinian public library built on sharing resources and knowledge on Palestine and its anticolonial struggle (Source: www.maktabatsabil.com).

Program

Day 1:

Monday, 11 November

Welcome and Introduction

Atwa Jaber

10:00 - 10:30
Room S5

Panel 1

On Conceptualising

Knowledges:

*The Making and Remaking of
Alternative Subjectivities*

Presenters: Rami Rmeileh and Shyaka Kagame

Discussant: Michelle Weitzel

10:30 - 12:00
Room S5

Lunch Break

12:00 - 14:00

Panel 2

On Framing Spaces:

*Space-Making as Sense-
Making*

Presenters: Bernard Keo and Faiq Mari

Discussant: Julie Billaud

14:00 - 15:30
Room S11

Film Screenings

They Do Not Exist by Mustafa
Abu Ali

Looted and Hidden by Rona Sela

Followed by a discussion with Riccardo Bocco

18:15 - 20:30
Auditorium A2

Day 2:

Tuesday, 12 November

Panel 3

On Oral Histories:

*The Politics of Memory, Care,
and Remembering*

Presenters: Atwa Jaber and George Severs

Discussant: Nicole Bourbonnais

10:30 - 12:00
Room S6

Lunch Break

12:00 - 14:00

Roundtable Conversation

To Bring Back The Voices

Chair: Erik DeLuca

Closed session with all participants

14:00 - 16:00
Room S6

Closing Session

*On the Work and Legacy of
Prof. Mohamedou*

A discussion with Davide Rodogno, Abha
Calindi, Apolline Foedit, and Stella Peisch

18:15 - 20:00
Auditorium A2

Concluding remarks

Atwa Jaber

20:00 - 20:15
Auditorium A2
