

Short-term Postdoctoral research position on Postcolonial Reparations (0,4 FTE) – 6 months (April-September 2021)

HOURS PER WEEK: 16 hours per week

FACULTY: Faculty of Humanities

DEPARTMENT: Department MCW, Graduate Gender Programme

APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 8, 2021

Job description

We are offering an exciting postdoctoral short-term position embedded in the “Postcolonial Justice in Postcolonial Europe” seed money research project. This project is aimed at building a European network of academic and non-academic institutions (such as NGOs, advocacy groups, think tanks, cultural foundations etc.) to prepare a consortium grant application to be submitted to the Horizon Europe 2021 call (Cluster 2: “Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society”; Destination 1: Innovative Research on Democracy and Governance – Call 1: Protecting and nurturing democracies). The deadline of HE 2021 call (opening in March) is September 2021.

Summary of the research topic

Can history be retroactively repaired? Might our postcolonial present do justice to the colonial crimes of the past?

These questions resonate with the claims raised in the last few years by a growing number of decolonial intellectuals and activists from all over the world and find increasing echo in current societal debates across Europe that discuss the legitimacy of the demands for slavery/colonial reparations (Araujo 2017), for the restitution of colonial artifacts displayed in European ethnographic museums (Sarr and Savoy 2018), for the removal of symbols of colonial legacy from the public space (Goddeeris 2020) and for the diversification of the Humanities curricula in higher education (Mbembe 2016).

The 2001 UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance – also known as the “Durban conference” – can be considered as a foundational date for the opening of such debates. In that occasion several arguments in favor and against reparations policies for slave trade and colonialism were for the first time explicitly discussed on an intergovernmental scale. With this regard, postcolonial feminist scholar Gayatri C. Spivak famously defined the postcolonial condition we live in as the “child of a rape”, simultaneously emphasizing the impossibility for contemporary Western societies to “righting the wrongs” of the past (Spivak 2004). Spivak’s works, while stressing such impossibility of remaking history by merely rewriting it, proposes to embrace critique as the postcolonial strategy par excellence to deconstruct and decolonize the cultural and intellectual heritage of modernity that still inhabits and haunts our contemporary postcolonial societies. If postcolonial critique can thus play a role in enhancing acknowledgment and recognition for collective crimes committed over the past five hundred years – such as slavery and human trafficking, mass genocides and colonial spoliations – the task of “brushing history against the grain” can be considered only as the *pars destruens* of a much more ambitious and constructive postcolonial engagement to make amends of the wrongs from the past by promoting sustainable changes in the present.

In view of this goal, this project argues that postcolonial critique as a theoretical approach aimed at decolonizing contemporary modes of knowledge production should be supplemented by a strong political and societal commitment of the field of postcolonial studies aimed at envisioning and framing concrete decolonizing interventions that should impact on European laws and policy making with the purpose to respond to the growing international demand for what could be named

“postcolonial justice”. In Western postcolonial Europe, the major claims for postcolonial justice that recently emerged in the public sphere can be grouped into four main streams of debate, each of which touches upon complex theoretical, political and legal matters, while raising significant cultural and social challenges for democracy:

1. **The debate on slavery and colonial reparations:** Are the claims for slavery and/or colonial reparations a crucial pillar of racial justice? On which basis would the descendants of enslaved/colonized people be entitled to reparations? Who should be considered accountable and responsible for repairing these crimes? Are reparations to be conceived as individual or infrastructural?
2. **The debate on the restitution of colonial artifacts and cultural objects that are exhibited in European museums:** Is restitution the most appropriate solution for repairing the colonial robbery of such artifacts? Is the demand compatible with other possible strategies for decolonizing European museums? What would a gradual process of restitution concretely entail in terms of transfer of ownership, preservation and fruition of these cultural objects?
3. **The debate on decolonizing public space:** How can the postcolonial city deal with the legacy of colonial domination? Should streets named after colonial national heroes be renamed? Are the statues celebrating leading figures of colonial regimes to be toppled down? How is it possible to resignify historical monuments embodying the very legacy of colonial history? How are urban spaces supposed to deal with the memory of colonialism?
4. **The debate on decolonizing the Humanities:** How can the canon of different disciplines within the *studia humanitatis* be enriched and diversified? What are possible and viable strategies for enhancing the decolonization of both social and human sciences? How can academic institutions meet the needs of increasingly diverse student bodies?

These different debates and the claims that are voiced in them do not necessarily overlap and cannot be conflated.

However, they definitely relate to each other and share a strong concern for providing postcolonial remedies to long-lasting colonial harms (Spinner-Halev 2012). Indeed, these four debates could gain further strength and legitimacy by being connected and combined from the perspective of a new interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

This is precisely the goal that this project aims to accomplish by elaborating a theory of postcolonial justice.

On a theoretical level, the project “Postcolonial Justice in Postcolonial Europe” aims at elaborating a new interdisciplinary framework – including postcolonial studies, legal studies, cultural heritage studies and urban studies – to link together these four different debates and investigate and develop normative grounds for legitimizing postcolonial demands for racial justice, cultural justice, epistemic justice and spatial justice (Fricker 2009; Mills 2018; Soja 2010). On a practical level, the goal of the project is to stage a triangular connection between 1. academic interdisciplinary knowledge, 2. the expertise of non-academic stakeholders (NGOs, museums and art foundations, advocacy groups, activist groups, research institutes, think tanks) and 3. the work of institutions and policy makers across eight Western European countries that can be considered as the “backbone” of Postcolonial Europe – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK – with the aim to establish a cooperative setting for assessing and implementing democratic strategies for postcolonial justice.

Qualifications

As the ideal candidate for this position, you hold a PhD in Law, or alternatively, Political Science, International Relations, Conflict Studies and you have a background in Critical Legal Theory. Furthermore, you have interest and expertise in postcolonial/decolonial theories, history of European colonialism and contemporary debate on reparations.

Your qualities include being motivated, communicative and resourceful, an effective independent worker, and a collaborative team member. You have an appropriate publication record and have experience with applying for grant funding.

Offer

We offer a short-term temporary position (0,4 FTE) for a period of 6 months. In case of the HE 2021 consortium grant will be obtained, there will be the possibility of further employment. The gross salary - depending on previous qualifications and experience - ranges between €2,790 and €4,402 (scale 10 according to the Collective Labour Agreement Dutch Universities) per month for a full-time employment.

In addition, we offer an exciting opportunity to contribute to an ambitious and international research programme with highly motivated students and to conduct your own research project at a renowned research university. You will receive appropriate training, personal supervision, and guidance for your research activities, which will provide an excellent start to an academic career.

About the organization

The Faculty of the Humanities has around 6,000 students and 900 staff members. It comprises four knowledge domains: Philosophy and Religious Studies, History and Art History, Media and Culture Studies, and Languages, Literature and Communication. With its research and education in these fields, the Faculty aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Netherlands and Europe in a rapidly changing social and cultural context. The enthusiastic and committed colleagues and the excellent amenities in the historical city center of Utrecht, where the Faculty is housed, contribute to an inspiring working environment

The Department of Media and Culture Studies provides education on and carries out research in the fields of film, television, games, new media and digital culture, theatre, dance and performance, gender and ethnicity, music and cultural policies. Culture is a dynamic mix of artistic, creative and everyday practices with which people shape their identities and actions, and within which societal structures and institutions take shape. Media (old and new) are crucial factors in these processes.

The Graduate Gender Programme is placed in the Department of Media and Culture Studies. Our research is embedded in the Research Institute of Cultural Inquiry (ICON) and focuses on processes of in- and exclusion and diversity in a broad range of media, cultural and artistic practices. Why, where and for whom is particular knowledge important? These are the questions that are key to every postcolonial and feminist project of the Gender Studies research group. Based on a feminist, queer and postcolonial perspective, our Researchers seek to identify, analyse, and rectify socio-cultural processes of exclusion and discrimination. Breaking open the relationship between self-evidence, truth, and power, the Gender Studies Researchers create new perspectives on art, culture, knowledge, and society for a more inclusive society. They are engaged in research related to social justice, equality and an affirmative understanding of difference at multiple levels (from the empirical to the symbolic). The Gender Studies research group actively participates in the UU Strategic Theme Institutions for an Open Society (IOS), and in particular in the Hub Gender and Diversity. UU Gender Studies also directs the Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies (NOG) and is the initiator of the Postcolonial Studies Initiative (PCI).

This project is supervised by **Dr. Jamila Mascat**, Assistant Professor in Gender and Postcolonial Studies, Graduate Gender Programme, MCW Department.

Additional information

For more information about this position, please contact:

Dr. Jamila Mascat – j.mascat@uu.nl

Apply

Everyone deserves to feel at home at our university. We welcome employees with a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

The application should include:

- a letter of motivation;
- a curriculum vitae, including a list of your publications. Please include at the end the name and contact details of a referee whom we may contact (max 4 pages);

Due to the coronavirus, interviews will be conducted by video calling.

The application deadline is **March 8, 2021**.