International Institute of Social Studies

Tanteando en la obscuridad: Decolonial Feminist Horizons

Inaugural lecture by Professor Rosalba Icaza

23 June 2022

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Abstract

Can *we respond to the possibility of an ethical life that is not structurally implicated with the suffering and the consumption of the life of earth and others?* In this lecture, I will set some of the elements of decolonial feminist horizons that can help us to address the erasure of experiences that can teach us about overcoming the destruction of Earth (ecocide) and of ways of knowing and forms of knowledge (epistemicide). I argue for connecting ecocide to epistemicide in our struggles to decolonize universities, methodologies, curricula, and ourselves. But, how can we nurture knowledges and learning in ways that lead us towards decolonial feminist horizons? Is this actually possible given the parameters of the university, of critical social sciences, of the fields of global politics, development studies and feminism? To co-generate some tentative answers to these questions, I present praxical thinking and ethics of relationality as the grounding tenets of my research, teaching and mentoring program on *Global Politics, Feminisms and Decoloniality* that aims to consolidate research on the turn towards an epistemic "South'' in the study of knowledge production in global development at ISS.

I Openings

Melipona bees….A few months ago, I read a post on twitter about the role that bees play in the reproduction of corn and in general on the wellbeing of plants that feed us. The number of bees are dropping dramatically across the world, and this was presented as one example of the ongoing destruction of the planet. Hopelessness and enormous sadness were expressed in the numerous threads. My twitter was flooded with images of bees.

Then someone posted the hashtag #climateracism followed by calls to connect struggles to preserve Earth and Earth beings to the anti-racist struggle across the world. Immediately after, someone else posted the following meme: If your environmentalism isn't anti-capitalist and anti-racist, then you're just gardening.

Today, "the ecological frontier coincides with the epistemic frontier" and the resource war we are facing is one in which first nations are struggling to preserve their lands, their rivers and mountains, their dignity, their right to self-determination" and knowledges (Icaza 2018:56).

Recently at ISS, we hosted Valiana Aguilar, a Maya women peasant from Sinanche, Yucatan and one of the founders of the collective *Suumil Mookt'aan*. Valiana was invited to share with ISS students in one of the courses I currently lead, the experiences of caring for Melipona bees in her Maya community and how in so doing, they are re-reading and re-learning from codices written by Maya people more than five centuries ago. These codices are housed in Spain, in Madrid, but thanks to friends in this city, Valiana and her community have had access to them and to the ancestral knowledge on the caring and stewardship of bees.

Valiana shared with us that in ancestral forms of caring for bees, they live in pieces of wood that are hundreds of years old and are used as hives. This form of caring does not expose them to any disease or pesticides as current technologies do. Furthermore, Valiana emphasized that the caring of bees and their honey is not for profit but for free exchange among Maya communities in the region. Valiana

also shared that this knowledge is registered in the codices and it is how the elders, the *abuelitos y abuelitas*, in Sinanche have been doing it. And they are doing this caring despite the constant peril of losing their lands due to interventions from neoliberal, liberal and neo-leftist governments in Mexico obsessed with bringing development and economic growth to her community.

With this re-telling, I am not speaking for Valiana, who is joining us today via livestream from Sinanche, Yucatan. Rather, I am honoring one of the many relations who have taught me how to become in/with ideas rather than just learning about those ideas.

In sharing Valiana and Suumil Mookt'aan's contemporary experience of bee caring through ancestral knowledge that is alive in the elders of the community, I seek to unveil the unequal structures of power, knowledge, gender, and subject formation that allows me, to speak now to you as a highly educated Mestiza woman, and not her. Furthermore, these conditions that are conceptualized as coloniality, disregard her and her community, while their knowledges have been produced as nonexistent. So, how do we undo this? How do we refuse the erasure of coloniality?

In this lecture, I am foregrounding Valiana and Suumil Mookt'aan's bee caring conscious of the impossibilities of undoing coloniality within academia. I seek to speak about this violence while connecting ecocide to epistemicide. In other words, interconnecting the destruction of Earth to the destruction of ways of knowing and forms of knowledge that for over 5 centuries has sustained the western modern patriarchal capitalist order across the world.

In what follows, I will share with you some thoughts about decolonization and feminism. Then, I will explain to you my feminist praxis and ethics and how I learnt to be a decolonial feminist in academia. Thereafter, I will explain the terms modernity, coloniality, decoloniality and how doing decolonial feminist work in academia contributes to our possibility of articulating horizons beyond capital, development and gender. I will finalize by sharing a glimpse of my teaching and research plans and close my lecture by honoring my elders, mentors and teachers sharing a decolonial feminist path.

II Decolonization(s) and feminist decolonial horizons

Can *we respond to the possibility of an ethical life that is not structurally implicated with the suffering and the consumption of the life of earth and others?*

If I had to summarize what is my interest as a scholar, and why this question is important, I would say that I am concerned with what is produced as nonexistent by the fields of global politics, feminism and development.

On the other hand, this question helps me to focus on the interconnections between epistemicide and ecocide while exploring what is produced as nonexistent by these two violent movements of erasure.

Furthermore, this question allows me to engage with what we can do in the university, in our teaching and research, and how to counter both the destruction of the life of Earth and of plural knowledges. It is important that we talk about this in our quest to decolonize universities, methodologies, curricula, and ourselves.

Decolonization has had different meanings across times and temporalities. For example, during the second part of the twentieth century, decolonization was mainly associated with national liberation struggles that ended formal colonial rule by European imperial powers.

Lately, as decolonization seems to be just another term to speak about any process and experience dealing with diversity and inclusion, First Nation scholar Eve Tuck with Wayne Yang (2012) have insisted that decolonization is not a metaphor but an ongoing struggle for land restitution, autonomy, and self-determination (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

In other words, decolonization is a political-economic and cultural transformation that is connected to the preservation of ancestral land, the recovery and acknowledgement of ancestral knowledge, and life horizons beyond capitalism and development, as the experience of Valiana and Suumil Mookt'aan teach us.

In this lecture, I will set some of the elements of decolonial feminist horizons that can help us to address the erasure of experiences that can teach us about the overcoming of ecocide and epistemicide.

What are these horizons you might wonder? In a nutshell, these are what exists after gender and development. These are transmitted to us in words and through deeds that are anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, anti-ableist but also life-affirming and coalitional. Life-affirming in the middle of death and the destruction of Earth, and of our connections with her. Coalitional in the sense that these encourage the alignment of one's interests, understandings, and goals with oppressed groups (Lugones 2003: 26). This is what Argentinean feminist philosopher, popular educator, and M*aestra* Maria Lugones called *deep coalitions*.

You might wonder now, what do life affirming and coalitional words and deeds sound and look like? Life affirming words and deeds are already here, spoken in unfamiliar ways. Over and over these are iterated in non-colonial languages, in vernaculars excluded from the accepted criteria that validates what is deemed scientific knowledge in academia. To be able to listen and to sense them one must move with others coalitionally and away from the desire to represent them, classify them.

Life affirming words do not germinate in the middle of the arrogant ignorance (Vazquez in Weavers 2019 and Santos 2007) of the prophetic intellectualism of the progressive left (Motta 2016). By arrogant ignorance, I mean, following Santos (2007) and Vazquez (2019) an epistemology, a way of knowing and a form of knowledge, that pretends to be wide-ranging, or even claiming universal validity, while remaining oblivious to the epistemic diversity of the world.

The prophetic intellectual of the progressive left, on the other hand, following Sara Motta (2016) is best embodied in the figure of the "development expert", he who does research about their supposedly non-contemporaneous women and men; through mediations such as the notion of development. I will return to this idea of development as a mediation later on.

Realizing this arrogant ignorance as a feminist was crucial to identifying the colonial and extractive nature of academic research. By colonial, I mean the reproduction of hierarchies of value and worth based on geo-historically constructed categories such as "development". By extractive research I mean, following Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), the objectification of peoples, their histories and sensibilities. In this hierarchy, the researcher as the 'knowing' subject is positioned as outsider/objective observer. She/he has been trained to believe in the possibility of mastering and explaining the Other. However, this critical evaluation of research inspired by feminist self-reflexivity was and is insufficient. It allowed me to diagnose what was wrong with development studies as a field, but not what to do next, and how to do it.

Life-affirming words and deeds are not new or innovative, these are not there to be 'discovered' or to be 'included' in our academic lingo and cannons. Life affirming words and deeds are contrary to bodyless, unrooted, and universal knowing. Life-affirming words and deeds are enfleshed, grounded, positioned in places, bodies, ecologies, and temporalities.

Maria Lugonés' beautiful phrase "*tantear en la oscuridad*" is an example of life affirming words and deeds that helps me to speak about the ways in which one moves with others coalitionally in social terrains that are unknown when we are looking to identify new geographies of resistance and liberation. She says the following: "I use the Spanish world '*tantear*' both in the sense of exploring someone's inclination about a particular issue and in the sense of '*tantear en la obscuridad*' putting one's hands in front of oneself as one is walking in the dark, tactilely feeling one's way" (Lugones 2003, 1).

I walked Lugones' *tantear en la obscuridad* seventeen years ago to reflect on my complicity in the destruction of forms of knowledges, ways of knowing and being in the world and of the life of Earth as a university educated feminist embodying the role of gender expert in development interventions (Icaza 2015). I approached '*tantear*' in the way it was transmitted by my grandmother to my mother and to me: "*tanteale el agua a los frijoles*" - sense if the beans have enough water to be properly cooked.

Tanteo helped me then, as it helps me now, to 'tactilely feel my way', one that foregrounds intuition, knowing as a sensorial and sensual experience, as something one does in the company of others, human and more than human others. As a life affirming word and coalitional deed *tantear* helps me to lay bare the self-attributed privileges of the arrogant ignorant knowing subject of academia and to liberate our capacity of knowing and sensing together (Icaza 2015 and Aguilar and Icaza 2021).

At the end of this lecture, my hope is that you will be able to listen to life affirming words and sense coalitional deeds when you go back to your everyday life.

III Feminism, Praxis, Ethics

In the context of international development studies, and the ISS, I belong to a generation of scholars, scholar-activists and students coming together to unlearn the categories we work with to teach about the so-called *Global South*. We understand unlearning as an everyday task taking place in every relationship to whom we are accountable to.

In this task, I am guided by feminist decolonial praxical thinking and an ethics of relational accountability. I am conscious that these are academic terms that require further explanation before moving forward. My second hope today is that everyone here can accompany me in every step I am taking. Let's start with the term "feminism" with the help of two of my favorite feminist of color writers.

You might have heard that "*Feminisms is for everyone*". This is the first part of the title of the book "*Feminism is for everyone: Passionate Politics*" written in 2000 by the late African American feminist and cultural theorist bell hooks. In defining feminism bell hooks argues that it is "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks 2000: 1). I particularly enjoy hooks' emphasis on feminism as movement which brings sensations of motion, co-motion, togetherness.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed defines feminism as "an affective inheritance; how our own struggles to make sense of realities that are difficult to grasp become part of a wider struggle, a struggle to be, to make sense of being" (Ahmed 2017: 20). In sharing how she became a feminist, Ahmed mentions the following: [becoming a feminist] "is also about generating ideas about the worlds

we encounter. Feminist theory, in other words, comes out of the sense- making process of becoming feminist and navigating a way through a world" (Ahmed 2017: 20).

In a world that is largely designed to serve the aspirations and needs of a minority, Ahmed's definition is closer to the ordinary experiences of most people. I particularly enjoy her definition of feminism as it connects to justice and our struggles for trying to make sense of a world that is deeply divided between those who consume the lives of others and of Earth, and those who are consumed.

This brings me to the term decolonial feminism. In the text "*Towards a Decolonial Feminism*", Maria Lugones (Lugones 2010) explains that the world is organized in atomic, homogenous, separable categories that follow dichotomic and hierarchical logics. For example, these are categories we learnt to understand as opposed to each other in which one is lesser than the other such as women/men; black/white; poor/rich; underdeveloped/developed; South/North; non-human/human. Lugones proposes decolonial feminism as a lens to analyze how this dichotomous hierarchy works when one thinks about race, gender, and sexuality (Lugones 2010: 742).

I also mentioned the term praxical thinking, which is also a contribution from Maria Lugones to coalitional work in feminism. Praxical thinking basically means that one *doesn't think what one doesn't do*. For example, when I think ecocide as connected to epistemicide I do it while teaching and mentoring women of color in higher education on how we can work coalitionally to overcome both.

Concretely, this takes the form of a constant search for pedagogical possibilities, for the opening of minds, hearts, ears when listening to and working alongside struggles across Abya Yala by first nation communities, Indigenous and afro-descendant women, peasants, and working-class folks who are resisting the violent destruction of land and territory, women's bodies, lives and hopes.

My intuition, following bell hooks, is that despite the given parameters of the classroom these can be transgressed (hooks 1994); and that it is possible to think and sense horizons beyond gender and development and act coalitionally about it.

This brings me to the term ethics of relational accountability which is inspired by the work of first nation scholars Shawn Wilson (2008), Linda T. Smith (1999) and Eve Tuck (2012). In essence this ethics centers our most important relationships to whom we are accountable to.

By appointing me as Professor, ISS will be the first academic institution in the Netherlands to formally host decoloniality as a "field" of critical inquiry in the social sciences at the highest level in the hierarchy of Dutch academia. But decoloniality is not a field of study. Decoloniality as a liberating praxis emerged from First Nations communities and Afro-descendant peoples in Abya Yala (the Americas) and their struggles for political autonomy and land restitution (Escobar, 2004, 2007; Icaza, 2018b; Walsh, 2011, 2010). In recent years, decoloniality has attracted exponential international attention that often reduces it to be just another academic perspective. Therefore, subscribing to and practicing an ethics of relational accountability makes more sense to me, now more than ever.

The words I share with you today emerge from accompanying the actions of BIPOC students in Dutch and European higher education institutions that have refused to partake in the suffering of others and the consumption of the life of earth. I am accountable to them.

These words germinate alongside First Nations and Afro-descendant communities' long struggle for collective liberation in Abya Yala and as part of the Red Transnacional Otros Saberes (RETOS) – Transnational Network Other Knowledges and the collective Suumil Mookt'aan. Together, we have been sharing the learnings that emerge from defending rivers, mountains, land, and our intimate relations with Earth. I am accountable to them as to Earth.

These words are an echo of the sacred ceremony of fire that my *comadre* Valiana Aguilar carried out to honor life, friendship, love, relation. I am accountable to Valiana, Suumil Mookt'an, the territory, land, and ocean of Sinanche, Yucatan, Mexico.

These words were conceived in the Nurturers' womb, an ISS network for women of color and critical allies embarking together to open a space in academia that nurtures pluriversality, or in other words, a world in which many worlds can fit. I am also accountable to her.

These words were written in the company of my daughter Daniela, my son David, and my partner Rolando. I finalized them imagining the presence of my parents Rosalba and Victor in this room while sensing the caring presence of Guadalupe, Gudelia and Ana Maria, my late grandmothers and grand aunty. I am accountable to all of them.

At this point, and before telling you a little bit of how decolonial feminist horizons can help us to speak more often about the connections between ecocide and epistemicide in our struggles for decolonizing universities, it is important that I share with you how, following Sara Ahmed, I learned to try to make sense of what didn't make sense in academia: the violence of representing others and the violence of critical thinking. Or how I learnt to be a decolonial feminist in academia. Thereafter, I will try to explain the terms modernity, coloniality, decoloniality with the audience of my 11- and 16-year-old children in mind. I will ask them later if I did a good job.

IV Trying to make sense of what doesn't make sense

Olivia Rutazibwa argues that "International Development Studies is constitutively defined by colonial amnesia. International Development Studies is not the only discipline to suffer from this, but these recurrent blind spots and institutionalized erasures are all the more remarkable and unacceptable, given that the enslavement/colonial encounter is what created the need for Development Studies, or international solidarity, in the first place" (Rutazibwa, 2018: 165). Due to these silences and erasures, Rutazibwa argues for the importance of points of departure and asks: where do we start the story [of development]?

Where do I start to tell the story of how I learned to make sense of what didn't make sense? I can start by saying that I am addressing you today as a decolonial feminist who has never studied development but that nonetheless is a product of development interventions. I am the granddaughter of peasant families who lost their lands and migrated to new industrialized urban centers in Latin America in the 1950's. I am the first generation of women in my family to attend university.

I also belong to the generation of Mexicans that in 1994 witnessed the challenge that the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN-Zapatistas) posed to the neoliberal government's flagship policy - the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – but also to the idea that Mexico was one Nation (Icaza 2022). I also belong to a generation of highly educated mestiza women in Mexico who grew up with images of Indigenous women as commanders and in positions of authority. Our mothers and grandmothers did not.

Today, I can say that my research is concerned with teaching young people how not to reproduce as non-existent these sorts of positioned experiences in international development.

In the late 90s, I became involved in anti-free trade struggles labeled by then Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo as "*Globalphobics*" due to our opposition to economic liberalization under NAFTA

terms. Internationally, these struggles were referred to as the anti-globalization movement or alter-globalization movement.

As a junior researcher in a local civil society organization based in Mexico City called the *Foro de Apoyo Mutuo* (FAM) Mutual Support Forum, my task was to develop and conduct a national survey on local civil associations that worked trans-regionally and transnationally. I witnessed firsthand the vibrancy and plurality of associational life within, outside and in the margins of 'civil society' that was opposing neo-liberal policies, and in particular free trade agreements. Despite the constant governmental surveillance and violent responses from authorities; labor unions, Indigenous communities and feminist organizations kept resisting.

The Indigenous women, I met and worked with then, shared with me their horizons for political organization beyond free trade, but also beyond the state, capital, feminism, and gender. Today, this is the transregional agenda for decolonization and *despatriarcalizacion*, for re-existence beyond resistance, for the defense of territorio-cuerpo-tierra; territory-body-land (see Cabnal 2019, Ruiz Trejo 2020).

My PhD research under the supervision of Professor Jan Aart Scholte explored this resistance. By presenting a detailed analysis of three cases of civil society organizations that worked across borders to resist free trade agreements, I tried to make sense of what didn't make sense: the constant erasures and disregard of territorio-cuerpo-tierra; territory-body-land by the established frameworks of understanding used by academics, and in particular the erasure of Indigenous women, as bearers of knowledge.

In my conclusions, I argued that two of the main theoretical frameworks in critical International Relations and International Political Economy literature namely, neo-Gramscian and Polanyian approaches both dealing with transnational resistance, conceptualized agency as *either* the product of powerful structures or as making up these structures. These hardly provided an adequate understanding of the rich texture of the associational life across borders I had witnessed and was a part of. So, how do we make sense of these erasures?

Subsequently, as a Marie-Curie post-doctoral researcher at the University of Gothenburg under the mentorship of Dr Edme Dominguez, I explored further the limits of neo-Gramscian and Polanyian approaches. I argued that these theoretical frameworks didn't allow me to speak of the associational life's internal plurality and tensions that mostly female comrades in the alter-globalization movement in Latin America and the Caribbean entrusted me to know and that I exposed in my academic work.

For example, my research showed that among labor union organizations across these regions, there was a taken-for-granted idea that a developmentalist model of the state was a common horizon and aspiration after the end of NAFTA style neoliberalism. However, this rendered invisible the political horizons articulated by First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations who challenged the existence of single nations within states in the first place (Icaza 2021).

As a feminist, I also explored the gendered inequalities and violence that my female comrades in the alter-globalization movement experienced perpetrated by governments, police forces, the military, but also their own male comrades in the movement. Likewise, I encountered profound disparities of power and resources within and between feminist networks and between these and Indigenous, working class, rural based and afro-descendant women organizations.

Furthermore, the established critical frameworks in feminist IR/IPE concerned with theorizing transnational resistance rarely opened the possibility to foreground the processes through which

researchers like me, were making sense of these disparities and erasures within the alter-globalization movement and of how this often took place in the company of those actively engaged in resisting erasure and disregard. In short, the how was lost under the what and this didn't make sense to me.

My encounter with decolonial ethics and scholarship took place in Sweden when I met for the first time Colombian anthropologist Professor Arturo Escobar who had been invited to deliver the keynote for the Annual Conference of the Nordic Feminist Network HAINA. During the conference, I presented a paper that reflected on what I had learned working alongside Indigenous and working-class women organizations' resisting neo-liberal regionalism in South America, Central America, and Mexico. I argued that their resistances carried forms of knowledges and ways of knowing that were not just critiques of racial, gender, and class-based oppression. These provided alternative understandings of regions and regionalisms, place, body, land and territory. I conceptualized this as 'alternative regionalisms' which at its core linked the loss of possibilities beyond development to the loss of lives of racialized women. I would learn to speak about this as the coloniality of epistemicide and ecocide later on, thanks to Arturo Escobar's generous comments and suggestions for further study that led me towards the work of Mexican Anthropologist Xochitl Leyva on co-labor and towards decoloniality.

At the end of that paper, I asked what would be necessary within IR and IPE feminist critical scholarship for these to be able to learn from Indigenous and working-class women resistances to neoliberal regionalism. I didn't think, in that moment, that sensing the colonial wound would be part of this.

V The (im)possibilities of explaining the colonial wound

What is the colonial wound and what do I mean by sensing it?

Let me explain this with an example that anyone who was born in the 1970s can relate to.

Figure 1. Recording Cassette. Taken from internet source

Who knows what this is? [Figure 1]. This is a recording cassette. Some of us used it before iPod, Spotify, and in general any online music streaming services. Some of us used these cassettes to record music with a tape recorder. I used to record the 1980s pop and rock music hits in both, Spanish and English. I recorded and re-recorded over the tapes until one day after so much use and re-use the tape broke, damaged forever. This was dramatic, if your favorite song was on it, it was now lost forever. Then you either bought the LP, another last century technology, or you listened patiently to the radio until the song was played and then you recorded it again.

The broken tape is a good image so to speak of how the colonial wound feels. One day, after listening to the narratives of humanity, civilization, science, progress, self-improvement, development, and feminist empowerment via education, access to civil society and enjoyment of human rights, and the re-recording of new versions, the tape finally brakes. For a while, one feels sad and lost and starts

looking for another tape to record again. But then, one starts to sense that there is no need to re-record anything because, in silence, one might recover the sense of pleasure of singing and of singing with others.

Through this example, let me venture to say that modernity is not only the technology behind the tape recorder and its evolution until digital streaming today, but also the songs sung in languages one does not understand and that speak about ideas, and visions of the world that are alien and strange but that everyone seems to aspire to. Is this wrong? No, but the technology of the tape recorder then and music online streaming today, the songs and their recording are considered a good thing to do, a common sensical thing to do, something that everyone does or wants to do. So, to stop doing or aspiring to do this seems irrational, romantic, 'you went native'.

Furthermore, asking what lies underneath these recordings or the use of the tape recorder is disregarded as a question, and if asked, it is addressed through the views and aspirations of the creators and designers of the tape recorder then, and the online streaming services today.

However, the silence of the broken tape reveals that one can sing, and dance while singing, but that under generations of re-recordings, our capacity for enjoyment while singing and singing with others is erased over and over with the recording of the next hit. Until the tape brakes.

With this, I am not trying to trivialize the violence that erasing worlds and ways of being entails. I don't want to trivialize sensing the wound, of *sentirse rota,* my intention is to connect with all of you today as much as possible in a way that doesn't reproduce more violence.

This silence, erasure, and breaking over is coloniality. Decoloniality is the movement away from re-recording and the erasure, and towards recovering our capacity of sensing the enjoyment that lies in singing and dancing together. We might record this singing, but that is not what matters. What matters is sensing our capacity for enjoyment in this togetherness, because as Audre Lord (1984) articulated in *The Uses of the Erotic. The Erotic as Power:* 'It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves" (Lorde 1984: 55).

The problem is that the university, as we know it, is not interested in cultivating and nurturing this possibility, but actively disregards it as nonsensical, or a matter of welfare for productivity. In the critical social sciences, including some feminisms, informed by the vision and aspirations of the tape recorders and music online streaming services' inventors and designers, what matters now is re-appropriating contemporary technologies. With this I want to emphasize that decolonial scholars and scholars informed by critical social and deconstructive social sciences are asking different questions about power, gender, knowledge, Earth.

Decoloniality, coloniality of gender[1]

Decoloniality contributes an understanding of power from the perspective of its coloniality (Vazquez, 2011). This means an interest in explaining what power erases, silences, and disregards, and how. Thus, decolonial scholars mobilize the notion of coloniality of power (as well as gender, knowledge, being and capitalism) to name what is not intelligible, what doesn't make sense to the dominant rationalities of heteronormativity, western science, gender, and capital.

[1] This section is a preliminary version of Icaza 2022 forthcoming

Coloniality as erasure of what remains outside or in the margins of what is considered as rational has rendered First Nations peoples like my friend Valiana and her community, and their ways of relating to Earth as unintelligible and non-existent (Vazquez, 2011 and 2017). The late Berta Caceres, an Indigenous woman and environmental activist articulated what land entails for the Lenca peoples in what today is known as Honduras. She indicated that '*Land doesn't belong to us; we belong to land*'. Decolonial scholarship is attentive to these ways of relating, in this case to land, and to how these are articulated in processes of collective resistance against land grabs (Icaza 2018; Walsh 2010 and 2011).

From a decolonial perspective, I conceptualize with Rolando Vazquez that development works as representation and articulation of colonial difference or, in other words, the division between the human and the savage, between civilization and nature (Icaza and Vazquez 2017 and forthcoming). We describe the function of development as articulating the separation between the consumer and the lives of the peoples and Earth that are being incorporated, dispossessed, extracted, and consumed. The loss of plurality of worlds of meanings and forms of life is the coloniality of development (Icaza and Vazquez, 2017: 47). As decolonial scholars we argue that development works as a mediation between those who consume and those who are consumed.

From this perspective, development comes to mean the loss of worlds of meaning ('worldlesssness'), the loss of the relation with the Earth ('earthlessness') and the loss of the capacity of contextual and enfleshed knowing ('enfleshlessness'). These losses are called the coloniality of development (Icaza and Vazquez, 2017; Vazquez, 2017).

By framing the losses in this way, our aim has been to counter ideas of progress, growth, innovations, betterment, positive change, and so on. But more importantly, by speaking about these losses, it is possible to highlight that not everyone experiences development and its dominant modern linear idea of change equally.

To close this part of my talk, it becomes relevant to mention that as decoloniality entered development studies via Professor Arturo Escobar, one of the most renowned post-development scholars, decoloniality and post-development have often been conflated or assumed to be addressing the same concerns in almost similar ways. However, this is far from reality.

Post-development approaches to development certainly paved the way for the decolonial (dis)engagement with development, but there is a constant although productive tension between the two perspectives. The recent compilation *Beyond the Master's Tools*, by postcolonial scholars Bendix, Muller and Ziai (2020), can help us to illustrate the tension as follows: whereas post-development scholarship is still questioning the feasibility of going beyond the master's tools, decolonial scholarship refuses to live in the master's house and use the master's tools as these are implicated in the consumption of the life of others and of Earth (Aguilar and Icaza 2021; Sheik 2020; Motta 2018).

To illustrate this point further, let me explain the notion of coloniality of gender.

Maria Lugonés coined the term 'coloniality of gender' when researching why people are so indifferent to violence against Black women and women of colour (Lugonés, 2007, 2008 and 2010). Lugonés wondered in which ways colonization and the dehumanization of some bodies were a part of the explanation of this contemporary phenomenon.

Lugonés thinks of gender as a mechanism of colonial domination over non-Western racialized bodies. And it is in this sense that she helps us to understand the historical moment in which this specific system (sex/gender) became a form of subjugation, in a concrete mechanism of transformation and

government of all life forms through control of the bodies and subjectivities of the people who had been colonized (Icaza and Vázquez 2016).

In the middle of the silence and erasure of coloniality of gender, decolonial feminists are asking the following questions:

What plurality of forms of sociability that were not deeply rooted in a sexualized dimorphic representation of male-female opposites of bodies, sexuality and spirituality were buried under the categories of 'patriarchy', 'gender', 'women', 'men'?

How do we show the analytical and theoretical limits of the notions of patriarchy/gender/women without denying their concrete violence? (Icaza, 2018b).

Let's bring here an illustration of how post-development and decolonial feminist scholarship have produced contrasting contributions to the field of development. Feminist post-development scholarship, inspired by anti-essentialist critical deconstructive and social theory, has contributed to the unsettling of gender binaries in development interventions, for example, on sexual and reproductive health. This scholarship has developed a perspective of power in and of development institutions and norms as historically situated in modernity, and even in British Victorian sexual norms (Lind 2010; Ahmed 2017).

Contrastingly, decolonial feminisms have contributed to unveil forms of social organization based on fluid sexual dualities already existing 500 years before the term of fluid sexualities entered feminist anti-essentialist registers (Lugonés, 2020; Marcos 2006, Perez Moreno 2020).

So, where do we start to tell the story of non-binary sexualities in development studies and for what purposes?

VI Doing Decolonial work

When I joined ISS in 2007, I continued exploring the theoretical and methodological boundaries of critical social science literature on transnational resistance but this time from a feminist decolonial perspective. Thanks to a second Marie Curie Research Grant, I was able to work alongside Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and feminist activists from the alter-globalization movement resisting the US led Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). I traveled to Bolivia and Trinidad and Tobago to join in their mobilizations against FTAA.

As part of this research, I co-organized meetings and encounters to evaluate the Venezuelan led *Alternativa Bolivariana para las Americas* (ALBA) and the opportunities and challenges of the twenty first Century Latin American Left posed to the autonomy, independence and creativity of social resistance opposing FTAA.

The constitutional reforms in Ecuador and Bolivia, that on one hand granted rights to nature and the integration of an Andean cosmovision to national development plans, on the other, revealed to us, the impossibilities of top-down state-led decolonizing and de-patriacalisation initiatives (see for example: Walsh 2010).

Meanwhile, my teaching and mentoring focused on exploring conceptualizations of transnational social resistance in development studies literature. I reflected in the classroom, with students on the erasure of plural forms of associational life outside and in the margins of what was deemed

'advanced', 'radical' or 'revolutionary' resistance by approaches that foregrounded the North-European and North American experiences of politics and the political.

In the article "*Social Struggles and Epistemic Struggles*" written with Rolando Vazquez (Icaza and Vazquez 2013) for a special issue in the journal *Development and Change* on *Transforming Activisms* we argued that social resistance couldn't be fully grasped just as a reaction to domination, or just as the necessary or logical outcome of the processes that preceded them.

Rather, social struggles seen as epistemic struggles helped us to characterize the creative power that delinks from the logics of the systems of oppression that we resist. Our aim was to think social struggles *otherwise*, beyond capitalism, patriarchy, and racialization, instead of explaining them through the same rationalities and frameworks of understanding they resist in the first place.

We argued for thinking social struggles as epistemic struggles as an invitation not so much to study them as objects, but rather to recognize the questions they pose to our forms of understanding. With this, we wanted to instigate an engagement with social struggles that includes not only their relation to economic and political forms of domination (e.g., neoliberal globalization), but also their capacity to generate knowledges and reveal the limits of our world views including our academic frameworks of understanding.

More specifically, we understand such dominant systems through the words and struggles of first nations and Indigenous communities in resistance in Mexico, particularly the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN)[2], that conceptualizes these dominant systems as a *capitalist hydra* and a *patriarchal racist colonial project of Death*[3].

For us, their resistance was then, as it is now, not fully determined by this capitalist hydra and patriarchal racist colonial project of Death, but by a politics of hope and affirmation (Motta 2018) beyond the modern frameworks of understanding in the critical social sciences. In advancing this we contributed to highlight an epistemic dimension of collective action across borders. Such a perspective was previously only marginally recognized in the fields of international relations (IR) and international development studies.

Prior to this, in 2008 I had traveled to CIDECI Universidad de la Tierra in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, in Chiapas in the South of Mexico to participate in a "*Dialogue of Knowledges*" sponsored by HIVOS Knowledge Program and co-organized with Mexican Anthropologist Professor Xochitl Leyva.

Together with a group of activists from Central America we visited Zapatista territory. In conversations with Zapatistas, those like me who identified as feminists were asked by Zapatista women not to consider them as our past because they "like us, were resisting in the now".

With this intervention, Zapatista women highlighted the ways in which university educated mestiza feminists like me, tend to reduce Indigenous women to be their past, hence erasing their co-contemporaneity. This is what has been named the coloniality of modern linear time.

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[2] The EZLN is the army branch of the indigenous Zapatista communities in resistance, which became internationally known in 1994 when it declared war against the Mexican State. For more information: http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/; http://zeztainternazional.ezln.org.mx/

[3] See, for example, the article by Jorge Alonso on the one-week event organized by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico to speak about *Critical Thought Versus the Capitalist Hydra.* https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5068

This was also the moment when I met Maria Lugones in Mexico City. She was attending a conference at my Alma Matter to present a draft of what later would be her seminal article "*Towards a Decolonial Feminism*".

Maria started her presentation with the following observation: "Resistance starts with a questioning of what is accepted". After her presentation we had the opportunity to talk, and she led me towards her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalitions Against Multiple Oppressions* and her 1992 interpretative analysis of Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands* the New Mestiza.

In the latter, Maria reflects on notions of border subjectivity, duality and vulnerability, discussing Anzaldua's views on resistance and proposes her own ideas on the sociability of the resisters, which would lay the foundation for her subsequent work on coalitions and coalitional work in decolonial feminisms.

Reading Maria then, as now while preparing this lecture, was an awakening of sensations, of voices that speak to me from far away in tongues I don't know but somehow understand. Words that choke in my throat but that can be written and shared when I read Maria.

In the article that I wrote some years later, to honor Maria Lugones and Gloria Anzaldua, entitled *"Testimony of a Pilgrimage: (Un)Learning and Re-Learning with the South"* (Icaza 2015) I tried to make sense of what didn't make sense of feminist expertise in development interventions. Following the invitation of Zapatista women to avoid erasing them as co-contemporaneous re-sisters, I explored the coloniality of modern lineal time in both, feminisms and development thinking. I refused erasure by questioning the subjectivity of the gender expert. But I also offered possibilities of relearning to work otherwise in academia as women of color.

Conceived in relation to a community of colleagues, students and friends gathered around the ISS *Other Knowledges Group*; *Testimony of a Pilgrimage* is concerned with the effects of the violence of critical thinking in development studies and of the representation of others life worlds in feminist studies. Auto-ethnographic reflection is introduced in a *dialogical* format as developed by Xochitl Leyva (2013) defined as "a kind of praxis of research of *co-labor* (collaborative research) in which the written text is a dialogue with the spoken and written word, with visuality, with past and present experiences and with the imagined horizon of autonomy" (Icaza 2015, Leyva 2013).

In this text, I introduced the notion of *vignettes* for the first time as small sensorial interventions that invite students of global politics to learn from social resistance to contemporary violence in Mexico. I foreground the learning possibilities that emerge from the embodied experience that carries the awareness of being implicated in the consumption of the life of earth and the complicity in the suffering of others. I invite these selves in germination to refuse the reproduction of their epistemic, material, racial and other privileges.

After a long period of sickness, I came back to ISS just in time to witness and partake in the effects of the students of color occupation of the Magdenhuis at the University of Amsterdam in 2015. Their demand for "No democratization without decolonization" literally rocked my world. By 2016, I was appointed[4] to serve on the University of Amsterdam Diversity Commission Chaired by Emerita

[4] UvA Diversity Commission was chaired by Emeritus Professor Gloria Wekker. The other members of the Commission included Marieke Slootman and Emeritus Professor Hans Jansen. The mandate of the Commission and final report can be accessed here: http://commissiedd.nl/diversity-commission/

Professor Gloria Wekker. The Diversity Commission mandate was to study the state of diversity in the university.

For the Commission, the question of diversity included but was not limited to the counting of demographics. The commission adopted a multi-level approach to diversity through which it became necessary, besides the demographics, to investigate governance structures, emotions and life experiences, and the ways of teaching and learning.

As one of the five members of the Commission, I coordinated a small team to investigate "*Meanings of Diversity*". The team included Jessica de Abreu and Melissa Evora, and together we conducted research as those who experience diversity work, not just as institutional change but as part of our experiences in institutions not meant to host us, as Sara Ahmed invites everyone doing 'diversity work' to consider (Ahmed 2012).

Our objective was to identify which meanings around diversity help those who claimed to do diversity work. Our main research question asked: *what are the meanings associated with diversity and the effects of these meanings in decision making over what is incorporated or not in curricula?* We found two main meanings associated with diversity: gender and internationalization.

When diversity was associated with gender, the notion of gender was limited to women and woman was limited to mean white women. When diversity was associated with internationalization, it was discursively represented by non-Dutch students, especially Chinese students. Non-white not-male not-able non-heterosexual bodies did count, but only in relation to the diversity of people in numbers. These non-normative bodies were seen and acknowledged. But these same bodies stopped counting when questions about who is or is not included in the canon of a discipline were asked.

As a Commission we implemented a novel perspective that combined intersectionality and decoloniality as a grounding framework. Intersectionality as a feminist perspective and a praxis for social action, allowed us to see why distinct social positions of individual students and staff determine how they experience the University. Decolonialty, on the other hand, allowed us to see how the dynamics of power differences, social exclusion, and discrimination (along the axes of race, gender, and geographical and economic inequality) are connected to the ongoing legacies of colonial history.

Decoloniality as a research perspective helped the Commission to "understand the role of the University as a modern/colonial institution in the reinforcement of Western perspectives at the expense of the plurality of knowledges of the world" (Wekker et. al. 2016: 10-11).

Decolonial feminism, and in particular the notion of coloniality of gender, allowed me to sense the limits of the notion of performativity when confronted with the coloniality of discourse, that is, when confronted with the condition across the colonial difference, meaning the condition of being placed outside discourse, outside the field of intelligibility of the modern/colonial order. How could we think of the possibility of performativity when people have been placed outside the realm of the discourse that determines the field of recognition? (Icaza and Vazquez forthcoming).

My subsequent research expanded on these ideas. In *"Encountering (Each) Other: Women and the Decolonization of Universities across the Global North/South Divide*" (WOMEN DECODE; 2018-20), I explored knowledge decolonization claims and institutional responses to the governance of learning in universities across the Global North/South divide. I asked what consequence, if any, connecting across borders has for collective action and claims. Women DECODE's collaborative approach to research has been of direct relevance to both, academic and non-academic organizations dealing with

the limits of diversity and inclusion frameworks in higher education in the Netherlands, Western Europe and Central America.

More recently, in the project "*We won't think what we don't do: Learning from Stories of Solidarity in times of Covid in the City of the Hague*" (LEF-SOS; 2020-21), co-lead with Dr Aminata Cairo, our team conducted research on the stories of solidarity taking place in the city of The Hague under COVID-19 and amidst Black Lives Matter global mobilizations. Our project's main research question asked: how could these stories become part of a new and expanded narrative that does not regard already marginalized populations as lesser than the dominant norm?

By leading a group of young minoritized local researchers, this project uses the power of storytelling and collaborative research approaches to unmute conceptual innovations around plural meanings of solidarity, while deploying and testing online qualitative research techniques originally designed under assumptions of physical proximity and body mobility.

As the research foregrounds active engagement with and accessibility to what has been collectively learnt, the outputs are directed to different audiences, including academia, teachers and students, the Den Haag Municipality, local policy makers as well as community and religious centers.

In 2021, together with PhD Researcher Marina Cadaval, I started the collaborative project *Indigenous Women Go Virtual: Responding to Racism in Graduate Education in Latin America* (#Indigenous&Woman@HE). This project explores the use Mexican indigenous women give to broader public virtual fora to disseminate their strategies of resistance against racism in postgraduate education. The research asks: How do indigenous women articulate their experiences of and responses to multidimensional expressions of racial discrimination in graduate education in virtual fora?

The project includes the participation of 10 women from Zapoteca, Maya, Ñuu savi, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Cho'l, Rarámuri, and Mestiza origin. All the planned research outputs are collaboratively conceived and directed to different audiences, including a co-edited manuscript to be published in 2023, and our collaborative blog *Resistencias y Mujeres Indigenas*.

Also in 2021, I joined the international multidisciplinary five-year research consortium, *PLANET HOPE: Weaving concrete utopias beyond 'development'* at the Decolonising Knowledge in Teaching, Research and Practice Research Hub (DECkNO) at the University of Bath (UK). Planet HOPE inquires into organizational processes that can promote transformative alternatives beyond development. The project connects with the Global Tapestry of Alternatives (GTA), which includes networks from Colombia, India, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain, South Africa, the UK and USA.

Together with Valiana Aguilar and Suumil Mookt'an, our contribution foregrounds the learning opportunities that emerge from collaborative strategies of bee stewardship (not keeping) and their translation into pedagogies for classrooms like the ones here at ISS. As Senior Co-Investigator, I will lead two Work Packages that nicely connect with the two thematic lines of my Professorial Plan focusing on the decolonization of development research methodologies and pedagogies.

Before telling you more about my future research, teaching, and mentoring plans, let me stress that my current understanding of decolonial feminist horizons and knowledge emerged from these research projects.

VII Feminist Decolonial Horizons

In development studies, critical feminist perspectives have contributed to interrogating and challenging gender hierarchies and inequalities in knowledge production. A decolonial feminist approach is particularly committed to identifying, analyzing, and proposing alternatives to these inequalities in knowledge production. It recognizes that these not only emerge from gendered institutional arrangements but also from the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, or body ableness. It seeks to understand why and how these inequalities manifest epistemically or cognitively, or in specific ways of knowing.

This means considering the colonial foundations that foreground today's multidimensional inequality in processes of academic knowledge production. It also means asking about ways to counter epistemic violence, which is “a form of violence that is expressed in prescriptions of standards, traditions, and ways of knowing that, instead of encouraging a plurality of perspectives, deauthorize them” (Baszile 2006: 196).

A decolonial feminist perspective is interested in the positionality of all knowledges which means that knowledges are generated in places, by bodies and that knowledges are local. Sometimes we only see their expressions in global designs or universalized categories. Understanding knowledges as local doesn’t mean that these are ‘better’ or ‘pure’ knowledges or that these are disconnected from international spheres or global interactions. It means that all knowledges have a specific geo-historical and body-political origin, or in other words, that all knowledges are generated in concrete places and ecologies and by concrete bodies (Icaza 2018).

It also means that all our knowledges are partial. This does not mean that everything goes, or that decolonial feminism is against expertise or is anti-intellectual work, which is a deeply problematic characteristic of our turbulent post-truth era. The partial characteristic of knowledges emphasizes an awareness of the limits of each of our perspectives and promotes an open approach to knowledge. An open approach to knowledge and expertise is an approach for geo-historically positioned forms of expertise that aims to encourage curiosity, reciprocity, dialogue, and collaboration (Icaza and Vazquez 2018).

Curiosity, reciprocity, dialogue and collaboration in knowledge production has taken the form of enquiries into the colonial and extractive nature of academic research in development studies too (Icaza 2021 & 2018). Here the term colonial means the reproduction of hierarchies of value and worth on the basis of social categories such as "race", “gender” and "woman" (Aguilar and Icaza 2021). Meanwhile, in this context the term extractive speaks of the non-reciprocal relationships that are established with peoples and places in the process of scientific research (Icaza 2021 & 2018). For example, these hierarchies produce ideas of "third world women'' as always constrained by “tradition" and patriarchal relations (Harcourt, Icaza and Vargas 2016).

In global development research, feminist decolonial enquiries have opened a field of investigation that focuses on explaining why and how these ideas of "third world women" were imposed and prevail to this day. More importantly, the priority is to account for women’s knowledges that were disregarded by such impositions and accompanying mis-representations. In a nutshell, the task of decolonial feminism is distinct and independent from established anti-essentialist critical feminist theories influenced by post-structuralism, post-humanism and neo-materialism.

Decolonial feminism’s priority is not the analysis of impositions or dominant representations of sub-alterity but that of exploring reciprocal and coalitional ways of de-silencing knowledges made absent (Icaza 2018, Icaza and Leyva 2019, de Jong, Icaza and Rutazibwa 2018). Precisely, in my own research

I prioritize the learning possibilities of experiential knowledges that are found at the margins of communities and in academia as the key towards feminist decolonial horizons.

VII Looking forward

Can *we respond to the possibility of an ethical life that is not structurally implicated in the suffering and the consumption of the life of earth and others?*

At the beginning of this lecture, I mentioned that this question allows me to highlight the interconnection between ecocide and epistemicide. It also helps me to explain the relevance of identifying decolonial feminist horizons to overcome both, epistemicide and ecocide. I also argued that in order to do this praxical thinking an ethics of relational accountability is necessary.

I have also shared with you how I have been nurturing decolonial feminist horizons in research on social resistance against free trade across borders, on the governance of diversity in higher education, on the responses by indigenous women to racism and discrimination in higher education in Mexico, on the stories of solidarity by marginalized communities in the City of The Hague during the COVID 19 lockdown, and more recently, on learning to be in/with ideas through the bee stewarship of Suumil Mookt'aan as an alternative to gender, development and capitalism.

But, how can we nurture knowledges and learning in ways that can lead us towards decolonial feminist horizons? Is this actually possible given the parameters of the university, of critical social sciences, of the fields of global politics, development studies and feminism?

To co-generate some tentative answers to these questions, I have put forward a program on *Global Politics, Feminisms and Decoloniality* that aims to consolidate research on the turn towards an epistemic "South" in the study of knowledge production in global development at ISS.

The program has two thematic priorities: decolonizing research methodologies, and decolonial pedagogies. The program will evolve over the next five years with each thematic line working on distinct projects with PhDs, Post-Docs, a series of research outputs and socially relevant activities with Dutch and other universities, national and international alliances, and coalitions.

A) Decolonizing methodologies

Let me explain to you what I mean by *decolonizing research methodologies* and how this thematic line will be implemented.

Despite local specificities, research in Europe investigating calls for the decolonization of universities has detected a common concern, to address the colonial legacies of universities (Icaza and Vazquez 2018; Icaza, Jong and Rutazibwa 2018). Elsewhere, such interest has led to removing statues of former colonizers such as Cecil Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and the University of Glasgow paying reparations for its role in slavery. Whilst art institutions in the Netherlands have started to confront their colonial past, (e.g., the recent Rijks museum exhibition on Slavery in the Golden Age and the renaming of the Witte de Wit museum of contemporary art), Dutch universities have fallen behind. To this end my Professorial Plan on decolonizing methodologies and decolonial pedagogies executed through the ISS begins to address this colonial past thus innovating and pushing the envelope in terms of the Dutch university landscape.

Building on my internationally established work connecting feminist analyses of knowledge governance in universities to decolonial and transnational activism studies, and once extra funds are secured (AHRC 2021/2), the first thematic line will prioritize looking at the productive tensions that

emerge around knowledge decolonization claims and practices within universities and research centers which teach and research global development. In so doing, the research will explore how claims and institutional responses inform each other.

As a first step, collaborative research will be conducted in a selection of institutional contexts to identify the existing inequalities that operate in specific research contexts: from the research design to the fieldwork and analysis research phases. As a second step, the research will investigate institutional practices in accreditation committees and national scientific bodies as development research and teaching institutions take on board knowledge decolonization claims. The research approach aims at listening to those demanding the decolonization of knowledge in global development research and teaching, to judge how inclusive and sustainable policies are or claim to be.

The strategy to advance this thematic line of work, on the decolonization of research methodologies, is to prioritize connections with the second on the decolonization of pedagogies, to pave the way into leading a transnational and multistakeholder consortium. This consortium's aim will be to train the next generation of decolonial researchers and teachers of global development.

B) Decolonizing/decolonial pedagogies

Relatedly, the second thematic line of my research program focuses on *decolonizing pedagogies.* This work is ongoing and in what follows I will speak of it and how it will be consolidated in the coming years.

There is still a lot to be done to decolonize our pedagogies in order to respond to the multi-layered wellbeing crises that confronts us, our societies/communities and the life of Earth. This means involving students and investing in developing pedagogies as a collective caring endeavor. In so doing, my research contributes to the operationalization of decolonial pedagogies as those addressing the challenges of positionality, relationality, and transitions (Icaza and Vazquez 2018).

Pedagogies of positionality refer to teaching practices that seek to expose knowledge in a situated manner. In other words, the geo-political location of the knowledge that is shared is discussed and the role that a specific canon might play in reproducing intersectional axes of exclusion.

Meanwhile, pedagogies of relationality refer to teaching practices that seek to transform established relationships in the classroom and across the university. It is not simply a participatory approach to teaching, but one in which the plurality of backgrounds and the positionality of students is not suppressed, but, on the contrary, enriches the learning experience for all (Icaza and Vazquez 2018).

In my teaching at the University College Roosevelt's *Going Glocal* Program and in the Maria Lugones Decolonial Summer School (led by Professor Walter Mignolo and Dr Rolando Vazquez) I have been able to practice pedagogies of positionality and relationality. Likewise, I incorporate pedagogies of positionality, relationality, and transition in my teaching contributions to the ISS MA program in Development Studies and PhD Supervision.

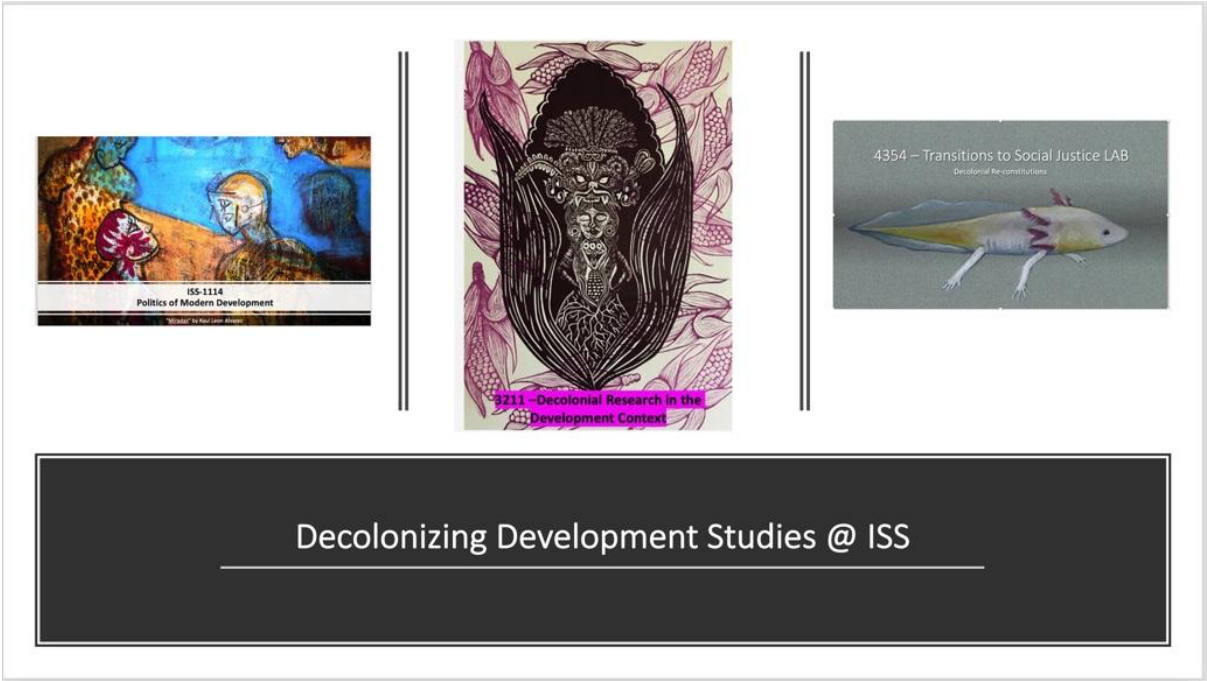

Figure 2: Decolonizing Development Studies @ISS

This is an image (Figure 2) that summarizes my current teaching at ISS in which decolonial thought and pedagogies are put in practice to decolonize both, the ways we teach and learn about development and the way we do research about development. In so doing, I operationalize in teaching a perspective of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (Vazquez 2011) as three different geo-historical movements (Figure 3).

In a nutshell, in the historical movement of modernity; hegemony and privilege speak, names and represents the other as "underdeveloped". The underside of this, coloniality, is the geo-historical movement of erasure, disregard, and negation of non-dominant worlds of meaning and being, the Lenca people's sense of belonging to Earth, being a case in point. Therefore, it is simply not enough to criticize and deconstruct modern forms of representation.

Decoloniality is a geo-historical movement and predisposition towards de-silencing what has been erased, disregarded and denied with tools that, following Zuleika Sheik (2021, 3), are not 'complicit in our own dehumanization'.

My interest in movements away from systemic thinking or matrices helps me pedagogically to highlight plural points of departure when teaching about global politics, feminisms and international development as I will go on to explain next.

1114 Politics of Modern Development – Decolonizing Power

I currently led a MA level course **Politics of Modern Development: *Decolonizing Power***. This intermediate foundation course introduces key concepts and analytical perspectives in modern politics and its anti, post, and decolonial alternatives. The course gives special attention to 5 notions: Politics, Power, Democracy, Nation, and the State in modern development.

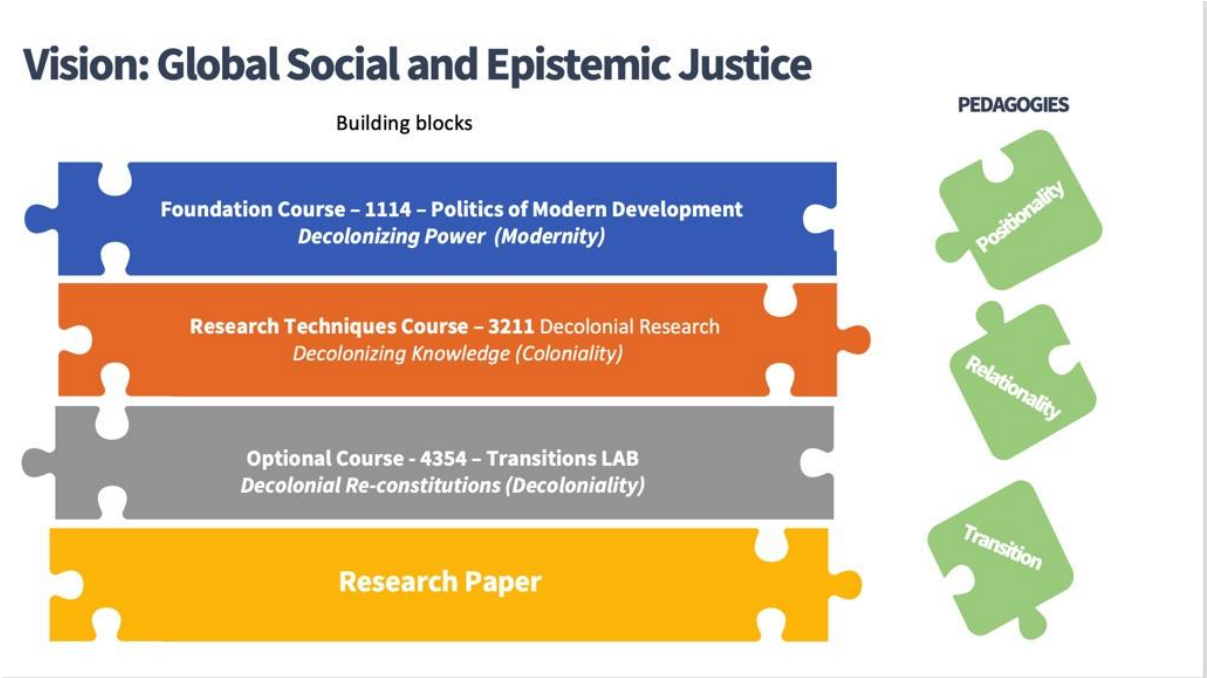

Figure 3. Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality

The course adopts a global perspective on contemporary political philosophy. This means that ideas and questions of European and American political thought are placed in a dialogue with authors and thinkers positioned in an epistemic or cognitive 'South' in order to stimulate a decolonial/decolonizing epistemology in the classroom.

Unlike well-established perspectives that mobilize modern western political thought to analyze manifestations of political power in 'developing' countries as what structures possibilities for realizing development, this course does something else.

Faithful to ISS' critical social science tradition, the course aims to encourage participants to formulate questions about taken-for-granted perspectives and conceptualizations of politics in 'developing' countries. Nonetheless, the course goes further than this.

In particular, the course seeks to encourage participants to ask why and how inclusions/exclusions and binary (mis)representations (e.g. modern/traditional; developed/underdeveloped) have articulated certain political norms, practices, and prescriptions as pre-conditions to attain modern development (e.g. industrialization as a precondition for economic growth).

In the course, we read materials that cover international relations, political, historical and sociological perspectives on race, racism, imperialism, colonialism, and slavery with particular attention given to First Nations/indigenous, black, southern and decolonial thinking. The approach is not about 'adding on' or 'including', but one that is concerned with changing the terms of the conversation on what to this day constitutes *politics* in modern development.

The following questions serve as points of departure to start conversations in the course: Where do we begin to tell the story of what is politics? Who has been telling that story and who has been listening? In which ways do our shared understandings of 'politics' connect to modern development, to its manifestations in institutions, practices, and interventions?

3211 – Decolonial Research in the Development Context – Decolonizing Knowledge

I am currently leading another MA course on **Decolonial Research in the Development Context– *Decolonizing Knowledge*** which was co-designed with Dr Zuleika Sheik and Lisa Gronemeier, both ISS alumni from the PhD and MA programs respectively.

As a postgraduate advanced course, participants are exposed to a plurality of forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, with accompanying approaches responding to decolonizing concerns. Special attention is given to concrete projects positioned in an epistemic or cognitive 'South' that emphasize the decolonization of what is known, such as: decolonial investigations, first Nations/indigenous methodologies, holding space, liminagraphy, anti-colonial archival research, and knowing *with* others.

Whilst particular fields and disciplines are starting to incorporate elements of a decolonial approach through diversifying their curriculum, this course explicitly and comprehensively addresses the question of *how* to apply a decolonial approach and ethics to research in the context of the social sciences and humanities, development policy and practice. In so doing, the course follows Hlabangane's (2018) critique of method to point at the impossibility of a decolonial 'method'.

The course gives special attention to the ethical challenges of a decolonial approach to research, but also its strengths and limitations in relation to concrete institutional contexts.

Using a decolonizing pedagogical approach that foregrounds solidarity, deep listening, coalition building and relationality, the course encourages participants to focus on the "doing" aspect of the research process.

The course is informed by indigenous/First Nations pedagogical practices which promote self-reflexivity and community building, both of which contribute to nurturing dialogical engagement, mutual (un)learning and a sense of community within the classroom.

The course delivery is through practice-oriented knowledge. This means that each session provides an opportunity to think with/learn from concrete research experiences and strategies linking research practices, social justice, and decolonization.

Given the pedagogical approach, participants can see themselves in the research and are given opportunities to practice and receive feedback via peer-to-peer learning. In addition, participants have the opportunity to meet and learn from/with established and emergent decolonial researchers in academia, the arts, policy, and NGO sectors.

4354 Transitions to Social Justice LAB – Decolonial Reconstitutions beyond power, knowledge, capital and gender

Finally, I also lead the MA level course **Transitions to Social Justice LAB – *Decolonial Re-constitutions*** which is designed to implement and practice pedagogies of transition. These pedagogies refer to those teaching practices that seek to bridge the epistemic border between the classroom and society, and between the classroom and the life of Earth as lived environment.

Working through these pedagogies means that we don't ignore what is surrounding us, but that we actively incorporate it in our activities. Pedagogies of transitioning highlight the importance of enabling conditions for generative learning tensions to emerge for students and researchers when confronted with the question of the meaning of the knowledge they are exposed to: 'what is this

knowledge for?'. In other words, 'what is the purpose of a particular knowledge? '(Icaza and Vazquez 2018).

At the center of pedagogies of transitioning are our relations to society and to Earth, our implication in the destruction of the life of others and of Earth but also the responsibilities we hold to care for others and restitute life.

The notion of 'transitionings' points to institutions, organizations, communities and individuals who are actively addressing their societal, and ecological implications and responsibilities. The plural in transitions also aims to question the newness of concurrent crises in education, migration, food, production, the environment, governance, the arts and culture.

The aim is to encourage curiosity and dialogue about how life has been sustained and restituted by marginalized communities around the world in the midst of genocide and destruction. This is key to enabling conditions for relations of reciprocal learning, care and life restitution while becoming activated listeners-learners (Aguilar and Icaza 2021).

I use the verb 'transitioning' instead of the noun 'transition' to emphasize possibilities for acting with others. The term transitionings also indicates an interest in re-examining socio-technical relations and the fragility and resilience of socio-economic-political and ecological systems of which we are a part. As a pedagogical approach, 'transitionings' helps me as a facilitator not to lose sight of how the knowledge co-created in the classroom impacts society and Earth.

The LAB's main innovation lies in the fact that, instead of trying to understand transitions separately, students are encouraged to approach them as interconnected via themes such as: Nurturing, Learning, Studying, Eating, Healing, Traveling, Hosting, Sensing, Caring, and Refusing.

By focusing on verbs that most of us use and act upon daily, instead of nouns or concepts such as Education, Migration, Food, Production, Environment, Aesthetics, Resistance, this course aims to cultivate a return to action in language and to encourage critical reflexivity around the everyday instead of detachment via disembodied abstractions (in other words positionality in practice).

VIII Re-centering learning, autonomy, translation, mentorship

As you can see, in setting out my research program, teaching is central to it. The classrooms at ISS and EUR have been and will continue to be a site of praxical thinking, of conceptualization and analysis of claims and practices of decolonization of knowledge and of decolonial pedagogies.

As my Professorial Program in Global Politics, Feminisms and Decoloniality stems from plural feminist traditions, I will prioritize work that creates opportunities for collaborations between feminisms in particular - *feminismos comunitarios territoriales*, black feminist thought, feminist critical political ecology - with decolonial pedagogies providing a space for that encounter.

This thematic line will contribute to the ISS' cross-cutting theme of environment and climate change by looking at socio-political-economic-ecological transitioning strategies deployed by a plurality of communities.

Publishing and translation

In 2019, I contributed to the official launching of RETOS' a non-commercial publishing house "Editorial Cooperativa RETOS". As one of the Chief Editors (together with Professor Xochitl Leyva– CIESAS

Mexico) I have contributed to the publication, editing, and technical montage of the whole publishing process. But, most importantly, we have organized a network of committed researchers who have mentored women of color and non-binary people in the process of writing.

As a non-commercial publishing house, all our publications are open access and can be downloaded free of charge via the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) virtual library, our facebook page and blog. This, I believe, is an example of a concrete initiative informed by my research findings on (the lack of) epistemic plurality in development studies' academic publishing practices.

Currently, I am also collaborating in the RETOS collection "Al Faro Zapatista/ To the Zapatista lighthouse". This book series is organized as single authored pivot style monographs or edited collections in the popular accessible format of pocketbooks which cover the Zapatismo's contributions to critical social sciences, decolonial scholarship and pluriversal studies.

A total of 27 books were commissioned to a group of Mexican and international leading experts on development, gender studies and feminism, social justice, decoloniality, and indigenous social movements; including John Holloway, Arturo Escobar, Arturo Anguiano, Diana Itzul, among others. The 27 books will be published in an electronic open access format by RETOS, CIESAS and CLACSO at the end of 2022. I am the editor of one of the books which features ISS PhD researchers' contributions.

Mentorship

As someone that constantly seeks long-lasting collaborations in the Netherlands and abroad with academic, policy and activist networks concerned with global justice, equity, and sustainable development, I value the practice of critical self-reflexivity as a basis to respond to and be with others effectively and caringly.

As teacher and mentor, in both undergraduate and postgraduate education in seven different countries I have learned the importance of deep listening, connection, and relation for sustaining long lasting collaborative work and being creative with our differences. I understand a Professorship as a moment of harvesting and honoring those who precede me and for mentoring those who come after me.

As the current Chair of the ISS Faculty Coordination Committee, former Team Chair of the ISS Diversity and Inclusion Team, founder of the first ISS support group for women of color researchers, "Nurturers", and a committed participant in the EUR Diversity and Inclusion Office activities, I am fully aware of the unequal representation of women, and people of migrant backgrounds in positions of decision-making in Dutch academia.

This awareness means for me, as a woman of color, that a successful research process requires leadership, but also mentorship in which the task of listening to marginalized voices within the university is central. By marginalized voices I mean students of color, non-binary, gay, queer, first- and second-generation immigrants, refugees, stateless, those with disabilities, and those from materially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Introducing an epistemic justice dimension to EUR drives my vision of the future of our community and of universities in general. Taking seriously the legacies of colonialism calls for a transformation of our frameworks of understanding and our pedagogical and institutional practices.

Research and teaching at ISS and EUR can benefit from these transformations if we deliberately encourage a systematic documentation and reflection on the current transitioning period from mono-cultural disciplinary thinking to a truly global interconnected reflexivity.

IX Closure as opening

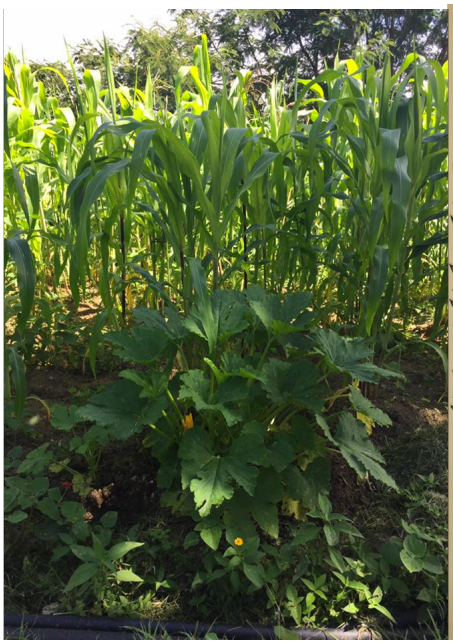

Figure 4. Milpa, Oaxaca, Mexio

Figure 5. Cuando las semillas de la dignidad Florecen

I am sharing with you two images now. On the left (Figure 4), a Milpa from Oaxaca, Mexico, which is a mix of squash, beans and corn; and next to her, the engraving "*Cuando las semillas de la dignidad florecen*" from the collective autonomous workshop Grieta Negra Taller.

In sharing these images today, I would like to invite you to think through the milpa as a convivial and pluriversal technology that for thousands of years in Mesoamerica has countered mono-crops as well as monocultures.

I wrote these words searching deep inside me, in silence, with my eyes closed to feel the embrace of the many women who are not feminists and don't want to be called feminists, but who are constantly struggling for life in the middle of death and violence, who are *poniendo el cuerpo*.

I am called to go slowly, to retell my own story as a possibility to share with others how important it is not to produce peoples as non-existent, or hyper visible or reduce them to a discourse of alterity, a ticking box in diversity and inclusion plans for action.

I want to move slowly throughout coalitional stories, led by the rhythm of tango in Maria Lugones' intellectual legacy while embracing the darkness of Nepantla to feel the burning whispering of Gloria Anzaldua in the pit of my stomach.

After choking in words, in Spanglish, I am seeking to be healed in the company of M. Jaqui Alexander's prose. My body moves again, *tanteando*, a body in motion and co-motion to rejoice and rejoice again. Audre Lorde tells us we cannot accept less.

I sense Aminata Cairo is holding space for me, Sara Motta burning incense reminds me to be courageous and Gloria Wekker naming me “Women of Color”. Those who precede me are to whom I am accountable to.

By holding hands with Zuleika Bibi Sheik and Paulina Trejo Mendez I embarked on the uncertain path of unlearning ourselves so we may learn each other.

Given the parameters of this lecture, following the legacy of all those who came before me and to the best of my capacities, I have articulated the (im)possibilities of being a woman of color in academia while setting out a decolonial feminist praxical thinking and an ethics of relational accountability. I can only hope that my words and my own story are part of yours now.

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Bees. Melipona bees from Sinanche Yucatan Mexico. In a couple of weeks, I will travel to encounter them guided by Valiana Aguilar, and the collective Suumil Mookt'aan. A pathway to walk on what has been, a feminist decolonial horizon full of learning possibilities to nurture reciprocity and relation beyond gender, capital and development. *Tanteo* life affirming and coalitional horizons.

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Acknowledgements and thanks

Before starting our fiesta 'Viva la Vida', I would like to thank and honor those who made it possible for me to be here with you today.

To my ancestor, Maria Lugones, and elders, Aminta Cairo, Gloria Wekker. Thanks for showing me the path towards liberation.

To the ISS members of the Nurturers Group: Paulina, Zuleika, Marina, Umbreen, Tamara, Ita, Constance, Yuchen, Larissa, Nanna, Daphina, Agustina, Charmika, Brenda…thanks for your company and trust.

To all students of color at Dutch Universities, in particular ESOC, UvA UoC, STAR...your resistance is a powerful inspiration.

To my elders in the decolonial summer school, the late Alanna Lockwood, Catherine Walsh, Jean Casimir, Walter Mignolo, and not so elders, Madina Tlostanova, Ovidio Tichindelau, Manuela Boatca, Aldo Ramos, Patricia Kaersenhout; thanks for your support always.

To colleagues and friends who have sustained me across continents, countries, and over the years: Sara C. Motta, Julia Suarez Krabbe, Olivia Rutazibwa, Sara de Jong, and of course my former PhD supervisor and friend Jan Art Scholte.

To former and current colleagues at ISS: Wendy Harcourt, Karin Arts, Inge Hutter, Arjun Bedi, Karim Knio, ThanDam Troung, Cristobal Kay, Sree Satiamala, Silke Heumann, Louk Box, Mohamed Salih.

Thanks to FCC colleagues: Irene van Staveren, Elissaios Papyrakis, Georgina Gomez, Murat Arsel

Special thanks to ISS Secretariat and support staff: Irene Lopez, Annet van Geen, Lubna Sharwani, and of course to Sandy, Gita, Andre, John, Robbie.

To my neighbors Maritza and Dan, Daniela, Roberto, Karina, Manuel, Antonieta, Dario, Manuel Jr; you made of the Hague, a home.

Rolando, my partner in decolonial transitions towards radical tenderness, love and friendship. Intellectual colleague and co-author. Thanks for co-parenting with me. And to my children, Dani and David, thanks for keeping me away from work, grounding me and making me happy and proud.

A mi mama y mi papa, Rosalba y Víctor, gracias por acompañarme y por decirme lo orgullosos que están de mi.

Muchas gracias, many thanks to everyone for being here with me today.

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