

CALL FOR PAPERS
On the Possibility and the Impossibility of Reparations
Workshop, 7-8th May 2020
Columbia University, New York City

In recent years, demands for historical justice have intensified in several national contexts in the form of claims to right the historical wrongs of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade by means of reparations. These demands have primarily been met with skepticism and distrust from national governments and a number of sections of civil society. In a context of growing grassroots activism primarily from black and indigenous communities around the world, an increasing number of political representatives are nevertheless starting to come out in support of material reparations. Reparations for the racialized descendants of European colonialism and transatlantic slavery is now a conversation at the highest levels of politics in the Global North in a potentially unprecedented manner.

Scholars dealing with questions of reparatory justice have tended to sympathize with the moral sentiments surrounding symbolic practices of reparations, but have often assumed the impossibility of widespread material reparations in the context of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. The scope of this emergent politics of repair is not exclusively moral, however, it goes beyond apology and commitments to symbolic change. Taking seriously reparatory justice in material terms thereby poses new demands to scholars interested in social inequality, racism, colonialism, and reparations.

The broad goal of this workshop is to investigate the significance of a turn to greater acceptance of material reparations for colonialism and slavery, to investigate what widespread material reparations could look like, and to probe the terms on which reparations would be capable of both enacting repair and combating social inequality in capitalist, white supremacist, and settler colonial contexts. The following questions serve as a guide, though we welcome all papers that deal with the theme of reparatory justice in the context of European colonialism and transatlantic slavery:

- How can we understand the relationship between racial categorization and reparatory justice - how do existing legal and political categories of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity limit or enable the scope for reparatory justice in various contexts?
- How do articulations of reparatory justice relate to wider questions of social equality, political participation, and futures beyond (neo-liberal) capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism?
- What could material reparations for histories of colonialism, colonial genocide, and enslavement look like, how might they be adjudicated and administered?
- How are courts of law and international organizations imagined as vehicles for reparative politics and how might such imaginations limit or enable the possibility of reparations outside of such venues?
- How might institutions, vernaculars, and methods of enacting justice be organized and reorganized in order to provide an adequate means for Western states to be made materially accountable for the history of colonialism and its attendant structure of racialized violence?

- On what terms could reparations as a political and legal technology be capable, in themselves of enacting repair, of righting the wrongs of the past, especially in contexts of ongoing settler colonialism, climate catastrophe, and white supremacy?

The two-day workshop will take place at Columbia University in New York City on May 7th and 8th 2020. A welcome address will be given on the first morning by Professor David Scott, after which each participant will be expected to present a paper of between 20 and 30 minutes. We welcome dissertation or book chapters in progress. Participants are expected to send final papers to the organizing committee two weeks in advance and we will distribute the paper presentation to your fellow panelists. Scholars who are invited to participate in the workshop may be eligible to receive a financial contribution toward travel and accommodation. The stipend aims to assist participants who do not have access to any funding from their institutions, and who will not be able to attend the workshop without assistance. Please indicate in your application a request to be considered for a small stipend.

Submission Guidelines

1. To apply, please email applications and other questions to the organizing committee at opircolumbia2020@gmail.com by October 31st, 2019 at 11pm (EST). Final decisions for papers to be presented at the workshop will be announced by November 15th 2019 at the latest.

2. Applications should include:

- A. Abstract (max 500 words). The workshop is interdisciplinary so please ensure that proposals can be understood by those outside of your field.
- B. CV (max 2 pages).
- C. Biography (max 250 words).

Please format all file names using “Lastname - Proposal”; “Lastname - CV”; “Lastname - Bio” (e.g., “Davis - Proposal”, or “Davis - CV”).

Further Information

The organizers of this conference are Ph.D. candidates in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University Anna Kirstine Schirrer (aks2217@columbia.edu) and Howard Rechavia Taylor (hrt2114@columbia.edu). More details on the program and venue will follow.

This event is sponsored by ISERP - Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy.