**Final PhD seminar**

Salmah Eva-Lina Lawrence is from the Milne Bay Province of PNG and belongs to two genealogies that were influential in the politics of the Kwato Mission. A former director with Deloitte based in London, she has also worked in international development, including with UN Women in Afghanistan. She is in the Department of Gender, Media, & Culture Studies and her PhD is supervised by Pr. Margaret Jolly.

Her final PhD seminar is on 18th August from 11am to 1230pm in Hedley Bull Theatre 2.

All welcome.

SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES.

KWATO PERSPECTIVES ON MATRILINY AND MISSIONISATION.

Narrowly conceived, this is an historical ethnographic study of the indigenous people who participated in the Kwato Mission in the matrilineal Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. More broadly, it is an examination of how people responded to the arrival of the culture of whiteness and the fundamental changes to practice and consciousness that took place through the processes of missionisation and colonisation. Changes were simultaneously subjective and objective, mental and material. In what ways did the Massim peoples engage with the new introductions? How did our own history shape those engagements with whiteness? And in what ways did the Massim peoples respond to attempts to coerce and dominate? Attention to power leads me to also engage with the question of knowledge production and to ask how is it possible to know the Massim people without fluency in Massim ways of knowing and languages.

My conceptual lens is decolonial and I draw on feminist theory and critical race theory. From Luce Irigaray and Iris Marion Young I borrow the concept of wonder as a theoretical construct to shift the gaze on how Massim people have often been represented by whiteness. Since a balanced comprehension of the world we live in must necessarily include different perspectives, social justice must allow for epistemic difference.[[1]](#footnote-1) There is, thus, both an epistemic and ethical impulse to name whiteness and to disrupt its hegemony. Guided by this decolonial imperative I examine the deep past of the Massim peoples and the wonder-full Austronesian migrations across millennia which more deeply inform present-day Massim languages and culture than does the whiteness of missionisation and colonisation.

The empirical part of my decolonial methodology draws primarily on oral history supplemented by archival work. I examine the disruptions presented by external forces of colonisation and missionisation and demonstrate how the Massim peoples responded to these. I conclude that Kwato Mission could not have existed without the support of the Massim people and that they shaped missionised personhood indelibly. I propose, too, that the matrilineal descent system of the southern Massim produces a distinct form of gender relations and particular structures of governance that are grounded in relational autonomy.

In this seminar I will outline my thesis and findings, and present one of my chapters concerning the motivations of those who lived on the cusp of colonisation and who actively invited the missionaries to settle amongst them, highlighting as well as aspects of matriliny and relational autonomy. Apropos my decolonial methodology, and my use of critical race theory, in this chapter I also draw attention to the linguistic and cultural misunderstandings that continue to have repercussions in the present.

1. Santos 2013. Epistemologies of the South : Justice Against Epistemicide. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)