

WS 47
Are African curricula decolonizable?
RG Afrika

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The dominance of the Eurocentric epistemic academic model, which attributes truth to the Western way of knowledge production, has been challenged by different actors in Africa and other parts of the world. Student/academic activists, most pronouncedly in South Africa, decry the colonial legacy of African universities. They demand curricula that are tailored to the practical needs of African students and recognize African forms of knowledge production. In the process of negotiating their demands, they face resistance by other actors whom ascribe to the idea of global knowledge production, asking: What will be the place of Western knowledge in the new curricula? Should African curricula be limited to African universities? How can they contribute to globally applicable curricula? While for a long time, the Western model of academic organization seems to have been non-negotiable, discussing the possibilities for decolonizing academic curricula is important and long overdue. In fact, the decolonization project is the beginning of a new negotiation process over what is to be taught and learned and what is valuable knowledge for Africa and academia in general.

In this panel, we invite anthropologists who do research on this topic. We wish to jointly reflect on the following questions: The current calls for the decolonization of curricula in Africa are diverse, as different definitions of 'decolonization' and 'curricula' are in use. What is the essence of the definitions employed by different actors? In a globalized world, how can advocates of decolonizing African curricula and promoters of indigenous knowledge negotiate and justify their claims? How can these advocates succeed in their mission when they are complexly involved (for example, through their university affiliations) in producing and disseminating knowledge that has been influenced by the legacy of colonialism? What are alternative models of knowledge production and dissemination, and how could they be applied?

Vortragende / Speakers:

Heike Becker (University of Western Cape, SA)

'Decolonising the Curriculum':

Reflections on teaching anthropological theory at a postcolonial South African university

My paper presents a reflective (auto)ethnography of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in anthropological theory and writing that I have taught at UWC in the aftermath of #FeesMustFall. Driven by the massive student movements during 2015-16, South African academia has been shaken out of lingering complacency by strident calls for the decolonization of education. This has become the subject of vibrant debates in the classroom. Students have called for a distinctive postcolonial anthropology curriculum, especially regarding the significance of theorising ways of knowing. Classroom discussions concern the content of curricula, including Africanist contestations of Cartesian ways of thinking. They also raise theoretical and epistemological questions of how anthropology from the African continent can help shape a new perspective on the world at

large. My presentation will focus on experimental knowledge forms and forms of presentation in the classroom. It will address questions of decolonial pedagogy and institutional culture. Tentative conclusions will be drawn regarding distinctive perspectives of decolonizing anthropology curricula in different African and global contexts.

Daniele Cantini (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

Decolonising knowledge production, in Egypt.

Changes and continuities in doctoral education at Egyptian public universities

While the debate on decolonisation develops all over Africa, it seems that North African countries are somehow less touched by it. In Egypt, despite the proud independence and the expansion of the university sector, it seems that the issue of decolonisation is still quite subordinated to the necessity of development. When it comes to producing research, scholars are still sent abroad to acquire knowledge, since well over a century. This old, colonial mode of education coexists with local provisions for research training that are normally viewed as being of lesser prestige and quality, and being geared to reproducing rather than creating knowledge. In this paper, I discuss the development of doctoral programs at Egyptian universities, focusing in particular on recent changes in the curricula to go toward a greater internationalisation, and the resistances these programs create. As a precondition to a discussion of the decolonisation of curricula, the paper argues that it is necessary to look at the conditions of knowledge production and of conducting research in Egypt, from the beginning of modern higher education in Egypt to the economic opening of the '70s, and from the privatizations of the 1990s to the present repression of intellectual activities.

Pierre Boizette (Université Paris Nanterre)

Fate of decolonized students:

'On the abolition of the English Department' and its consequences on the cultural field.

When we talk about the decolonization of the curriculum in Africa, the example of the English department of the University of Nairobi often comes to mind. There, in 1968, three young researchers, N. wa Thiong'o, T. lo Liyong and H. Owuor-Anyumba, undertook to reform the curriculum to give further space to African and Afro-descendant literatures. The episode had an international impact. It prefigured contemporary reflections on the decolonization of knowledge. Nevertheless, what was the real impact of this revolution in the cultural field? The study of the trajectories of several students in the department at the time reveals that it had a decisive influence both nationally and internationally. Indeed, people like H. Chakava, C. Wanjala, W. Mūkabi and K. Njogu became leading figures in Kenyan publishing and universities, contributing to revalue local languages and disseminate the ideas of their mentors. Others, such as S. Gikandi, J. Ogude or G. Gĩtiti went to foreign institutions, mainly American. They contributed both to the emergence of post-colonial studies and to the revision of the knowledge taught, in particular by co-opting African researchers or by investing themselves in transatlantic initiatives.

Claudia Rauhut (FU Berlin)

Decolonizing knowledge within the Caribbean agenda for slavery reparations

The paper deals with the current Caribbean agenda for slavery reparations championed by the CARICOM Reparations Commission, emphasizing the call for an African knowledge program within its 'Reparatory Justice Framework'. This commission, mainly composed by civil society activists from Anglophone Caribbean countries, which are still highly shaped by the legacies of transatlantic

slave trade and slavery, urges European governments to engage in measures of reparations embracing economic, political and legal aspects as well as dimensions of culture, education and health. Based on empirical research in Jamaica, the paper analyzes the arguments and campaigns led by the activists of the National Council for Reparations, who are also global players within CARIOCM. In particular, it highlights those narratives and activities that call for a reeducation and rewriting of history (including in the curricula of schools and universities). It finally discusses to what extent this agency might contribute to the restoration, production and circulation of a decolonized knowledge about slavery and its legacies.