

**Panel E29 : Local Knowledge and its (non-)integration in “formal”
education institutions
1 February 2021**

This panel will touch upon the general questions of: What constitutes indigenous African knowledge? To what extent is it compatible or incompatible with Western knowledge? What is the importance of African indigenous knowledge for the future of our planet?

Convenors :

Initiated by the group d’Estudi de les Societats Africanes/Barcelona, University of Ilorin, MITDS, Bolgatanga.

Taiwo Olorunboba-Oju (University of Ilorin)

Albert Roca (University of Lleida)

Marieke van Winden (conference organiser) (African Studies Centre Leiden)

David Millar (Millar Institute For Transdisciplinary And Development Studies)

Contributors :

- Bertus Haverkort (Compas) and David Millar (Millar Institute For Transdisciplinary And Development Studies)
- Madi Ditmars (Leiden University)
- Olawale Akinrinde (Nigerian Defence Academy)
- Sarah Cummings (Wageningen University and Research)
- Chris Zielinski (University of Winchester)

Moderator : Marijn Prakke is the moderator of the panel in the Africa Knows! conference on February 1st. He is working in the field of history of science, that transforms into history of knowledge. He is interested in the concept of equal footing.

Panel report: Tikam Sall

14:00-14:10 General welcome and introduction of the panel

Albert Roca is presenting the panel, himself, and explains that he proposed this panel with 2 others professors.

He adds that he doesn't like the word decolonization. For him it includes African passivity. He argues that in the word decolonization there is a connotation that gives too much importance to the colony as if it nothing had existed before and everything was erased while colonization. He rather prefers the word emancipation, that does not portray African minds and beings as inferior. He describes decolonization as a dilemma, where African minds do not need to be decolonized but rather decision makers. He emphasizes on the will of transforming this panel into a forum in putting together people and experiences.

Marijn Prakke introduce himself, presents the timetable of the first and second sessions and reminds some practical matters.

14:10-15:00 5x 10 minutes opening statements of the first 5 speakers:

1. Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju

Before starting his presentation, he answers on Roca's comment. He disagrees with Roca's argumentation, and states strongly that we do have to keep going back to colonization as it was a cataclysmic intervention. Colonization infiltrated in every layer of society and affected everything from the economy, to religion, gender and even interpersonal relationships. The need to decolonize is present. He makes a comparison with a Yoruba saying and illustrates it with the metaphor of an amputee that should be allowed to keep talking about his or her amputation. Bringing it to the conclusion that it is hypocrite of a valid thinker to complain about unexperienced invalidity.

Presents his paper: African indigenous knowledge systems: towards policy changes and a bi-system curriculum in the academy.

2. Bertus Haverkort (Compas) and David Millar (Millar Institute For Transdisciplinary And Development Studies)

Millar is not present, the paper is presented only by Haverkort: Towards endogenous education, research and development: lessons from Ghana, India and Bolivia

3. Madi Ditmars (Leiden University)

Presented her paper : A Glocal Curricula: Integrating Global and Local Knowledge Systems in Higher Education

4. Joseph Ndalilah (University Of Kabianga)

Not present.

15:00-15:25 Roundtable Discussion

Yvonne de Moor opens the discussion by asking to what extent exchanges by young people of their reality through video platforms or social media could be considered as shared learning and cross-cultural communal learning.

Oloruntoba-Oju is the first to answer. Of course, he sees the benefits of social media in the education sector for sharing information. Besides the good effects of virtual platforms as a source of serious knowledge sharing, the main problem with social media entertainment is that it also carries small talk, gossip, and stereotyping way of communication. He gives the positive example about the debate on the validity of the continuous use of colonial languages that shows how social media platforms gives space for anybody to contribute to the discussion. Also, regarding the pandemic, people are communicating about how they want the state to take decision, about home remedies against the virus, the fears against the vaccine. So, all in all there is no doubt about the social media as a source of knowledge and information that scholar could use.

Madi Ditmars answers as well shortly the question by adding that not only social media, but also web tools have contributed to education, especially with traveling being restricted this year, online communication has permitted collaboration with African students on the continent.

Haverkort adds as a final remark to this question that internet has been very important in times of corona, however, also warns of some of the dangers. Virtual communication is an impersonal mode of communication. He gives the example that, storytelling, and many other types of indigenous knowledge can't be done online. Further he warns that impersonal communication can tend to extract knowledge and "not give back to the field". He gives the example of an elder in Ghana that complained of receiving a lot of researchers but very little results back.

15:25:-15:45 Questions from the audience

The second remark from the audience is given by Paul Engel. He complains about missing a discussion of who is the colonizer? Moreover, he suggests that scientific methods in themselves can also be the colonizer. He mentioned trying to push for other research methods and tried to introduce participatory observations in university and replies complained about its scientific

validity. He adds that it is a universal phenomenon to marginalize particular types of knowledge.

To answer Oloruntoba adds, that codification is why certain kind of knowledge is also being marginalized. In fact, certain kind of knowledge exists but without being codified with the scientific process needed. So codification becomes a problem in itself as it also has to respond to certain standards.

The last question asked for this round has been posted in the chat: “Can it be that many African scientists have internalized colonial attitudes and mind frames, and have separated their ultra-scientific 'act' within universities from the personal (including religious) lives they live?: Internalized schizophrenia, because they are supposed to do so to succeed or even survive in their academic careers?”

Haverkort responds that Millar has been marginalized inside of the university because of giving importance to spirituality in academic research.

Madi agrees and says that it creates a lot of tension and binary oppositions. She illustrates it with the image of an insider and outsider position.

Oloruntoba finally adds that even the scientist coming from outside have a stereotyped way of looking for indigenous knowledge only in worshipers for example. Furthermore, spirituality is not restricted to Africa.

15:45-16:00 BREAK

16:15-17:05 5x10 opening statements of the second round of panelists:

5. Olawale Akinrinde

Presents his paper: Globalism vs localism: the irony of local knowledge system in Africa

6. Sarah Cummings & Chris Zielinski

They present their paper : Local knowledge and health in Africa: barriers and potential ways forward.

7. Oluwasola Ojo

Presents his paper: Variation and resistance: new proverbial forms and the Nigerian academy

Bad connection

One comment in the chat: Nollywood shows the power of (re)imagination, and the 'invention of tradition'. The Indian and Chinese movie industry did that earlier and helped to connect 'traditions' with the 'modern era' (and with millions of people being influenced). Where else in Africa can we see the same processes.

8. Oikelome
Not present.

9. Pino Schirripa

Presents his paper : Forgetting Alma Ata.

10. Albert Roca

Presents his paper: Covid-19, local knowledge and university training. A new opportunity.

17:05-17:30 Roundtable discussion

We skipped this roundtable because of time constraints.

17:30-17:50 Questions from the audience

The moderator invites to reflect on the Covid pandemic and questions the benefits of local knowledge for the world.

Roca intervenes by saying that, we cannot ignore local knowledge. He gives an example of doctors and traditional healers in Gambia. He pushes for the integration of a bi-system, that would challenge to put different things together.

Haverkort warns about monolithic thinking that is derived from a Eurocentric perspective. Whereby, different worldviews and technologies have not had the chance to be developed because they have been marginalized. He advises to give more space and chances to different kinds of thinking.

Oloruntoba's point of view on this matter, is that Africans have been suspicious of the big pharmaceutical industries because of historical facts (Africans have been used as guinea pigs for vaccination) and because they are profit oriented. Therefore, to work toward a global integration, Africa needs to develop their own capacities. He gives an example with the reverse scenario of the covid pandemic, what if the pandemic would have started in Africa. Would there be the same reciprocity? The problem of power asymmetry is making the process even more complicated.

Sarah Cummings confirms that the relationship between pharmaceutical medicine and local knowledge is contested. She gives the example of a doctor that said that local knowledge is problematic in some areas such as medicine against snake bites or believes around female genital mutilation. Thus, the integration of the two systems is difficult. He also raises the problem of rather extractive cooperation instead of real combination. There is a need for new governance system not to be embedded in those extractive "cooperation".

Madi Ditmars makes a short comment, by raising the importance that local knowledge should be transferred and integrated into higher education.

Albert Roca answers to Cummings, by sharing a similar experience in the health care system. He explains that even if the first intention is to collaborate, it might end up in extractive “collaboration”. The problem might be sometimes time, but the main problem for biomedicine is the access to hospital. Nevertheless, traditional medicine is not impeding access to biomedicine.

Oloruntoba-Oju goes back to the topic of Nollywood. In fact, it is regarded as the second biggest after Bollywood. Interestingly, it opened discussions about sexuality and gender. The issue of language in Nollywoods, has advantages as it diffuses local languages and knowledge but the downside is that the local languages are “bastardised”. The industry water downs the stake of language.

Marijn Prakke reminds that all the papers will be published in the Knowledge Management for Development Journal.

Ton Dietz adds as a final remark that the lack of recognition for local knowledge is also because of missing role models. The lack of respect and esteem towards indigenous knowledge is being rebuilt with Nollywood and the prestigious film industry helps at bringing light to building up that prestige.

17:50-18:00 Round-up, conclusion and farewell

Oloruntoba-Oju thanks everybody for attending the panel. Reiterates that the problem of defining local knowledge have also contributed to its inferiorization. Indigenous is too often assimilated only to orality, rituals and spirituality and trapped into the past. Though, indigenous knowledge is dynamic, and not trapped in the 18th century. The meaning needs to come from a new definition that talks about capacities from the localities and that needs to be disconnected from the West. His remark: “We have no choice but to decolonize for human survivals” underlines his argument that colonialism was no accident, instead it was a deliberated plunder and a cataclysmic incident.

Albert Roca concludes by inviting this panel to be the first step for further collaboration and other meetings. He emphasizes that we have we have more publications in the horizon to come.