Academic Knowledge Production in and on Africa

Transferable Skills Seminar: Doing Research in Africa. Funding, Ethics and Integrity

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Overview

1. Authorship and authority in ethnographic research
   - Working with 'research collaborators'
2. Knowledge production in and on Africa
   - Who publishes where and what?
3. Ways out?
   - (Un)realistic (?) suggestions

1. Authorship and authority: Who gets the credits?

"While professional ethnographers – usually white, mostly male – have normally assumed full authorship for their ethnographic products, the remarkable contribution of these [research] assistants - mainly persons of colour - is not widely enough appreciated or understood." (Sanjek 1993: 13)

"Perhaps more than many other academic fields, successful ethnographic work depends upon a wide range of collaborations. Unlike the sciences, where the contributions of multiple people to a research project are acknowledged in long lists of authors, ethnographic work is almost always 'single-authored', claimed to have been the work of a single individual." (Gupta 2014: 394)

Giving credits: Colleagues

- Andrea Kaiser-Grolimund & Sandra Staudacher (both University of Basel)
  - Publication 2016: Research Assistants: Invisible but Indispensable in Ethnographic Research
  - Panel 2018: Un-packing the Black Box: 'Research Assistants' and Knowledge Production in Social Anthropology. Conference of the Swiss Anthropological Association, Zurich (CH)
  - Presentation 2019: Knowledge Production and Academic Publishing in a Globalised World. Roundtable on 'Connecting People Through Academic Writing – How to Bridge the Gap?' 8th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS), Edinburg (GB)

- Fiona Siegenthaler (Universities of Basel and Johannesburg)
  - Presentation 2019: Whose Margins? On What Terms? Individual Positionality and Systemic Frameworks for Anthropological Knowledge Production in and on Africa. Annual Meeting of the Swiss Anthropological Association, Geneva (CH)

Giving credits: Research collaborators

- Djénabou Drame (2011-2013)
- Thierno Abdoul Sow (2011-2013, 2019)

Authorship and authority

Little debate on 'research collaborators'

"…it is surprising that we still know relatively little about how research assistants and interpreters are positioned in the field and their own concerns, constraints and coping mechanisms. […] a key partner in the research process has been rendered invisible and effectively silenced." (Turner 2010: 206)

- Recently some literature
  - Special issue by Townsend Middleton and Jason Cons (2014): Fieldwork(ers): Research Assistants, Researchers, and the Production of Ethnographic Knowledge
  - Parry, Jonathan (2015): The Anthropologist's Assistant (or the Assistant's Anthropologist?). The Story of a Disturbing Episode
  - Schiltz, Julie & Karen Büscher (2018): Brokering Research with War-Affected People: The Tense Relationship Between Opportunities and Ethics

Who are 'they'?

- The research collaborator "figures [...] as an interlocutor and 'fixer' of ethnographic relations – not merely a worker *of* the field, but rather constitutive of the field itself." (Middleton and Pradhan 2014: 357, emphasis in original)

- Challenging collaboration
  - Inequalities
  - Recognition
  - Ethical issues

Authorship and authority

Transparency & acknowledging contributions

- Joint authorship, no authorship?
- Universities
  - Discuss role of 'research collaborators' in teaching
  - Ethic committees
- Publishers
  - Guidelines regarding authorship
  - Mandatory 'who contributed' sections
- Funding bodies
  - Mandatory section on ethics
 - Mandatory section on collaborations (in the field)

Talking about our experiences

- Thierno: As-tu rencontré des difficultés comme étant...entre toi et tes assistants et surtout l'un n'a pas avancé à l'école, l'autre a même étudié? – Honnêtement!
- Carole: Dans tous interactions humaines, il y a toujours les deux côtés, le côté facile et le côté difficile. Mais je dis toujours que j'ai eu beaucoup de chance de pourvoir collaborer avec vous deux, je ne pouvais pas souhaiter mieux. [...] mais j'ai eu et j'ai toujours peur aux implications négatives que ma présence à eu à vos vies, par exemple que vous devez payer plus au marché parce que on vous a vu avec une blanche. Bref, tous les inégalités qui existent entre nous, que je peux faire le va et vient, est-ce que je ne vous exploite pas,...

2. Knowledge production in and on Africa

https://worldmapper.org/maps/science-paperspublished-2016/
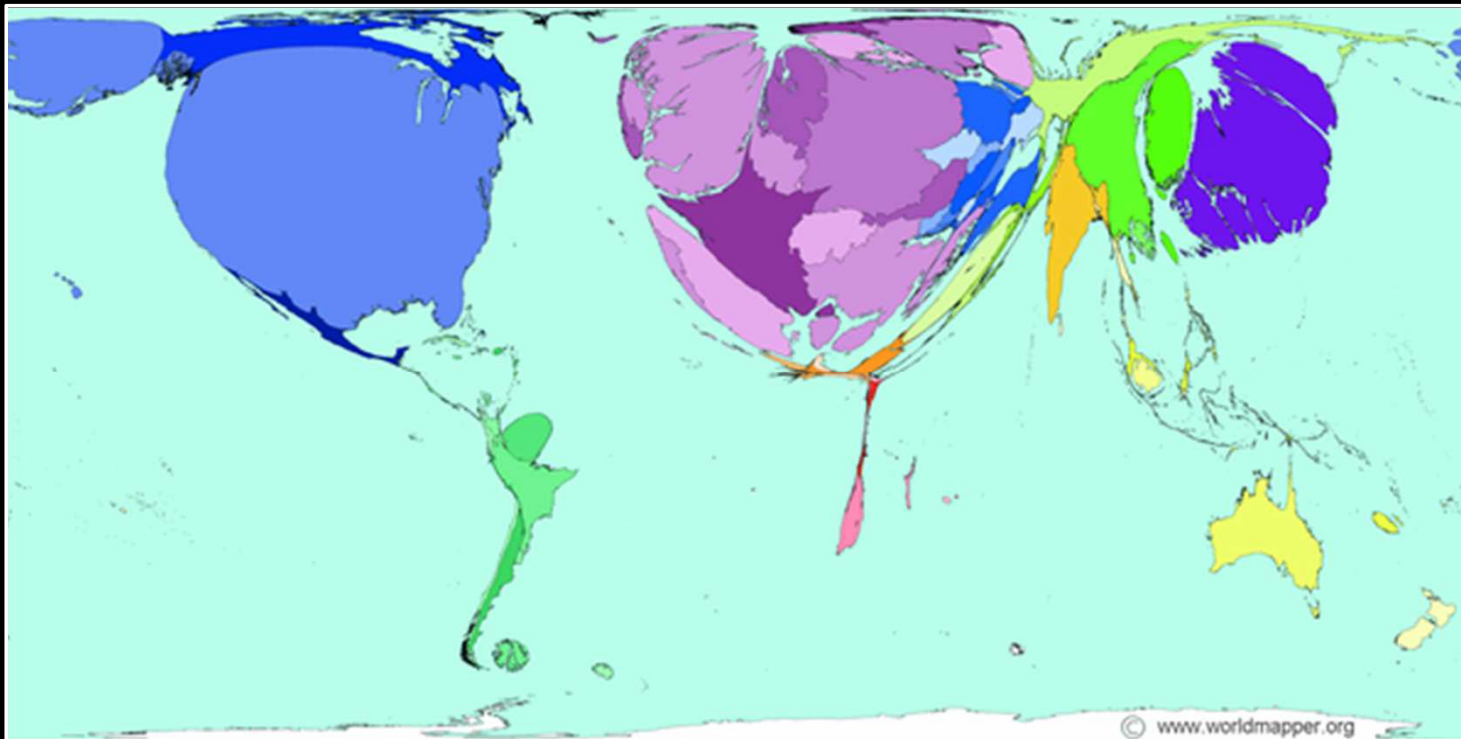
Who is visible?

- Who and where?
- Whose research agendas?
- Disciplinary boundaries?
- Who gets published, cited, promoted?

- Literature
  - Allen, Jafari Sinclaire and Ryan Cecil Jobson (2016): The decolonizing generation: (Race and) theory in anthropology since the eighties
  - Nyamnjoh, Francis (2019): Decolonizing the university in Africa
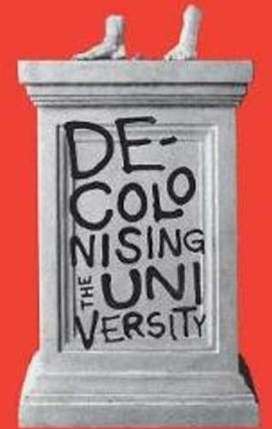 - Okune, Angela (2019): Self-review of citational practice

#RhodesMustFall
Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa

- Francis B. Nyamnjoh -

What kind of knowledge?


Scholarly epistemology and publication modes

('Global North') academic system

– 'Other' forms of knowledge production and dissemination

– ('Global South' and 'other') non-academic system

# 3. Cooper & Morrell (2014): The possibility of Africa-centred knowledges

"Africa-centeredness insists that unless we are aware of our tools and concepts and the politics to which they are linked, we will invariably reproduce old forms of oppressive power and new orthodoxies." (Cooper & Morrell 2014: 2)

Ways out?
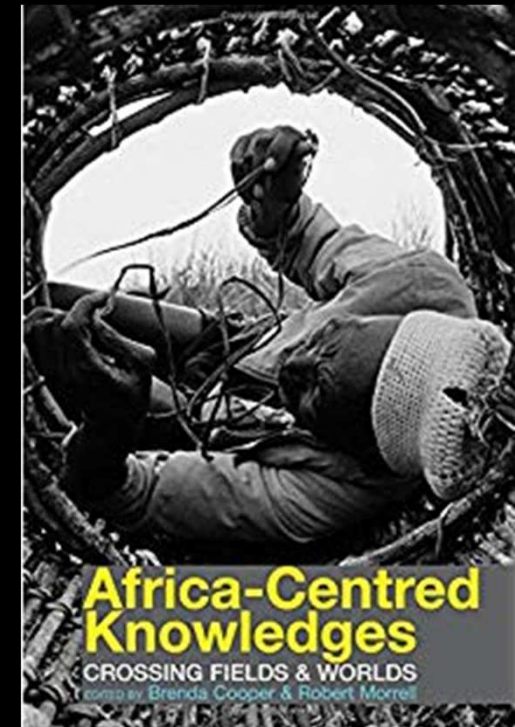
Ways out?

- Diversifying academic knowledge production and dissemination
  - Individual level
  - Institutions & universities
  - Funding bodies
  - Journals and publishers
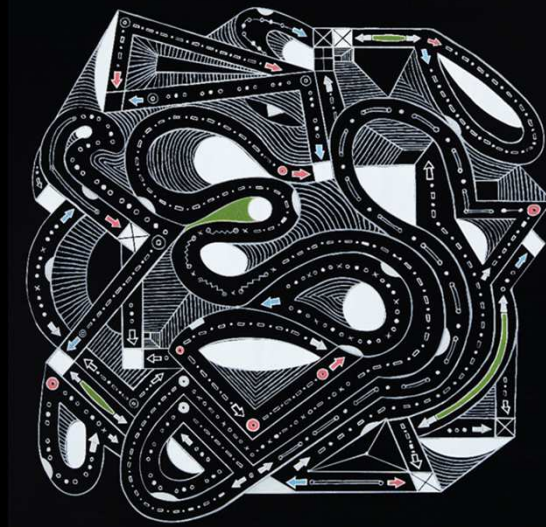
ON BEING **INCLUDED**

Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life

Sara Ahmed

LSE Citing Africa Podcast Project

http://www.lse.ac.uk/africa/citing-africa/citing-Africa

Idealistic (?) suggestions on individual level

- Conceive research projects differently
  - Interdisciplinary approach
  - Transdisciplinary approach
  - Include 'marginal(ised)' stakeholders
  - Create output that serves the 'margins' rather than the 'center'
- But: Extra time and resources needed
  - Unrealistic?
  - Sustainable?
  - Radical consequences?

Realistic (?) suggestions on individual level

- Citing
- Teaching
- Conferences
- Publishing
- Research collaboration

Ways out?

Okune (2019): Self-review of citational practice

"I have come to understand that working outside conventional (academic) structures requires additional commitment, time, labour and social capital. […] In most cases, this additional labour is neither valued nor promoted within academic review systems, and so it falls onto the shoulders of the individual scholar. To move their work outside of well-established, normative systems of scholarly knowledge circulation, these scholars must go beyond what is expected, accounted for and credited, in an already demanding system." (Okune 2019)

Suggestions on institutional level

- Institutes and universities
  - Collaborate with institutions on the African continent (and on whose terms?)
  - Invest in research networks, exchanges & tandems
  - Support scholars with unconventional track records
- Funding bodies
  - Fund institutions on the African continent
  - Fund 'other' forms of research
  - Fund different 'excellences'
- Publishing agencies
  - Include local languages
  - Editing and translation services
  - Diversity boards & reviewing committees

Nolte (2019): The future of African studies

"An active and ethical scholarly life in our discipline includes the engagement with the inequalities that shape our interpersonal relationships and research networks. (…) the study of Africa is central to the production of insights and approaches that transcend the normative dominance of European concepts." (Nolte 2019: 309-310)

Thank you for your attention!

Picture: Project 'Longing for the future.' Young graduates in Mali and Burkina Faso

http://longingforthefuture.ch/de/?