BIGSAS Seminar and Working Group

Epistemologies of the Global South: Contributions to Reconfiguration of African Studies

Prof. Dr Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni with Dr Christine Vogt-William  
Chair in Epistemologies of the Global South

**Time:** 10am-12noon

**Description**

Epistemologies of the Global South embody knowledges that have been silenced and displaced as a result of the unfolding of Euromodernity and its constitutive elements of racism, empire, capitalism and patriarchy. The epistemologies of the Global South are resilient and they confront the problem of cognitive injustice, that is, the practice of non-recognition of diverse ways through which diverse people make sense of the world and themselves. Therefore, epistemologies of the Global South are directly linked to struggles for re-existence of those people who were subjected to coloniality but maintain their will to live. Throughout the seminar, the decolonial analytical category of intersectionality and engendering of knowledge production is deployed as an intrinsic component of decolonization as it highlights how historically and socially produced modes life and living are aggravated by race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, able-bodied-ness, among other cultural and political identity vectors. As a decolonial critical praxis, intersectionality clears space for marginalized groups to articulate new and old realities from their situated standpoints. Therefore, the seminar series and discussions draw insights from epistemologies of the Global South and decoloniality to test their contribution and applicability to the reconfiguration of African Studies.

**Mode of delivery of seminars**

- Facilitated discussions
- Presentations
- Invited speakers
- Debates & conversations.

1. **Creating an Intellectual Community of Practice**  
19/4/2021

**Description:** This opening session is dialogic and conversational on how to constitute ourselves into an intellectual community of practice that is open and sensitive to inequalities, cognitive injustices, racism, sexism, patriarchy, and other injustices. The second task here is to agree on a mode of working together, learning together, teaching each other, and co-producing knowledge in a non-colonial and non-hierarchical way. The third task is to explore how to make sure we all benefit from this intellectual community of practice.

2. **Decolonizing Methodology and Theory**  
26/4/2021

**Description:** Do the existing methodologies and theories enable the oppressed to represent the world as their own and in their own terms? Are methodologies and theories free from politics of knowledge? The biggest task at hand is how to decolonize knowledge and the methodologies by which it is produced. The starting point is to
accept the epistemic diversity in order to enlarge and deepen world experience and conversation; all this cannot happen without change in our methodologies and theorising. Questioning the epistemological, methodological and theoretical premises of Eurocentric knowledge is an agenda which is upon and we have to rise adequately to the challenge before us through engagement with processes, politics and in indeed practices of decolonizing methodologies and theories.

Readings


3. The Cognitive Empire and Colonization of the Mind

**Date:** 03/5/2021

**Description:** The cognitive empire operates through invasion of the mental universe of its targets. This invasion is called epistemological colonization mainly because it targets the mind. This seminar posits that knowledge creates reality (epistemology frames ontology). Hence the empire was always underpinned by coloniality of knowledge. Such institutions as school, church and university played a central role in the unfolding of the cognitive empire. In this seminar, we discuss the technologies used by the cognitive empire to inscribe colonization of the mind. The starting point concerns the coloniality of being enacted through social classification of human population in accordance with racial and gender hierarchies to invent artificial differential ontological densities. The seminar also discusses the long-term impact of colonization of the mind as well as the ways of decolonizing the mind. At the same time the colonization of the mind – that of the coloniser and the colonised – is read through frames of multiplicity and relationalities of power and position informed by intersectionality perspective.

**Reading:**

4. The Politics of Knowledge and African Intellectuals

Date: 10/5/2021

Description: The questions of what accounts as knowledge, who has knowledge and who does not have knowledge constitute some of the key questions in the politics of knowledge in Africa’s continental and diasporic contexts. At the centre of politics of knowledge are the following: the theft and erasures of histories, epistemicides, linguicides, and alienations. African intellectuals are products of the modern westernized university and this has long-standing impact on their psyches and consciousness. The diversity of situated standpoints amongst African intellectuals necessitates the consideration of intersectional complexity among African intellectuals and their relations to their intellectual pursuits, their academic community networks and their own political positionalities. The advantage is that it makes them part of the global knowledge network on the one hand, but the disadvantage is that their immersion into modern knowledge has often entailed abandonment of their African cultures, history and African ways of knowing – which in turn have been subjected to modes of colonization especially with regard to conceptions of race, gender, knowledge production and evaluations thereof. This seminar discusses the following issues: the formation of African intellectuals, their self-perceptions as African intellectuals, and the genealogies and younger generations of African intellectuals.

Reading:


Date: 17/5/2021
**Description:** Despite the epistemic damages inflicted by the cognitive empire, African intellectuals have not been passive in resisting epistemological colonization. They have been resisting, contesting and countering Eurocentric knowledge. Such resistance and contestation have manifested at the intersections of cultural, structural, interpersonal and disciplinary domains of power, where discrepancies in intellectual engagement with socio-political concerns and cultural mindsets in many disciplines have been noted, navigated and interrogated. This seminar discusses African intellectual and ideological productions and how they responded and contested Eurocentric knowledge, beginning with how African intellectuals disproved the notion of an Africa without history and knowledge.

**Reading:**

6. **The Africanization and Decolonization of the University in Africa**

**Date:** 31/05/2021

**Description:** Africa had some of the earliest universities in the world in such places as Mali, Morocco, and Egypt. These were precolonial African universities that were not part of the present westernized global university system. However, these institutions did not continue into modern era. Hence Africa has to ‘receive’ universities from elsewhere during the colonial era. These institutions were part of Euromodernity’s colonization of the world. This is why one finds African anti-colonial nationalists not just agitating for African universities but also trying the Africanize existing universities in Africa. What does such Africanization entail? Citation practices regarding Global South scholarship would be a good place to interrogate whose knowledge is foregrounded and evaluated as ‘proper’ scholarship. Considering especially local African scholarship at African universities as possible sources of decolonial thought might be a first step, whereby the tensions that are raised through reading local African scholarship through intersectional frames may reveal modes of coloniality around understandings of e.g. race, gender, ethnicity and religion, existing alongside ‘western’ frames of thought, will also merit scrutiny. This seminar is focused on the question of universities in Africa as sites of struggles and discusses the key decolonizing initiatives since the 1960s.
Readings


7. The Crisis in African Higher Education and Neoliberal Coloniality of Markets

**Date:** 7/6/2021

**Description:** By the mid-1970s African higher education plunged into crisis because of a combination of factors such as economic crisis, rise of authoritarianism (one party states and military juntas), Cold War ideological coloniality, and impact of the Washington Consensus and its neoliberal philosophies. The African public university system suffered a deep crisis as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were unfolding in the 1980s and 1990s. Conceptions of knowledge underwent commercialization, commodification and corporatization. Universities were invaded by corporate cultures that turned them into ‘market places.’ This seminar focuses on this era where students were redefined as customers, intellectual productions were subjected to quantification and universities suffered from managerialism with its log-frames.

**Reading:**


**Date:** 14/06/2021

**Description:** African knowledge production has experienced many intellectual and academic ‘turns’ beginning with the ‘colonial turn’ dated to the time of colonial encounters. This seminar discusses the key ‘turns’ in African knowledge production such as the ‘nationalist turn,’ the ‘Marxist turn,’ the ‘cultural turn,’ the ‘feminist turn,’
the ‘neoliberal turn,’ the ‘postcolonial turn,’ right up the current ‘decolonial turn’, and how these turns impacted on the understanding of Africa.

**Reading:**


9. **The Global Political Economy of Knowledge**

**Date:** 21/6/2021

**Description:** A global republic of letters is upon us together with its global protocols, standards, measurements, and rankings. This reality has generated debates about a possible human commonwealth of knowledge enabled by increased planetary human entanglements. One strand of debate is that there is even nothing called Western/European knowledge because that knowledge is fed by other knowledges. The argument is also that binaries and dichotomies of North-South and Centre-Periphery no longer make sense in a globalized world. It is within this context that the notion of global economy of knowledge and global studies has arisen. This seminar discusses the logics and critiques of this notion of a global economy of knowledge and raises questions of the resilient uneven intellectual and academic division of labour as well as the continued hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge.

**Reading:**


10. **Engendering Knowledge and Scholarship on Africa**

**Date:** 28/6/2021

**Description:** The problem of patriarchy and androcentrism bedevilling modern society is also endemic in knowledge and scholarship. Across the world there is resilient male dominance in knowledge production and scholarship. This seminar discusses the
necessity and politics of engendering knowledge and scholarship on Africa. It posits the urgent need for depatriarchization of knowledge and scholarship through privileging the feminist and womanist archives and such concepts as intersectionalization of knowledge.

Reading:

11. The Rhodes Must Fall Movements
Date: 05/7/2021
Description: The outbreak of the Rhodes Must Fall movements in South Africa in 2015 and 2016 producing other formations such as Fees Must Fall constituted a necessary rupture in the knowledge domain and forced universities in South Africa in particular to take the agenda of decolonization of the university seriously. This seminar focuses of these student movements, their demands, their politics and their impact on the global knowledge project and the universities in Africa.

Readings:

Date: 12/7/2021
Description: The death of George Floyd in the United States of America galvanized a planetary decolonization struggles whose key signature was the toppling of statues and monuments of celebrating figures that dehumanized black people through slavery, colonialism and apartheid. While the statues and monuments became the soft targets, the planetary decolonization of the 21st century is broader and confronts issues of
racism at a world scale. This seminar focuses on the Black Lives Matter movements and their advancement of decolonization.

**Readings**


13. Conclusions of semester.