Building an Africa-identified and Africa-led Research Agenda

Institute #2 | Concept Note

Knowledge Politics and Production in Migration Studies

The Knowledge Politics and Production Institute draws on conceptual and empirical scholarship to explore the dynamics and power relationships that underlie knowledge production, and how these impact studies of migration, particularly in Africa and the Global South. We aim to foster dialogue around the decolonisation of knowledge and knowledge spaces in centres of learning and what doing so means for the way we research, write, teach, and attract funding in the broad field of migration and mobility studies.

The Institute will locate migration in Africa within a global knowledge politics, reversing the routine of sourcing knowledge from elsewhere. We refer to Vanyoro, Hadj-Abdou and Dempster's (2019) recent discussion to move from "dehumanising" to "decolonisation" of migration studies by addressing power relationships in academia and migration and mobilities research. Decolonisation requires, as Pillay (2018) asserts, not only the interrogation of Eurocentrism in scholarship but also a theoretical curriculum "as a diverse set of intellectual traditions which are neither discreet nor static but rather entwined and dynamic" (Pillay, 2018: 36). Power relationships and inequalities in academic spaces and granting partnerships create "isolation from global scholarly publications and dialogues" in Africa (Landau 2012:559). These inequalities and divides also emerge through what Heath Cabot (2019) referred to as "crisis chasing" in the "business" of funding research on refugees.

By centralising decolonised methods from the Global South alongside intersecting inequities, the Institute aims to also address the inequalities between institutions, cities and regions within Africa itself, as well as the racialised hierarchies in academia with implications for research, methodologies and theorising. Francis Nyamnjoh's (2015:48) call for a more collaborative "negotiated understanding" with those studied, rather than being "unilaterally determined" by researchers and funding agencies will be examined. The Institute will also foster interdisciplinarity, or rather transdisciplinarity in overcoming "disciplinary decadence" (Gordon 2014: 87) in migration research. In this respect, we will consider the perennial question of who dominates the study of African migration and the place of African voices in migration scholarship.

Knowledge production on migrant lives and on mobilities of various scales is closely linked to (often glossed over) histories of movement and exchange and the varied categories of belonging and citizenship in Africa (Pillay 2004), including women's representation and gender justice (Pailey 2019). Increased mobility in Africa, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:23) argues, "implores us to rethink the very ideas of borders, nation, identity, state, belonging and citizenship in more flexible ways than colonialists and nationalists understood them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." We will consider how development agendas aim to control African mobility as "containment development" (Landau 2019). The Institute approaches

migration and mobilities beyond the "sedentary bias" (Sheller and Urry 2006) to analyse the differentiated access to mobility- what Sheller (2018) terms 'mobility justice'.

The Institute aims to foster dialogue around: the production of knowledge about the 'other'; the exclusionary language used to denote the naming and categorisation of migrants (Vanyoro, Hadj-Abdou and Dempster 2019; Bauder 2014; Khosravi 2010); a decolonised methodology including co-production of knowledge with migrants in our research; the valorisation of certain knowledges and the de-valorisation of others; the dominance of certain categories and concepts and the neglect of competing ones; the terms of collaboration and agenda setting in research; the historicity of concepts and categories in thinking mobility in Africa (in history, geography, and oral archives) before the advent of mainstream migration studies; and the place of mobility both in the peopling of the African Continent and related embeddedness of mobility in popular outlook and relationship to place in Africa.

Central to the objective of the Institute is to open a space for the next generation of African scholars to engage with each other outside of their immediate national or regional contexts, and to engage the global academy towards a different ethos of knowledge production. The discussion aim to contribute to new theoretically rich scholarship while taking seriously the legacy and hierarchical ordering of knowledge in migration studies about Africa. The Institute considers how the rethinking of knowledge production and theorising assist us in understanding approaches to migration research (Bakewell, Oliver and Jónsson 2013). Questions we aim to explore include:

- How can we conceptualise an African-driven and decolonised research agenda in migration studies?

- What is the role of knowledge production and circulation in migration policy and governance?

- What research methodologies are needed for co-production of knowledge in the field of migration studies?

- How do the politics of belonging and citizenship, and colonial historical interface of border-making practices relate to histories of movement and exchange?

- What is the place of mobility both in the peopling of the African Continent and related embeddedness of mobility in popular outlook and relationship to place in Africa?

SOURCES

Bakewell, Oliver and Jónsson. (2013). Theory and the study of migration in Africa. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 35(4): 477-485.

Bauder, Harald. (2014). Why we should use the term 'illegalized' refugee or immigrant: A commentary. International Journal of Refugee Law, 26(3): 327-332.

Cabot, Heath. (2019). The business of anthropology and the European refugee regime. *American Ethnologist*, *46*(3): 261-275.

Gordon, Lewis. (2014). Disciplinary decadence and the decolonisation of knowledge. *Africa Development*, *39*(1): 81-92.

Khosravi, Shahram. (2010). An ethnography of migrant illegality' in Sweden: Included yet excepted? *Journal of International Political Theory*, *6*(1): 95–116.

Landau, Loren. (2012). Communities of knowledge or tyrannies of partnership: Reflections on North–South research networks and the dual imperative, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25 (4):555–570.

Landau, Loren. (2019). A chronotope of containment development: Europe's migrant crisis and Africa's reterritorialisation. *Antipode*, 51(1): 169-186.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. J. (2018). Decolonising Borders, Decriminalising Migration and Rethinking Citizenship. In Hangwelani et al, (eds), *Crisis, Identity and Migration in Post-Colonial Southern Africa* (pp. 23-37). Cham: Springer.

Nyamnjoh, Francis B. (2015). Beyond an evangelising public anthropology: Science, theory and commitment. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 33(1): 48-63.

Pailey, Robtel Neajai. (2019). Women, Equality, and Citizenship in Contemporary Africa. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.

Pillay, Suren. (2004) Where do you belong? Natives, foreigners and apartheid South Africa, *African Identities*, 2(2): 215-232.

Pillay, Suren (2018) Thinking the State from Africa: Political Theory, Eurocentrism and Concrete Politics, *Politikon*, 45(1): 32-47.

Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. (2006).The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2):207-226.

Sheller, Mimi. (2018). Theorising mobility justice. *Tempo Social*, *30*(2): 17-34.

Vanyoro, Kudakwashe, Leila Hadj-Abdou and Helen Dempster. 2019. Migration studies: From Humanising to Decolonising https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/highereducation/2019/07/19/migration-studies-from-dehumanising-to-decolonising/ (blog)