



## **Report on Africa Webinar Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge Monday 26 October 2020**

A Collaboration between the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. In support of the creation of a UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science.

Webinar available here: <https://youtu.be/JgBlZXXKIGks>

Report prepared by Dr. David Monk, Gulu University

### **Agenda and participants**

Moderator: Professor George Openjuru, Vice Chancellor, Gulu University, Uganda

Welcoming words: Ms. Ama Serwah Nerguaye-Tetteh, Secretary-General, Ghana National Commission for UNESCO

The UNESCO Brief: Dr. Budd Hall, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, University of Victoria, Canada

Speaker: Dr. Catherine Odora Hoppers, Gulu University, Uganda (Sick on the day of the webinar so could not participate)

Speaker: Dr. Obadele Kambon, University of Ghana

Speaker: Dr. Ada Peter, Covenant University, Nigeria

General Discussion: All participants

Closing: Prof George Openjuru

### **Welcoming remarks by co hosts:**

Professor Openjuru, Vice Chancellor of Gulu University in Uganda emphasized the need for input into open science from Africa, and in particular Indigenous knowledge.

He highlighted the need to acknowledge all forms of knowledge and knowledge making and access to all forms of knowledge for everyone. This is especially relevant for scholars in the “global south”. This will enhance participation in the global knowledge society.

Ms. Ama Serwah Nerguaye-Tetteh, Secretary General of Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, Co-host of the webinar.

Knowledge has been weaponized in the past and reduced to a few people. It is important for Africa to have a voice.

The value of knowledge sharing was evident during COVID 19

Open access to knowledge is fundamental to addressing changes.

Decolonization: what do we stand to gain from Africa's Knowledge, and from Africa's access to knowledge. I look forward to learning about this today.

Congratulates everyone for their hard work.

### **Dr. Budd Hall: UNESCO Brief**

Gave thanks to the Canadian commission, recognized the lands we are all on in our different spaces.

The goal of this webinar is to move beyond open access- open for what? Not just opening European Cannons, but different types of knowledge sharing (not just text), open to and inclusive of knowledge cultures that have been marginalised and previously excluded knowledge. COVID 19- has shown the importance of open knowledge.

Actions needed:

support co-construction of knowledge between universities and communities

money for this knowledge sharing

diversify publishing boards

decolonize our research and teaching in higher education.

We need creative ways of producing knowledge as well- music, dance, art

It is no longer sufficient for universities to only be based in European knowledge

This will contribute to the brief which will be discussed by UNESCO in March 2021

We can share this video

we can contribute to the brief

we can share the brief

we can open up and support spaces, such as at Gulu University for co-creation of knowledge

### **Speaker 1: Dr. Obadele Kambon, University of Ghana**



*"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed"*

-Steve Biko

Focus on what knowledge needs to be decolonized-Spatial and temporal conceptions.

Functions of knowledge: Pursuing collective survival, pursuing collective interests, maximization of the potential of numbers, solving collective problems

As Afrikan people we need to think about decolonizing knowledge in terms of how access to knowledge applies to these functions of knowledge.

Decolonization of knowledge can also be called dewhitenization of knowledge.

### Spatial orientation

Maps have been used to construct false imagery and project false narratives of centres of importance (so-called Europe). They are important hegemonic tools used in colonization.

First of all he points out that Europe is a land mass that is physically connected to Asia, so he questions it being called a continent. Throughout his presentation he therefore uses the terms “so called Europe” and Eurasia.

*He also uses the term so called Afrika- 3rd punic war- romans labelled Afrika as “the province of Afrika” But previously it was referred to as Kemet (literal translation is land of Black people)*

So Called Europe is central on the mercator, gall peters, winkle maps (SCE origins). These are recently redesigned maps. We need to come back to original maps made in Afrika.

“Turin” Papyrus map (artefacts often named after the thief who stole the map, or the place it was taken to) 1160 BCE- produced by Imaxw Amennakht showing 15 kms of Wadi Hammamat

Significance is that early maps from Kemet showed South at the top and east at the left. When looking at such maps you can easily see how the sun is rising from the east (Left). Left hand and east were the same word, right hand and west were the same word.

In terms of decolonization- we can think of the expression “you don’t even know which way is up” as an important expression that represents literal geographic colonialism in multiple ways!

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## FIRST MAP MAKERS (WHO WERE FROM AFRIKA)

The way we have been taught to think of the world is upside-down!

rsy 'south'      šm'w 'Upper Kemet'

izbtj 'east, eastern, left hand, the East'  
(Montgomery 2013a; Faulker 1962)

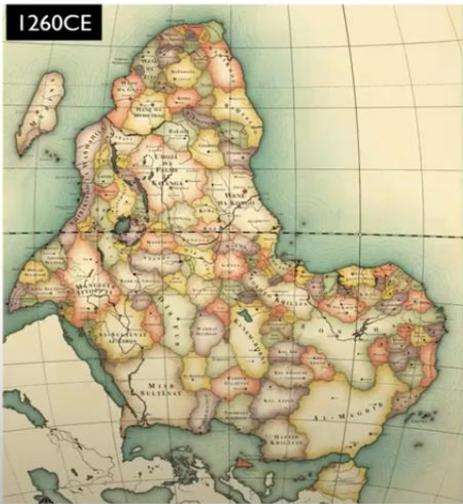


imn 'right (hand), right side, the West'

mhw 'Lower Kemet'      mht 'north'

(screenshot taken from presentation)

PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA



NEO-COLONIAL AFRICA



(screenshot taken from presentation representing “the differences between the borders decided by black people and the neo colonial map of Ottoman Bismark and his criminal accomplices”)

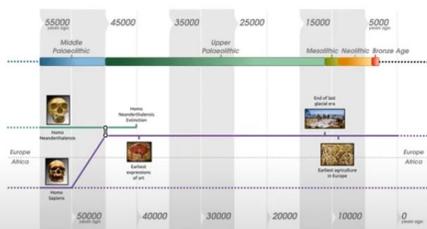
Temporal Spatial relationships

Eurasian time as linear vs Afrikan time as cyclical. He uses the example of Kytmw (Kôngo) worldview to depict this.

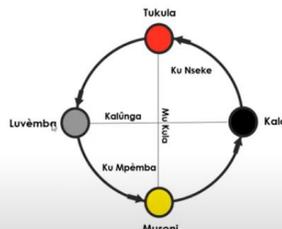
Afrikan as cyclical is based in Kemetu science and the rise and fall of the sun. Luvemba=sunset; Musono=midnight; Kala=sunrise; Tukula=noon.

This is profound because it represents the cycle of all life including humans, plants, stars etc.. In modern physics it is conceived of as energy in a closed system being transformed. The idea here is that life is cycles of transformation. Kemetu Proverb: *Life is a cycle*

TIME AS A LINE OR AS A CYCLE



Eurasian worldview – time as linear



Kmtyw (Kôngo) worldview – time as cyclical

If you look at the sun at the vernal equinox, the position of rising is going to be 1 degree different towards the east. The sun moves backwards against the fixed stars at a rate of one constellation over the course of 72 years, and the whole 12 signs in about 25,920 years (Calculated in terms of astrological ages which is 72 years x 30 degrees = 2160 years)



(screenshot from presentation representing 12 signs)

### **What knowledge should be ~~DECOLONIZED~~ DEWHITENIZED: Who should be known**

*“Those who have no knowledge of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration that comes from the teaching of biography and history.” - Carter G. Woodson*

Several thousand years before any of the popular European portrayals there were African knowledges of all kinds. He gives a number of examples to show how this has been hidden:

History: Herodotus 484-425 BCE VS Heru Scorpionian 3250 BCE

“Divine Saviour”: Hr (Horus) (Archtype of Jesus and black) 3150 BCE VS Ceare Borgia (Jesus?) 1475 CE

(- and sA rA Akhenaton 1380 BCE- accredited for development of monotheism)

Science/ multi-genius: imAxw Imhotep 2650- 2600 BCE Vs Albert Einstein 1870-1955 CE

Medicine: imAxw Hesy-Ra 2650 BCE VS Hippocrates 460-370 BCE

writing/ philosophy: sA ra Hardjedef 2521 BCE/ imAxw Kagemni 23245-2333 VS Socrates 470-399 BCE/ Plato 424-328 BCE

writing: imAxw Ptahhotep 2365-2322 BCE VS Shakespeare 1564-1616

Religious texts: sA RA Wenis Pyramid texts 2380-2350 VS King James bible (which is based on, along with all other religious texts, SA rA Wenis text) 1566-1625 CE

Women in medicine: imAxwt Peseshet 2400 BCE VS Florence Nightingale 1820-1910 CE

Human nature and social relations: sA rA Merikare 2075-2040 BCE VS Karl Marx 1818-1833 CE

First female ruler: sAt rA Sobekneferu 1802 BCE VS Queen Elizabeth I 1558-1603 CE

Literature: imAxw Sanhat 1991- 1926 BCE VS Homer (unkown)

Greatest femal rulers: Hatshetsup 1507-1458 BCE/ Tiye 1398-1338 BCE VS Queen Victoria 1819-1901

Peace: sA rA Akhenaton 1380-1334 BCE/ sA rA Ramesses II 1303-1213 BCE VS Gandhi 1869-1948

World as round: imAxw Wereshnefer 380-300 BCE VS Galileo 1564-1642 CE

The new world: Mansa Abu Bakr II 1311(sailed across the atlantic with 3000 ships) BCE VS Christopher Columbus 1451-1506 CE

Free republic: Nana Gaspar Yanga 1545 CE/ Tâta Ganga Zuma 1630-1678 CE/ Baba Zumbi Dos Palmares 1695 CE VS George Washington 1732-1799

Women warriors: Nana Amanishakheto (stopped Roman empire) 60-10 BCE/ Mwene Njinga Mbande 1583-1663 CE Vs Joan of Arc 1412-1421 CE  
 Military acumen: Nana Jean Jacques Dessalines I (defeated Napoleon) 1758-1806 CE VS Napoleon Bonaparte 1769-1821 CE

The importance of these examples is that this knowledge has been hidden, and is not being taught to Afrikans. It is purposefully kept out of textbooks, and is part of the colonization process.

He asks us to look at the images of the Kemet scholars and points out that they are black and have Afros (two examples below). Colonizers attempted to erase this history and knowledge and the representations of this knowledge, and have claimed to be the owners of it.

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### VIRGIN BIRTH OF DIVINE SAVIOR

𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏 3st (2445 BC to 2421 BCE)



Mary/Jesus (never)

Jackson, John G. 1985. *Christianity Before Christ*. Austin, TX: American Atheist Press. 450–500 in Europe

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### GREATEST FEMALE RULERS

𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏 **Hatshepsut (1507 – 1458 BCE)**



𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏 **Tiye (1398 - 1338 BCE)**



Victoria (1819 – 1901 CE)



Van Sertima, Ivan. 1984. *Black women in antiquity*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

The documents are all in “global north”. Just like the artefacts have been stolen and taken, so has the knowledge. To access it, you have to travel to the global north (if you know what to look for). That is another discussion that needs to be had in terms of open science.

*“What you do for yourself depends on what you think of yourself, and what you think of yourself is depends on what you know of yourself, and what you know of yourself depends on what you have been told.” Dr. Runoko Rashidi.* Colonized people don’t know about themselves, so we don’t feel good about ourselves. This situation has been purposefully fabricated as part of the colonization process, and when we think of open science, it needs to be centred.

Finally Dr. Obadele Kambon warns Black people to be cognizant of aggressive mimicry because some people are talking about decolonizing knowledge just to get money. You get lured to the table only to find out you are dinner.

**Speaker 2: Dr. Ada Peter, Covenant University, Nigeria**

Key question for her: How do we instigate a movement from the very fulcrum that drives the very subtle but violent act of erasing diversity and alternative forms of knowledge?

Key area of interest:

Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing and epistemologies;  
Scholarly knowledge of marginalized groups of people in western english speaking science such as women, minorities, non anglophone scholars, or scholars from less privileged countries in the global south.

Science should be much more pluriversal by opening itself to these families of knowledge. Global structures and institutions including UNESCO, World Bank, IMF, etc. have and still reinforce systems and science that marginalize people.

She asks us to think which are the “super structures” that would employ someone trained by an indigenous knowledge system. The structures today are created and assessed through eurocentric knowledge. She points out that this is also the case for UNESCO- if you want to work there you need a European education.

Those without eurocentric knowledge are relegated to dismal jobs. In this system local efforts to solve local and global issues are sure to go unrecognized.

If we are truly seeking to decolonize knowledge then we have to dismantle the extant global structures as we have them, including UNESCO, UN, IMF, WHO, etc.  
This also includes the dismantling of the employability criteria, financial structures, health structures. We are actually seeking a new set of national and global structures. She argues that it is difficult, but not impossible and asks if this UNESCO forum is proposing the same thing?

Eurocentric knowledge systems have gained significant privileges, and this makes it difficult. You are more likely to excel on the global stage. Even at international meetings you need this knowledge and language to understand.

This is done through education. Language is a conveyor of culture. As long as language and knowledge is colonized, we will never be in an equal setting.

How do we dismantle the European science and hegemony systems, using their same systems?

Science

Until very recent times- western science was shared through military conquest, missionary activities.

She asks How European science neatly diffused into our cultures. If we understand this, perhaps we can come to understand how to change it. Natives like you and me allowed western interpretations of our flora and fauna. We accepted it and allowed it.

Flip the coin

can open science do this for other alternative methods of knowing

can UNESCO through open science support for others representations of flora's and fauna's to support

She recommends that UNESCO open science definition include Indigenous peoples quest to study other peoples flora and fauna in the native ways without vindictive attitudes and approach to accepting such findings. what this means is when I study a report on how to change the weather using local methods, Western Europeans need to accept these findings as long as nature proves the benefits of my findings to humanity. In my culture we interpret the flora and fauna in different ways that may be termed unscientific by European standards, but these findings are important and spread diversity. For example, for a crop that European science may have limited to medicine, the same crop in my culture may prove to be able to change the weather from sunshine to rain. this will quickly be termed "black magic".

UNESCO must be able to accept, recognize, support, and reward people that graduate from alternative systems of education. The benefits are immense. Imagine a pear tree. If we only look at it through one lens -if we only see one pear- we are hurting ourselves. We are missing the full potential. There are different pears and different ways of explaining pears. Indigenous science is evident in dealing with the COVID-19 health crisis for example.

Getting local knowledge interpreted and accepted by colleagues and employers is a key hurdle because of the dominant discourses we have received through education. Artificial Intelligence may be able to help as we learn to live and work together differently.

She worries how far and genuine our call and efforts may go? Many people may think this effort to value local science is a futile effort. However, change starts with a thought, and continues with a conversation, and a small group of people can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has. (quoting Margarte Meade)

Coming together is the beginning, keeping together is the progress, if we continue to work together we can see success.

### **Professor Openjuru remarks**

The take home for me is still the question of the existing dominant pervasive knowledge systems and acceptability of indigenous learning. I have a problem with the term of indigenous- it is a process of othering by naming them. The so called indigenous are told to call themselves indigenous.

Language dominance and dissemination of knowledge is a big challenge. UNESCO open Science needs to engage with this, so that they can genuinely contribute to a solution without falling into aggressive mimicry.

On the side chat there is a lot of discussion going on. I would like to point out one strain: decolonization vs dewhitenization, reAfrikanization. This last one contextualizes Afrikan, but we need to also think about the excluded North, such as the Australian aboriginals.

### **Questions and discussions**

Dr. Femi: Thank you to all presenters. I Work for INASP, an international organization based in Oxford.. When the recommendations go to UNESCO we need to seriously look at the terminology that is being used. The term indigenous as Professor Openjuru says reinforces the differences and ghettoization of knowledge. Epistemologies need to stand side by side. Not indigenous knowledge and all other knowledge. All epistemologies should be able to stand side by side, and we need to question the terminologies we are using.

We are not talking about eurocentric education. The foundations of eurocentric education are not eurocentric. It actually has its origins in Afrika. So it is important to give credit to where credit is due and give worth to everyone's knowledge.

Prof. Openjuru: Naming is a problem if it is othering, and demonizing. Epistemologies need to be treated equally.

Dr. Obadele Kambo: A few comments: A lot of the problem has to do with naming. When we ourselves use terms as western and eastern - greco roman terms- we are buying into a fiction of the Aegean sea as being at the centre. The terms that we use are in and of themselves a problem, and they cover up.

Another issue is with the term global south. How can all of these countries be labelled as the global south when they are actually in the northern hemisphere. For example China and India and Ghana are all in the northern hemisphere. It makes no sense, but we use these terms.

If we look at Kemet depictions from about 3500 years ago, they identified as kemetu (black people) and foreigners, but they distinguished between black foreigners (portrayed the same way as kemetu) and foreigners from other places (Persian, Asian, etc). The point is we did not refer to global south or north but black and not black. When we talk about raising black consciousness, we should not be thinking about black people everywhere in the world. We find black consciousness everywhere in the world- not on where we are.

Professor Openjuru: this goes back to naming and reorienting knowledge. BUt we are still locked up in these epistemologies. History has been recorded subversively for thousands of years. This has distorted. It is the radical disengagement that we need to strive for. We need to move beyond pointing out the facts, so that we can raise the “alternatives” - for lack of a better world. The big question is: How can we disengage from this framework? Does anyone have an answer.

Profesor Jacques Zeelen: I agree language matters and categories matter. When I talk about western Science and Eurocentric science I think I have to be careful not to put everything into one box. I work in the social sciences- within this there are different methodologies and epistemologies. This category of western science in my field goes from Skinner to Habermas. It is broad. We need to create conversations to have cross-fertilization across epistemologies and within them.

Professor Openjuru: Emphasising the diversity. We need to disrupt without pushing the other. The idea of democracy- we need unity within diversity. We can't exclude or allow for one dominant. The supermarket approach of knowledge is needed. If you deny anyone their knowledge value, you are denying their humanity. Let us go for multiplicity, not radical rejection. Let us add to what is already on the table. How can the penetration be done to get acceptability with the full force of what it deserves.

The side conversation is talking about other forms of knowledge. Let us not create a dichotomous situation. We also need to think about other methods such as arts, storytelling.

Dr. Obadele Kambon

I talked about the purposes of knowledge. We need to question open knowledge. Open knowledge for what?

When we go to the texts across Africa, we understand that we have always identified ourselves as black people. It comes down to common ancestry. But for some reason we are being asked to identify in (incorrect) geographical terms. This is part of colonisation.

Professor Openjuru: The question remains: How do we disrupt the distortion and reclaim space and history. Will it be open science or aggressive mimicry. Even the language we want to liberate ourselves in is already colonized. How do we engage in epistemological liberation? Not just for Afrika, but for the whole world. “alternative medicine” is accepted in China, why is it called witchcraft here?

Budd

This is the most exciting conversation that I have heard for years. We need to think about how this conversation can continue. There is a lot of work to be done. This UNESCO open science will not be enough. We are talking about thousands of years of the weaponization of knowledge. The longest trajectory of knowledge by humans comes from Afrika, so it has a very special place when we talk about ecologies of knowledge. We need to illuminate this extraordinary trajectory of knowledge. We need to decolonize ourselves. Some of you are doing this, and others are way behind. We need to decide what we are teaching and how we are teaching- who we are researching with, who we are referencing, where we are publishing. A conversation has progressed, and action is there as with the case of Gulu University. It will continue, and we need

to speed it up. There is a lot more momentum than when I started engaging with these ideas in the 1960's. I am slightly pessimistic now, but optimistic in the long run.

Femi

I think decolonization can only happen with Afrikan people across the world. It has to do with heritage not geography. This is not a new conversation. It has to start with the individual, and with those who have the power to influence curricula. This has been a passionate forum.

## **Closing**

Ms. Ama Serwah Nerguaye-Tetteh

This has been a rich discussion. We have only just scratched the surface. As Afrikans we need to follow this up. Following this I will be contacting other secretary generals to see how we can have further discussions about this. The breadth of the discussions we have had today, tells us how broad this conversation is. We look forward to more. is remarkable.

Professor George Openjuru

Take home:

we acknowledge a distortion in knowledge presentation  
current dominant knowledge systems controls the resources distributions that makes it very  
difficult to disengage with  
all forms of knowledge need to be accepted for the benefit of all of humanity  
we need to continue this discussion

Final question: As Afrika, how do we carry this forward? This is a conversation that does not need to get lost.

Budd Hall: This has to be Afrikan driven, Afrikan based. I look forward to being on the sidelines as it continues.