



Participant of the workshop "Towards an Independent Anthropology at African Universities", University of Cologne, 11.1.19

"Towards an Independent Anthropology at African Universities: Possibilities, Challenges and Trajectories"

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This two-day workshop of the Regional Working Group Africa of the German Association for Social and Cultural Anthropology (DGSKA) was held on January 10 and 11, 2019 at the University of Cologne. It was organized by Michael Bollig, Michaela Pelican and Karim Zafer from the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, and supported by the University of Cologne, the Global South Studies Center Cologne (GSSC) and the DGSKA. It brought together 18 colleagues from ten universities in Africa and five universities in Germany, who discussed about the stance of anthropology as a discipline in the academic landscape at African

universities. The theme was approached from three different angles: Panel 1 discussed the historical development, institutional context and curricular development of anthropology. Panel 2 addressed teaching and research collaborations within and beyond Africa. Lastly, panel 3 focused on the relationship between 'pure' and 'applied' anthropology and the question of job opportunities.

The goals were three-fold: The first aim was to connect scholars from African and German universities to discuss challenges and potentials of the discipline. Secondly, theoretical and methodological innovations by scholars based at African universities were to be valorized. And lastly, promising areas of teaching collaboration should be identified.

Key questions referred to the status of anthropology in various countries, the role of cooperation partners, and how to prepare students for the current job market. Following the inputs in Panel 1 three main historical

phases could be identified that anthropology on the continent passed through, i.e. the colonial period, the post-colonial period, and from the 1990s until today. Moreover, the history of anthropology can only be understood in consideration of its political and national entanglements. Panel 2 highlighted major challenges: Several universities on the continent are marred by institutional constraints and clientelist networks; administrative procedures required by funding institutions limit the possibilities for equal partnerships; restrictive European visa regimes impact effective collaboration. Panel 3 highlighted the interconnectedness of 'pure' and 'applied' anthropology as well as the need to adequately prepare students for the job market.

Based on the contributions and discussions, the following ideas for possible further steps emerged: To engage in a productive discussion on how to achieve 'decolonization of education', we first need to understand what different actors and authors mean with this term, which seemingly can have rather different connotations. As emphasized by several contributors, the goal is to develop a curriculum for 'anthropology in Africa' rather than 'African anthropology'. Workshop participants also agreed that more room should be given to shared didactics and to supervision and co-supervision of students.

More dialogue with funding institutions is needed to ease international collaborations. Workshop participants appreciated programs that promote the mobility of junior staff and students whose international experience strengthens the teaching and research environments both in Africa and Europe. They recommend the extension of such programs and call for more support from universities and funding agencies. In addition, universities and research institutions could develop a shared data base on academics' visa applications to identify problem zones and develop supportive measures.

Applied anthropology deserves more recognition as part and parcel of the discipline, be it in regard to anthropological training, its contributions to anthropological theory, or its representation in professional associations. More alumni surveys should be undertaken in order to identify job opportunities for anthropology students.

The fruitful discussions initiated in this workshop will be continued later this year in a corresponding roundtable (anth 46: Decolonizing the Academy in Future Africa) at the ECAS conference in Edinburgh (12.-14.6.19), and a panel (47: Are African curricula decolonizable?) at the DGSKA conference in Konstanz (29.9.-2.10.19). We look forward to more suggestions and measures towards strengthening anthropology at African universities.