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Part 2 | Session 10 | 27 Jun 2024 | Rethinking Knowledge Production in German African Studies

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Our talk builds on our ongoing research project, "African Studies in Germany through the lens of critical race theory" which is part of a Volkswagen Stiftung research theme: "Open Up – New Research Spaces for the Humanities and Cultural Studies," which seeks to use interdisciplinary and multi-perspective approaches in order to reveal and understand complexity on newer and older research themes in the humanities and cultural studies.

Our project joins an ongoing conversation on what it means to do African Studies in Germany against (a) claims of Germany being a "postracial" society, and (b) the colonial roots of European/German African studies. To this end, we are enormously inspired by, and seek to project mergers and intersections, with the work of anti-colonial, anti-racism activists/scholars and institutions such as BiPOC, and *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* (ISD), among others. A core part of our ambition is to infuse 'racial consciousness' into African studies research projects, and curriculums. We seek to question and problematize claims of objectivity, science, *the* canon, market-driven, the law, and other normalised claims which are common in institutional politics (such as recruitment) and research and curriculum designs.

Thus, following the groundbreaking work of Akosua Adomako Ampofu, Lynda Chinenye Iroulo, Juliana Tappe Ortiz, Jean Allman and Shose Kessi (among others), we sought to think through structural whiteness in the processes of knowledge

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production about Africa with a focus on German academic institutions. In joining the debates that are tinted with power, history, politics, capital, ideology, and location, we aimed to explore what it means to think about African Studies from various and different disciplinary and conceptual positions, and analytical tools.

Thusly, our project asks a series of many, many questions of both conceptual and empirical nature: (1) What constitutes the canon of African Studies? Who gets omitted, who gets read, and how do we conceptualize these omissions and what they mean to the project of knowing Africa from a particular angle? (2) How are students of African Studies from diverse backgrounds (race, class, disciplines etc.) positioning themselves or are positioned in German African studies? (3) What does African Studies mean when imagined through the different intellectual trajectories that arise in different contexts on both the African continent and Europe – and Germany specifically? (4) How could we think about race, particularly Blackness when we do African Studies in Germany especially the ever-changing (including black and brown) configuration and composition of German societies? (5) How do both academia and activist spaces take up current debates around Europe's reckoning with its colonial histories and race relations to enable more rigorous engagement? (6) How should we think about the notion of Germany being a post-racial society against the work of anti-racism activists and groups in German academic institutions (BiPOC) and the public domain such as ISD? (7) How could we generate conceptual and theoretical tools that provide vocabularies and spaces for a more rigorous engagement which will bring together scholarly and activist knowledge production on Africa?

In raising these questions, we aim to propose a fresh engagement with the colonial roots of African Studies in Germany and the absence of (colonialism/colour) race as an analytical category in the field.

Readings

Iroulo, Lynda Chinenye, and Juliana Tappe Ortiz. 'Dear German Academia:

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What Is Your Role in African Knowledge Production?' *Africa Spectrum* 57, no. 1 (April 2022): 72–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397221085982.

Locating African European Studies: Interventions, Intersections, Conversations. Routledge Studies on African and Black Diaspora 10. London: Routledge, 2020.

Serawit Debele *is a Junior Research Group Leader at the Africa-Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth. Her work focuses on moments of socio-political change in Africa asking what possibilities these moments might open up for non-normative sexualities and genders. Her ongoing project focuses on Ethiopia, Tunisia and Sudan. She is the author of the book "Locating Politics in Ethiopia's Irreecha Ritual" and currently working on her second book on sexual pleasure and the politics of freedom. Her articles have appeared in journals such as „History of the Present" and „The Journal of African History". Together with Stephanie and Yusuf, she is working on the VW funded project that examines German African Studies through the lens of CRT.*

Stephanie Lämmert *is a researcher at the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, Germany. Her current research explores the history of intimacy, motherhood and care work in twentieth-century central African copperbelt society, and its broader implications for histories of feminism, labour and global capitalism. Stephanie is also working on a book manuscript dealing with agrarian struggle in Tanzania. She has published in journals such as gender & history and past and present. Together with Serawit and Yusuf and funded by the Volkswagen Open Up! New Research Spaces for the Humanities and Cultural Studies, Stephanie explores the absence of race as an analytical category in German knowledge production on Africa.*

Yusuf Serunkuma *is currently a postdoc fellow at Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg in Germany where he also obtained his PhD in Social and Cultural*

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Anthropology. Yusuf is a cultural studies major, and is interested in nationalist sentiments; the politics of knowledge production; postcolonial theory, Critical Colonial Studies (CSS), and general popular culture. Yusuf is a playwright, essayist and activist. He is author of The Snake Farmers (a play), and the collection of essays, Non-Essential Humans: Essays on Governance, Ruin and Survival in Covid-19 Uganda. His activist writings often appears in The Observer newspaper in Uganda (where he has a column); Review of African Political Economy (Roape.net), The Elephant in Kenya, and Pan-African Review in Rwanda. Yusuf has published articles in Africa Spectrum, African Studies Review, and Public Culture (forthcoming).