

BEYOND BINARIES

18-19
SEPT
2025



GLOBAL CIRCUITS OF INFLUENCE, EXCHANGE AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

WITS HUMANITIES GRADUATE CENTRE, GROUND FLOOR, SOUTH-WEST ENGINEERING BUILDING, BRAAMFONTEIN EAST CAMPUS

The Beyond Binaries project, a collaboration between Wits and the French National Research Institute invites Wits academics and PhD students to join its initial workshop at the Wits Humanities Graduate Centre on 18-19 September 2025. Bringing together 20 academics from Wits, UCT, UJ, Mozambique, Kenya and France, the workshop will launch a year-long program of dialogue and collaboration focused on rethinking knowledge production in a time of global crisis.

The project responds to the inadequacy of entrenched binaries—north/south, west/rest, civilized/uncivilized—in explaining today's interconnected challenges, from climate change and pandemics to authoritarianism and economic inequality. Instead, it explores global circuits of influence and exchange, where ideas, practices and solidarities circulate multidirectionally, disrupting deficit framings of Africa and Eurocentric knowledge economies.

The workshop will be structured around three main themes:

- **Global circuits of influence and exchange** – moving beyond binaries to rethink power, hierarchy, solidarity and patterns of global influence.
- **Transformation and decolonization** – finding ways to integrate decolonial theory with decolonial praxis, and thereby prevent the reduction of decolonisation to a self-selecting theoretical abstraction.
- **Fieldwork, knowledge and partnership** – confronting extractive practices, the possibilities and pitfalls of partnership, imagining equitable collaboration, and interrogating funding streams and their effects.

Participants will have opportunities to engage with senior scholars across Africa and Europe in discussing these themes. This workshop also serves as an entry point for ten fieldwork research bursaries for current PhD students which will be advertised late this academic year, with an additional programme of training and support for successful bursary recipients, that will eventually culminate in a final project conference in 2026.

AGENDA

18 SEPTEMBER

08:30AM | TEA & COFFEE

09:00 | OPENING REMARKS

09:30 | PANEL 1: GLOBAL CIRCUITS OF INFLUENCE AND EXCHANGE

Hear from Lorena Nunez Carrasco (chair), Julia Hornberger, Dilip Menon, Divine Fuh, Mathieu Rey, Noor Nieftagodien and Victoria Collis-Buthelezi

11:00 | TEA & COFFEE BREAK

11:15 | ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

12:30 | LUNCH

13:30 | PANEL 2: TRANSFORMATION & DECOLONISATION, FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Hear from Nicky Falkof (chair), Laurent Vidal, Sechaba Maape, Samia Chasi, Paula Prandini, Thokozani Chilenga and Josh Platzky Miller.

15:00 | TEA & COFFEE BREAK

15:15 | ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

16:30 | PANELLIST DINNER

Bitten Studio @ The Artivist Gallery
7 Reserve Street Braamfontain.

19 SEPTEMBER

08:30 | TEA & COFFEE

09:00 | PANEL 3: FIELDWORK, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND POSSIBILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP

Hear from Joel Quirk (chair), Annael Le Poullennec, Sophie Otiende, Siphwe Dube, Elina Hankela, Jean-Pierre Misago, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi and Ingrid Palmary.

10:30 | TEA & COFFEE BREAK

10:45 | ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

12:00 | LUNCH & ROUND TABLE

Annael Le Poullennec (chair) will lead a discussion of the overall learnings and conclusions from the workshop, and avenues for future collaboration.

14:00 | DEPART



WELCOME FROM THE HOSTS

I look forward to this exciting exchange of ideas and to collaboratively exploring forms of engagement and partnership beyond binaries. Together, I believe we can foster meaningful dialogue and build pathways for sustained collaboration.

Lorena Nunez-Carrasco
Head of the School of Social Sciences, Wlts



One of the main areas where the rubber hits the road when it comes to decolonisation is fieldwork and ethnography. Within Africa, fieldwork often brings to mind the figure of the “native informant”, who is typically positioned as an unacknowledged assistant/broker/translator for European experts who show up at “exotic” locations for short trips to ask locals questions and then return home to build their careers. In recent decades there have been numerous attempts to move from extraction to equity. These include projects focusing on training local researchers, paying researchers and respondents fairly, naming all researchers involved in published outputs, and structuring projects and outputs in ways that respond to/reflect local priorities and perspectives, such as participatory action research. These kinds of initiatives directly respond to decolonial models and critiques, but they have also repeatedly run up against entrenched power structures and hierarchies. With these fieldwork bursaries, we hope to find ways of developing applied examples of equitable fieldwork and collaboration, and to thereby extend and refine the arguments and interventions made at this workshop.

Joel Quirk
Professor of Politics, Wits



I am doubly pleased to say a few words in introduction to this seminar. First, this seminar is part of a tradition of collaboration between Wits and the French research institutions that I represent in South Africa: the CNRS and the IRD in particular. I am particularly pleased that the IRD, my home institution, has been able to support the organization of this seminar. The fact that the initiative is coupled with support for students seems to me extremely commendable. The second reason for my satisfaction relates to my own areas of interest as an anthropologist, who advocates reflexive approaches that are also empirically grounded. From this point of view, this seminar, which is intended to be a forum for discussion, aims to break down the barriers imposed by ideologies and move beyond binary visions of the evolution of relations between the different spaces of our world, while remaining rooted in the life experiences and thoughts of each individual. Finally, I would like to add that this seminar, which is intended to be a forum for debate and not just a presentation of ideas, aims to have a follow-up, as the topics discussed call for an ambitious research project.

Laurent Vidal
Anthropologist, Head IRD CNRS CIRAD joint office in South Africa



PANEL 1: GLOBAL CIRCUITS OF INFLUENCE AND EXCHANGE

This project focuses attention on forms of knowledge, experience and influence that cannot be easily defined in terms of familiar north/south binaries. The local, regional and global have all become increasingly interconnected, but there is no singular direction of travel. It is instead more productive to think in terms of global circuits of influence and exchange, wherein people, ideas, and commodities are (re)circulating across multiple locations and contexts. These global circuits are still inflected by power, position and hierarchy, but these hierarchies are much more layered than a singular binary between north and south is able to adequately capture. Moving beyond binaries means developing new ways of both analysing and classifying linkages and influences which shape politics and experience in different parts of the globe. It also means trying to develop evaluative standards and starting points which avoid the trap of defining peoples and states in Africa in terms of absences, or deficits, against idealised Eurocentric standards. Policy proposals that narrowly focus upon correcting deficits within Africa are simply not going to cut it. We are currently facing a political moment where it is clear that peoples in different parts of the globe are grappling with common challenges and constraints, including authoritarianism, populism, religious fundamentalism, mobilities, corporate power, and climate change. The European world is currently grasping in the dark, just like everyone else, for strategies and models which can meet the moment. There is lots of talk of “building back better”, or “just transition”, but these will only be viable if they build upon inputs, insights and experiences from across the globe. Europeans are not going to be able to solve anything on their own. New forms of solidarity and different starting points are desperately required.

It is here, we contend, that African vantage points have much to teach us about what has been happening within the European world, and where things might be heading in the future. Ideas and practices regarding democracy, populism, feminism, equality and many other themes are not uniquely European, but are instead circulating amongst states and peoples across the globe, and they have developed in ways that can be learnt from and/or built upon. Responses to the COVID-19 epidemic might have been much more effective if expertise and experience developed in response to the earlier HIV epidemic in South Africa had been both recognised and applied. Populist vocabularies and strategies are circulating through the globe, with key political figures such as Donald Trump, Jacob Zuma and Silvio Berlusconi all drawing upon a common playbook to deflect from their numerous scandals and sexual abuses. Declining faith in expertise and bureaucracy is a global challenge.. Social media hashtags and platforms have created global communities that bring people together in unexpected ways. Bonds of solidarity are not what they once were, but there are still times where connections are established across the globe (witness white Afrikaners being invited to seek refuge in Texas, or the South African case before the International Court of Justice). The expansion of BRICS has raised the possibility of a new global order while also underscoring key divisions between states which otherwise get lumped together into the “Global South”. None of these influences, circuits and common challenges are compatible with singular north/south dyad.

The juxtaposition between North/West/Modern/Civilised and South/Rest/Traditional/Uncivilized ends up homogenizing both sides of the binary, and thereby repeating the mistakes of earlier colonial models, which saw a singular “European” essence juxtaposed against a singular “African” alternative. It has become axiomatic that “Africa is not a country”, but this formula also holds equally true for Europe as well. Knowledge about our world is now being created, disseminated and consumed in ways that directly connect and implicate scholars, activists and policy makers on both sides of the Mediterranean. The core promise of liberal democracy, as equal citizenship and genuine civic participation, has rapidly eroded while history has continued, so we are now all in the same boat when it comes to rethinking starting points and strategies.

PANEL 1: GLOBAL CIRCUITS OF INFLENCE AND EXCHANGE

Julia Hornberger

I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Wits University. My work is on the anthropology of policing with a focus on human rights, on how policing does not just respond to fakes but produces them, and on what happens when ordinary police are conscripted into health care work.

The department – a tangible space in the circuits of knowledge and what it means to 'hold space'

I want to address the somewhat awkward sounding question: What kind of time and place is a department? This question is animated by two lines of pondering. One is specific to the Anthropology department at Wits, which is currently marking its centenary. The other one arises from a dissatisfaction with the abstract ways in which discussions of so-called "circuits of knowledge" are being conducted. I want to make a case for engaging more directly with the actual (institutional) spaces and temporalities in which knowledge is produced in order to examine what these spaces enable and what they foreclose. At first glance, departments may seem rather torpid and conservative, primarily concerned with preserving status-quo. Yet, on closer inspection they are also of a transcending durability that lends itself to 'the holding of space' – enabling in turn some underdetermined but protected openness from which new ideas can spring in unpredictable and unaccounted for ways.

Dilip Menon

Dilip Menon is a historian and Professor of International Relations at Witwatersrand University. He is interested in the idea of theorizing from the global south and local traditions of intellection.

Given that the world is now characterized by a borderlessness and migration of peoples arising from war, natural disasters and political oppression, it has become necessary to move beyond conventional theorizations of the nation-state and citizenship. This is particularly so given the presence of Afro-Asia in Europe as a result of these migrations that is seen as an incursion of foreign bodies – the immigrant threat – fueling right wing populism. The very idea of Europe is beset by challenges of a declining population, the influx of Islamic migrants, and challenges to the idea of the European Union arising from secession and the threat of the breakup of defence alliances like the NATO. What is needed is to think with the question of immigration not merely as the incursion of bodies but the influx of ideas from elsewhere that can repair the emergent fractures in Europe. We need to move away from the schadenfreude of the Global North now engaging with precarity, political improvisation etc as the Global South has (argued by Comaroff et al) and move towards a more robust theorizing from the global south that addresses the blockage in European thought.

Divine Fuh

Divine Fuh, from Mankanikong in Bafut, Cameroon, is the Director of HUMA – Institute for Humanities in Africa at the University of Cape Town, and Head of the Anthropology department where he is associate professor.

Deprovincialising decoloniality, centring respect.

What is decolonisation good for? What life should it take after abstract critique, or what some have described as wallowing in futile complaint? My intervention will seek to tackle the polarising responses to the resuscitation of decolonial thinking, critiques of Eurocentric academic orthodoxy, particularly the push to provincialise Europe. Reflecting on research partnerships, funding and associated practices, I will deploy the Africa Charter's principles to illuminate the critical importance of transitioning from equitable to transformative partnerships, and the urgency of centring decoloniality in reimagining global modes of research collaboration. In order to do this, I treat decoloniality as a global theory of respectability and dignified cohabitation.

Matthieu Rey

Matthieu Rey is a historian of state-building and political entities in Southern Africa and Southwestern Asia. He is currently CNRS Senior Researcher at the Centre des Recherches Historiques at EHESS (Paris), and formerly a Director of the Contemporary Studies Department at Ifpo (Beirut).

Area studies, circulation of knowledge and the reproduction of Western borders.

Looking at scholarship in the field of Area Studies reveals how knowledge does not easily circulate between the Global South without the mediation of Northern institutions. African specialists often collaborate with their peers across the continent and with counterparts in the North. Difficulties emerge when these same specialists engage with Southwest Asian specialists, for example. Scrutinizing scholarship from these two areas (Southwest Asia/ Middle East, and Southern Africa) offers insights into the structural, institutional, and intellectual boundaries that divide social science specialists. This presentation will begin by focusing on the constitution of universities in both regions and their links with the North. One by-product of the post-colonial era of academic cooperation has been that scholars from the South have been largely drawn either into former colonial power centers or the United States. At the same time, academic dynamics in the US have fueled the emergence of linguistically specific centers in which Southern scholars have gathered and exchanged. These places have not allowed for a break in inherited scholarly boundaries. Several examples are then highlighted, which show how certain concepts have traveled (or not traveled) through these regions: on the one hand, the social history approaches of E.P. Thompson; on the other hand, the work of M. Mamdani, which grew to popularity across former British territories. These are contrasted with the works of Bourdieu and Tournaine, which have spread particularly in Western Africa and parts of the Middle East. Such divisions have reproduced institutional mechanisms of scholarly circulation. Finally, the presentation highlights the effects of the current crisis on the social sciences, examining how it has reduced the scope of exchange rather than expanding it.

Victoria Collis-Buthelezi

I am associate professor of English and Director of the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study (JIAS). My research centers on black intellectual and literary histories with my current book project exploring global frames for understanding blackness in early twentieth century Cape Town.

My presentation will explore the limits of how we understand race and equality as a kind of 'numbers' game of representation. The provocation is that Global North paradigm -- numerical nonwhite minority groups and indigenous of nativized white majority populations -- has dominated our discursive vocabularies and imaginaries, such that we are unable to think of equality otherwise.

Lorena Nunez Carrasco

Professor Nunez Carrasco joined the Department of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2013, where she taught and coordinated the Master's programme in Health Sociology for a decade. She has held several academic leadership roles, including Assistant Dean for Postgraduate Affairs and Academic Coordinator of the Humanities Graduate Centre (2017-2018, 2022-2023). In 2024, she was appointed Head of the School of Social Sciences in the Faculty of Humanities.

Noor Nieftagodien

Noor is the South African Research Chair in Local Histories, Present Realities and is the Head of the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he also lectures in the Department of History. He is the co-author, with Phil Bonner, of books on the history of Alexandra, Ekurhuleni and Kathorus, and has published books on the history of Orlando West and the Soweto uprising, as well as co-edited books on the history of the ANC and student movements. Nieftagodien has published journal articles and book chapters on aspects of popular insurgent struggles, public history, youth politics and local history. He has also used his position as an historian to publish articles and chapters reflecting on contemporary politics, especially on aspects of radical movements. Nieftagodien serves on the boards of the South African History Archives (SAHA), the Centre for the Urbanism and Built Environment Studies (CUBES), the Socio-Economic Rights Institute, the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) and the Alternative Information and Development Centre, as well as the journal, African Studies, and the social justice magazine, Amandla. The rest of the time he continues a life of activism, which started in the 1980s.

PANEL 2: TRANSFORMATION & DECOLONISATION, FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Moving beyond binaries means thinking about alternative forms of knowledge production. This topic starts by recognising a disconnect between scholarship “on” Africa and the work and activism of scholars based “in” and working “from” Africa. One key issue here is how and why research data and arguments and analysis end up being generated, validated, and disseminated. This is not simply a methodological question. It is also a far-reaching ethical and political challenge. Several key issues can be briefly highlighted. Firstly, there is the enduring question of what ends up being recognized and respected as knowledge in the first place. Within an African context, this raises difficult questions about the effects of colonial anthropology and colonial governance, where it has long been clear that much of what is “known” about Africa and its peoples has been largely generated by European actors in European languages for European purposes and audiences. Secondly, there are epistemological issues associated with tensions between the universal and the particular, where arguments predicated upon universal human attributes (values, experience, behaviour, rationality) run up against arguments grounded in positionality, particularity, and incommensurability. This is partly a question of who speaks (for whom) and on what terms, and partly a question of when and whether moral values and normative claims can travel across religious, cultural, and historical divides. Finally, there are questions relating to expertise and lived experience. Longstanding hierarchies which treat researchers as holders of superior expertise have increasingly run up against arguments that individuals/communities that are most directly affected by specific events and issues are the true experts. One way of trying to square this circle is to try and make space for different forms of expertise and experience, but this is easier said than done. The famous call of disability rights campaigners - nothing about us without us - has more recently been taken up by many different individuals and communities, but “meaningful engagement” with “people with lived experience” frequently ends up as a box ticking exercise. There has been lots of talk about participatory action research in recent years, yet we still have very few applied examples of PAR in action. Most forms of research and knowledge production continue to adhere to longstanding conventions that treat researchers as experts and their respondents as “data sources”.

There is currently limited appetite for genuine engagement with different forms of expertise and experience within South African society. Systems of racial capitalism remain entrenched - and remarkably similar - despite the emergence of a dominant black political class. It is clear, moreover, that social and judicial moves towards equality have had limited effect upon established patterns of privilege. This is a system where hierarchies remain strong, and “community consultations” are frequently little more than tokenistic window dressing for decisions made by experts and elites. South Africa is not alone in regard. Political and economic elites across the globe increasingly favour a model of “consultation” where the outcome is decided before the conversation actually takes place. Mining and energy have emerged as major flashpoints here, as sectional economic interests continue to secure approval for extractive projects in the face of community opposition and climate collapse. Despite growing pressures for reform, entrenched conventions and interests have proved remarkably durable. Policies which are supposed to transform things for the better end up reinforcing the status quo. These and other related questions fall under the rubric of decolonisation, which has become increasingly controversial in recent times. Part of the controversy can be traced to a right-wing populist backlash against all things “woke”, which has seen an accelerating pushback against decolonial efforts to create spaces for hitherto marginalised histories, experiences and perspectives. On the other side of the ledger there is a second and entirely different critique, which instead holds that the radical potential of decolonisation has been deflected, diluted and co-opted. Both strands can be regarded as important examples of circuits of exchange in action, since both the turn to decolonisation and the backlash to the same are inherently transnational, with intellectuals and institutions across the globe grappling with common issues and influences.

The ongoing controversies surrounding decolonisation have demonstrated, yet again, that it is impossible to maintain the fiction that knowledge production is neutral, objective, and “purely” scientific. Knowledge will always be for someone and for some purpose, and these debates over decolonisation have brought these underlying issues to the forefront of political conversations. At the same time, however, there has also been a tendency to (re)treat (to) decolonisation as a theoretical conversation - or metaphor - rather than a pragmatic imperative. In its current form, decolonisation is largely discretionary. Some opt in. Most opt out. And those who opt in frequently understand decolonisation in highly theoretical terms. The practical applications of decolonial theories are more often alluded to than taken up with sustained intensity. The practical institutional gains which have been made by decolonial approaches within the academy are much smaller and more selective than the right-wing backlash imagines. Instead of transforming the academy, decolonial theories have increasingly become an elite specialisation within the academy which is oriented towards self-selecting post-graduate students and theorists. Any version of decolonisation which is all theory and no praxis risks betraying decolonisation as a political project. Academics who have always been comfortable doing theory are comfortable with decolonisation as theory, but the harder work comes when it comes to connecting/applying theory with practice. It is very easy to make sweeping generalisations about all the ways in which the academy needs to be decolonised if you have no interest or investment in doing the unglamorous institutional work of bringing about practical reforms. We live in a world where institutions and elites have become experts at creating the appearance of both change and consultation without actually delivering on either in substantive terms. Decolonisation promised that things would be different, but so far this hasn’t happened to any sustained or significant degree. We now have lots of theory but relatively limited practice.

PANEL 2: TRANSFORMATION & DECOLONISATION, FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Nicky Falkof

Nicky is a cultural studies scholar based at Wits University in Johannesburg. She holds the SARCHi National Research Chair in Critical Diversity Studies and is the Director of the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies. Her current research invokes media discourse to discuss race, anxiety and moral panic in the urban global south, with a primary focus on South Africa.

Laurent Vidal

Laurent Vidal is an anthropologist, Senior scientist at IRD (Pr.). For nearly 40 years, he has been working in Africa (Niger, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Senegal) on health issues (AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, maternal health) as well as on the epistemology of social sciences in “development” contexts. His work has been the subject of some 20 books, including six under his own name, nearly 60 articles, and dozens of book chapters. He headed the IRD's social sciences center in Abidjan in the early 2000s, then the IRD's social sciences department at its headquarters in Marseilles. He was also a member of the IRD's “Humanities and Social Sciences” sectoral scientific commission and the scientific council of Sidaction. He was IRD Representative in Senegal from January 2015 to December 2018 (where he was made a Knight of the National Order of the Lion), then Representative of the Institute in Mali until 2023, and is currently Director of the Joint IRD/CNRS/CIRAD Office in Pretoria, South Africa. He chairs the Steering Committee of the Global Africa project (<https://www.globalafricasciences.org/>) and is the scientific coordinator of the PASAS program (Learning and Knowledge Platform in the Sahel) <https://pasas-minka.fr/fr/>. He is also President of the Scientific Council of the French Red Cross Foundation.

Anthropology: from bogeyman to paragon of decolonization?

Historically a science of colonization, anthropology, through its concern for local knowledge, its immersive methods, and sometimes its political struggles, has transformed itself into a science of decolonization. At the same time, it continues to be attacked solely on the basis of its past or depending on who is carrying it out. Anthropology alone is the focal point of the openings and ambiguities of a decolonization of knowledge that fails to move beyond theoretical posturing to see, in concrete terms, how it can feed into a practical agenda for the decolonization of knowledge and practices. One of its strengths is the reflexivity that lies at the heart of its approach. This applies to a variety of topics that will be discussed in this panel: anthropology “at home,” the promotion of local/national languages, publication signing policies, its practice of interdisciplinarity, and more. Anthropology is certainly not a model, but it is a resource for proposing concrete avenues for implementing the decolonization project.

Thokozani Chilenga

Thokozani Chilenga-Butao is a lecturer in the Political Studies department at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Her research interests are decentralisation and federalism; governance; public policy and public administration. Through topics such as education governance, the National Development Plan, social grants policy and the just energy transition in South Africa, she has conducted research in important sectors, such as the Department of Basic Education and its provincial education departments; National Treasury and the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (now Department of Mineral Resources and Petroleum).

What still remains in the practice of transforming academic departments under the banner of transformation or decoloniality?

In 2014, a group of postgraduate students in Political Studies wrote a Transformation Memo, challenging the department's curriculum, staff cohort and support for students in an African university. As both a precursor to the Fees Must Fall movement at Wits, and part of the broader timeline of decolonisation movements in higher education at the time, the now Memo serves as a reflection of a contentious but necessary time and space in Political Studies and the university. This presentation will focus on continuing questions of curriculum development, staff representation and supporting students in an increasingly hostile global environment that blames social sciences and humanities for being ‘woke’. The presentation will draw lessons from the Transformation Memo moment, of which the presenter was one of the authors of the Memo; and use this to question what action remains and why it is necessary.

Paola Prandini

Dr Paola Prandini is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies. She is the author of five books in Portuguese, published in Brazil, as well as co-author of the bilingual publication *Blood of My Blood*, in collaboration with Sara Carneiro. Dr Prandini is also an entrepreneur and activist, working through and for Educommunication, Critical Praxis of Whiteness, Antiracism, and Gender Equality.

In recent years, the notion of being decolonial – whether through the adoption of decolonial epistemologies or the pursuit of decolonial transformative projects – has become increasingly trendy. Even when money is not included in the negotiation, showing off a decolonial approach or behavior is relevant to one being seen and respected in a capitalistic arena where selling an image of who you are is more important than being for real. Against this backdrop, the intention of this dialogue is to engage critically with the challenges and limitations that arise when academics commit to a decolonial praxis. Adopting the perspective that theory and practice should not be separated in academia, the purpose of this dialogue is to discuss some (self-)reflexive questions: Is it possible to undertake academic research entirely detached from the identities of researchers themselves? Does a decolonial investigation necessitate a researcher who is ethically committed to decolonial principles? If so, where does this process begin: with the individuals who pose the decolonial question, or with the research question itself, which compels researchers towards a decolonised understanding of themselves? Therefore, this is an invitation to a situated understanding of decolonial praxis as a lived, contested, and ongoing struggle that insists on both epistemic and material transformations of our present days.

Sechaba Maape

Dr. Sechaba Maape is an architect, researcher, and cultural strategist whose work explores African identity, decolonisation, and design. Through Afreetecture, he integrates indigenous knowledge, AI, and narrative to reframe architecture and consulting, creating culturally attuned strategies, exhibitions, and curricula that connect people, place, and future transformation.

This paper introduces the concept of ontological dialectics as a framework for understanding and mobilising African identity in architecture and design. Emerging from my own positionality as a black South African architect, the argument begins with the recognition that African identity is not fixed or essential but is lived through hybrid, dialectical engagements. Building on Frantz Fanon's account of the black man's lived experience in *Black Skin, White Masks*, I situate my work within the tensions of a postcolonial, post-apartheid context, where identity is both imposed and reconstituted within the field of architecture (after Bourdieu). The theoretical framework brings together Fanon's dialectical lens, Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, and Virgil Abloh's practice of framing and reframing through design. Together, these tools enable the operationalisation of "African" identity both strategically, when necessary to open institutional or cultural doors, and "deconstructively", when essentialism risks becoming a constraint. This methodological flexibility, which I term ontological dialectics, allows identity to function as a mode of decolonisation: an instrument to navigate, destabilise, and reconfigure architectural discourse. Methodologically, the paper engages a series of case studies drawn from my practice. These projects illustrate how African identity can be alternately mobilised and dissolved, depending on the terrain, to unsettle paradigms of authenticity, purity, and fixed cultural representation. The paper concludes that ontological dialectics is both a critical lens and a decolonial practice: a way of recognising and operationalising the dialectical movements of identity in order to create liberatory space within the field of architecture. By observing, inhabiting, and tactically negotiating these shifting positions, African identity becomes less a burden to be defined once and for all, and more a dynamic method for designing futures.

Samia Chasi

Dr Samia Chasi is an accomplished practitioner, scholar, facilitator and consultant in higher education internationalisation, with over 25 years of experience advancing internationalisation and cultivating strategic partnerships. She is currently the Head of the Internationalisation and Strategic Partnerships Office (ISPO) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits). Her current research interests lie in critical perspectives on higher education internationalisation, with a particular focus on decolonial approaches.

She will speak on the theme: *Navigating the in-between/s of knowledge/s and partnership/s*

Josh Platzky Miller

Dr Josh Platzky Miller is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Josh works with social movements, African and Latin American politics and political thought, critical pedagogy, and the global history and historiography of philosophy.

This paper critically maps how “decolonisation” was taken up in the Fallist moment (2015-16), tracking how a concept revived in the crucible of collective pain and radical imagination became refracted, institutionalised, and at times neutralised in the years that followed. Despite its visibility during the protests, the language of decolonisation did not take root in South Africa's broader public or political discourse. Within the academy, by contrast, decolonisation endured, albeit in a narrowed form. This persistence has largely been epistemic, centring curriculum and pedagogy while leaving material demands under-addressed, and engaging selectively with epistemic sources from Africa and Latin America. We offer a synthesis of the resulting academic terrain, highlighting typologies and frameworks that capture the internal debates and points of reference from around the world, while noting the growing critiques around an increasingly fragmented and, at times, fatigued discourse. This paper is coauthored with Dr Anye-Nkwenti Nyamnjoh (UCT).

PANEL 3: FIELDWORK, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND POSSIBILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP

One of the main areas where the rubber hits the road when it comes to decolonisation is fieldwork. Within Africa, fieldwork often brings to mind the figure of the “native informant”, who is typically positioned as an unacknowledged assistant/broker/translator for European experts who show up at “exotic” locations for short trips to ask locals questions and then return home to build their careers. In recent decades there have been numerous attempts to move from extraction to equity. These include projects focusing on training local researchers, paying researchers and respondents fairly, naming all researchers involved in published outputs, and structuring projects and outputs in ways that respond to/reflect local priorities and perspectives, such as participatory action research. These kinds of initiatives directly respond to decolonial models and critiques, but they have also repeatedly run up against entrenched power structures and hierarchies. Decolonising fieldwork is yet again one of those things that primarily treated as a discretionary choice. Some researchers try for equity. Others continue with extraction. Some researchers argue that it is best practice to materially compensate respondents for their time and expertise. Others respond with bewilderment when the issue of compensation comes up.

Fieldwork and research are often undertaken by teams and international networks, rather than singular individuals, which in turn raises difficult questions about the nexus between partnership and knowledge production. Partnerships come in many different forms. In the best possible scenario, parties come together as freely consenting equals over an agreed upon project in which they have mutual interest, and from which they can derive mutual benefit. Yet very few real-world partnerships actually align with this scenario. The key sticking points are once again power and position. Some partners invariably have a much larger voice than others when it comes to priorities, funding, project design, and outputs. As a general rule, international partnerships are organized along two main axes: 1) partnerships between academics in different corners of the globe, and 2) partnerships that reach beyond the ivory tower to include business, civil society, government, and/or international organizations. While these partnerships sometimes emerge organically, their overall design and operation tends to be strongly affected by both funding streams and institutional hierarchies. This has never been a straightforward meritocracy, wherein the most compelling ideas and proposals rise to the top of the pile, but instead needs to be understood in sociological terms.

The vast majority of funding for international partnerships comes from wealthy countries. And this is also where funds tend to be administered and audited. As Loren Landau has argued, this creates incentives for research partners based in Africa to gravitate toward short-term “piece work”, where researchers are commissioned or subcontracted to execute a small piece of a larger project, yet have little or no capacity to influence the design of the whole. This, in turn contributes to “a global division of labour where southerners become data collectors while northerners produce knowledge and offer scholarly and policy critiques” (Landau 2012, 563). And since this “piece work” is frequently short term, there are further incentives to produce results that align with expectations since this is the most likely route to future commissions. Anything which appears as “radical” or “unconventional” to funders is unlikely to find favour.

By zooming in on practices of knowledge production, particularly about the African continent and research on Africa writ large, we want to open space for discussions around ethics, methods, and knowledge economies which speak to decolonial priorities in practical terms. By emphasizing the importance of situated knowledge and cultural context, we want to explore possibilities for sharing best practices and mutual learning across disciplinary, institutional, national and continental boundaries. We do not expect to be able to transcend existing hierarchies and power structures anytime soon, but we do hope to be able to expose their effects and to identify alternative pathways to partnership.

PANEL 3: FIELDWORK, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND POSSIBILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP

Joel Quirk

Dr Joel Quirk is a professor of politics at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Global funding streams have attracted a great deal of scrutiny in recent times. Building upon earlier critiques of neo-imperialism, scholars of critical humanitarianism (e.g. Mitchell & Pallister-Wilkins 2023) have argued that northern/European funders routinely use the power of the purse to dictate the activities and vocabularies of their southern/African “partners”. From this vantage point, funding serves as a covert instrument of control that enables metropolitan power centres to circumscribe the rules of engagement for their subordinates in the periphery, who are commissioned or subcontracted to execute “piece work”(Landau 2012), yet have little or no capacity to (re)shape the design of the whole. In this paper we flip this now familiar story on its head. Using the recent history of British government funding for ‘modern slavery’ as a case study, we argue that these kinds of dependant relationships are also common within the north, but the lingering effects of Eurocentric scripts have made them hard(er) to see. As post-colonial scholars have demonstrated, binary oppositions between north/west/modern/developed and south/rest/traditional/undeveloped help to sustain an Manichean image of the world which regards Europeans as “enlightened” agents and non-European as “backward” dependants. The first acts. The second is acted upon. In this paper we further deconstruct these unhelpful binaries by exploring how funding streams circumscribe agency within northern/European contexts in ways that both replicate and reinforce dependant relationships more commonly associated with north/south dyads. Funding rules all over. It isn’t just northern funding flowing south.

Annael le Poullennec

Dr. Annael Le Poullennec is a French scholar whose research has looked in the direction of South African cinema for fifteen years, and “research-creation” (“recherche-cr  ation”) for the past five years. She received her PhD, focused on narrations and representations of post-apartheid space in South African 2000s feature films, from the University of Aix-Marseille (France), and holds a double Masters in English Studies and Comparative Histories (University of Paris-Diderot), and two B.A.s in French literature and English Studies (Ecole normale sup  rieure de Cachan and University of Rennes-II). She currently heads IFAS-Research (MEAE/CNRS), a French research centre in the social sciences and the humanities with a Southern African focus, based in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, and is an associate researcher at Institut des mondes africains, a pluridisciplinary research institute in African Studies, based in France.

She will speak on the topic: *Research from the North in the South? Perspectives and questions from IFAS-Research*

Sophie Otiende

Sophie Otiende defines herself as an African feminist, teacher, poet and survivor advocate for survivors of trafficking. She is the founder of Collective Threads and Azadi Community. Her work has mainly focused on thinking about the institutionalization of care and critiquing the ethics of current institutions.

The question of what knowledge is, is inseparable from who holds power. Definitions of knowledge are always political: they shape and reinforce structures of authority. My discussion begins with this premise, that transformation requires redefining knowledge and interrogating who holds the authority to define it. This tension is evident in the legitimacy granted to certain methods of knowledge production, and in turn, to certain voices. Central to this is the persistent binary between theory and practice. Theory is often framed as objective, universal, and abstract, while practice is cast as applied, local, and embodied. This framing underpins debates on lived experience, expertise, and leadership, while obscuring the fact that theorists also practice, and practitioners also theorise. The binary has limited how lived experience is understood, often relegating it to the margins of practice rather than recognizing it as a site of rigorous knowledge production. Consistently questioning what we call knowledge is therefore vital in not only to challenge epistemic hierarchies but also to imagine new ways of working together in a time that demands collaborative, inclusive leadership.

Siphiwe Dube & Elina Hankela

Siphiwe Dube and Elina Hankela are Associate Professors in Political Studies (Wits) and Religion Studies (UJ), respectively. They have a shared interest in social justice, specifically the role played by religion in promoting or mitigating socio-political structural change in South Africa and beyond.

Drawing from our current research project on Rethinking Liberation Theologies in Post-Apartheid South Africa, we will speak a little bit about how our project tries to embody ethnographic theology, an approach to studying Christian communities that has become increasingly popular among theologians over the last decade or so. In particular, our research data has made it clear how a different methodological approach from the normative ones in theology can yield rich data for theological conversations, whether these conversations are located within theology as a discipline or in the social sciences. While for theologians ethnographic theology provides tools to think of theology differently, for social scientists it provides a lens through which people of faith can be taken more seriously than what traditional social scientific tools may allow for. Overall, we are interested in how ethnographic theology, as a methodology, helps us navigate “multiple disciplinary issues...particularly those related to questions of theological normativity, the relationship between everyday and academic theology, and the tensions that erupt between empirical and theological modes of knowledge production” (Wigg-Stevenson 2017).

Jean Pierre Misago

Dr Jean Pierre Misago is a Senior Researcher at the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), University of the Witwatersrand. His research focuses on migration, identity, and belonging, with a particular focus on xenophobia and other forms of migrant discrimination. He also examines migration governance at multiple levels, particularly at the local government and community level.

Knowledge Production on African Migration: Trends and Geographies of Influence

Drawing on preliminary data from an ongoing study, this presentation discusses knowledge production on African migration, focusing on current trends and geographies of influence. The study highlights that while the Global North dominance persists, African migration research and scholarship not only exist but are significantly expanding, although much of this work remains invisible within Global North-controlled data and publishing infrastructures. Further, emerging shifts in geographies of influence are evident through the growth of African migration research institutions, still modest but increasing South-South funding and collaborative networks. These dynamics are increasingly allowing African (and African-based) scholars and institutions to play a more active role in setting the research agenda and shaping the epistemic orientation of knowledge production on the continent's migration. The study highlights these emerging transformations while underscoring the need to sustain momentum toward plural, Africa-centred scholarship.

Ingrid Palmary

Ingrid Palmary is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg. Her research has been in the field of gender, violence and displacement. She has published in numerous international journals and is the co-editor of *Gender and Migration: feminist interventions* published by Zed Press; *Handbook of International Feminisms: Perspectives on psychology, women, culture and rights* published by Springer; *Healing and Change in the City of Gold: Case studies of coping and support in Johannesburg* published by Springer. She is the author of *Gender, sexuality and migration in South Africa: Governing morality* published by Palgrave.

I reflect on recent work I undertook in three countries: Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. The work aimed at mainstreaming gender into accelerated learning programmes (ALPs) in these countries. ALPs aim to provide intensive learning in basic subjects to children who are out of school so that they can reenter mainstream schooling or develop vocational skills. In this paper, I look at how three themes rooted in postcolonial power dynamics played themselves out during the fieldwork and what they tell us about gender equity interventions. These themes can be roughly named the what, who and how of gender mainstreaming interventions. In other words, paying attention to what we think gender equality is, who should play which roles and how it should be achieved allows us to consider the coloniality of this kind of research fieldwork and its activist (im)possibilities.

Sekibakiba Lekgoathi

Sekibakiba Lekgoathi is a Fulbright-MacArthur scholar with a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, USA. An Associate Professor of History at Wits University, Lekgoathi is a widely published scholar on diverse topics such as radio broadcasting in South Africa; Ndebele ethnicity; the politics of knowledge production; and popular struggles in the country. He is a co-editor of the book *Guerrilla Radios in Southern Africa: Broadcasters, Technology, Propaganda Wars, and the Armed Struggle* (Rowman & Littlefield International and Wits University Press, 2020). He is currently serving as a member of the Ministerial Task Team (History) for the Department of Basic Education, and Deputy-President of the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA).

White anthropologists studying Africans have often relied heavily on the information provided by local African researchers or assistants during their fieldwork. These assistants have played multiple roles as interpreters and cultural intermediaries and, in some instances, as informants and writers of vernacular texts, thus contributing immensely to the production of cultural knowledge. While it is quite common for the anthropologists to acknowledge the role of their key assistants and informants in the process of production of cultural knowledge, very little is revealed about the local interlocutors' life trajectories both before and after the anthropologists had left their field sites, as well as about the assistants' personal motivations in working as assistants. This paper focuses on Sofonia Poonyane, who was Isaac Schapera's key local intermediary, author of vernacular texts and one of his most reliable informants during his Kgatla researches in the 1930s and 1940s. Based on a combination of archival sources (Schapera's papers) deposited at LSE's library and the national archives of Botswana, plus oral interviews with relatives and acquaintances of Poonyane. Drawing on Lyn Schumaker's notion of the "co-production of cultural knowledge," the paper seeks to develop a fuller understanding of Poonyane's biography and personal motivations, as well as the complex relationship which he had with Schapera.

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