

Building the void to support an African education

Africana Librarians Council Spring Meeting

Friday April 30, 2021

12:00 noon - 12:50pm Central Time (USA); 7:00pm - 7:50pm South Africa Standard Time

Speaker

Reggie Raju, Director of Research and Learning Services, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

For decades there have been calls, throughout the African continent, for a decolonised education. In this postcolonial period, the umbilical cord continues to persist through the education system. There have been numerous attempts to sever this dependency syndrome. In South Africa, the 1976 student protest for a relevant education laid the foundation for challenges to follow. However, even in a post-apartheid era, South African higher education remains rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western world views and epistemological traditions (Mampane, Omidire and Aluko 2018).

The more recent student protest of 2015 reignited the call for a decolonised education. The RhodesMustFall Movement demanded an immediate revision of the curriculum; these fallists demanded a decolonised education. However, as asserted by Heleta (2016) “one of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of the Western knowledge as the universal knowledge”. As much as there was acknowledgement and support for a decolonised and relevant education, access to commensurate scholarly content was a significant challenge.

The current publishing landscape, driven by profit margins, perpetuates the colonisation of the knowledge system. There is a continuation of the marginalization of research voices from Africa. Hence, there is a need for Africans to reimagine an open access system that will break this profit driven knowledge colonialism. Alternatives such as diamond open access library publishing provides the forum and support for a decolonised education. Librarians have a significant role to play in supporting the call for a decolonised African education.

Africana librarians need to add to their role as stewards of Africana collections, initiators of alternative streams for the production of African scholarly literature. The collection of African material should not be confined to that published by traditional publishers:

collections residing in 'stiffy disks' in the drawers of African researchers must also be collected. Organisation of information should be more than an excellent catalogue record – the organisation of these 'stiffy disks' into open access publications should become mainstreamed and disseminated with minimum access barriers. Dissemination should not be confined to scanning and emailing to requesting libraries – dissemination should be via diamond open access using the library as publisher service.

Africana librarians need to reinvent their service model for a continuation of Africana librarianship.

Discussion questions

As Africana librarians or Special Collections librarians what would you consider to be appropriate interventions to support the reinvention of a service model? Or, are you of the opinion that the service model should remain the same but there is a need for another set of interventions to improve accessibility?

Africana collections are synonymous with hard copy of materials, what would you consider to be the role of open access, specifically library publishing, in opening or improving the dissemination of Africana scholarship?

It is difficult to divorce the oral tradition from African heritage. The richness of African heritage escapes organization and dissemination. As Africana librarians what would you consider to be appropriate actions to fill this void?

Since the turn of the century, the number of publishing houses in Africa has been on the decline. African authors are resorting to publishing their works with global north publishers. One can safely assume that the market for this scholarship will be smaller. Yet, these global north publishers continue to publish this Africana content...

References

Heleta, S. 2016. Decolonisation of higher education: dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1):a9.
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Mampane, R, Omidire, M. and Aluko, F. 2018. Decolonising higher education in Africa: arriving at a glocal solution. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(4).
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Speaker Bio

Reggie Raju is the Director (Research & Learning) at the University of Cape Town Libraries. He has been in academic libraries for more than 30 years. He holds a PhD in Information Studies. He is the author of several publications in peer-reviewed national and international journals, chapters in books and a book publication. His research focus is on research librarianship with an emphasis on open access and library publishing. Reggie is an NRF rated researcher with the research focus of open access. He is currently a member of the Academic and Research Libraries Standing Committee of IFLA as well as being the convenor of its Special Interest Group: Library Publishing. Reggie is currently the Chair of SPARC Africa and is driving the social justice agenda of open access for Africa. He serves on the editorial board of Journal of librarianship and scholarly communication and South African journal of libraries and information science.

