

Introduction

Decolonizing Academia through Feminism

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Decolonization as a process has long ceased to refer only to the 'official' withdrawal of European colonial powers from various parts of the world. Rather, the concept of decolonization has been increasingly used and reinterpreted to refer to the inequalities and power mechanisms that guide our world, to challenge them, and thus to open new debates. The concept of decolonization can be stretched, formed, and used in new ways, as the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa in 2015 and 2016, and the Decolonizing the Curriculum movement in UK since 2015 have indicated. Thus, in the fallist movements, #feesmustfall, and #rhodesmustfall at South African universities in 2015 and 2016, feminist, and queer activists stood up for thinking decolonization beyond race as a liberation from multiple and intersecting oppression based on gender, race, class, sexual identity, and other factors (Xaba 2017; Mavuso 2017; Ndelu/ Dlakavu/ Boswell 2017).

With regard to more recent efforts on the decolonization of education in Austria, there have also been a number of initiatives and projects that have emerged from the Austrian Black community, and in which students, and or staff of the Department of African Studies at the University of Vienna have often been strongly involved. These initiatives include the Racism-Critical Working Group

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at the Department of African Studies¹; the Advancing Equality Within the Austrian School System (AEWTASS)² initiative; the publication of a special issue of *Stichproben - Vienna Journal of African Studies* (Krenčeyová/ Gomes 2022) on perspectives, practices and positionings with regard to anti-/racism in Austria; the Initiative for a Discrimination-Free Education System (IDB)³; and the Erasmus + project HELCI - Higher Education Learning Community for Inclusion, a partnership project between three European universities in which a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on *Diversity in the Context of University: Racism-critical Perspectives Into Everyday University Life*⁴ was developed at the University of Vienna. In recent years, movements often driven by student activism and campaigning in Africa, North America, the UK, and Europe have thus given new impetus to free higher education from a one-sided orientation towards Western-centred, white and male-dominated knowledge traditions and institutions, and to open it up to knowledge that has been and continues to be marginalized by imperialisms, old, and new (Charles 2019; English/ Heilbronn 2024)⁵.

In these movements, as in earlier 20th century movements for cultural decolonization on the African continent that preceded them, activists and thinkers have advocated an understanding of decolonization which includes dismantling of gender hierarchies, and the transformation of patriarchal gender ideologies, as decolonization that unilaterally benefits one population group cannot be complete, either socially or at the level of knowledge production. Drawing on Latin American discourses, theorists today often distinguish between decolonization as a “multifaceted process of liberation from political, economic and cultural colonization” that “removes the anchors of colonialism from the physical, ecological and mental processes of a nation and its people,” and decoloniality as a broader “disruption of legacies of racial, gender and geopolitical inequalities and domination” (Tamale 2020: xiv, see also Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). In the same vein, decolonial feminist researchers such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), María Lugones (2010), and Sylvia Tamale (2020) have laid the foundations for an inclusive decolonization of academic knowledge production

¹ <https://afrika.univie.ac.at/en/about-us/wg-against-racism/> (accessed 03.12.2024).

² <https://aewtass.org/en/homeeng/> (accessed 03.12.2024).

³ <https://diskriminierungsfrei.at/> (accessed 03.12.2024).

⁴ <https://imoox.at/mooc/local/landingpage/course.php?shortname=helci&lang=en> (accessed 03.12.2024).

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this introduction to go into continuities and discontinuities with (theorizing of) earlier movements for cultural decolonization in the context of national liberation, anti-colonialism and anti-racism in Africa and Europe, but reference is made here to Ndlovu Gatsheni (2020), Tamale (2020), and Xaba (2017).

and institutions, pointing to the blind spots both of Eurocentric feminist theory and of male-dominated decolonial theory. Furthermore, they have emphasized in their works that 'gender' and 'coloniality/raciality' cannot be treated separately but must be seen as intertwined and interactive. In practice, however, as Graness and Mbithi point out in their contributions to this issue, decolonizing knowledge often results in the expansion of academic canons to include literature and research from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific, while the overrepresentation of male scholarship persists. From these and other experiences, we conclude that the feminist dimension of decolonization must be constantly affirmed, asserted, and demanded in practice.

Against the backdrop of these recent movements and initiatives and ongoing debates, the idea for this special issue was developed at a workshop with the same title, which we organized at the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna in January 2022. Our motivation was to strengthen the debate on decolonizing knowledge in European universities by highlighting the need to think and do decolonization in an intersectional and inclusive way. For us, this meant including the voices of students in this conversation. As part of an interdisciplinary seminar on feminist theory in Africa, students from Gender Studies and African Studies organized a focus group that used group discussions to explore practices of inclusion and exclusion experienced by women, lesbians, inter-, non-binary, trans and a-gender people, and people of colour at the University of Vienna with an intersectional lens. During the workshop, the students presented their findings, which highlighted the need to rethink academic structures and promote a more inclusive, feminist approach to knowledge production and dissemination. Furthermore, it was our aim to enter into dialogue with feminist approaches to decolonizing knowledge in African universities. Thus, we intended to reflect on current trends and walk uncommon paths towards an inclusive, and mutually supportive understanding of decolonization and feminism.

Decolonization of Higher Education and African Feminist Theories

The Ugandan legal scholar and feminist activist Sylvia Tamale proposes a framework for the effective decolonization of universities in Africa. Debates about decolonizing the university in Africa, Tamale critiques, typically focus on changing the curriculum and/or "replacing white faces with blacks" (2020: 236). However, this would not fundamentally change the coloniality of the institution and the processes of academic knowledge production or rather, these changes would fall short. To effectively decolonize the university and make room for a

decolonial academic practice would require substantial transformation at multiple levels. Tamale describes these as 1. the institutional ethos; 2. curriculum content; 3. pedagogical practice; 4. research politics; and 5. as the outermost layer, inclusiveness of diversities (2020: 236). Her identification of these five levels, all of which need to be addressed together to effectively decolonize the university, seems to us to be a very wise and useful model, not least because it identifies the institutional ethos, understood as “the fundamental character and culture of the university” (Tamale 2020: 236), as a central factor alongside the well-known and often foregrounded factors of curriculum diversification and inclusiveness of diversities. In other words, if the institutional culture does not change, efforts at an inclusive decolonization will remain superficial and incomplete. As Tamale argues,

“[c]ommunity members will not fully engage or feel truly valued unless their worth and beliefs are respected regardless of race, gender, origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status and so on” (2020: 258).

Therefore, a “responsive institutional ethos acknowledges diverse needs and vulnerabilities” and “works very hard to create bridges and flatten hierarchies” (2020: 258). In the end, it is the institutional ethos, which “makes the difference between students looking forward to or dreading the learning experience” and “between academics thriving or barely surviving in the Academy” (Tamale 2020: 261). Bringing the institutional ethos to the fore essentially means, removing the pressure on students and academics of marginalized groups, including women, to adapt and learn the rules of an institution that is structurally hostile to them. We should not have to ask ourselves: How do we, as subjects of knowledge, need to change and adapt to be accepted within the university as institution? But rather: *How must the institutional culture change* to make room for a plurality of subjects of knowledge, of experiences and forms of knowledge and its production? How must higher education change to actively embrace and reflect the plurality of our societies and our diverse experiences and standpoints? Following feminist standpoint theory, we do not understand standpoints here as individual positions, but rather, as Patricia Hill Collins (1997: 376) emphasizes, as “historically shared, group-based experiences” of groups that “have shared histories based on their shared location in relations of power”.

If we aim at transforming institutional academic cultures that continue to produce exclusion along the lines of gender, class, race and sexuality⁶ it is valuable in many ways to engage with feminist concepts and debates in and from Africa. By their very situatedness in global relations of power and confronted with what the Nigerian scholar Chinyere Okafor in this volume describes as the “post-colonial reinforced patriarchy”, African feminist scholars have significantly advanced intersectional theorizing. As Tamale reminds us, “[i]n the neoliberal geopolitical order, the continent of Africa itself is positioned at the assemblage point of multiple structural inequalities and erasures, relative to other continents.” According to her, “[t]he epistemic value of intersectionality is that it provides us with a critical lens within which to view the world.” (Tamale 2020: 67).

In addition to intersectionality, we want to highlight a second factor regarding the decolonization of knowledge to which feminist research in Africa is making a significant contribution: the uncovering of Indigenous forms and concepts of social and communal organization that have promoted and supported gender equity. Running against the grain of post-colonial reinforced patriarchy, feminist thinkers in Africa are today “changing the frame” (Graness / Kopf 2024) of theorizing gender and social transformation in African contexts by drawing on models, concepts and cultural values from the African experience. An important source for this has been and continues to be the literature of women writers from Africa and the global diaspora. In her keynote lecture to the workshop, titled “Mapping African Feminism in Africa and the Diaspora”, Tomi Adeaga traced how early female novelists in particular built a bridge through their writing to Indigenous experiences of lived feminism, paving the way for younger women writers today. Adeaga articulated this in the words of Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa:

“From my childhood I lived among very strong women: my two grandmothers and their co-wives. They were strong women. In my native Oguta it was the women who first started trading with the foreign companies. Trading was the job of the woman in the riverine areas. So the women gained economic power through trade before the men, and all this influenced my writing and that is why I project women as great achievers. I do not see women as second-class citizens.” (Nwapa in Umeh 1998: 10)

⁶ See the chapter “Rethinking the Academy in Africa” in Tamale 2020: 235-284 on structural inequality in African universities. For a recent study on German universities, see the 2023 report “Universität und Diversität: Status Quo: Eine Bestandsaufnahme der Diversität an deutschen Universitäten”, available at https://www.im.ovgu.de/diversity_at_german_universities-dir-/_/260723Universit%C3%A4tundDiversit%C3%A4tStatus%20Quo.pdf (accessed 03.12.2024).

When feminist researchers and authors in Africa today study Indigenous gender philosophies and social orders, it is not to idealize the past. Rather, to speak with Tamale:

“If African women are to successfully challenge their subordination and oppression, they need to carefully and rigorously develop home-grown conceptualizations that capture the specific political-economies and cultural realities encountered, as well as their traditional worldviews.”
(Tamale 2020: 43)

The late Kenyan literary scholar, poet and feminist activist Micere Mugo (2015) framed such an endeavour as a “progressive return to the sources”, referring to Amílcar Cabral's seminal essay on the role of culture in theorizing African liberation. Environmental activist and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, a pioneer of intersectional African ecofeminism, also emphasized the importance of “looking back to move forward” (2020: 190). In this issue, Okafor (2024) describes this contemporary African feminist engagement with Indigenous cultural sources with the Adinkra concept *sankofa*, which is symbolized by a bird turning its head back to rescue a forgotten egg – a symbol also referred to by Tamale (2022).

On the Articles

In academic feminism in Africa, scholars from Nigeria in particular, have been very productive since the 1980s in developing conceptualizations of transformative feminist thought and practice in African post- and neo-colonial contexts that build on African ways of knowing. Critical of the Eurocentric, imperialist, race-blind and culturally alien elements and strategies of *white*, middle-class Western understandings of feminism, they have developed alternative conceptualizations through Womanism (Ogunyemi 1985; Kolawole 1997), Stiwanism (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994), Motherism (Acholonu 1995), Nego-feminism (Nnaemeka 2004), Femalism (Opara 2005) and Snail-sense Feminism (Ezeigbo 2012). These Africa-centred approaches have been critically and controversially debated and taken up in feminist research and theory on the continent and beyond (Dosekun 2021; Graness et al 2019; Nkealah 2016; Arndt 2002). With Akachi Ezeigbo, Chinyere Okafor, and Chioma Opara, we are happy to present in this special issue three scholars who have extensively written and published in this vein and have

significantly contributed to establishing gender studies in Nigerian universities, and in the Diaspora.

Akachi Ezeigbo's article "Towards a Decolonized and Transformed Academia and Community through Snail-sense Feminism, an Indigenous Model" opens the issue. A snail may not be the first animal that people who strive for social transformation would like to identify with. Nonetheless, Ezeigbo employs the metaphor of a snail and refers to the Igbo saying "*Ire oma ka ejule ji aga n'ogwu*", which means "[t]he snail passes over thorns with a fine and well-lubricated tongue". The author proposes a model of feminism based on the Igbo metaphorical and philosophical attributes of the snail that "enable it to defeat all obstacles and succeed – its power to negotiate and dialogue with its environment, its wisdom, sensitivity, resilience and determination to overcome". Ezeigbo builds her theorization of an Indigenous model of feminism on an "in-depth research or investigation into the condition of Nigerian women, their reaction and response to socio-cultural and political forces that impacted and still impact on their lives" and on "the principles of shared values which operate in many cultures in Nigeria [which] encourage one to learn to be tolerant, to imbibe the virtues of negotiation, give and take, compromise, balance, and inclusivity". Another foundation of this approach is Ezeigbo's research on female leadership among the Igbo people, on which she published the book *Women and Leadership in Igboland: Omoku, Ime Chi and Omugwo Institutions* in 2021. By emphasizing the leadership roles that women played in African societies prior to the colonial encounter, she also argues for a fluid, and dynamic understanding of gender in the present. The potential for success of this "realistic, practical, and functional" feminist model is evident in the author's academic practice and productivity. During her academic career, Ezeigbo has actively promoted a feminist culture and the value of gender research at the University of Lagos, successfully campaigned for the advancement of female academics and an opening of the curriculum and has been extremely productive as an author of both academic works and of novels and children's books, which she published under the name Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. The scope and appreciation of her work is demonstrated not least by the fact that in October 2024, the '1st Professor Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo International Conference on "Gender Dynamics in African Literature, Visual Arts and Performance"' was held at the University of Lagos. Although, as Ezeigbo points out, her proposal of snail-sense feminism does not have the proverbial slowness of the snail in mind, it seems to us that this layer of meaning can also be beneficial to think about in situations where obstacles seem set in stone. In these situations, it can sometimes be helpful to embrace the often-painstaking slowness with which tangible and sustainable change is achieved,

and to turn it into strength through the snail's perseverance and ability to overcome these obstacles.

Another proposal for a progressive and transformative gender philosophy that “builds on the Indigenous” is **Chinyere Okafor's** article “Theorizing *Omumu* as an Indigenous African Concept of Power”. In this article, Okafor delves deeply into the epistemological foundations of the Igbo past and its social and spiritual organization of gender to understand how it “promoted the self-esteem and dignity of women in society” and enabled women “to aspire to achieve in religion, economy and other aspects of life”. As she writes, “female power was culturally embedded in many African societies in ways that surprised early European colonialists and scholars from distinctly patriarchal cultures”. While African scholars today largely acknowledge the former power of African women, Okafor notes gaps in understanding the ideological underpinnings that created and sustained such power. One key to such an understanding is Okafor’s theorization of the Igbo concept of *omumu*, a term that has no English equivalent and has been variously translated as “the spirit of fertility”, “the goddess invoked to secure the gift of children” and “the gift of childbearing”. Okafor herself translates the term as “birthing power”, based on her analysis of how *omumu* was embedded in a social philosophy that valued life-giving, both physical and metaphorical, as a paradigm of social power.

Okafor herself first encountered this concept, as she writes, in the 1980s as a graduate student during fieldwork in Ajalli, Anambra State, Nigeria, when she witnessed an elderly woman and priestess of the Earth Goddess Ani confronting a young man for allowing the pregnant woman at his side to carry a heavy load. The older woman rebuked him for disrespecting *omumu*, whereupon the man apologized to her and took the load off his wife. As Okafor went on to observe, “[t]his unbalanced gender situation did not evince any reaction from the contemporary post-colonial people [...] but it greatly offended the old woman who was more attuned to the old tradition of *omumu*.” For Okafor, this encounter became an impetus to explore the cultural system in which this inequity in burden-sharing was explained “as a lack of respect for *omumu* and unkindness to the unborn baby”. Based on her own field research, participatory observation, interviews with elders and community leaders in Abia, Enugu, Rivers, Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi states, historical and anthropological research on Igbo society in the 19th and 20th centuries, and embedded in an African feminist framework, the author develops an analysis that goes beyond earlier understandings of *omumu* as biological fertility. Instead, she reads *omumu* as “a conceptual stream of birthing power through which everyone came to life and can draw power

from notwithstanding differences such as sex, gender, ability, colour, height, or any other mode of difference". Furthermore, through its inclusive, life-affirming and non-discriminatory qualities, she proposes *omumu* as an episteme for a contemporary social theory of power with "the potential to inspire positive changes in gendered and/or racialized societies where the orthodox episteme is one of privileged white male production."

Looking at the same nexus of gender and power from a different angle, the implicit question that runs through **Chioma Opara's** article "Integrative Dynamics of Femalism in African Feminist Discourse" can be posed as follows: What is the ontology of the African woman? Is it possible to speak of an ontology of the African woman? Through her article, Opara answers this question with a resounding yes, which she underpins with the Igbo name *Nwanyibuife*, which she translates as "womanhood is essential". Against the prevailing patriarchal order in many African societies, which places greater value on the male child than on the female, Opara asserts this ontology of the African woman as a cross-culturally anchored, self-determined and self-explanatory female existence. Drawing on both a European-centric canon of cultural analysis – from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical critique of gender – and African feminist discourses, Opara engages a wide range of fiction by African writers of different nationalities – including Nawal el Saadawi, Flora Nwapa, Rebeka Njau, Akachi T. Ezeigbo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ousmane Sembène and Nuruddin Farah.

Through their works, she reads an ontology of the African woman phenomenologically through gestures, postures, references to corporeality – such as the pregnant body through which Adimora-Ezeigbo in her novel *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1994) makes the strong mind of her female protagonist speak – and the inscription of signs and gestures that "may be used as indices of patterned female communication behavior in the underscoring of the female body", including "the folding of arms across the breasts in moments of sorrow and despondency; the placing of hands on the hips in dire straits or in challenging moments; the tightening or knotting of the female covering or wrapper in a belligerent mood". Furthermore, Opara argues for the assertive recourse to a transcendental femaleness through the conscious use of nakedness "effectively employed as a political strategy in grassroots African feminism". Opara calls this gender philosophy, which she reads in cultural gestures, practices and literary texts and which is based on a female existence that is not conceived in relation to and dependent on the male, "femalism". Opara's proposal of a femalist philoso-

phy of female subjectivity transcends biological motherhood by recognizing the productivity of a specifically female existence beyond physical childbearing.

What and whose knowledge informs the processes of academic research and teaching? How do disciplines need to change not only their canons but also their approaches to their own processes of knowledge production if they are to meet the demand for epistemic justice? **Anke Graness's** article "Black Women in the History of Philosophy: Methodological Considerations" provides answers to these questions. From the perspective of her discipline, philosophy, and in particular the history of philosophy, Graness discusses the problems and challenges of establishing the intellectual work of Black women in the history of philosophy. The author is one of the driving forces behind the decolonization of philosophy as an academic discipline on the European side. Graness was director of the Koselleck Project on *Histories of Philosophy in a Global Perspective* and is the author of the landmark book *Philosophie in Afrika: Herausforderungen einer globalen Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung* (2023, "Philosophy in Africa: Challenges to a Global History of Philosophy"). Furthermore, she is known for her activism in academic networks and associations – including being one of the initiators and signatories of the Barletta 'Declaration on Philosophy and Interculturality', a policy paper for philosophy in a global world, produced at the invitation of the G7 summit in Italy in 2024.

In this article Graness argues that, in practice, initiatives to decolonize the discipline often end up teaching and studying Indian, African, Pacific, Latin American, Arabic, and other regional and historical approaches to philosophy alongside European ones, but still privilege the work of male philosophers and marginalize the philosophical work of women, past and present. In the article, she writes: "The programme of making philosophical traditions from all regions of the world visible in academic discourse and integrating them into teaching and research on an equal footing [...] has thus far not extended to women philosophers" in those traditions. On the contrary, "the same gender bias that we are already familiar with from European and North American philosophy pervades intercultural philosophizing and regional as well as global histories of philosophy to a large extent." At the same time, feminist projects and initiatives by *white*, Euro-American women scholars to open up the discipline to the philosophizing of women past and present are often Eurocentric. As a result, according to Graness, "women philosophers in 'non-Western' traditions constitute a doubly marginalised group", which is "hitherto invisible in regional and intercultural discourses" and "barely perceived even in feminist historiography of philosophy". In the article, she argues that the discipline of philosophy needs

to open up to the forms and genres in which women have philosophized in predominantly oral cultures, as well as in postcolonial and diasporic contexts where African and Black communities in general, and women in particular, have had late access to university education. These are, for instance, in literary forms, in letters, and orally transmitted wisdom. Graness illustrates her argument with the example of two historical figures: the African American poet Phillis Wheatley (18th century) and her collected poems and letters; and Wallatta Petros, an Ethiopian nun and saint of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (17th century), whose words and deeds were recorded in a hagiography written after her death in Ge'ez by the monk Galawdewos on the basis of oral testimony. Thus, Graness suggests that Wheatley's poems and letters "contain a concept of freedom and of art as a means of expression", while Wallatta Petros' life story provides material "for philosophical debates about non-violent resistance" as well as "metaphysical questions about the relationship between body and soul". It cannot be emphasized enough that the aim of such an opening up of the discipline is not simply to add previously excluded voices to the existing canon, but rather to profoundly transform the understanding of the discipline and of what constitutes relevant knowledge within it.

Esther Mbithi's contribution complements these methodological considerations by discussing observations from the field of Kenyan literature and literary studies based on academic teaching practices and the content they represent and ignore. In her article, "What Is '*She*' Like? Reflections on Indigenous Experiences of Gender and Feminism in the Study of Literature in Kenya and Canada", she uses an intersectional lens to discuss and compare pedagogical and research approaches to the literary work of Kenyan and Canadian Aboriginal female writers. She introduces two Kenyan writers, Rebeka Njau and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, and two Canadian Aboriginal writers, Jeannette Armstrong and Beatrice Culleton, examines the literary research attention paid to their female characters, and the place of literature and research by female writers and academics at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, in general. Furthermore, Mbithi collected and critically commented on course reading lists from all stages of the literary studies programme at her university and made them available in an appendix.

Her article thus takes a comparative look at the relevance and representation of women writers and, more specifically, at the study and significance of the female characters they create in the context of processes and debates on the decolonization of literary criticism and literary studies in Kenya and Canada respectively. Particularly, her article draws attention to a gap between the strong presence of women writers in Kenyan literature in English from its beginnings in the 20th

century, and their lack of, or delayed, representation in literary studies at Kenyan universities. As she writes, Kenyan literature today is predominantly associated with the name Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. However, the first English-language novel to be published in Kenya was *The Promised Land* (1966) by Grace Ogot. Similarly, the first play published was *The Scar* (1965) by a female writer, Rebeka Njau. In contrast to the actual literary productivity of Kenyan women writers, and in view of the over-representation of male writers in academic curricula and reading lists, Mbithi asks, "Where are the women?" Regarding Kenya's pioneering female writers, she draws an interesting parallel to the delayed academic recognition of African language literature, stating that "[t]hese women were writing stories; they did not necessarily join institutions of higher learning to teach or further their education." They were, therefore, treated in the same way as writers in African languages, for whom Mbithi notes with Gikandi that "what this meant, among other things, was that they did not have a voice in the debate on literature and culture."

Mbithi's comparative view of the writing and concerns of Canadian First Nations and Black women writers in Kenya, based on shared (post-)colonial experiences, is innovative. Her reflections could well serve as a stimulus for a wider, systematic study of academic reading lists, the criteria by which they are put together and who decides on them, the regional and national particularities and learning content they reflect, and how they map situated understandings of the discipline.

Mbithi concludes that despite the increasing visibility of women writers in curricula, the in-depth study of female characters created by women writers as sources of feminist knowledge remains marginalized. However, this is not the case for the two articles by Evelyn Urama and Leonard Onwuegbuche. In her article, "African Feminist Writers' Creation of Powerful Voices through Female Characters' Silence", **Evelyn Urama** analyzes the suppressed and silenced speech of women who experience patriarchal violence. She is particularly interested in how feminist writers explore dimensions of silence through their female characters in their literary works, thus creating a space in which socially imposed silences, suppressed knowledge and silenced subjectivities can be communicated.

Her focus is on three classics of modern feminist literature from Africa, the novels *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) and *Two Women in One* (1985) by the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi, and *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) by the Nigerian diaspora author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Urama is also interested in how each of these novels depicts various acts of silent rebellion through "the creation of radical female characters who speak powerfully in silence." In *Woman at Point*

Zero and *Purple Hibiscus*, this rebellion goes so far as to have female protagonists kill male characters who repeatedly inflict extreme violence on them. Urama reads these representations of silent women resorting to killing their oppressors as a radical expression of a decolonization of the mind “from religious doctrines and practices that degrade women.”

Leonard Obina Onwuegbuche’s article, “The Black Community and the Female Child in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” concludes the issue with a fresh look at a classic of African American literature. His article acknowledges the importance of Black women writers in the US, who “created a new Black aesthetic characterized by realism and the depiction of an accurate picture of Black life”, thus “propagating the cause of women and Black communities as a whole”. Accordingly, his analysis interprets Black feminism as a communal concern. Zooming in on Morrison’s literary engagement with the relationship between the individual and the community, Onwuegbuche emphasizes the responsibility of Black communities to ensure that their daughters find ways to own their bodies in an environment characterized by structural racism and toxic masculinity. Onwuegbuche’s emphasis that protecting Black girls from sexual violence and destructive body ideals based on *white* and sexist beauty standards must be a collective endeavour, and that girls must not be left alone with the resulting injuries, is timely.

In view of the number of feminist civil movements which stand up against femicide #*niunamas*, sexual violence #*metoo*, misogynistic and inhumane political regimes #*WomanLifeFreedom*, and the abduction and enslavement of girls #*ChibokGirls* #*BringOurGirlsBack*, women and girls across the world are hoping that their sons, brothers, fathers, friends and husbands stand with them for their right to live free from fear and violence, and with the shared conviction that women’s and girl’s freedom matters for a community’s well-being as a whole.

In a famous essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury”, Black lesbian poet and activist Audre Lorde, the daughter of Caribbean immigrants to the USA, emphasized the importance of poetry in feminist knowledge processes. She described poetry as a form of knowing, an epistemological process that can (re)uncover repressed and buried subjectivities, knowledge and experience through poetic language. In her words:

“For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language,

then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought." (Lorde 1984: 37)

In this sense, the poems collected in this issue by **Akachi T. Ezeigbo**, **Chinyere Okafor**, **Chioma Opara** and **JG Danso** take the reflection and exploration of the issues explored in the research articles to another level through the medium of poetic language. Okafor and Ezeigbo are established literary writers in addition to their academic work, and have contributed poems specially written for this volume, titled "Towards a Decolonization of Knowledge" and titled "Omumu at the Crossroads", respectively. Chioma Opara wrote another poetic contribution entitled "Mothers of Iconic Daughters and Sons". In addition, the young Black British poet and activist JG Danso, who lives in Austria, contributed poems inspired by the topics and questions addressed in this issue. These are the texts "Eve Got Life's Party Started", "Feminist Blues", "An Angel Called" and "Inner Sanctum".

The image on the cover shows a painting that one of the editors of this issue, Lisa Tackie, together with Nadine Okalanwa, then MA students, created for a public conference on debates concerning decolonization and racisms ("Schnittpunkt Afrika: Debatten um Dekolonisierung und Rassismen") at the Department of African Studies at the University of Vienna in 2022. With this image, Tackie and Okalanwa wanted to capture the wealth of knowledge that has been and is being produced by and for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, whether it is a novel, a scholarly article or a children's book. At the same time, it is an urgent call to listen to and read the voices of marginalized people in order to decolonize one's own mind.

A note on the terminology. Throughout the issue, we follow race-critical uses of the categories "Black" and "*white*". By capitalizing Black, we emphasize that we do not think of black as a skin colour, but in terms of a social and political category that reflects shared experiences, subjectivities and standpoints; similarly, we italicize *white* to make it clear that it is a socially constructed category. Likewise, we understand the term "Indigenous" as a critical-analytical category that, in the context of the decolonization of knowledge, describes local knowledge systems that are deeply rooted in the history of a society and that inform its agency and decisions. We capitalize the term to emphasize that we do not use it in the sense of an essentialized, othered identity.

With this special issue we argue that the work of African feminist scholars for a feminist decolonization of knowledge processes in academia and beyond is of global relevance, regardless of our cultural context, nationality or religion. As

human beings, we are now searching globally for solutions to the enormous inequalities and imbalances that exist between and within geopolitical regions, nations, and genders in their access to and control of resources. The research articles and poems in this issue suggest ways feminism and decolonization, as a mutually supportive process, promote inclusive and intersectional thinking and practices, which are fundamental to transforming the institutional ethos of the university.

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