

MOVING TOWARDS AN OPEN ACCESS
DECOLONIAL KNOWLEDGE
PRODUCTION MODEL: THE NEED FOR A
SYSTEMIC, PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACH

Dr Romina Istratii, SOAS

My journey in decolonising knowledge-making and publishing 2016-2020

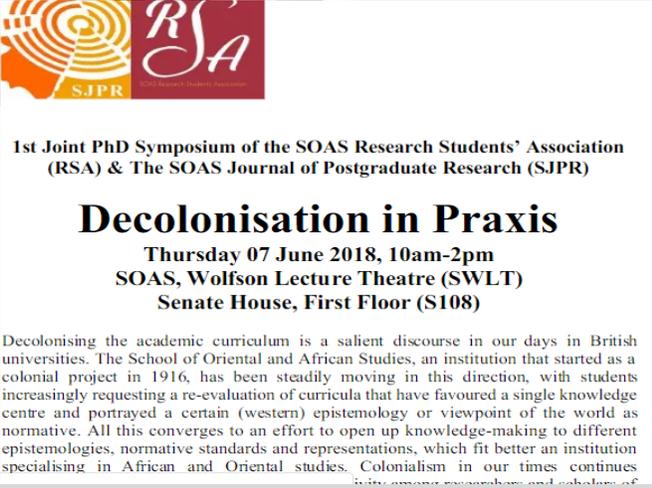


SOAS University of London

Open Conversations

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1st Joint PhD Symposium of the SOAS Research Students' Association (RSA) & The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research (SJPR)

Decolonisation in Praxis

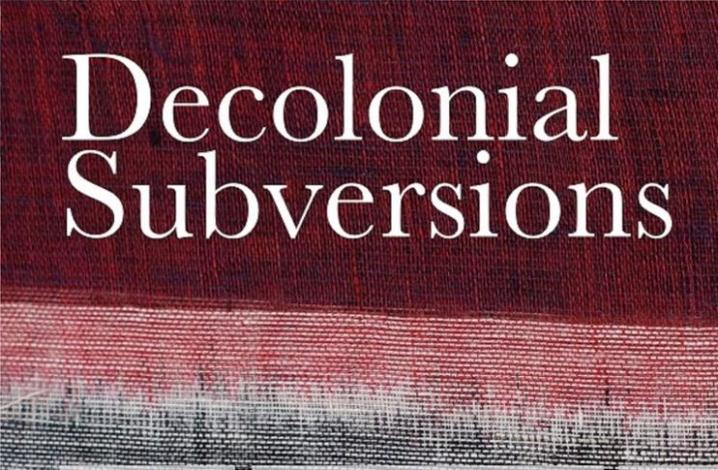
Thursday 07 June 2018, 10am-2pm
SOAS, Wolfson Lecture Theatre (SWLT)
Senate House, First Floor (S108)

Decolonising the academic curriculum is a salient discourse in our days in British universities. The School of Oriental and African Studies, an institution that started as a colonial project in 1916, has been steadily moving in this direction, with students increasingly requesting a re-evaluation of curricula that have favoured a single knowledge centre and portrayed a certain (western) epistemology or viewpoint of the world as normative. All this converges to an effort to open up knowledge-making to different epistemologies, normative standards and representations, which fit better an institution specialising in African and Oriental studies. Colonialism in our times continues to create a divide among researchers and scholars of



Applying a Decolonial Lens to Research Structures, Norms and Practices in Higher Education

Conversation Event
SOAS University of London
18th September 2018



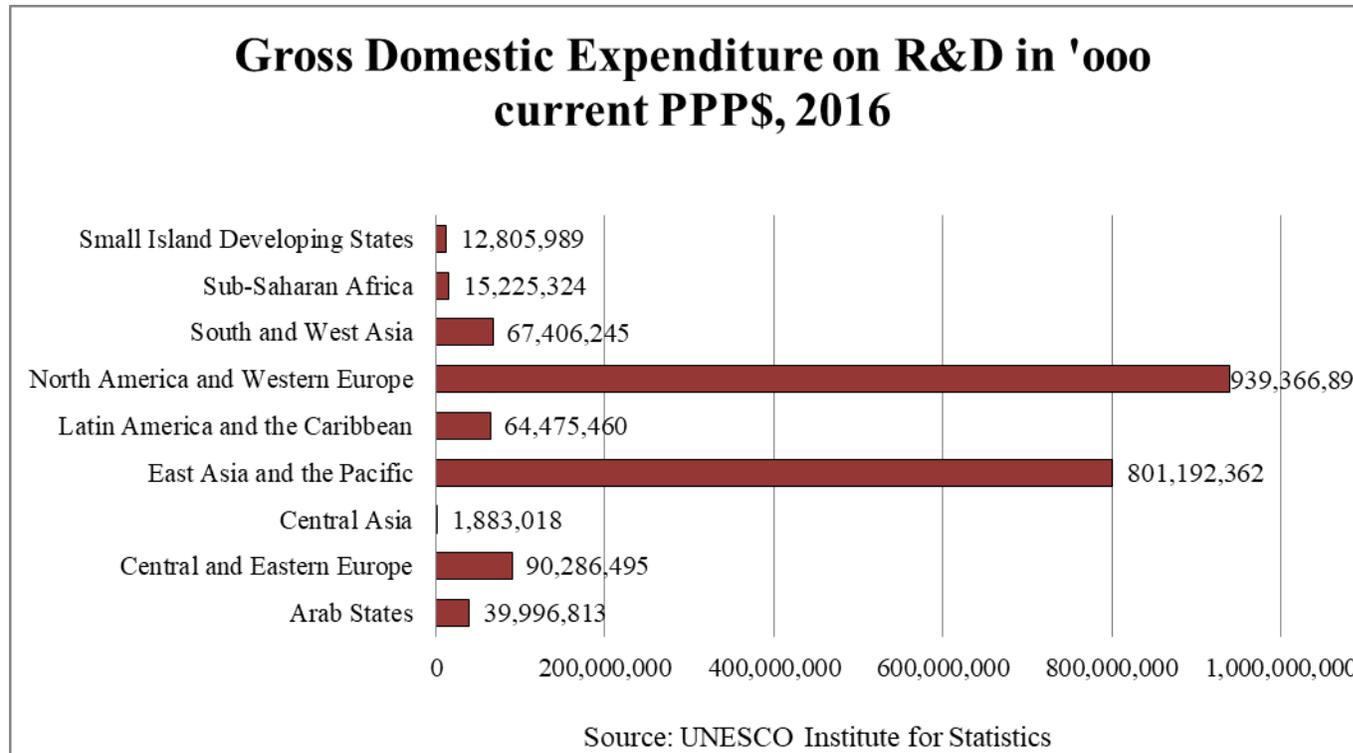
Guiding questions

- What does the current knowledge production system look like?
- How do shifts to Open Access & decolonisation movements affect this system?
- What else needs to be done and what might be effective approaches?

What does the current system look like?

- Disconnect between scholarship and lived experiences/society, contributing to a two-tier knowledge system (whereby non-experts have access to less rigorous or immediately relevant information compared to the privileged scholarly class).
- Dominance of English language in teaching and published research, which favours Anglophone standards of knowledge production (language and epistemology are interlinked).
- Western Euro-centric standards of knowledge validation, research excellence and impact, as seen in citation politics, peer review norms and modes/forms of knowledge production & sharing.
- Political and ideological agendas and regulatory frameworks in institutionalised scientific research (e.g. Research Excellence Framework) contributing to a competition-based model where the value of knowledge is measured by impact metrics.
- Research funding distribution, funding priorities, eligibility criteria, data management laws and due diligence expectations favouring Northern academics (especially those in elite institutions).
- Geographic distribution of publishing houses, with most high-impact journals being Northern, perpetuating western Euro-centric publication metrics (journal indexing and citations).

R&D asymmetries



Sub-Saharan Africa: 0.7
percent of world total

Central and Eastern
Europe: 4.47 percent of
world total

North America and
Western Europe: 46.5
percent of world total



Source: Demeter (2019)

3-dimensional model of academic stratification

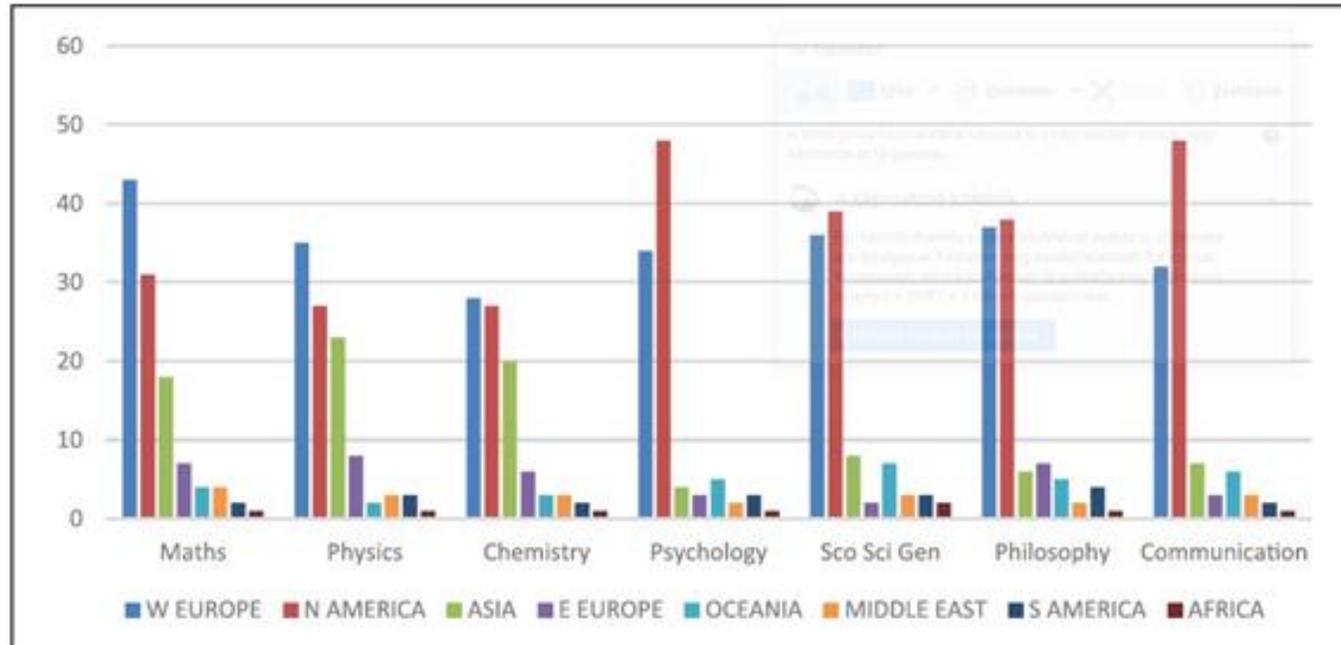
Core-periphery structure
of global academic
capital

Inequalities at different
levels: geography,
institution, socio-
economics class
(associated with 'cultural
capital')

Publishing asymmetries

Contribution of world regions in different disciplines from 1975 to 2017, by the affiliation of authors of research articles indexed in SCI/SSCI WoS.

Note: Vertical axis (left) shows the percentage of a given world region. SCI = science fields; SSCI = social science fields; WoS = Web of Science.



Source: Demeter (2019)

How do Open Access and decolonisation movements affect this system?

- Active efforts within higher education sector and technoscientific fields to decolonise knowledge production and research methodologies; efforts to engage substantively with and to cite non-western, indigenous, female and other marginalised voices.
- Efforts to decolonise research development and raise awareness around western Eurocentric funding structures and understandings of impact; increased awareness of the need for reflexive and dialogical research collaborations; funders involving more Southern researchers involved in the peer review of funding proposals, Northern funding bodies seeking partnerships with Southern counterparts, etc.
- New publishing initiatives to overcome material barriers in publishing and to make knowledge more immediately accessible through the shift to Open Access publishing & increased diversity in publishing formats (e.g. films, poetry, ethnographic notes, etc.)
- Efforts to promote indigenous languages and to connect knowledge production with real communities and societal issues (decolonising understandings of research impact).

But...

- Despite a diversification in theoretical frameworks and a better engagement with non-English speaking scholarship, the language of science remains largely English (although publishing in Spanish is becoming more popular, e.g. Iberoamerican journals).
- The current Open Access publishing model has become another business model for large publishers to continue their oligopolistic behaviour and profit-seeking practices. Article Processing Costs charged under hybrid or Gold OA models correlate positively with Impact Factor in Northern-dominated disciplines, which anticipates an increase in publishing inequalities in these disciplines (see next slide).
- The problem of scholarship being the preserve of academia continues, despite efforts to bridge rigorous research with societal affairs – economic inequalities and a system that favours western Euro-centric standards means that those at the margins can hardly make it in this system (without risking co-optation, e.g. by migrating to the North).

Scrutinising what Open Access Journals Mean for Global Inequalities (Demeter and Istratii 2020)

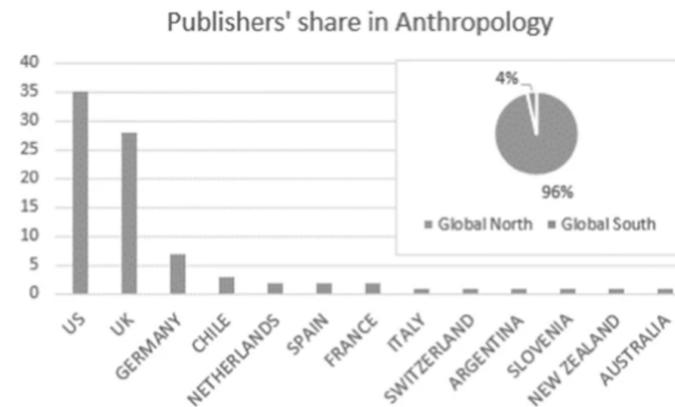
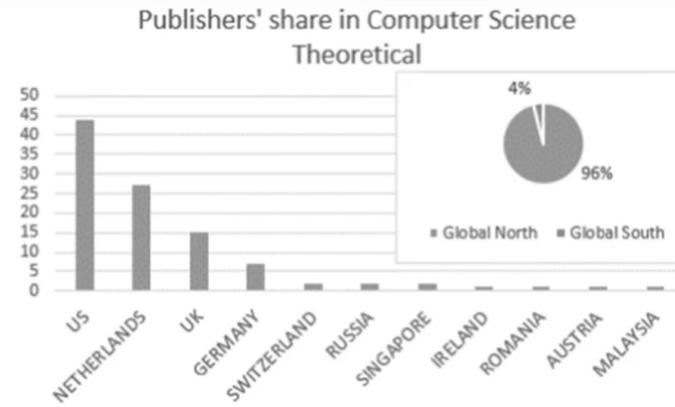
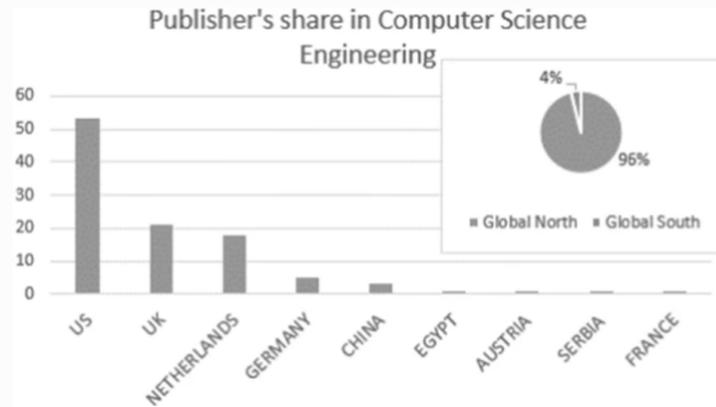
- The study found significant positive correlations between APCs and IF in Area Studies and Anthropology but not in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering). The average APCs in Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be considerably higher than in Computer Science (Theoretical and Engineering).
- Both Anthropology and Area Studies were found to be dominated by Northern publishers. The implication is that different subject areas are dominated by more or less internationally distributed publishers, which shapes their interest in IF journals, the kind of market competition they face, and subsequently the APCs they choose/are able to charge.
- Authors in Southern regions of the world will be challenged to publish as prolifically as their Northern peers in *pareto* optimal conditions, but will be especially challenged to publish in Global North-dominated subject areas and journals, such as in Anthropology and Area Studies.
- In subject areas that are dominated by Northern publishers, the level of APCs charged and IF will move together, which, combined with the existing economic inequalities among countries, are anticipated to grow publishing disparities between Northern and Southern researchers.

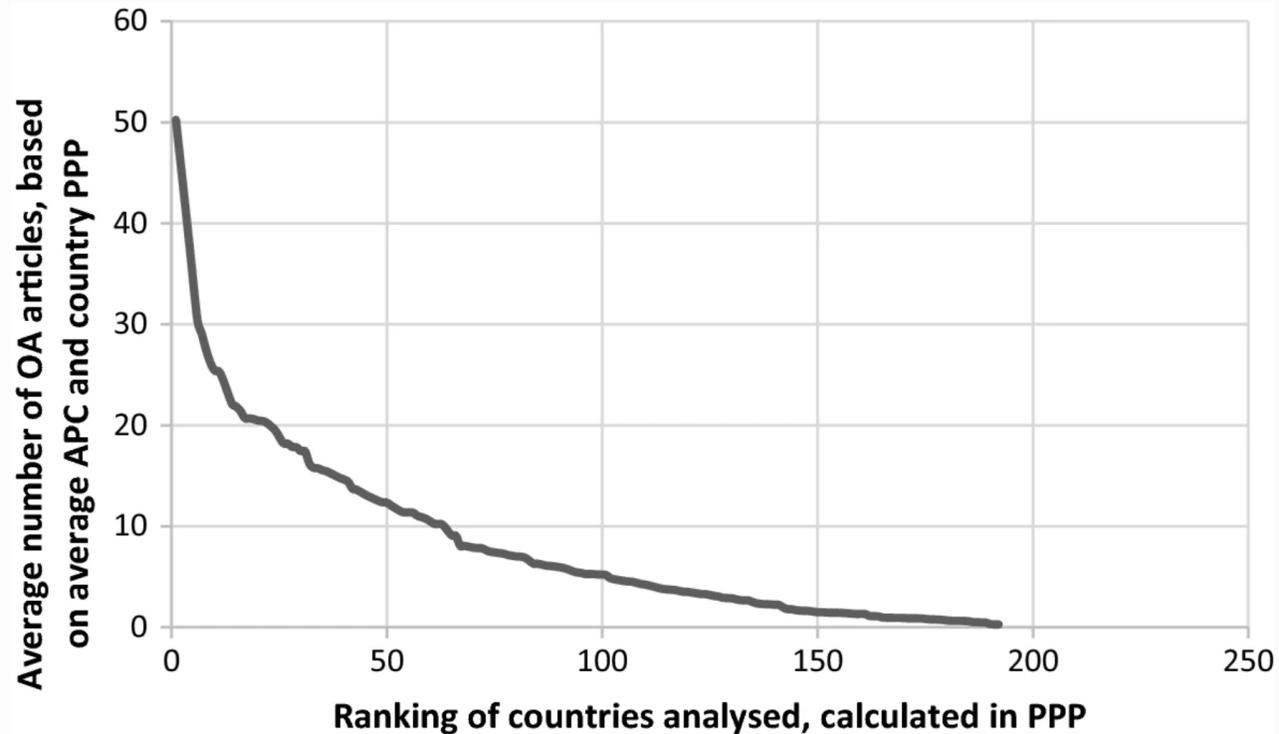
Global Distribution of Publishers

The share in world publications for the Global North cumulatively is 96–97 percent.

The less wealthy or peripheral regions are extremely underrepresented in terms of 'high-impact' published research in all the analysed fields.

But, considerable differences within the centre and across wealthier nations.





OA articles per year for different countries

The horizontal axis shows the analysed countries by World Bank ranking 2018. This ranking assigns the countries (range: 1–192) by their annual per capita GDP (PPP).

The vertical axis shows the number of OA articles per year that could be theoretically published by country (calculated by dividing the country per capita GDP (PPP) by the average APC)

The majority are found in the area of < 20 articles per year, which explains why the diagram is long-tailed

A macroscopic look: The work of Decolonial Subversions

- In response to these asymmetries, Decolonial Subversions publishes free of charge and encourages contributors to submit their contributions in their native languages, where an English version can also be provided, or to translate contributions in English to languages pertinent to the communities of research or contributed content. Decolonial Subversions has also pioneered a new open review process that encourages transparency and a higher degree of dialogue between reviewer and author.



Aspired modus operandi

- Collaborative – consultative
- Mutually fulfilling and beneficial
- Rotational editorialship
- Bridging academia, activism and practice
- Decentred
- Reflexive attitude
- Continuously revisiting and, where necessary, amending, the concept of 'decolonisation'
- Bottom-up approach
- New metrics foregoing established publication hierarchies: free accessibility worldwide in an ever increasing number of language, styles (academic and non-academic), and modes of expression (visual, acoustic, written)

Challenges and preconditions for opening up science

- There is a need to identify viable business models without charging APCs, but especially when working multilingually. Southern authors tend to need support with translating, editing and proofreading and this involves important costs. Many prefer writing in English despite being given the option to contribute in local languages because writing in English is considered more rigorous or because local languages have been marginalised as a result of colonial legacies and other reasons specific to the local societies.
- Rigorous academic research and scientific results are not immediately available to the public, even when published open access. A bridging of knowledge production with society and a democratisation of science will require publishing in Southern countries at locally affordable prices, working with local printing presses – virtual open access knowledge is not sufficient.

Challenges and preconditions for opening up science (cont.)

- The different needs for contributions from practitioners and non-academics require taking a case-by-case approach, identifying peer reviewers from respective sectors and showing flexibility with format and style. Non-standard academic contributions (e.g. films and visual contributions) require developing new peer review standards and assessment processes.
- Ensuring rigour without losing the voice of the author requires decolonial reflexivity and skill on behalf of editors and proof-readers.
- Working effectively with diverse contributors requires being concerned with their growth and development. It requires a pastoral approach on behalf of publishers and a collegial attitude on behalf of Northern academics and openness to learn from Southern (and marginalised Northern) colleagues.

