



## Call to Participate in a Workshop on Rethinking Knowledge Politics in Migration Research, Teaching & Practice

**Workshop Date: December 3, 2021**

Recently, there has been a proliferation of representations of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants waiting at land, sea as well as air border crossings headed towards Europe. These groups are often framed in highly emotive language that associates them with threats, or portrayed as either tragic or miserable, or as the exemplary citizen. There has also been an increase in emphasis on normative concepts such as ‘safe, orderly and regular migration’ in contemporary migration debates and policies; over and above already established ones such as ‘integration’. Often, we also find inherent presumptions that structural disparities between Europe and Africa can be resolved by addressing the root causes of migration and displacement via research and practice without necessarily addressing the causes of oppression. Conversations about African migrants tend to portray Europe as the main host continent for the majority of African migrants in spite of the greater numerical significance of internal and cross-border migration within and across the countries of the global South. All these developments point to the need for ongoing reflection and in particular the need to address northern-centric views in social science and public debate.

This call invites abstract submissions to participate in an online workshop as part of the [African Academy for Migration Research Virtual Institute on Knowledge Politics and Production](#). The workshop is hosted by the [African Centre for Migration & Society \(ACMS\)](#) at the [University of the Witwatersrand](#) and [Department of Political Science](#) at the [University of Vienna](#) in partnership with the [African Research Universities Alliance \(ARUA\)](#) and the [Anti-Racism Working Group](#) of the [IMISCOE International Migration Research Network](#). The workshop aims to engage with the question, what can (and should) migration academics and practitioners do to engage in these discussions and debates in a meaningful way? The ‘reflexive turn’ in migration research has engaged with the politics and ethics of knowledge production processes that involve vulnerable groups. While the ‘reflexive turn’ offered a paradigm shift in thinking about these questions by way of epistemological and conceptual reflections, migration research has now also started to engage more with decolonial perspectives. While decolonisation itself is not a new notion, it has been largely at the margins of migration research in Europe. We have seen an increasing attempt to focus on decolonising migration research, especially in the wake of the Black Lives Matter mobilisations.

This workshop asks if decolonisation as an analytical and reflexive tool can provide new or critical knowledge about more productive, inclusive and transformative approaches, language and categories of doing migration research, teaching as well as practice. Put differently, what does decolonisation have to offer to migration researchers and practitioners that differs or is inimitable from pre-existing notions of reflexivity in the field, and what, if any, are its potential pitfalls? While existing works on decolonising migration research have initiated an important

debate, we identify an ongoing gap in genuine perspectives that are the outcome of robust engagement of scholars and practitioners across the Global North and the Global South. This runs the risk of reducing decolonisation to a normative and at times arbitrary framework, retaining hegemonic characteristics by silencing certain perspectives and/or side-lining existing work. We suggest that decolonisation as a discourse also needs to be questioned and its usefulness and limits as a reflexive tool, not only for academics but those working in NGOs and practitioner institutions, and in the framework of exchange among academics and policy makers, further explored.

This workshop is meant to provide a space for this kind of allyship and exchange, taking stock of existing work, reading and critiquing each other's work as well as opening up conversations that are guided by mutual trust, understanding and support among migration scholars from different world regions, and from different disciplines. In this workshop, we would like to ask:

***How useful and inimitable is the language of decolonisation in varying, situated contexts of migration research, teaching and practice?*** Decolonisation can mean different things for differentially situated actors, yet there is a risk that it could become highly normative. We are specifically looking for contributions that offer grounded definitions, meanings and implications of decolonisation by reflecting on experiences found in intersubjective relations, humanitarian norms, language and procedures as well as knowledge production and teaching processes. Here, we are particularly interested in contributions that reveal both the desirable and undesirable consequences of adopting the language of decolonisation in the field and the possibilities of other emancipatory frameworks beyond or alongside this (if any).

***What are the institutional barriers to reflexive, transformative praxis in the world of migration?*** Those working in migration research, teaching and practice are constantly grappling with the possible influence of different ethnic, professional, racial and gendered positions. Yet, even for those who would like to acknowledge or assume responsibility for this power relation, a tendency to avoid debate embedded in institutional norms, and procedures often constrains reflexive exercises. We are looking for critical, genuine reflections on: the instances of the reproduction of unequal power relations; the institutional constraints to reflexivity in training and teaching in higher education as well as within NGOs and practitioner institutions; and the limits of using the language of decolonisation in calling for reflexivity within 'rigged' institutional contexts.

***What practical approaches and tools can be adopted to achieve a genuinely reflexive and transformative field of migration research, teaching and practice?*** Concepts and approaches that are currently applied in migration teaching, research and practice are often either highly normative or policy driven, which also means they have the potential danger of contributing to the 'othering' of migrants. Contributions for this workshop should address how to bring reflexive, transformative discussions into our work and into our research and spaces of learning in ways that shift power asymmetries; and ways to open up space for debate and emancipation as well as creating trust and an environment of feeling safe to reflect and act on errors instead of fostering distrust, and adversarial politics. We are also interested in contributions that unpack how we can build a continental African migration research agenda,

in a globally comparative way. We also welcome reflections on teaching migration studies in an online world.

### How to join?

Send an e-mail to [rethinking@migration.org.za](mailto:rethinking@migration.org.za) by **October 20, midnight** (your time zone) with the following information:

- Name
- Title and abstract of proposed contribution (300 words)
- Short bio: university affiliation, title, research interests, time-zone where you are currently based
- Write in the subject line of the e-mail: **Rethinking Migration Workshop**

We will notify those invited to participate on the basis of accepted abstracts by **October 30**. All papers are due by **November 30**. We envisage essay length papers (ranging from 3000 to 5000 words) that are a basis for discussion and exchange among the participants. Workshop contributions will go towards the compilation of an edited volume that engages scholarship on knowledge politics in the field of migration. The workshop will be held online to make it as accessible as possible for participants across the globe.