

## Folklorisation in the Current Emerging Global Space: Quo Vadis?

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The 2016 Southern African Folklore Society Conference was held from 24–28 October at the Bolivia Lodge in Polokwane. The conference was co-hosted by the School of Human and Social Sciences of the University of Venda, and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Limpopo. The purpose of the conference was to attract scholars and researchers from various disciplines, and to bring together a cohort of established and emerging researchers in one assembly to deliberate on topics related to the theme and sub-themes of the conference. The theme of the conference was *Folklorisation in the Current Emerging Global Space: Quo Vadis?*

The theme looked at how the discourse of folklore, which gained traction in the late 80s and 90s, has evolved, and is being sustained through various research and study efforts. In essence, the theme sought to identify opportunities and challenges in the application and implementation of “folklore ideas” in the current global perspectives—including issues such as climate change, disturbing deepening poverty, and the realities of inequality, various socio-political developing dimensions (locally, regionally, and globally), economic hegemonies, discussion on language and debates, to mention just a few. Conversely, it is a fact that the current global space offers intellectual debate and discussion for folklore research and studies. For instance, there are already stories or narratives on the current situation such as global economies, as well as political conversations on corruption that is rampant locally and regionally, etcetera. Admittedly, folklore scholarship has to be counted among disciplines that offer solutions in addressing some of these challenges.

The aim of the conference was to invite critical reflections, based on inter-, trans-, and multi-disciplinary backgrounds, in order to unpack this *plethora* of global challenges. It



became evident from various contributions made during the conference that attempts were made to produce original research, drawing from diverse disciplines, using different theoretical and methodological perspectives in exploring this range of cross-cutting issues. Some of these contributions looked at folklore and gender perspectives, past and current historical, political and developmental perspectives and folklore, folklore and globalisation, emerging philosophical underpinnings, education and learning conversations on folklore, and so forth.

To a larger extent, much of the literature on developmental issues in Africa has been dominated by the impact of the interaction between our continent and the West, especially Western Europe. While scholars, both from Africa and the West disagree on the nature of this impact, what is beyond dispute is that the West has dictated the pattern of this interaction since the era of the slave trade, with the result that the benefits have been disproportionate. Attention can be drawn to the fact that (generally) knowledge production and dissemination in Africa has suffered a fate similar to that of African economies—that is one of underdevelopment and disarticulation. Some of the existing challenges in this regard are:

- Disarticulation and incoherence
- The apparent lack or absence of complementarity; and
- The lack of reciprocity and linkage with local communities and their respective economies, histories, heritage and cultural sectors.

Another fundamental cause of the extraversion of African scholarship is the fact that most academic activities are carried out in foreign languages. African scholars are expected to master these languages, thus reducing investment in and removing research and theory out of the indigenous conceptual sphere. The issue of language was key in the debate by the Kenyan intellectual, Ngugi wa Thiongo, when he visited South Africa in 2017. Wa Thiongo concluded that the way to attaining knowledge is through the use of the language of the consumers of that knowledge.

This special edition presents voices that strongly argue that in the global space, Africa's history must be truthfully studied in its own terms, in order to satisfy the needs of its people, through indigenous approaches. Various philosophies and theories of truthful knowledge about Africa in the global space should challenge all African researchers, academics and practitioners to unmask western ideologies about their continent, expose exploitation, injustices, and explore local knowledge systems that promote values that facilitate an agenda of social emancipation and equity among all sections of society—that is women, men, children, youth, people with disabilities as well as HIV/AIDS victims. On the other hand, the silence imposed on Africa's history needs to be broken. Africans and their heroic struggles, victories and creative energies need to be rediscovered, promoted and celebrated through the scholarship of folklore and orality.

The fact remains that knowledge is not produced in a vacuum. Thus, Afrocentric prisms of knowledge are echoed in most of the articles published in this edition.

In this edition authors engage with the notion of globalisation, which reinforces images of global uniformity, imposing its own version of knowledge about Africa to all parts of the world, but at the same time, increasingly denying Africa a global space to produce the truthful knowledge of itself, and guard against being silenced or reduced to a caricature of truth. In so doing, contributors interrogate existing African studies and their shortcomings. They (authors) expose ways in which western epistemology—including its methods, paradigms, production, and dissemination amounts to “imperialism in the guise of modern scientific knowledge.”

This can be done by identifying and promoting indigenous approaches and methods that bridge existing gaps between Africans and those studying Africa in other parts of the world in this age of globalisation and globalism. The sounding message here is that Africa must stand up and insist on being studied on its own indigenous terms that would reflect its unique historical, social, economic, cultural heritage and circumstances. It must also be acknowledged that most of the African universities and research institutions have not lived up to their responsibilities as guiding lights in the continent and in the societies in which they are located. However, despite the extraversion and disarticulation of knowledge production in Africa, the catastrophic history of the continent (slavery, colonisation—and Apartheid and globalisation, especially in South Africa), has not completely destroyed the African intellectual and spiritual heritage. The wealth of knowledge among the elders in the African local communities is an important source of vibrant intellectualism, to which African researchers should turn to. When researchers carry out their tasks, the big question should be how they would ensure that the local communities benefit, are recognised, and capacitated to use their knowledge to alleviate poverty, and to regain their dignity.

It remains the challenge of current folklore scholarship to offer some responses to emerging local and global challenges. One can only hope that the contributions made in this edition will serve as a voice for providing vital guidance for future scholarship.

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