

INTRODUCTION: DECOLONIAL PROCESSES IN SWISS ACADEMIA AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Empirical and Theoretical Issues

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Abstract

This introduction discusses aspects of decolonial processes and their relevance with regard to Swiss cultural institutions and higher education by presenting key concepts of decolonial thinking such as coloniality, modernity and de-linking. Boaventura de Sousa Santos' suggestions for decolonizing Western universities are juxtaposed with actual decolonial processes taking place in different academic, (art) education and museum settings in Switzerland and abroad, and their political dimensions are scrutinized. The introduction concludes by presenting current debates, research projects and suggestions for practical implementation, as reflected in the contributions to the Dossier.

Keywords: *decolonial thinking, Switzerland, cultural institutions, university, art education*

Decolonial is the new black. Over the last few years in the fortress Europe – which is where we are speaking / writing from – there have been numerous events, exhibitions, research projects, and publications in the academic and in the cultural worlds where the word «decolonial» has been mentioned. More than a trend, decolonizing (the arts, academia, and so on) has become a necessary call. Or, conversely, more than a necessary call, perhaps decolonizing has become a trend. It is so widely used that one is right to ask whether it is really more than a trend, and what and who is behind the call. Isn't it a utopian call? What are the realities and implementations of such a call? How much of these initiatives are part of a «decolonial washing», to serve as alibi for institutions (or people) in a world where identity politics have become so prominent?

As Switzerland has never been a colonial power, there is a general assumption in public discourse – and tacitly even in some academic fields – that it had nothing to do with colonialism and therefore there is no need to assess its legacy nor to decolonize its power structures. This narrative has been addressed and deconstructed in several studies published in recent years as the scope of this call for decolonization has started to be taken into consideration (Purtschert 2012, 2015, 2019, Zangger 2011, Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015, Kurjaković et al. 2016, Lüthi et al. 2016, Mörsch et al. 2017, Laely et al. 2018).¹ Some research projects, conferences and public plenary discussions have recently taken up the topic and tried to assess the relevance, feasibility, and difficulties of a decolonial approach, especially to archives,

¹ See also the exhibitions at Swiss ethnographic museums in the last few years that scrutinize the history of their own collections such as *Expeditionen. Und die Welt im Gepäck* (2012-2016) at the Museum der Kulturen Basel or *Man muss eben Alles sammeln* (2012-2013) at Völkerkundemuseum Zurich as well as museums exploring alternative exhibition formats such as the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich.

ethnographic collections, curating and higher education systems.² This move invites us to reconsider historic global connections, markets, and power networks to unveil their colonial roots, and brings to light the contemporary participation of Swiss institutions in research trends, discourses, and cultural economies worldwide.

Decolonization remains a challenge in Swiss academia as well as in related cultural and educational institutions. What does decolonization mean and how does it apply to the ways we generate, transmit, and preserve knowledge in museums, archives, and universities? This question addresses both theoretical and empirical issues. On the one hand, it points to the need for a more profound and critical engagement with the various concepts and theories of decolonization and their relevance for the Swiss context. What needs to be decolonized? What would it mean for institutions and their audiences? How can international decolonial theories support this process and how are Swiss specificities taken into consideration? On the other hand, it asks how such decolonial processes can take place in practice and what are the implications for the structure, organization, employment policy, education programs, funding, cultural politics, and even for the *raison d'être* of our educational and cultural institutions. How can curators, artists, archivists, teachers, and scholars respond to the call for plural epistemologies in practice? Can institutions like museums or universities become platforms to interrogate or even change our epistemological foundations, and how?

The Decolonial Option: Key Concepts

As decolonial and postcolonial are often mistaken for being alike, it is important to remember that, although capitalizing on postcolonial studies and their key concepts such as representation, the subaltern, hybridity and its variations, indigeneity, race, critical whiteness, feminism, agency, language, identity and body politics, sexuality, diasporas, globalization, and queer theory, decolonial thinkers are critical of postcolonial studies. In their view, postcolonial studies still share the discourses and values of (post-)modernity and consequently of coloniality³. They «do not alter the internal discourses inherent in and fundamental to modernity, such as progressivism

and developmentalism: both are implied in the prefix «post» (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012: 35; on the prefix «post», see also Appiah 1991 and Ashcroft 1996).

[P]ostcoloniality presupposes postmodernity, while decolonial thinking and decolonial option are always already delinked from modernity and post-modernity. It brings to the foreground a silenced and different genealogy of thought. Decolonial option originated not in Europe but in the Third World [sic], as a consequence of struggles for political decolonization. And it emerged among «minorities» in the heart of the U.S. as a consequence of the Civil Rights movement and its impact on decolonizing knowledge and being through gender and ethnic studies. (op. cit.: 33)

This fundamental difference between postcolonial theories and decolonial thinking is not so much located in the topics they address, but in the position of enunciation: they «are interrelated at the level of the enunciated (i.e., the content, the concern with colonial histories and their consequences for the present) but they do not intersect at the level of the enunciation (i.e., the terms of the conversation)» (op. cit.: 34). In academia, the decolonial option comes from traditions often rooted in anti-establishment and activist milieus, which intersect and create multifaceted constellations of resistances. One such option emerged from the works of scholars from the Latin American continent such as Enrique Dussel, Ramón Grosfoguel, María Lugones, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Catherine Walsh, among others. Inspired by the concept of coloniality of power coined by Quijano (1992), these scholars endeavored to break away from Western canons of thought in order to produce radical, alternative knowledges that «take seriously the epistemic perspective / cosmologies / insights of critical thinkers from the Global South thinking *from* and *with* subalternized racial / ethnic / sexual spaces and bodies» (Grosfoguel 2007: 212). It is not an anti-European or anti-Western criticism, but a «perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism» (*ibid.*). In addition to this tradition, there is one of native / aboriginal approaches contesting white supremacy through their struggles for land reclamation and for the sovereignty of their communities. Finally, intertwined in these two traditions, maybe even enabling their joining, are antiracist and anti-capitalist feminist theories, in particular those developed by Afrofeminists and women of

² Examples are the international conference *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: Opportunities, Challenges, Modalities* at the Völkerkundemuseum Zurich (1-3 December 2016), the panel discussion *Aussereuropäische Kunst: Blinde Flecken in Europäischen Kunstmuseen?* at the Kunsthhaus Zurich (1 April 2017), and the symposium *Decolonizing Art Institutions* at the Kunstmuseum Basel, organized by the Post-Graduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK (21 June 2017).

³ Accordingly, Ramón Grosfoguel includes «global coloniality» imposed by the United States of America through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Pentagon, and NATO as parts of this system, as they reproduce the developmental discourse of coloniality.

color like Chandra Talpade Mohanty or M. Jacqui Alexander engaged in the struggles for social justice. They share an agenda to inhibit the danger of transforming articulations and discourses on transnational feminism into an expression of the free market and a normative gesture. Feminist solidarity and resistance networks that are being organized beyond borders represent «a spatialized analytic frame that can account for varying scales of representation, ideology, economics, and politics, while maintaining a commitment to difference and asymmetrical power» (Alexander and Mohanty 2010: 25).

With reference to the concept of coloniality of power, decolonial thinkers make a clear distinction between colonialism as a historic, economic, political system and coloniality as

patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (Maldonado-Torres 2010: 97)

Considering that the Western discourse and ideology of modernity is constitutive of *coloniality*, it therefore represents a fundamental aspect of coloniality as a «colonial matrix of power» (Quijano 1992, Mignolo 2010a: 320, Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012: 38), which involves economic control, control of authority, control of gender and sexual normativity, and control of knowledge and subjectivity (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012: 44-45, see also Schiwy 2010). Most significantly, coloniality is not limited to the territories of the ex-colonies or the ex-empires, but operates beyond geopolitical borders worldwide. It may be experienced differently in particular geo-political settings and subjectivities, and it shapes these very subjectivities (Mignolo 2010b: 19).

Similar to the distinction between colonialism and coloniality, decolonial processes can also be conceived as historical processes (Dülffer and Frey 2011, Betts 2004) on the one hand, and as processes leading to the end of hegemonic power structures on the other. The first processes designate decolonization, and the second decoloniality. While decolonization concentrates on the handing-over of institutions and political sovereignty from the former colonialists to the newly liberated nations – ideally implying a *tabula rasa* as Frantz Fanon envisaged it (2002 [1961]: 39) – decoloniality is a much more complex process that involves overcoming the deep legacy of colonialism in the culture, psychology, and everyday experience of the former colonial subjects. Decoloniality is therefore the «undoing of

the colonial matrix of power» (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012: 59, see also Mignolo 2010a: 330). To attain decoloniality, de-linking (*desprendimiento*) (Quijano 1992, Mignolo 2010a) from epistemic principles informed by modernity and colonialism is a key process. It has also been theorized as epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2010c), and as «learning to unlearn» (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). De-linking counters the dominating epistemologies with other epistemologies that had been oppressed, denied, and neglected within the patterns of coloniality. It therefore means «to change the terms and not just the content of the conversation» (Mignolo 2010a: 313). This process of learning to unlearn colonial epistemology means to give up established notions of expertise and disciplines and open up to other «decolonial options» (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012: 19-22).

De-linking, epistemic disobedience, and learning to unlearn have a double feature in common: on the one hand, they question and deconstruct coloniality as a hegemonic pattern of Western domination, on the other, they seek for and support the establishment of alternatives by promoting other modes of knowing and experiencing, such as indigenous knowledge. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is often cited as an exemplary study for indigenous anthropological research that not only offers solutions to the troublesome politics of ethnographic representation but in fact introduces an alternative epistemology to the discipline of anthropology:

When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms. (Smith 1999: 193)

In that sense, de-linking is an actionistic shift towards seeing and reasoning the world from non-Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

This emphasis on decentering Western epistemologies in favor of «other» epistemologies is crucial in decolonial thought. In this sense, it is informed by a notion of alterity that does not support gestures of inclusion or assimilation – in fact, it is the «reverse of «assimilation»» (Mignolo 2010a: 315). If «other» epistemologies are included in dominant institutions and their discourses, they do not constitute a decolonial force but rather are co-opted or incorporated into the dominant epistemology – post-colonial theories have also come across this pitfall (Araeen 2000). Radical decolonial thinking therefore asks not only for an equal position and validation of marginalized epistemologies but claims an «other-centric» perspective that ignores or abandons dominant forms of knowledge and its institutions; it is a question of sovereignty rather than inclusion (Ash-Milby and Phillips 2017).

Where Are We with the Decolonization of Higher Education and Cultural Institutions?

Since Foucault and Freire, we know that education empowers, but it is also a means to weaken others by imposing and propagating one kind of knowledge, and denigrating and exterminating another (Freire 1970). Not only are the contents of the curriculum defined by hegemonic Western discourses, but also the methods (e.g. reading), means (e.g. latin alphabet), interpretative framework (Western modernism), and material and sensory setting (rectangular school rooms with tables and chairs). As Grada Kilomba stated: «Academia is not a neutral space» (Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies 2013: 25).

Calls for decolonization are not new in Western academia. On the contrary, many scholars are inspired by decolonial theories and theories from the so-called South, especially in the fields of postcolonial and gender studies. But the political urgency of decolonial claims in public protests has triggered a new wave in academia that pushes more deliberately towards a change in practice, beyond mere theorization. It has been a prominent feature in numerous international journals, especially of African studies, as a research topic, but also as a guiding principle in questioning the editorial politics of scholarly journals.⁴ Decolonizing knowledge applies to former colonies as well as former imperial centers. However, the recognition and willingness to decolonize the «westernized» university vary strongly (Grosfoguel et al. 2016). Recent movements in South Africa like #FeesMustFall (2015-2017) and #RhodesMustFall (2015) are less concerned about the continuity of Western knowledge in European universities than about the education systems in their own country. South African universities had been entirely «westernized» even before apartheid, and are well known for their discriminatory practices against local knowledge in those times. Although universities did much after the end of apartheid to be more inclusive in terms of admission, they failed to recognize the continuity of their «westernized» structures and the implications of excluding African forms of knowledge from the curriculum.

If the deconstruction of Eurocentrism and the introduction of «other» knowledges is truly a political program, then Western institutions face the imperative to de-westernize their knowledge system. As Velásquez argues:

The problem with this internalized historical narrative is it informs a methodology that either excludes whole continents and islands with histories where thinking on these matters occur such as Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean, or it integrates one token figure in a ghettoized fashion that is tacked on at the end of a book as a diversity afterthought, unconnected to the wider conversation and history of philosophy. (Velásquez 2016: x)

Arguments to decolonize such Western self-assertion therefore are various, such as the contemporary reality of migration and cultural diversity in Europe or the acknowledgement of the slave history and its heirs in the USA as ethical and moral duties. This involves a historical awareness of how certain forms and traditions of knowledge (predominantly white, heterosexual, and male) are perpetuated. Intersectional analysis on the other hand makes the «intermingled causal roles» of «race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, and religion» (*op. cit.*: x) for dominant and dominated forms of knowledge more visible.

In his latest book *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (2018), Boaventura de Sousa Santos attempts to define decolonizing interventions in the university. Always occurring «in the midst of turbulence and conflict, [...] they destabilize institutional inertias [and] reflect long-term social conflicts occurring either covertly or overtly in other sectors of society [...]» (Santos 2018: 271). He suggests three core principles to help implement them in Western academia:

1. The impact that decolonizing interventions «may have on capitalist and patriarchal domination» (*op. cit.*: 270) must be taken into consideration, because, as interventions can only be partial, they may inadvertently reinforce certain forms of domination while accounting for others.
2. They should be «articulated with other processes of decolonizing social and cultural relations prevailing in society». This involves, among other things, employee recruitment, «health policies, family and community relations, [and] the media» (*ibid.*).
3. They «must not resort to the methods of colonialism, not even inverted colonialism» (*ibid.*). Rather, «the magnitude of the decolonizing task calls for alliances among different social groups». Such collective engagement would

⁴ A recent example is the introduction of vol. 61 issue 3 (2018) of *African Studies Review* on «Decolonizing African Studies» which addressed exactly this knowledge decolonization paradigm. Also in 2018, the special issue 45(1) of *Politikon* titled «Decolonisation after Democracy» included essays tackling the implementation of decolonial claims in practice, with a considerable emphasis on (South) Africa.

avoid identitarian politics and instead would encourage «coknowing» as a «knowing with» rather than «knowing about» (*op. cit.*: 147, 188-190).

Reflecting extensively on the possibility of a decolonial curriculum, Santos also suggests a range of different approaches. Key is the polyphonic university as opposed to the (traditional) university. It embraces both institutionalized and non-institutional forms of knowledge (Santos 2018: 277), and aims for incompleteness rather than completeness, pluriversality rather than universality (Mignolo 2011, Escobar 2018, Reiter 2018). The polyphonic university thus aims «to render different ways of knowing more porous and more aware of differences through intercultural translation» (Santos 2018: 275). The latter is of crucial importance in this regard and perhaps the key for a practical implementation of decolonial claims: «Building mutual intelligibility among different knowledges would be the central task of the learning process, and it would be carried out by resorting to procedures of intercultural translation» (*op. cit.*: 276). As knowledges are plural and everyone has something to learn, hierarchization between learner and teacher is significantly narrowed. Instead, significant energy is dedicated to building links through networks and cooperations between social movements in the struggle against structural violence and neo-liberal capitalism (*op. cit.*: 285). However, this does not exclude collaboration with more established institutions like universities.

Decolonial Calls in Art and Cultural Institutions

The decolonial turn has also reached European art universities and institutions with their insistence on creating alternative forms of knowledge through art and art research. In 2013, *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality* was published as an outcome of a six year-long program in the Post-Conceptual Art Practices class at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where processes of studying, learning, and de-learning were actively debated through collective discussions and readings (Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies 2013). A seminar explicitly entitled «Decolonising the Museum» was held in November 2014 at the Museo d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). It addressed colonial

legacies still informing European museums and collective imaginaries, as well as solutions already offered by curators to overcome these legacies both in ethnographic museums, and modern and contemporary art museums (L'Internationale Online 2015). More recently (June 2017), the Postgraduate Program in Curating of the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) organized a symposium at the Kunstmuseum Basel, «De-Colonizing Art Institutions», which invited various cultural producers from all around the world to share their experiences and debate possible strategies (Kolb and Richter 2017). In September 2017, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven gathered scholars, curators, and directors of art institutions around the topic: «Collections in transition: Decolonising, Demodernising and Decentralising?».⁵ Decolonial intentions and curatorial decisions have marked the conceptual core of recent international key art events, notably documenta 14 in 2017 (Latimer and Szymczyk 2017) and the 10th Berlin Biennale in 2018 (Kunst-Werke Berlin e.V. 2018). Between October 2017 and November 2018, the Akademie der Künste der Welt of Cologne, in cooperation with art institutions in Poland, China, Israel, the USA, and Sweden, developed a (self-)critical international research project entitled «Perverse Decolonization» which, in reaction to the use of decolonial rhetoric in contexts of the resurgence of rightwing politics and xenophobia, aims at looking at an «emancipative process gone wrong».⁶ Simultaneously, the Universität der Künste Berlin organized «Decolonizing Arts: Aesthetic Practices of Learning Unlearning», a lecture series bringing together scholars, curators, and artists.⁷ In September 2018, in France, a collective of fifteen artists, filmmakers, scholars, curators published an artistic and political manifesto entitled – with the injunction to decolonize the arts – *Décolonisons les arts!* (Cukierman et al. 2018). The November 2018 issue of *Frieze* also offers an assessment of the situation of the decolonization of culture and where we go from here. This non-exhaustive enumeration shows not only the plurality of the propositions but also of the issues addressed.

The Political Dimension

Public debates about migration and «integration» also show that decolonization is a major challenge in everyday practice. How much adaptation to local languages, education systems, and socio-political contingencies can be expected, and when are subalterns marginalized by policies considered democratic

⁵ See program online: <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/collections-in-transition>, accessed September 15, 2018.

⁶ See program online: https://www.academycologne.org/en/article/1411_perverse_decolonization, accessed September 15, 2018.

⁷ See program online: <https://www.udk-berlin.de/forschung/temporaere-forschungseinrichtungen/dfg-graduiertenkolleg-das-wissen-der-kuenste-veranstaltungssarchiv-des-dfg-graduiertenkollegs/kuenste-dekolonisieren-aesthetische-praktiken-des-lernens-und-verlernens/>, accessed September 15, 2018.

and egalitarian? Even in multilingual Switzerland, schools are not very favorable to the idea of introducing non-national languages (apart from English) as part of their curriculum, and art museums, as part of a major art world system, are still reluctant to accord non-canonical artists the same position and attention as a Picasso or a da Vinci. Un-learning means taking risks that deeply disturb and perturb time-proven knowledge and values. At the same time, the construction of such knowledge and its historical change have raised awareness among ethnographic museums of the hegemonic politics inherent in collecting, categorizing, and representing, prompting them to reconsider earlier practices and develop new ones, often in (major or minor) conversations with «source communities» in an attempt to generate new knowledge and heal the colonial wound. They frequently find themselves in a dilemma between their decolonial agenda and the limitations set by established policies and practices.

Decolonial processes have fundamental political implications. As an example, there has been less reflection in Switzerland than in the USA about what decolonial reforms mean with regard to employment policy and structural reforms of the institutions themselves, beyond their collection policy, acquisition policy, or methods of research and display. These issues became particularly topical when, in April 2018, twelve anti-gentrification groups and allied organizations in New York mobilized to demand the Brooklyn Museum to create a «Decolonization Commission». Although this protest was an immediate reaction to the hiring of a white female curator for the African art department, it reflected a criticism of the Museum's hiring policy and power structures more generally (Vartanian 2018a, 2018b). The situation in Switzerland is different, yet worth some reflection with regard to diversity in hiring policies. While gender equity has been a topic of discussion for at least ten years now (but still tends to be unequal at the highest levels of the hierarchies), the question of epistemological diversity in hiring policies is not discussed. As an example, while many museums actively try to address migrant communities with their exhibitions and education programs, only few persons with non-Western migration experience or with knowledge acquired outside Western university curricula are found in the curatorial and educational departments of the same museums.

Nevertheless, the «decolonial turn» has also reached Switzerland and its various institutions. Interestingly, institutes mainly dedicated to gender studies or linked to the visual arts have undertaken some steps towards a public discussion of decolonization, often in cooperation with civil society groups. It seems that the opening of academic universities (and related funding bodies) to artistic practice and artistic research as a specific mode of knowing and knowledge generation in the past few years has opened up a particularly qualified space for deco-

lonial research and experimentation. Cited above, the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) has been a site of reflection and cooperation for several years now, where de-colonial thought has been put in relation to art practices, art education, and curatorial practice in Switzerland (Kurjaković et al. 2016, Kolb and Richter 2017, Mörsch et al. 2017, Saner et al. 2016, see also the prologue by Patricia Purtschert in this Dossier). Artistic forms of decolonial engagement play an important role as they offer unfamiliar and new perspectives on familiar topics and assumptions. Such initiatives often take place in collaboration with independent scholars and curators, such as, for instance, Koyo Kouoh who is based in Senegal and Switzerland while engaging in a transnational curatorial and academic field (Kouoh 2013).

Decolonial Processes in Swiss Academia and Cultural Institutions: Contributions to this Dossier

A Dossier about «Decolonial Processes in Swiss Academia and Cultural Institutions» in a journal for social and cultural anthropology may look like a contradiction. Universities and museums have a fundamental share in what decolonial criticism considers the hegemony of Western epistemology. Associated with «Western» (Mignolo 2011) or «Northern» (Santos 2018) domination and definition of knowledge, as the source of epistemic oppression, they constitute the target of decolonial criticism.

On the other hand, the contributions to this issue show that although knowledge generation in Switzerland is far from being decolonial, there are various processes taking place that aim at allowing plural views and voices in Swiss schools, higher education and museums. This Dossier represents a modest contribution to the written history of these processes happening in Switzerland lately, and we remain conscious of the non-exhaustive and still partial view it will offer to readers, despite our efforts to include as many different voices as possible. We hope that it will inspire debates and keep new and ongoing discussions open.

In her prologue to this Dossier, Patricia Purtschert deploys a concise summary of the state of postcolonial discourses and decolonial processes in Switzerland with a rich collection of examples. By referring to studies on continued social and institutional practices of racism at the civil registry offices, on the Eurocentric setup of the music curricula at schools of higher education, or on promotional material at art universities, she illustrates how entrenched inequalities remain both omnipresent and unarticulated. She complements this with instances of challenging hegemonic power structures by political motions, civil society organizations, and collaborative projects by artists and curators. She thereby provides

a subtle image of how diverse the sites, actors, and practices are, and how powerful representation, political frameworks, and mechanisms of othering continue to be.

Anna Christen submits the discipline of philosophy in Switzerland to a critical assessment. As a key discipline of Western epistemology, it continues to corroborate its Western canon, ceding philosophical traditions from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other regions of the world to area studies or anthropology. Based on a philosophy course in Grahamstown (South Africa) in the wake of the *#RhodesMustFall* and the *#FeesMustFall* protests, she presents a proposal as to how Western and other philosophies can be brought into an engaging dialogue and diversify the curriculum. Notably, she calls for deeper methodological reflexivity as part of such disciplinary reconfigurations.

Tracing the missionary and collection history that links the Museum der Kulturen Basel (MKB) with artists of Milingimbi in East Arnhem Land, Beatrice Voirol describes how this contact has changed over several decades, resulting in a recent digital restitution project and a direct conversation between museum staff, the Yolngu community, and selected objects from the collection. It shows how developments of mutual exchange including a jointly celebrated *Makarrata* attempt at insuring the dignity and integrity of the material heritage stored in Basel and a constructive basis of knowledge exchange between museum staff and members of the Yolngu community.

In her essay, Claire Brizon creates a bridge between Swiss historical collections from the 18th century and an exhibition that will open in 2020 at the Palais de Rumine in Lausanne. Choosing three object case studies to be presented within the future exhibition she conducts detailed research in provenance and material properties as well as archival documents. They serve as entry points to reassess the complex colonial history of Switzerland and unveil the role of missionaries, diplomats, merchants, explorers, slave traders, mercenaries, founders of colonial enclaves, and collectors. The forthcoming exhibition will adopt various techniques of display to offer a decolonial approach to these collections by including plural perspectives on the objects.

The round table conversation with the director of the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève (MEG), Boris Wastiau, and the newly appointed directors of the Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel (MEN), Yann Laville and Grégoire Mayor, unfolds around a number of aspects in the practical work of ethnographic museums. It illuminates the distinct institutional histories as well as the range of expectations placed upon such institutions by decolonial criticism, diverse audiences, «source communities» and political forces. Moreover, the round table illustrates the different approaches of the museums themselves

with regard to collecting policies, exhibition concepts, mediation programs, and institutional structures. They are reflective of the potentials and the contingencies of museological practices in a postcolonial setting.

Irène Zingg discusses language hierarchies at Swiss schools in the context of a plurilingual nation marked by transnational migration. She shows that although national and federal language policies have changed significantly since the 1970s, monolingual and hence exclusive politics continue to be an impediment in the school experience for many pupils with multilingual competences. Exclusionary and ethnocentric language politics are often coupled with practices of cultural and/or racial discrimination. Therefore, Zingg calls for structural adjustments in Swiss education policies towards seeing potential rather than deficiencies in the plurilingual competences of learners.

We are delighted that the contributions in other sections of this *Tsantsa* issue relate to the topic of the Dossier. In the visual anthropology section, Kadiatou Diallo presents an essay based on the *SCH* exhibition she curated in 2016 at the Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel. As Purtschert elaborates in her prologue, the exhibition touched upon stories by individuals and communities who are silenced by heteronormative, racial, and other forms of exclusionary practices and discourses in Switzerland. The Review section includes an assessment of the book *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe* edited by Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, and Raphael Schwere that engages with cooperation as a chance and challenge to decolonize museum practices (Laely et al. 2018). Finally, within the Open section, Karin Kaufmann presents her curatorial approach towards pluralizing perspectives on museum collections by giving audiences an active role in the selection of objects for the anniversary exhibition *Take Your Pick – 125 Objects for the 125 Years* at the Museum der Kulturen Basel (2018).

The essays in this Dossier are far from representative for the entirety of current and past initiatives and processes aiming at decolonizing aspects of exhibition practices, education, and scholarship in Switzerland. In addition, as publications in a peer reviewed scholarly journal, they meet the standards of an established system of scholarship in line with Western epistemic traditions. However, they represent different approaches of researchers, lecturers, museum experts, and curators in Switzerland who tackle challenges and questions relating to the call for a decolonial turn in higher education and cultural institutions. Changes are constantly taking place, be it on a higher policy level or on a more practical level on the ground. Hence our emphasis on decolonial *processes*: processes are part of social and institutional practices, and even though they may be embedded in hegemonic conceptions and

structures of knowledge, they reject stasis and instead reflect movements – small or large – within and beyond fixed structures of power. As Patricia Purtschert shows in her prologue with several examples within and outside Swiss institutional frameworks, space is continuously created for counter-narratives, activist engagements, and experimental testing grounds to explore and offer different views on seemingly established

knowledge. In this respect, the contributions in this Dossier mirror different aspects of processes in the making. For the moment, the trajectories and possible outcomes remain uncertain and open-ended. In any case, as co-curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale Yvette Mutumba states in an interview, to attain true decolonization, it will certainly «have to hurt» (Deutsche Welle and Mutumba 2018).

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