

Africa: Diversity and Development

African Studies in Australia and New Zealand: Prospects for Knowledge and Informed Engagement with Africa

Tanya Lyons (Flinders University) and Aime Saba (University of Queensland)

This paper will compare the availability of relevant courses and topics in the Australian and New Zealand university sector that examine Africa – and that can be generally considered as African Studies. The levels of the tertiary education sector’s engagement with Africa will then be compared with each nation’s foreign policies toward Africa. It will be argued that the delivery of African studies in Australasia and the Pacific is constantly thwarted by the lack of diplomatic, aid and trade attention to the African continent, leaving little space in the tertiary curriculum for the delivery of courses and topics specific to African issues.

In 2013 Lyons (Lyons, 2013, p. 193) argued that “the role of the education sector in Australia’s relationship with Africa ... [was] dominated by the Australia Awards in Africa (AAA) Scholarships program”. The then Labor government had intended to “educate up to 1000 African students per year from 2013 through to 2016 in targeted courses in Australian institutions” (Lyons, 2013, p.193). Indeed by 2014, the current Liberal/Coalition government through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) was boasting 5000 Alumni back in Africa (see DFAT 2014). What they didn’t boast was the fact that this figure was rounded down from total of 5078 alumni scholars who were awarded long term (masters or phd) scholarships between 1960-2014. The significance of this is that the bulk of scholarships – approximately 3000 were awarded post 2005, and prior to that on average only 44 would have been awarded a year. While there may have been 5000 Alumni in Africa from Australia over the last 54 years, there is a good chance they are not all still there, or indeed alive. Furthermore, it seems rather limited compared to for example the Chinese program to Africa which reportedly boasted up to “35,000 African students in China, most of which were beneficiaries of Chinese government scholarships” (see *New Times*, 2014)¹.

Educating Africans in Australia to boost the soft-power of Australia across the Indian Ocean, and to increase the ‘people-to-people’ links, that would ultimately benefit the Australian national interest, in terms of trade and business opportunities in the mining and agricultural sectors – must have seemed like a good idea at the time. But what is interesting is that while all this money was spent on bringing them here – inflating the overseas aid budget - 90 cents in the dollar stayed in Australia, mainly to boost the Australian university sector, and not necessarily enabling or developing any further knowledge about Africa and Africans. Lyons has discussed

¹ “The Chinese Government has also established 38 Confucius institutions in 32 countries in Africa, further increasing the opportunities for education based exchanges between China and various African countries”, See the Lusaka Times (2014) “China Urges African students to fully utilize its scholarships” 27 May 2014, <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2014/05/27/china-urges-african-students-fully-utilize-scholarships/>.

this elsewhere (See Lyons, 2014), but here we will argue that knowledge about Africa in Australia remains limited, and little has changed over the last decade, despite the rapid increases in scholarships offered to Africans; and despite the “new engagement” with Africa espoused by the former Labor government. It is unlikely to change anytime soon under the current government, which has only cut the budget to foreign aid, especially to Africa, and to also to the domestic education sector. It is to this latter sector that this paper now turns to update research begun in 2003 by Lyons and Dimock (see Lyons and Dimock, 2003; Lyons and Dimock 2007). Back then, Lyons and Dimock concluded that “African studies exists in Australian universities because of the dedication of a core group of enthusiastic scholars who have had the opportunity to deliver topics on Africa, and develop research in specific fields of interest in their respective university departments.” (Lyons and Dimock, 2007). Again, here we will demonstrate that not much has changed in the past decade.

The basic assumption that we are working on is “that the role of the education sector, especially at the tertiary level, but also at the primary and secondary levels, should be to educate Australians about Africa, which would in turn contribute to a more informed Australian foreign policy towards Africa.” (Lyons, 2013).

Clearly we have been told it is an Asian century, and this remains our dominant focus, and perhaps this is justified, but not at the expense of knowledge about ‘other countries that aren’t Australian’. For example there is no valid reason to exclude specific African studies topics from the primary or secondary school curriculum, now that we have a national curriculum in Australia. Nonetheless, this is exactly what has happened. For example, specific mention of Africa only appears in the history curriculum, where it is suggested that “[s]tudents should have an appreciation of the major civilisations of Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australia” (Australian Curriculum Board, 2009, p.9). In order to achieve that focus on Africa, teachers can direct their students to “Unit 1: History from the time of the earliest human communities to the end of the Ancient period (c. 60,000 BC–c. 500 AD)” – and there they may learn about “human migration out of Africa”, or from other regions. It is ironic that one of the growing recent migrations from African countries, refugees fleeing from conflict, has resulted in over 300,000 Africans settling in Australia, making a significant contribution to the Africa diaspora and the Australian population, but still there is little education about their continent or journey in our national curriculum [see Lyons, 2013, pp.201-202]. Although there is more a student could be exposed to in “Unit 4: Australia in the Modern World (1901–present)”, as they may be able to do a comparative study about apartheid in South Africa compared with Indigenous rights in Australia. Although it is absolutely clear that 60% of this unit will be about Australian history (Australian Curriculum Board, 2009; and Lyons 2013, pp.201-202).

Moving on from the secondary schooling dilemma of a crowded curriculum, it may seem more appropriate to specialize in area studies at the tertiary sector. So, when we get to university we could then focus on Africa if we want to, just as we could focus on Latin America, or specialize in Nano-technology. However, again there is very little in the undergraduate tertiary curriculum to enable a focus on Africa, unless you can choose to focus on an African related case study within other topics, or go onto postgraduate studies where specialist skills are honed.

The following is a summary of the courses or topics available in the Australian university system that either have a focus on Africa, or provide a comparative case study on something about Africa. 2014 is the first time we have also included statistics from a search of New Zealand Universities as well, but as you will see it does bode well for New Zealanders either.

Table 1 below lists the Undergraduate courses or topics available in Australian and New Zealand Universities which have a specific focus on Africa. The information was collected in 3 snapshots of the topic availabilities gleaned from university websites and handbooks of course information in 2003, 2011 and 2014. The Table 1 shows that the total number of specific topics on Africa shifted slightly from 16 in 2003, to 21 in 2011 and down to 18 in 2014. However, looking more closely at the topic availabilities we note some interesting provisos. While we have included New Zealand universities in the 2014 count, it has made no difference to the overall totals of specific African topics, as there were none that registered in the audit search.

Furthermore, in both 2011 and 2014 Monash University's campus in South Africa was included in the count. In 2011 it offered 2 topics, but by 2014 it had become the only 'Australian' university to offer students the chance to do a Minor Sequence in African Studies within their degree (they would do 3 topics specifically with an African focus plus one with a general comparative focus). Nonetheless, the campus is in South Africa and very few Australian students would have access to its curriculum, and the Australian campuses do not appear to offer an equivalent.

Therefore, if we exclude the figures from Monash South Africa, we see that the total figures remain at 16 in 2003, 19 in 2011 and 15 in 2014.

Is this the rise and fall of African Studies in Australia? It is noteworthy that the 2011 heights also corresponded with the Labor government's 'new-engagement with Africa', and the 2014 decline corresponds with Labor's decline from government to opposition in late 2013.

However, further to consider is Macquarie University which offered 7 topics on Ancient Egypt in 2011 as part of its major sequence in Ancient History – they were

1. Introduction to Coptic Art and Archaeology
2. Egypt in the First Millennium
3. Monasticism in Egypt
4. Voices from Coptic Egypt
5. The Art and Archaeology of Coptic Monasticism
6. Early Christianity in Egypt
7. Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt: Texts and Documents

Not wanting to prejudice against ancient history necessarily, but if the reason for developing a relevant knowledge to influence Australian foreign policy is one of the goals of including African studies in the tertiary curriculum, then we can arguably remove these 7 topics in 2011 from our current discussion. Furthermore, in 2014 the BA with major in Ancient History – Egypt and Near East probably includes a similar amount of topics – although accessing them from the Macquarie website was convoluted, and thus did not appear in the 2014 audit. Nonetheless, by removing the 7 topics from 2011, we get a more accurate reflection across the board of topic availability on issues that are not ancient Egyptology.

Therefore, the total numbers appear to be 16 in 2003, 12 in 2011, and 15 in 2014.

However, the almost insignificant decline in numbers hides the interesting fact that 7 new African studies topics were created by 2014, and these are –

1. "Haunted Histories: South African Writing (ENG2103). (University of Adelaide, Convened by Prof. Dorothy Driver dorothy.driver@adelaide.edu.au).

2. Africa: International Interventions (INTR3003), (Flinders University, Dr. Tanya Lyons)
3. Law and Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa (LAWS8071) (Australian National University, Rebecca Monson Rebecca.monson@anu.edu.au)
4. Contemporary African History - ZHSS2230 (University of New South Wales, Canberra, Assoc Prof. Eleanor Hancock, e.hancock@adfa.edu.au)
5. POLS3334 The International Politics of Africa (U/grad), and
6. POLS5671 Peace and Security in Africa (MA level) – (Both by Assistant Professor David Mickler, david.mickler@uwa.edu.au)
7. Politics of Development in Africa (DEVT90049) (Melbourne University, Dr. Melissa Phillips phim@unimelb.edu.au)

Noteworthy from this collection of 7 new topics on African studies is that all but one academic are females. (It would be interesting for further research to also examine the circumstances in which these 6 academics were able to introduce topics on African studies into their departments).

The topics that were discontinued by 2014 were –

1. Ancient Sudan, Kingdom of the Black Pharaohs (Sydney University - Centre for Continuing Education, last taught in 2011).
2. South Africa Under Apartheid 1948-1994 (Melbourne University)
3. Worlds of the Pharaohs, The Archaeology of Ancient Egypt (La Trobe University)
4. Anthropology: South Africa the Politics of Memory (Curtin University, last taught in 2008)

Also, interesting from the Table 1 below are the number of topics that appear to have been maintained in between the snapshots of 2003, 2011 and 2014. For example the following 4 topics have apparently been available since the 2003 –

1. Africa on a Global Stage (INTR2008) and
2. African Politics: Global Issues (INTR7008 and 9055) (both Flinders University, Dr. Tanya Lyons)
3. African Archeology (La Trobe University, Nicola Stern, n.stern@latrobe.edu.au)
4. African Politics and Globalisation (POL255) (Macquarie University, Prof Geoffrey Hawker, Geoffrey.Hawker@mq.edu.au)

The following 5 topics have been available since 2011 (or may have been introduced in-between the 2003 and 2011 snapshots, further research is required here to narrow down individual availability).

1. Africa: International Interventions (INTR3003) (was Introduced in the second semester 2011, Flinders University, Dr. Tanya Lyons)
2. Africa: Environment, Development, People (GEOG30024) (Melbourne University, Assoc Prof Simon Batterbury, simonpjb@unimelb.edu.au)
3. African Drum and Dance Ensemble 1 (MUSI10021) and 2 (MUSI10022) (Melbourne University, Prof. Catherine Falk, cafalk@unimelb.edu.au).
4. Contemporary Africa (HUS02317) (RMIT, Dr Jonathan Makuwira, jonathan.makuwira@rmit.edu.au)
5. Contemporary Africa and Social Change (ASS5080) (Victoria University, Dr Charles Mphande, Charles.mphande@vu.edu.au).

Therefore up to 9 topics could be considered sustainable within the university curriculum, and added to this is the hope that the 7 new topics in 2014 will still be available into the future.

Nonetheless 15 topics (with each topic amounting to perhaps only 4% approximately of a student's degree) across 43 Australian universities surveyed here in 2014 is hardly going to scratch the surface of knowledge about Africa – or more positively, at least a handful of students could choose to do one of these topics within their degrees, and get a taste for African studies, to pursue in their higher research degrees (this is where specialist Africanist academic staff members come in handy to supervise, and this will be the subject of another study, based on the outcomes of the AFSAAP Project Audit).

Let's look at the comparative topics next – perhaps this is where African Studies will need to be located into the future (see **Table 2**)

In 2003 there were 32 topics offered with an African case study within it, and this dropped to 18 in 2011, and rose to 25 in 2014. (Unfortunately, back in 2003 we only tracked the discipline each topic was offered in so it is difficult to assess the longevity of each individual topic. Also, unfortunately the original 'appendix' noting this information was excluded from the final Lyons and Dimock (2007) publication, and thus will now be included here for comparison – see **Table 3 below**).

In 2011 a topic on “Nationality, Ethnicity and Conflict” was offered at Monash South Africa (and Malaysia); and in 2014 this topic was shifted to Monash Clayton, Australia. In both 2011 and 2014 a history topic “Empires and Peoples” was offered at the University of Victoria, Wellington, NZ, and has been offered since 2007 (see <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/student-admin/course-outlines/2007/trimester2/hist/hist117-2007-t2.pdf>). The historical focus contextualizes slavery and European colonization in Africa, among other historical perspectives across Empires.

Nonetheless, if we exclude these 2 topics a year from Monash South Africa Campus and the New Zealand Universities, (because we are assessing the likelihood of participating in an African Studies topic in Australia), these totals reach 16 in 2011 and 23 in 2014.

What can we determine from these numbers?

The following disciplinary patterns (see Figure 1 below) show that if we include politics, development studies, and criminology in a general framework of International Relations, these disciplinary areas dominate the provision of case studies related to Africa or African studies in their respective topics, with a total of 14 topics including such case studies. The History discipline offers 7 topics, and an initial scan reveals the '1994 Rwanda genocide' is the most common case study comparator.²

1. La Trobe University - Genocides and the Holocaust: Europe, Asia, Africa (HIS2GAH + HIS3GAH) (in both 2011 and 2014)
2. Melbourne University - The Holocaust & Genocide (HIST20013) (appears to have started in 2010, and in both 2011 and 2014).

However, while these 2 topics are offered at undergraduate level, they are both offered through the lens of History. At Melbourne University – a student can do the Postgraduate and Masters

² It is noteworthy that at Flinders University, the Rwandan genocide was offered as a comparative case study in the History Topic “History's Killing fields” – between 2004 -2010 only, and thus was not included in the figures here or below.

Level topic taught only in alternative years “Violence, trauma and Human Rights (CRIM90017)” which has case studies from South Africa and Rwanda. This topic offers a unique examination of the issues through Criminology. The teaching areas of Literature and Music offer 2 topics each, or 4 in total.

Figure 1 – Disciplinary Distribution of Topics offering African case studies in 2014.

<p>INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS / POLITICS / DEVELOPMENT / CRIMINOLOGY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alternative Globalisations (INTR13-310) 2. Global Institutions and Political Conciliation (INTR71-206) 3. AIS302 - Developed and developing worlds. 4. Land law and land tenure in developing countries. 5. Post-Conflict Justice and Reconciliation Processes 6. Aid, Adjustment and Development (Third World focused) (HUSO2078). 7. International NGOs, Civil Society and Development (HUSO2096). 8. Governance and Democracy in Developing Countries (HUSO2073) 9. Development, Culture and Conflict (DEVT50001) (Grad/PG – MASTers) 10. Health Issues in Development (HUSO2072). 11. Indigenous Health Around the World (ABOR3440) 12. ATS 3623 Nationality, Ethnicity and Conflict (Case- South Africa) 13. Integrated Methods of Humanitarian Action and Community Studies(HCS365). (This course places students in humanitarian agencies, some of which working in/on Africa.) 14. Violence, trauma and Human Rights (CRIM90017)
<p>HISTORY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. HIST327 Global Histories: First Nations and Colonisation (2015) 2. HIST328 Gender in world history (gender in regions such as Africa,etc) 3. HIST210 European Expansion 1500-1800 –(Euro colonisation and Africa) 4. War and Peace in World History (L-HST220)...(Includes colonial empires, South Africa) 5. Genocides and the Holocaust: Europe, Asia, Africa (HIS2GAH + HIS3GAH) 6. The Holocaust & Genocide (HIST20013) 7. NZ HIST-117 – Empires and Peoples
<p>LITERATURE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Empire Talks Back: Postcolonial Voices 2. Black Writing from Africa, the US and the Caribbean
<p>MUSIC</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MUSC257 Music of the World 2. MUSC2116 Sound, Society & Self in World Music; Comparative Management Systems

What are the conclusions we can draw from this? There is a ‘random’ chance that an undergraduate could be exposed to an opportunity to do research on or study an African issue within their degree through a topic that offers a comparative study on Africa. If the student wanted to enroll in specific topics offered on Africa which state would they would be better off in? see Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Australian States offer the most African Studies Topics – Specific and Comparative

State	#
Victoria	16

New South Wales	10
Western Australia	4
South Australia	3
Queensland	3
Northern Territory	2
Australian Capital Territory	1

The student would most likely be better off enrolling at Melbourne University which offers 3 specific topics on African Studies

1. Africa: Environment, Development, People (GEOG30024)
2. African Drum and Dance Ensemble 1 (MUSI10021) and 2 (MUSI10022)
3. Politics of Development in Africa (DEVT90049)

And 3 comparative topics, although 2 of these are only offered at PG level

1. The Holocaust & Genocide (HIST20013)
2. Violence, trauma and Human Rights (CRIM90017)
3. Development, Culture and Conflict (DEVT50001)

1. However, if musicology is not their 'thing', then RMIT in Victoria is the second best institution to enroll in, but it only has one specific topic – 1. Contemporary Africa (HUSO2317) - on Africa, and 4 comparative topics -

but at least all of them are offered at the undergraduate level, and they are all development focused.

1. Aid, Adjustment and Development (Third World focused) (HUSO2078).
2. International NGOs, Civil Society and Development (HUSO2096).
3. Governance and Democracy in Developing Countries (HUSO2073)
4. Health Issues in Development (HUSO2072).

In conclusion, by comparing the availability of relevant courses and topics in the Australian and New Zealand university sector that examine Africa, we have shown that there is not much available for undergraduate students to choose if they wanted to find out more about Africa. This lack of general knowledge at least about Africa in the tertiary sector has remained consistently low, compared to other places in the world not Australia! The situation is worse in New Zealand.

Therefore, it is clear that the expansion and delivery of African studies in Australasia and the Pacific is correlated to the foreign policies of a nation, such as Australia and New Zealand. In both cases, while there is some goodwill and diplomatic connections; while there is a modest aid budget; and while trade remains limited to the minerals and resource extraction industries, there is not much scope for more generalist knowledge of African studies to be developed, and or required. This has left very little space in the tertiary curriculum for the delivery of courses and topics specific to African issues, and has left a huge gap of knowledge in the educated elite of Australasia. Nonetheless, some lucky postgraduate students can develop this knowledge and fill the gap to some extent through their access to the committed and passionate academics and researchers who do have an interest in African studies. The AFSAAP Project 2014 – details these staff members, whose names were extracted from their respective university websites as being interested in Africa in their research or publications. It is clear there are more people interested in Africa, than there are opportunities for them to teach their expertise to a generalist undergraduate audience.

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