

The Western university in 'exotic spaces'

It is common practice for researchers with degrees obtained from Western universities to enter "exotic spaces" for research purposes.

Spaces in which they engage with local organized groups, the keepers of traditional knowledge. Where phrases

such as, "Working together with you to improve island sustainability" or, "You islanders will remain in charge of your own narrative" are repeated continuously.

But conflicting messages oftentimes emerge. For while external researchers claim that traditional ways of knowing are respected and are included in their research findings, they state in the same breath that they come to teach locals innovative ways to improve their traditional knowledge system. A knowledge system gained through direct observation, experience and interaction with the natural environment. A knowledge system proven to be effective within the local space.

My issue is not only with external researchers, but also with the keepers of traditional knowledge, as there is this faulty belief that the Western university creates knowledge

that is somehow superior to traditional knowledge or is a true reflection of modernity.

Keepers of traditional knowledge should know that knowledge produced within the Western university, like traditional knowledge, is situational knowledge. Knowledge created within specific spaces. But unlike the keepers of traditional knowledge, keepers of Western university knowledge lay claims to the universality of their knowledge system.

Therefore, genuine keepers of traditional knowledge should only participate in research initiated by researchers from the Western university if the encounter results in decolonized spaces within the university. Spaces in which the curriculum is reflective of different, yet equal voices from different geographical places.

Xiomara Balentina