

Report third Diversity Journal Club

The third Diversity Journal Club @ Science Park of November 2020 was devoted to the topic of 'Cultural bias in the exact sciences' with a special focus on the decolonization of mathematics. Diversity Sounding Board members Danielle van Versendaal and Diletta Martinelli co-hosted this edition and wrote the following report:

We decided to suggest the readings of two articles. The first one, [Is mathematics invented or discovered?](#) by P. Ernest, invited a reflection on the nature of mathematics. Compared to other subjects, mathematics can appear as culture-free and universal, but a deeper reflection poses some questions that might challenge this statement. For instance, do mathematics and logics come after the development of a language?

If so, can the language we use to formulate mathematics influence the development of mathematics itself? Having a written or oral tradition can affect your logical reasoning? The field of ethnomathematics investigates the relationship between mathematics and culture and studies different mathematical traditions around the world. But how can we compare different mathematical theories? Perhaps we should also challenge our ability to recognise and categorise something as 'rigorous mathematics'. What if even our conception of what is rational had unconscious cultural bias? This topic is clearly a matter of debate and it is not possible to reach unanimous consensus.

The inclusiveness of mathematics was the second topic we chose to discuss by reading the article [In South Africa, "Decolonizing" Mathematics](#) by Thomas Lewton. In the discussion it was acknowledged that it is important for us to give credit to those who contributed to the development of our knowledge, something the Western world has neglected to do so for a long time.

In order to feel like mathematics is something you can understand, use and study, it is important to have a sense of ownership. And there is no reason to maintain the statement that you have to be part of an exclusive club.