

# The Notion of the “Field” and the Practices of Researching and Writing Africa: Towards Decolonial Praxis

by

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*“Researchers [in the 1960 and 1970] flocked to the continent to study the sexual behaviours of Africans in relation to fertility. Images of oversexed, promiscuous, less moral and less intelligent Africans were never far from the minds of the demographers and other researchers interested in the study of fertility control” (Tamale 2011:16).*

## Abstract

The coloniality of researching, writing and publishing Africa has not received adequate attention notwithstanding contemporary scholarly concerns for decoloniality of knowledge, politics and being. To move beyond colonial methodologies, we interrogate the traditional notion of the “field” in “fieldwork” on Africa, and the Global South more generally. We interrogate the coloniality of defining Africa as a “field” from which to mine “raw data”. We build on scholarly concerns that African people have so far participated in researches more as hunter-gatherers of “raw data” that is subsequently processed into theories by Northern scholars. The paper argues that Africa has suffered confinement as a “field” that awaits cultivation by scholars from elsewhere beyond the continent. The paper further argues that decoloniality should not be limited to “participation” or “action” in research but needs to extend to building theories from the Global South using data organic to the contexts. African scholars therefore need to become cultivators of relevant *African theories* and desist from being mere keepers of often irrelevant Northern *theories on Africa*. The paper further argues that since cultivation, civility and culture share the same roots, to portray Africa merely as a “field” is to presume that Africa has no creativity, culture, civility and cultivation of its own. Thus the paper argues that the disregard for African culture since the colonial era originated from methodological practices that took Africa as a “field” without organic cultivators. Such conceptualisation of Africa merely as a field for mining “raw data” has legitimised centuries-old (neo-) colonial epistemic and methodological experiments on the peoples of the continent.

## Introduction

Traditionally fieldwork involved journeys to the “field” far from home, possibly picturesque, probably small and rural, and very likely inhabited by people who bore little relation to home society, class, profession, or employing institution (Forsythe 2001). Although with the end of colonialism, with the reduction in funding for academic institutions, with increases in student enrolments and with difficulties in accessing the fields, there has been an increase in fieldwork at home (Munthali 2001), the notion of the “field” has been resilient. Fieldwork has been defined as the laborious agricultural tasks, though it has also come to designate the act of inquiring into the nature of phenomena by studying them at first hand in the environment, in which they naturally exist or occur (Georges et al 1980). Moreover, the notion of fieldwork also conjures up adventures (Gerber et al 2000) with the primary task being to “gather”, to “collect” and to extract “raw data” from extreme environments, for subsequent analysis and processing back home (France et al 2015).

Thus, Africa as a “field” has, for centuries now, been considered to be a “magnificent natural laboratory” where animals and human beings can be examined in the laboratories of their natural environments (Tilley 2011: 1-2). Africa has been considered to be a region in which the human sciences: anthropology, archaeology, philology, psychology, and even racial science might flourish. It has thus been argued during the colonial era by Jan Hofmeyr thus: “...in Africa as nowhere else, the factors which constitute these problems can be studied both in isolation and in varying degrees of complexity and inter-relationship, that in Africa we have a great laboratory in which to-day there are going on before our eyes experiments which put to test diverse social and political theories as to the relations between white and coloured races” (Tilley 2011: 2).

The colonisation of Africa was thus imbricated with field research, colonial practices and theories of research fed into the imperial machine, enriching imperial and colonial administrators whose effectiveness depended on the availability of reliable information. Much as we have them in the contemporary era, African people were enlisted in their numbers as translators, research informants, and assistants: the researches were ultimately meant to assist the imperial projects across the swathes of the continent (Tilley 2011: 4). Thus, “ It was largely field scientists-geographers, anthropologists, botanists, and specialists in medical geography-who took part in the partitioning of tropical Africa, and field research that informed many of the investigative projects that were part and parcel of colonial state building” (Tilley 2011: 13).

This continued imbrication of African research in the global matrices of power speaks to the broader issues of coloniality over which scholars in the Global South are increasingly gathering over. The increasing researches over Africa, particularly at a time when African governments have lost policy space to Northern donor organisations (Abbas 2009; Oya 2006) therefore necessitate a series of questions by African scholars.

One of the questions is that if research in the Global South is supposed to feed into policy making and implementation, into whose policy making and implementation are researches in Africa feeding since the implementation of neoliberal reforms that retrenched African states? The issue is that increasingly research over Africa is [like colonial research, continuing] feeding into policies of Northern donors, some of whom have arrogated and monopolised policy making over the continent. In other words, behind researches on the continent there are manifestations of global imperial designs and technologies of subjectivation which masquerade as emancipatory while in reality serving the perpetuation of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). Thus research has increasingly become a tool for indirect rule via the invisible global matrices of power [into which research feeds] over Africa. Being an invisible power structure sustaining colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012), coloniality in research legitimises epistemological colonisation in which African subjectivity is treated as inferior and constituted by a series of “deficits” and a catalogue of “lacks” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012: 49).

Sadly, after formal decolonisation, universities in Africa have often tended to perpetuate and perpetrate coloniality on the African peoples that they should have freed. Thus, scholars have argued that the most enduring colonial institutions in Africa are the universities (Mazrui 2003 cited in Faleye 2014). Universities in Africa often perpetrate intellectual imperialism by emphasising western philosophies and realities while ignoring organic theories, perspectives and methodologies (Jussim 2002 cited in Faleye 2014). African academies have not only witnessed the death of intellectualism or capacities to engage at the realm of ideas and rational enquiry but they have also increasingly created people who are neither fascinated by ideas nor do they possess capacities to handle some ideas effectively (Mazrui 2003: 136). Thus, universities in Africa have tended to produce exogenously induced and internalised senses of inadequacy in African people; devalorisation and annihilation of African creativity; agency and value systems; cultural estrangement; self-hatred and profound sense of inferiority (Nyamnjoh 2004: 160 cited in Letsekha 2013). Mazrui (2003: 140) argues thus: “The capacity to be curious and fascinated by ideas has to start early in the educational process. The spirit of intellectualism has to be nourished from primary school onwards, but it can die at the university level if mediocrity prevails”

The colonial idea that Africa is a “field” legitimised violence in the realm of knowledge where African guides were forcibly used to reveal African secrets, pathways and biodiversity (Santos 2007: 51 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011: 7). Similarly, the notion that Africa is a “field” connected to adventures accounts for experiments with colonial projects that for instance saw over hundreds of thousands of African people killed in the colonial “adventures”. Those who survived were incarcerated in camps where they were subjected to medical experiments including sterilisation and injections with smallpox, typhus and tuberculosis (Lusane 2005).

Medical and other experiments that could not possibly be carried out in the imperial centres were executed in colonised Africa, on enslaved African people and minorities such as Jews that were considered to be subhuman and therefore their consent to the experiments was regarded as unnecessary (Eckart 2004; Bankole 1998; Schaft 2004; Gordon 2014). Thus those colonised and enslaved others who were thereby considered 3/5<sup>th</sup> of humans were experimented on; many would return home more sick and some did not even return home after the experiments (Gordon 2014; *New African* 1 October 2012). In some instances human skulls of African people were taken back to Europe for further experimentation and examination in order to ascertain the status of African people in the human race using race science informed by social Darwinism (BBC News Africa 11 October 2011: 15:18; Bracht 2015; Anderson 2005).

When citizens of the world raise concerns about the Northern testing of biological and chemical weapons in Africa, and the testing of products of the International military-industrial complex in Africa (*Independent* 2 December 2014; Al Jazeera 11 January 2014; Swanson 2013; *Daily Observer* 9 September 2014), they are in essence questioning the international practices that take Africa to be a “field” where weapons of various forms, drugs of various kinds, cultural, political, economic and development experiments can be tested. It therefore is this notion of the “field” conceived broadly that is the subject of this paper.

While postcolonial scholarship has addressed some of the above issues in terms of ethical questions, the challenge is much broader than ethics. Thus, Benson (10 June 2013) describes what has recently happened in Chad where parents of African children were not asked for consent before their children were experimented on while at school using drugs that cause convulsions, paralysis etcetera (see also *Independent* 6 April 2009). When global corporations continue to use the African poor to experiment on drugs (*The Atlantic* 27 February 2013; *The New York Times* 31 July 2007; BBC News 20 June 2007; *The Guardian* 4 July 2011; *The Herald* 22 January 2015; Al Jazeera 3 January 2015; Tilley 2016), the issue is more about coloniality of power than it is about mere ethics. When officials trumpet their benevolent ambitions in Africa as they grapple with illnesses and debilities they have caused or exacerbated (Tilley 2016; *Daily Observer* 9 September 2014), the question is more about coloniality than it is about bare research ethics. Thus, these issues are more about coloniality of methodologies than they are merely and narrowly about ethics. Similarly when genetically engineered insects such as what happened recently in Brazil (Joshi 2014) and where drugs and medical innovations are tested first on Africa [and in the Global South], then the issues are broader than ethics; rather they speak to coloniality of power, coloniality of Being and coloniality of knowledge, including methodology. When Africa and the Global South more generally, are treated as “field”; development, economic, political, social, cultural, scientific experiments are repeated on it, and as Hill et al (2005: 141-2) argue, each failure leads to another reprieve, a report on lessons learnt and the way forward, and a call for more funds, larger research time or alternative approaches.

In view of the foregoing, Africa arguably is not merely suffering the resource curse as other scholars have put it (Demissie 2014; Elbra 2013; Wohlmuth 2007); rather Africa is [for centuries now] suffering the curse of “collectors” and “discoverers”. While other scholars argue that Africa is suffering the curse of having abundance of resources which it allegedly *fails to turn into growth and development*, there is evidence to show that Africa has for a long time suffered the curse of collectors of Africa’s material resources, cultural artefacts and knowledge. Cultures continue to be selected, collected, gathered and detached from original temporal occasions; much as African and Native American artefacts were collected and removed from their original contexts (Smith 2008; Feest 1980: 9). The fact that kidneys and other body organs are collected or gathered (Wilson et al 2012; New Internationalist Magazine, May 2014) from the living poor, in continents like Africa, to enhance the longevity of the rich and that even the graves of the African dead are vandalised and looted for jewellery (Ellert 1984; Severing 2005), underscores the existence of the curse of collectors and gatherers, unleashed on Africa. In view of the centuries old affliction of the continent with the curse of collectors and gatherers, the contemporary discourses of decolonisation have to facilitate unthinking and rethinking of this curse. To forestall the curses, African scholars have to go beyond collection to theorise not only life on the continent but also they have to theorise and tell their own stories about the dead, the animate and the inanimate.

Thus other scholars like Smith (2008: 24, 68-9) argue that the idea of collecting legitimised theft by first of all dehumanising the subjects via considering them in zoological terms, and then purporting to have discovered them willy-nilly. As Smith (2008: 68-9); Churchill (2004: 87-89) and McDonald (2014: 73-4) observe, collecting in the colonial territories also included forcibly removing children from their parents and indoctrinating them with epistemologies that painted their own cultures, knowledge, societies, economies and their being as problems. This perception of the colonised and their institutions as problems continues as witnessed in countless pre-fieldwork proposals that define indigenous African societies targeted for research as research problems or as some realms of dark matter needing enlightenment through Western-centric research. The deployment of African researchers into their own communities [that are defined initially as research problems] to do research all point to the need to decolonise fieldwork, research and writing in Africa.

Because it is the Global South that is defined prior to fieldwork as [more of] a problem hence warranting concerted [collaborative] efforts between Northerners and Southerners, Northern researchers head southwards for research. Paradoxically, even in the collaborative researches the Southerners are not expected to also head northwards to investigate their counterparts (Tamale 2011: 27). Thus, Smith (2008: 24-5) argues: “Research within late-modern and late-colonial conditions continues relentlessly and brings with it a new wave of exploration, discovery, exploitation and appropriation....

One of the supposed characteristics of ‘primitive’ peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellect. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use the land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the “arts” of civilisation”.

Having foregrounded these issues, it is necessary to focus on the issues of colonialism and coloniality of fieldwork more closely before proceeding to look at ways in which decolonisation might be realised.

## **Colonialism and Coloniality in “Fieldwork”**

While the era of formal colonialism, in which scholars like Jan Hofmeyr above defined Africa as a laboratory came to an end in Africa, contemporary scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a; 2013b) call for attention to the resilient invisible global matrix of power that continues to prey on the continent. The coloniality of knowledge, the epistemicide [on indigenous knowledge] by the global matrix of power and the resilience of colonial education all bear on the practice of fieldwork in contemporary Africa where the continent is entangled in predatory epistemic cobwebs. Thus, in the world global transnational corporations continue to trawl indigenous knowledge for profit (Connell 2016: 3). Transnational corporations, such as global pharmaceutical corporations, trawl indigenous knowledge for profits in search of new drugs hence fieldwork in Africa continues to be defined largely by transnational quests for profits. Thus the continent of Africa has not been helped by the era of the so called “knowledge economy” partly because global corporations fund research and subsequently lay claim to African indigenous knowledge. Much as the continent is being exploited via extractive industries, field research in Africa has perpetuated the exploitation and disinheriting of African people by global corporations anxious to bio prospect and exploit African indigenous knowledges and other resources.

The continent is therefore much more than a laboratory; it is also a mine from which data is extracted via [field] research that unfortunately further impoverishes the peoples of Africa. Thus Adams (2014: 468) argues: “In the infrequent cases where investigators travel to research settings (rather than rely on local collaborators) they generally arrive with their own ready-made tools to mine data on behalf of external interests.....” Similarly, Powledge (2001: 273, 275) laments ways in which transnational corporations are laying patent claims, in the name of research discoveries, to everything including plants, food and knowledge that indigenous African people have used and relied on for centuries. Thus Powledge (2001:273) observes: “When collectors come along-from national research programs, international research centres, far off universities, and private industry-they took some of the improved seeds, presumably always with the farmers’ blessings, when they left.”

Researchers are unwittingly or wittingly engaged to carry out fieldwork in Africa, often interviewing traditional healers regarding substance use and then the Western corporations patent African drugs submitted for research often without the knowledge and consent of the African indigenous people. So the corporations have secured patents [worth billions] for instance on Zimbabwean and South African traditional medicinal drugs without the consent of the indigenous traditional healers whose knowledge is researched and then expropriated from them by the corporations (Sharma 2004; Pan African News Agency 7 November 2000; Powledge 2001). We argue here that such extraction and expropriation of African knowledge and pharmacopoeia is legitimised by the scholarly resilience in labelling Africa as a global field *par excellence*. The fact of lack of effectiveness of assertions of sovereignty and complaints by developing countries that the North is exploiting, via the modalities of research, their natural resources, often without compensation (Powledge 2001: 275), underscores that there is much more that needs to be interrogated in the coloniality of research in Africa. International laws protecting intellectual property rights, patents and so on are failing to protect Africa's resources, the proliferation in post-independence Africa of universities across the length and breadth of the continent has not helped to decolonise research and so the continent continues to be entangled in predatory global invisible matrices of epistemic power. The resilience of such coloniality of global epistemic power is explicable in terms of the persistence of the colonial label of Africa as a field for discovery, a laboratory for research experiments, a mine for collecting data rather than a continent with inherent knowledge yearning for epistemic independence and majority status. Africa therefore continues to be afflicted by the virus of discoverers and the curse of hunter-gatherers of data that sadly continues well after formal colonialism. Thus sadly, there is resilience of the gospel that the continent can only become better developed the more it is discovered by those that hold the torches of a particular form of enlightenment that paradoxically has already cast its long shadow on Africa for centuries.

If the world has only one light, as is presumed by subscribers to the notion of a singular Northern enlightenment, the question for African researchers is, who suffers the shadow of the holder of that light and enlightenment? Unless scholars assume that the holders of the light are some selfless celestial transcendental being gazing at the world from above, we would be interested to know not only the direction of the light but also the direction of the shadow of the light holder. The question therefore is that, might those [majorities in the world] following the few ones holding the [supposedly] single light enjoy as much light? If the [celestial] gods (-desses) of the supposedly singular light were selfless how could they ever provide one light and one enlightenment in such a vast world as we live in? By extension, why would it not be legitimate to ask if by subscribing to a singular enlightenment, we did not buy into the project of a selfish god (-dess) that deceives the world about notions of dispassionate, objective field research in the service of the entire world? The sad fact that the more Africa has been researched, the poorer it has become, warrants scholarly questions about whether research has not been more for (neo-) imperial control and governance than about helping the researched indigenous populations in various parts of the world.

The fact that the more African people have been researched the less knowledgeable about their own epistemologies and ontologies, warrants scholarly questions about whether research has not been more about erasing, distorting, deterritorialising and jettisoning the epistemologies of the indigenous researched peoples. The question is whether research on Africa has not been more about espionage and spying on postcoloniality (Das 2014) than helping the researched African peoples to sustainably better their lives without relying on [erroneous] presumptions of a singular historical enlightenment in the world.

In spite of Africa having historically and monumentally suffered at the hands of “discoverers”, “explorers”, “expeditions” and “collectors” who fed the insatiable imperial museums and libraries with African artefacts and knowledge, these culpable imperial notions continue to be prized and often richly rewarded with international research funds. Yet the notions of Western discoverers presuppose that African people are nonbeings and incapable of discovery of their own environments; the notions presuppose that African people are incapable of knowledge although they can conversely richly endow the world with “raw data” for the generation of knowledge by others. The underlying assumptions of this argument are still evident in researches in and on postcolonial Africa where fieldwork on the continent can only provide “data” [and not forms of knowledge] that are deemed to be “raw” material for the generation of knowledge by others. Invariably what is provided by African informants is merely “data”: this presumption undergirds the centuries old colonial/imperial assumptions that African people have no knowledge of their own. This presumption entails that African people in collaborative researches are little more than hunter-gatherers and trackers of “raw data” for and on behalf of Northern scholars who continue to privilege themselves with claims of abilities to transform the data into knowledge that is then used for the imperial global governance, including for Africa (Mamdani 2011; Smith 2008; Nyamnjoh 2004).

As producers of “raw data” and not knowledge, African people are sadly deemed to supply impurities to academies; what they consider to be knowledge cannot be published without going through processes of distillation and purification using Northern purist epistemologies. In spite of working as collaborators [or accomplices] with Northern scholars for purposes of “gathering raw data”, African scholars who try to publish what cannot be “sanitised” using Western expectations are visited with frustration by the publishing industry that is predominantly Western. Thus, Nyamnjoh (2004: 15) argues: “Often, cooperation takes the form of western universities calling the tune for the African pipers they have paid. Collaborative research has worked in the interest of the western partners, who, armed with assumed theoretical sophistication and economic resources have generally reduced their African collaborators to data collectors and research assistants”.



There is thus need for scholarly attention to the fact that African people cannot continue to be providers of “raw data” without being apprehensive of the attendant presumption that providing “raw data” implies possessing “raw minds” from a “raw continent”. In other words, the statements that African people are providers of “raw data” are a carry-over of colonial caricaturing of Africa as “the heart of darkness”, African people as “uncivilised” and hence “raw” and needing western refinement. It implies the perpetuation of colonial portrayals of African people as freaks of nature without civility, culture and knowledge of their own. Considerations of African knowledge as “raw data” from the “field” is in fact a continuation of colonial caricaturing of African people as little more than “beasts”, as “wild”, “savage”, “impure”, “barbaric” and “requiring civilisation”, “domestication” and “uplifting” by the imperial powers (See for instance Magubane 2007). The coloniality and racism of fieldwork involving “collecting” of “raw data” from Africa is clearly underscored not merely by the continued shipment of such “raw data” to the Global North but also by the continued shipment of African people considered “raw”, “savage”, “barbaric”, “impure” and “animistic” to the human zoos in the West where they have constituted “freak shows” (BBC News 7 June 2016; Lindfors 2014; BBC News 27 December 2011; The Guardian 29 April 2014). Thus, much of the “collection” of “data” is done from Africa historically, people have been “collected” from Africa in much the same way there has been the “collection” of African artefacts that still fill up Western museums; African human beings were “collected”, kept in human zoos and when they died their remains were “collected” and put in Western museums alongside “raw” and “brute” animals (Jacobson 2001; Smith 2011).

African people therefore need to rethink and unthink their being reduced to colonial curios for Northern scholarship, and so they need to start being curious about the coloniality of invisible global epistemic matrix of power that continues to define them as largely a “field” for “raw data collection”. It is neither sufficient for African scholars to be contented with their names being appended on books, papers and articles, nor to merely participate in research in the guise of emancipation and freedom. For African scholars to celebrate mere participatory action would be impetuous, particularly in view of the fact that participation or action in research does not *ipso facto* amount to liberation, as indeed it can lead to the opposite. We can note here that even colonial victims acted [wittingly and unwittingly] in colonial projects but their participation did not always necessarily amount to decolonisation and liberation; often times it was exactly the contrary. Similarly the enslaved acted in the slavery projects but their mere participation, as underdogs, did not amount to liberation.

Action, and hence participation in research, can result from a will that is overborne by invisible, structural or systemic constraints such as when colonists [and colonial researchers] forcibly enrolled indigenous people into colonial education designed for their extinction (Churchill 2004), including the extinction of their wills to actively resist. An education system that zombifies the subjects, or in Althusserian sense interpellates and hails the subjects, stymies volitional participation and action; it makes it harder to attribute action and participation merely to the subjectivity of the visible actors. It makes it murky to readily and invariably equate action and participation to liberation and freedom.

Besides, the history of colonial researches involving colonists and their collaborators, *alias* accomplices, has to be considered as influential to participation and action in research by subjects. In contexts where continuities, *albeit* invisible, structural and systemic, between colonialism and coloniality are evident; researchers should not wish away subjects' apprehensions of the coloniality of research. The issue here is that participation and action alone do not count as decolonisation because what indigenous people have suffered is not necessarily lack of participation or action but *a fortiori* the space to (re) make and define their world; they haven't necessarily suffered inaction but more emphatically the space for poesies.

Colonialism and coloniality have not denied African people the space for mimetic action and participation; rather they have denied African subjects the spaces for African poesies. In fact mimetic action was a requirement of colonial epistemologies particularly in so far as colonial education sought to assimilate African subjects by infiltrating and afflicting their subjectivities. The rote learning which for Paulo Freire (2005) is facilitated by the banking method of teaching, had as its object the generation of colonial subjects with immense abilities to parrot and mimic the colonial authorities. As far as this paper is concerned, poesies with its space for critical thinking, for originality of truths and for artistic creative production, is what has lacked for African subjects and still lacks for subjects of coloniality of power. This is the space that is critically needed in decoloniality; the space for poesies, for productive creative participation and action involving critical thought processes. The fact that African metaphysical foundations, epistemological, ontological, material, spiritual, social, cultural and economic foundations, including identities have been colonially defined a priori for them constrains the space for African poesies without necessarily constraining as much the space for action and participation in the mimetic sense. Thus what is needed for decoloniality is not *mimetic action* and participation in researches; it is rather *spaces for poesies* or spaces to reimagine; remake and creatively produce African thought that has power to remake the [African] world.

Poesies addresses the challenges of Africa being defined a priori as a field that always provides "raw data" for knowledge generation elsewhere; it makes it possible to see shortcomings of being linguistic slaves in research as that stifles imagination while fostering mimesis. It also underscores the challenges of relying on exotic imported categories to research African people, rather than relying on Africans' own categories as foundational in research. The replication and mimesis, by Africans, of colonial derogatory categories such as tribe [from *tribus* for barbarian) and underdeveloped [presupposing colonial senses of uncivilised and backward] for instance exemplifies uncritical mimesis. But African languages cannot merely be used to ensure efficient "collection" of "raw data" which is then translated into official (neo-) colonial *lingua franca* before shipping it off to Northern centres to feed into their theorisations of the world, that is, their poesies thriving on the mimesis of indigenous scholarship.

Thus, much as African people are increasingly calling for the beneficiation of African raw minerals before shipping them off to the world market, there is a need for similar logics in African scholarship so that Africa does not continue to be a “field” for “raw data collection”. Just as the absence of beneficiation is costly to Africa in terms of continued subjugation in the world, the absence of poesies by African scholars is costly to Africa in terms of the continued subjugation of the African academies beholden to global mimesis. Solutions to the coloniality of research are irreducible to tinkering with research ethics as has become fashionable in academies; the issues go beyond research ethics to matters of decoloniality of research on the continent and in the South more generally.

## **Decolonising Fieldwork, Research and Writing Praxis**

Scholars have suggested that the antidote to coloniality of research is acknowledgements of the thinking and knowledge producing capabilities of others; practising pluriversity of meaning; taking seriously the knowledge production of non-Western critical traditions; cognisance to the entanglements of several cosmologies and thinking pluritopically (Boidin et al 2012; Mignolo 2013). However the multiplicity of meanings as recognised through collaborative research has been argued to also inhibit the indigenous researchers’ knowledge as well as subjugate Southern contributions (Daniels 2011: 7). Thus in debating multiplicity as an antidote to coloniality, there is need to be mindful that colonisation itself involved considerations and creations of others as “multiplicities”, as multiple ethnic, “tribal”, “racial” others. The upshot of this is that recognising multiplicities alone does not amount to decoloniality as indeed others have often been colonised because they were first divided into multiplicities. Recognising others as multiplicities, as constituting the pluriverse begs the question about which epistemologies and ontologies are foregrounded and used as lenses for the recognition and constitution of others as such. If western epistemologies are foregrounded to recognise and constitute multiplicities, the question is whether Africa can ever decolonise when it continues to depend on epistemic charity (Nhemachena 2016); if other Western epistemologies continue to be *foregrounded* on the continent there is the inevitability of *foreshadowing* African epistemologies.

Recognising multiplicities to whom [epistemic] charity is then extended is not necessarily a way to decolonisation as indeed the charity itself is often a carrot for domestication and containment rather than decolonisation for the other. Charity does not *ipso facto* reverse [epistemic] hegemony; rather it is often a tool for manufacturing, and or renewing, consent from the dominated multiplicity. Thus, to call for recognition of multiplicities of epistemologies is not in itself a tool of decolonisation. African epistemologies have not been merely suffering lack of recognition but *a fortiori*, they have suffered recognition for purposes of exploitation as for instance global multinational pharmaceutical corporations have secure patents on the basis of exploiting African indigenous knowledge. The challenge in decolonising African indigenous epistemologies here is not merely a historical lack of recognition but the problem is recognition with a view to exploitation.

Thus to preclude chances of running into decolonial *cul de sacs*, it is necessary to retrace and note that colonisation and coloniality are not about absence of charity, recognition and inclusion. In fact African people were included in the colonial projects as cheap labour, they were recognised as underdogs and charity was extended to them in the form of colonial food hand-outs, colonial education, health and colonial spiritualities. Even African ancestors were recognised and included in the colonial project but as demons, and African religion was recognised and included but as devil-worship such that its inclusion and recognition would legitimise the colonial projects. The point here is that decolonial projects have to go beyond merely tinkering with questions of charity, recognition and inclusion as if these are ends in themselves.

Thus African epistemological angst for inclusion and recognition has resulted in African scholars distancing themselves from the realities on the continent as they actively seek identification with the external and distant that is often evangelised as inclusive (Ngugi wa Thiongo 1997: 28, 72, 88). While other scholars have challenged African academics and the research that they do to show that they belong to Africa by being relevant and serving African people (Teka 2003: 225-6), the challenge is about decolonising first and foremost the African minds that have been trained for centuries to take epistemic flights from realities on the continent. The problem in Africa is in demonstrating to African scholars that they not only need to identify and define research problems as lying in their own communities but also that problems also lie in the Northern epistemologies that they rely upon to do research. Such Northern epistemologies teach African people to “accurately” and always identify their communities as [research] problems but these epistemologies are problematic. They are problematic in the sense that they are used in researches generated by the North in order to answer to Northern needs including in areas such as their politics, economies, epistemology, ontology, spiritual, cultures etcetera (Teka 2003). Thus, African scholars need to notice that problems in research cannot be narrowed to identifying African communities as [research] problems; the problems are also epistemological, theoretical and academic. It is time that African communities are not seen merely as constituting research problems; it is necessary to ask if research(ers) are not a problem to African communities, particularly where they gobble up time only to produce irrelevant solutions or bookish solutions with little space for practical relevance as well as for African poesies. Thus, underscoring the priority to decolonise minds, Nyamnjoh (2012: 145-6) has lamented that: “The suggestion to study and understand Africa first on its own terms is easily and uncritically dismissed as an invitation to celebrate African essentialism and exceptionalism. There is little patience with anything African, even by African people. There is little discourse on Africa for Africa’s sake, and the west has used Africa as a pretext for its own subjectivities, fantasies and pervasions”.

Underscored by Nyamnjoh (2012; 2004: 16) is the need for African people to tell their own stories; to ensure that the perspectives of the majorities that have been deprived of opportunities to tell their own stories in their own ways are surfaced. Instead of maintaining their intellectual dependency on the imperial centres that use the rest of the world as datamines (Connell 2007), African scholars are enjoined to facilitate African people to tell their own stories in their own ways. Such spaces to tell own stories are irreducible to merely creating spaces for participation and action by African communities; rather there is always a need to distinguish between acting and participating and poesies that have been explicated above. What is needed in decolonising methodologies including “fieldwork” is to go beyond ready satisfaction with capturing multiple meanings by supposedly multiplicities of African communities. We argue here that what is needed is not for African communities and scholars to merely participate and act but they need to remake their world in their own ways [including knowledge]; they must not be modelled a priori by theoretical booby traps from the North. Thus, it is arguable that the swiftness with which African stories are modelled and swallowed into Northern-framed theories effectively distorts African stories. Why African stories and knowledge must be judged in terms of Northern epistemologies is cause for African scholarly disconcertion in the twenty-first century. Pre-framing and forcing African stories into Northern theoretical frameworks is in effect a way to deny African people their authentic stories, their own poesies and intellectual creativity with their stories. It is therefore strange that while researchers often request community members to tell their stories, the same community members are often not informed about the ways in which their stories eventually get distorted when they are forced to fit into Northern theoretical models many of which hardly speak to situations on the continent. We therefore concur with Smith’s (2008: 39) argument that: “Indigenous people have been, in many ways oppressed by theory.....methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied”.

In order to ensure that African stories do not become slaves of Western theoretical mills, African researchers need first and foremost to consider African stories on their own terms so that African stories do not become subordinate to Western stories. There is need to desist from merely applying imported theories and methods but rather shift to crafting theories from the continent. These arguments are supported by Comaroff and Comaroff (2012: 1) who decry the fact that: “Western enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning, of science and philosophy, uppercase; concomitantly it has regarded the ancient world, the orient, the primitive world, the third world, the underdeveloped world, the developing world, and now the global south - primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means, above all, of unprocessed data ....

These other worlds, in short are treated less as sources of refined knowledge than as reservoirs of raw fact, of the historical, natural, and ethnographic minutiae from which Euro modernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates, and principles.....just as it has capitalised on non-western “raw materials” - materials at once human and physical, oral and medical, mineral and man-made, cultural and agricultural - by ostensibly adding value and refinement to them. In some measure, this continues to be the case”.

Underlying Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2012) argument are ways in which African stories are conveniently defined as “raw data” in order that they can possibly and easily be swallowed by Western stories masquerading as theories. Also underlying their argument is the fact that Africa and its inhabitants are first of all defined as incomplete, that is, as “developing”, “underdeveloped”, “primitive”, “third world” so that they are trimmed to size before being swallowed by the West. These terms fabricate and stress the incompleteness of the African “other” or of the subalternised, so as to make them delicious when swallowed [just as one would cut stake to size for barbecue]. Just as the preceding colonial caricaturing of African people, it is a strategy that involves the *reduction* of the other to, and emphasises the, “inadequacy”, “immaturity”, “rawness”, “absence of civility” and “proper processing”. Unfortunately, African scholars merely and uncritically mimic these derogatory terms even as they claim that the researches and scholarly works they are producing are aimed at helping Africa. African scholarly efforts even if well intended to assist Africa are being swallowed by the uncritical application of exogenous categories and theories, in research and writing, whose underlying assumptions are derogatory to Africa.

What all the above scholars surface is the inadequacy of mere participation in research for decolonisation, rather they underline the need for scholars in Africa and the rest of the Global South to be innovative and creative enough to generate theories that are relevant to their contexts. If Africa continues with the intellectual dependence on the Global North, the risk is that it continues to be the source of “raw data” and African scholars remain “hunter gatherers” of “raw data” for theorisation by the Northern scholarship. Thus what is missing in the decolonisation of African academies is not mere participation, setting of agendas or African voices; what is missing is *a fortiori* [adequate] scholarly innovativeness and creativity. It is such robust innovativeness and creativity that is lacking in all African institutions from the economy, politics to the academies that continue to supply only “raw” materials for the North to process and distillate. It is such abilities to adequately intellectually process, refine and distillate that will free African academies from being mere actors, agents, collaborators or participants. A turn to theorisations and to the distillation of data promises to take African academies out of global *zombihood*; it promises to bring life and vitality into the academies that have for long been concerned more with gathering “data” without much creative theoretical reflection and interrogation to deliver Africa out of the curse of being a “field” *par excellence*. This *zombihood* explains why sadly African scholarship has for long constituted the shadow of Northern scholarship; blindly participating, acting, collaborating in researches that have not seen any significant development on the continent.

In fact, paradoxically the more research has been done on African societies, the more those African societies have lost their traditional skills to mine, smelt, weave, grow, carve, mould; in other words, though at the inception of colonialism African people had knowledge about their own industries, cultures, languages, identities and religions, they have lost these skills and knowledge the more they have been subjected to research over time. Indeed some (neo-) colonial researches were meant to spy on African people in order to destroy their industries and skills [as well as steal the products of their creativity], which they would have relied on to compete with colonists' establishments (Ellert 1984; Posselt 1935). Thus, research was done to destroy African creativity or African poesies, and it is this poesies, which African researchers need to nurture and regrow as a crucial aspect of transformation and decoloniality in the twenty-first century. The fact that research has since the colonial era been used to spy on and destroy African institutions entails the need to research research in order to establish its relevance for the peoples of the continent. In other words, researchers themselves need to be researched as much as they would want research others.

## **Conclusion**

The argument in this paper is that what is needed is for African academies to become cultivators, rather than to remain the “field” from which and through which “raw data” is collected as is currently the case with the continent. Much scholarly productions in and on Africa is about trying to fit the continent into prefabricated theories from the North as if African scholars cannot be their own theoretical architects. Much anxiety on the continent is about keeping and trying to force-fit Northern *theories onto Africa* rather than generating organic *African theories*. African academies can ill afford to continue justifying their existence merely or largely by shopping for and fitting theoretical innovations and creativeness from the Global North. It is such innovativeness and creativity that should mark the success of the African transformation and decolonial projects.

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