

KNOWING - UNKNOWING

African Studies at the Crossroads



Edited by
Katharina
Schramm and
Sabelo J. Ndlovu-
Gatsheni

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Knowing - Unknowing

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Katharina Schramm
Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni



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Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Illustrations	VIII
Notes on Contributors	IX

Introduction: Thinking as Moving – Knowledge Practices and Decolonial Frames in African Studies	1
<i>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Katharina Schramm</i>	

PART 1

Un-doing the Canon

1	African Studies, or How to Make the Canon Apocryphal	31
	<i>Elísio Macamo</i>	
2	Dissecting and Transcending Enduring Fallacies	46
	<i>Elelwani Ramugondo</i>	
3	Knowledge Matters: Racism and Its Wording as a Tool for Reconfiguring African Studies	67
	<i>Susan Arndt</i>	

PART 2

Institutional Challenges and Transformations

4	The Ongoing Tune of the African Genius at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana	93
	<i>Edwin Asa Adjei, Samuel Ntewusu and Akosua Adomako Ampofo</i>	
5	Written in Water: the Legon School of History and the Publication of the Past	122
	<i>Cassandra Mark-Thiesen</i>	
6	Gender, Feminism and Politics of Knowledge Production: an Interrogation of Institutional Cultures of Africa's Institutions of Higher Learning	135
	<i>Catherine Kiprop</i>	

- 7 Transformation beyond the Surface: Race, Power and Young Academics
after #RhodesMustFall 158
Thando Njovane and Amanda Hlengwa
- 8 On Access and Responsibility – Questioning Ulli Beier’s Legacy through
Collaborative Approaches 171
Katharina Greven and Lena Naumann

PART 3

Thinking as Moving: Future Pathways

- 9 Women Sages in Male Epistemic Spaces – an Analysis of Patriarchal
Forces in Female Knowledge Production 195
Anthony Okeregbe and Muyiwa Falaiye
- 10 Knowledges in Conflict: Conceptualizations of Age in Colonial
Letters 217
Eric A. Anchimbe
- 11 Haunted Numbers: the Lingering Legacies of Colonial Statistics and
Measurement 237
Christine Hanke
- 12 Lamb Description – a Circulation of Knowledge Practices 261
Eleanor Schaumann
- 13 Combative Decoloniality and the BlackHouse Paradigm of Knowledge,
Creation and Action 281
Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres
- Index 307

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Illustrations

- 5.1 & 5.2 Covers of the first two issues of *Ghana Notes and Queries*, both from 1961. Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. Images taken by Cassandra Mark-Thiesen 125
- 8.1 Various black and white photographs on paper. © CBCIU & Iwalewahaus. Photo by Lena Naumann 172
- 8.2 Georgina and Ulli Beier at the Berlin Theatre Festival in 1964. © CBCIU & Iwalewahaus 174
- 8.3 Files in the Photographic Estate. © CBCIU & Iwalewahaus. Photo by Lena Naumann 179
- 8.4 Packed objects of the art collection at the Mash Up Festival in 2013. © Katharina Greven 181
- 8.5 Installation shot, Mashup exhibition, 2015, Iwalewahaus: Sam Hopkins and Simon Rittmeier. © Siegrun Salmanian 182
- 8.6 Installation shot, Mashup exhibition, 2015, Iwalewahaus: Délio Jasse. © Katharina Greven 183
- 8.7 Installation shot “Existential Phantasies – The Monkey on your Shoulder” at the CBCIU in Osogbo, Nigeria. © Lena Naumann 186
- 10.1 Former Southern Cameroons (Anglophone) territory in Cameroon today. *Source*: Anchimbe (2013: xxv) Copyright: Eric A. Anchimbe 222
- 11.1 Mediality of the Table. Wilhelm Volz. 1899. “Zur somatischen Anthropologie der Battaker in Nord-Sumatra.” *Archiv für Anthropologie* 26: 717–732, 723, Extract 248
- 11.2 Stacked curve pre-form. Fritz Falkenburger. 1913. “Diagraphische Untersuchungen an normalen und deformierten Rassenschädeln.” *Archiv für Anthropologie* 40 (= N.F. 12): 81–95, 92 249
- 11.3 Stacked curve pre-form upside down. Fritz Falkenburger. 1913. “Diagraphische Untersuchungen an normalen und deformierten Rassenschädeln.” *Archiv für Anthropologie* 40 (= N.F. 12): 81–95, 92, upside down 249

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Thinking as Moving – Knowledge Practices and Decolonial Frames in African Studies

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Katharina Schramm

1 Introduction

In his book *Arrow of God* (1964), the eminent African novelist, Chinua Achebe, drew from rich Igbo proverbs to define the world as being “like a Mask dancing” (or masquerade), and explained that “if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place” (Achebe 1964: 46). This definition was adapted by Francis B. Nyamnjoh, to define Africa and Africans in relation to the world: “*Africa* and being *African* are like a mask dancing. If you want to see them well, you do not stand in one place” (Nyamnjoh 2021: 2). If Africa, as a site of knowledge production and study, is constantly moving, swirling and shifting its form, we need to engage with it in an open, responsive and dynamic manner, taking multiple relations and articulations into account.

This position was poignantly stated by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), when she warned against “the dangers of a single story” and rejected the stereotypical image of Africa that emanated from a narrow focus on an African essence or metaphysics and colonial racial misrepresentations of Africa. Her caution also allows for a critical questioning of locality as a singular site of knowledge formation. It rejects a universality that hides embedded particularities. If we want to know anything, we need to step out of the comfort zones of taken-for-granted positionalities – be they essentialist or universalist. This process calls for a careful engagement with the situatedness of knowledges and knowers (Haraway 1988), thereby not fixing them but rather accounting for the specific historical, material and epistemic entanglements that have formed and continue to shape their interrelations.

Indeed, the field of African studies is traversed by deep-cutting relations of power and violence – epistemic and otherwise. To account for these means to pay attention to coloniality as a mode of being and thought (Wynter 2003; Quijano 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 2013b). And yet, there is more to say about knowledges in and of Africa than describing a hegemonic colonial matrix,

as recent discussions about the status of “Southern theory” have pointed out (Connell 2007; Cooper and Morrell 2014; Diagne and Amselle 2020).

In this volume, we depart from the space of friction and multiplicity that marks the dynamics of knowing and unknowing in our contemporary world. Calling into question the asymmetrical global economy of knowledge and its uneven division of academic and intellectual labour, we explore what a decolonial horizon could entail for African studies at the crossroads. We deploy the topical, resurgent and insurgent framework of decolonization/decoloniality as an epistemic catalytic force, which allows us to reconsider basic epistemological questions while at the same time challenging us to reorganize our own ways of knowledge production and rethink our research ethics. Our understanding of decolonizing and decoloniality is relational and reflexive, rejecting all fundamentalist frameworks that would suggest a return to a pristine, prior and homogenous subject (Hall 1990; Povinelli 2011).

The urgent need to translate the principles of decolonial thought into a (new) programme of research becomes evident in this volume. We tackle the radical exercise of un-disciplining African studies through the making and unmaking of knowledges, that is, in methodological, empirical, theoretical and institutional terms. We ask about the multiple configurations of knowledge and being that are at stake in discussions about “epistemic freedom” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) and decolonization in African studies. Dancing with and around the notion of Africa as our matter of epistemic concern (with a nod to Latour 2004), we also seek to reflect on African studies as a dynamic intellectual and academic field with multiple and contesting historical, discursive and ideological positions and various genealogies of knowledge.

We note that at the centre of African studies there is an inextricable convergence of existential, historical and epistemic questions, some perennial and others emergent. As a starting point, we take Countee Cullen’s question “What is Africa to me?”, from his 1925 Harlem Renaissance poem, “African Heritage”. This soul-searching question has deep epistemological implications for diverse ways of knowing and unknowing Africa. Cullen’s poem responds to the violent displacement and dispossession of transatlantic chattel slavery, the disrupted memory of place and kin and the brutal dehumanization of racial hierarchization. He suggests a mode of diasporic identification and relatedness that places Africa at the centre of the self. Here, and in the various facets of political and intellectual Pan Africanism(s), diasporic connectedness and African identities emerge through a shared core (essence) and lore (knowledge). Projects like the *Encyclopedia Africana*, which was initiated by W.E.B. Du Bois when he took residence in independent Ghana, sought to translate this programmatic

call into a solid knowledge foundation that ought to serve as a source of self-awareness, emancipation and empowerment.¹

These objectives have been shared by a number of African thinkers and intellectual movements on the continent, from *négritude* to the African Renaissance. They mark a notion of heritage that is foundational to the present: a precious seed that lies buried in the past and needs to be dug up, protected and preserved in order to grow into the future – just like the Adinkra symbol, *sankofa*. The *sankofa* bird holds the past in its beak but is a living and moving creature that is not confined to the temporality of antiquity. Even though its head is turned to the past for orientation, its feet point forward – towards a possible future. This is not a linear temporality but a circular and dialectical one that also holds the promise of a sense of reconnection and continuity (for further discussion of the *sankofa* symbol and its significance in Ghanaian historiography, see chapter 5 by Cassandra Mark-Thiesen in this volume). In a similar vein, the movement that is evoked in Léopold Sédar Senghor's (1964: 259) metaphoric African dance (*"Je sens l'Autre, je danse l'Autre, donc je suis"*) suggests a natural rhythm and existential form of "being African" that is connected to a circular temporality of return and to a fundamental relatedness with others.

However, the rhythm of the masquerade is not always regular or harmonious – the mask may break out and scare the audience. The movement that accompanies it may not lead to a better (or even comprehensive) overview, as suggested by Achebe and Njammjoh, but it may rather be a flight. Likewise, the dance may not hold just one memory – or even one of a glorious or useful past, for that matter. It may also be an expression of layered experiences of violence and trauma and a negotiation of power and resistance, as Nicolas Argenti has shown in his ethnographic study of the Oku masquerades in the Cameroonian grassland (Argenti 2005). Translated into the question "What is Africa to me?", this facet of the dance leads to a different understanding of the past in the present, namely one that is profoundly marked by the violent rupture of enslavement and colonialism.

What kind of knowledge can emerge from this constellation? The traumatic event cannot be known, it can only be repeated in an endless present (Argenti and Schramm 2009). In her travelogue, *Lose Your Mother*, Black feminist

1 The *Encyclopedia Africana* project was strongly supported by Kwame Nkrumah, but never saw the light of day. At the turn of the millennium, the idea was taken up by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., who published a five-volume edition (Appiah and Gates 2005).

scholar Saidiya Hartman (2007) discusses the impossibility (and, perhaps, undesirability) of a return to a foundational, prelapsarian time and place. She questions the promise of citizenship – both national and pan-African – and argues against an identitarian (and exclusionary) notion of belonging or wholeness (Schramm 2020). In this version, the epistemic movement is not one of recollection and return but rather resembles a radical fugitive move. This movement, like the mask's, is not predetermined or fully choreographed but relational, and it may miss a step. Its goal is not to get “the full picture” (by circling around the object of knowledge – in our case “Africa”) but rather to engage with the dancing mask, to smell its sweat, to carry its sound away or even to turn one's back on it. This links with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013), who speak about “fugitivity” as

the movement of things [that] can be felt and touched and [that] exists in language and in fantasy, it is flight, it is motion, it is fugitivity itself. Fugitivity is not only escape, “exit” as Paolo Virno might put it, or “exodus” in the terms offered by Hardt and Negri, fugitivity is being separate from settling.

HALBERSTAM 2013: 11

This Black radical tradition and aesthetics of flight situates the realm of knowledge in sharp opposition to any extractivist, functionalist or foundational epistemology. The metaphor of moving around the mask and the meshwork of relations that it evokes not only unsettles the certainty of being (as defined through nationalist projects). It also allows us to open up to forms of knowledge beyond the descriptive. It leaves room for opaqueness, errantry, serendipity and failure. In his *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant (1995) links this epistemic form to a mode of decolonization that builds on *lived* relations. Not being but becoming – and becoming *together* – marks the possible point of departure.

In a recent collection of essays on decolonization, *Out of the Dark Night*, Achille Mbembe (2021) has also argued against what he calls “the night of identity”, where Africanness emerges as a prior form of being and thinking. Against the sharp divisions of identitarian politics, he poses the human as a planetary being who will overcome the burden of race and racism not by turning the brutalizing and dehumanizing figure of “*le nègre*” on its head (as Senghor attempted to do) but by radically leaving it behind (Mbembe 2017). This planetary subjectivity stands in opposition to the character of “Universal Man/Man II” that Sylvia Wynter (2003) has criticized so profoundly in her analysis of the limited humanism of the Enlightenment, which conceptualized

“the human” through the radical exclusion, exploitation and extermination of non-European Others. Wynter has opposed this typology with “being human as a practice”, once again prioritizing relations (including historically situated ones) over fixed positionalities. In a similar vein (though with sole reference to male thinkers like Frantz Fanon), Mbembe argues for an entangled and multiple understanding of African subjectivities.

Mbembe’s planetary orientation is a claim for the universal without its homogenizing tendencies. However, as Suleymane Bashir Diagne has pointed out in his exchange with Jean-Loup Amselle, *In Search of Africa(s)* (2020), the universal is not a fact; if anything, it can be only an aspiration. Whereas Amselle rejects any reference to an “African” sense of self and claims “the universal” as an unmarked and neutral vantage point, Diagne acknowledges the existence of Africa as a specific historical formation and position (Diagne and Amselle 2020). In African studies more broadly, this discussion around the universal versus the particular is still ongoing. However, if we think through multiplicity, the pluriverse (Escobar 2018, 2020) might be a more fitting concept because it acknowledges and addresses the planetary scope while allowing for multiple forms of knowledge and being.

Clearly, the mask is not a singular cultural artifact, but the product of multiple exchanges, inventions and reinventions (Mudimbe 1988; Mazrui 2005). Likewise, the dance and the masquerade cannot exist in isolation; they fade and lose significance without the active engagement of the participants. Therefore, as scholars concerned with rethinking and reconfiguring the field of African studies, we are aware that, in studying Africa, there is always creation and recreation of the matters of concern. But, as we have outlined above, there are different pathways to take and different understandings of what this engagement may look like. Our commitment to movement and multiplicity implies that we critically engage with the different genealogies that have shaped the dynamics of power and knowledge in the field of African studies. Thus, in the following sections, we first briefly discuss the problem of doing and undoing the canon as part of the politics of knowledge. A second focus is on institutions, since it is here that African studies take shape and are potentially reconfigured. Finally, we outline briefly what our understanding of “thinking as moving” could imply for future pathways in African studies.

2 Un-doing the Canon

Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature, and range (of criticism, of

history, of history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested.

MORRISON 1989: 8

In her essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”, about the African-American presence in American literature, Toni Morrison (1989) addresses the profoundly political character of knowledge. She notes that the claim to the universal is often articulated from the unmarked vantage point of *whiteness* (Morrison 1993), a vantage point that denies its own conditions of formation and its situatedness within a web of relations that go far beyond the bourgeois white subject. Individual books are classics for Morrison – in the sense that “a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say” (Calvino 1986). But the canon, or the repertoire of works to be considered a “must read” for a whole (universally imagined) collective – be it a nation or a discipline – is problematic, because it is infused with power and bound to the history of empire.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has analysed the centre–periphery logics that have shaped canon formation in the field of history and in the social sciences more broadly. His call to provincialize Europe is an appeal to rethink the ways in which the history of modernity is told. Chakrabarty also challenges the vantage point from which to conceptualize the postcolonial subject. In other words, decolonizing must simultaneously entail “provincializing” and “deprovincializing” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Against a developmentalist and diffusionist teleology of modernity that takes Europe as a standard and defines the rest of the world as “lagging (behind)”, Chakrabarty advocates for a more careful analysis of regional dynamics and articulations of modernity.

This critical approach also demands a closer look at the political and material entanglements that have shaped the development of modern sciences, and at the very standards of scientific and academic authority on which knowledge production (and canon formation) are based. Decolonial studies have therefore paid close attention to “the darker side of modernity” (Mignolo 2011) and the “coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom” (Wynter 2003), calling for a new reflection on what it means to be human. Similarly, science and technology studies have unpacked the many ways in which (scientific) knowledge, material world and political (colonial) order are linked (see, for example, Haraway 1989; Latour 1993) and how they could be otherwise (Escobar 2007; Law 1990). Although these debates are often kept apart, we are convinced that they can and should be brought together in fruitful conversation (see, for example, the chapters by Christine Hanke and Eleanor Schaumann in this volume).

Regarding the idea of a canon in African studies and its relationship with conceptions of standard, authority and meritocracy, we are reminded that any reflection on its possible content and form must also include a critical analysis of the knowledge base from which we determine what is important or, indeed, of universal appeal, a task that is taken up by Elisio Macamo and Elelwani Ramugondo in this volume.

Given all these critical assessments, the question arises whether and how the canon should be replaced, expanded, abandoned or dismantled. This question resonates with recent discussions in African studies and adjacent fields. Over the past years, we have seen an increasing number of articles, editorials and think pieces emerge that address pertinent questions, like “How African is the *African Studies Review*?” (Lawrance 2019), “What We Can Do to Keep Africa at the Heart of our Research” (Nolte 2019) or “[How to] Decolonize the African Studies Centre” (Branch 2018). Following the South African #Rhodes-MustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements, which gained global traction and put the content and framework of (higher) education to the test, some of these (mainstream) reflections appear as a belated response to a wake-up call, suddenly realizing the significance of positionality, representation and power linked to whiteness (see Susan Arndt in this volume for another aspect of white hegemony, namely language and terminology).

Jean Allman’s (2019) presidential lecture at the African Studies Association, “#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968”, makes explicit reference to the problem of scholarly and political gatekeeping that is linked so closely to canon formation, citation practices and institutional politics. However, as Allman realizes in her contribution, this is a problem that has accompanied the very formation of the field of African studies since World War Two. It has also been problematized by African and Black scholars for a long time (Clarke 1979; Ake 1979; Laurer and Anyidoho 2012; Pailey 2016; Blakey 2020) – and it has affected the very idea of “area studies” more broadly (Huat et al. 2019; Schramm 2008).

Where does this leave us in relation to the canon? First, it is clear that we need to address the problem of power/knowledge in relation to infrastructures and institutions (see Part II of this book) – because this is where knowledge gets (re-)produced and disseminated, where scholarly and other networks are formed, where collaborations are sought out and where the challenges of decolonial thinking and moving are put to practical test.

Second, we acknowledge that there is no such thing as a singular canon in any field. In other words, the notion of *the* canon is a projection, a gesture of power. There are always twists and turns and sideways shifts that keep a debate alive and moving. This must not lead to conformity or the simple replacement

of one body of knowledge, one narrative or one curriculum with another. As recent debates that have sprung up in response to the widespread call for decolonizing the curriculum in anthropology and other fields show, there are many ways to approach what appears as an established corpus of “classical” texts – neither through hagiographic reverence nor iconoclastic condemnation (Da Col et al. 2017; Handler et al. 2016). A critical engagement means to reflect on a text’s multiple points of reference, to examine the problems on which it casts its light and the shadows and silences that may be generated by its presence. It means to unsettle what might have been taken for granted. This is an exercise that Anthony Okeregebe and Muyiwa Falaiye undertake in this volume, engaging with the work of Henry Odera Oruka (1991) and his concept of philosophical sagacity.

Third, and finally, we need to be aware of the limitations of any discussion about a disciplinary canon if we want to consider knowledges and epistemic practices more broadly. Largely limited to the institutional space of the university, the question about the canon runs the danger of reproducing the very elitism that we seek to overcome in our critical endeavour. As various chapters in this volume demonstrate, we urgently need to pay attention to knowledge practices outside the university – not in an extractivist sense, as the raw material for academic theorizations, but as theoretical contributions in their own right. This may concern community-based activism and combative teaching, as discussed by Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, as much as the contemplations of the female elders interviewed by Anthony Okeregebe and Muyiwa Falaiye or the unique conceptualization of age that comes to the fore in the letters written by indigenous Cameroonians to the British administration, as discussed by Eric Anchimbe. Clearly, un_doing the canon is a multifaceted task. In profound ways, it is linked to institutions and their transformation.

3 Institutional Challenges and Transformations

As a field of study, “African studies” is closely tied to institutions that shape knowledge production and exchange in this intellectual terrain. Universities, African studies associations, African studies centres, funding bodies, publishers, journals, regulatory agencies and many others play distinct and overlapping roles in framing debates on the direction of African studies. Within associations of African studies, the interrelated and overlapping issues of membership, representation and participation (power), epistemic perspective and ideological orientation (politics) and commitment to liberation and justice (relevance)

have emerged. Some of these debates have led to a sharp critique of the established “Africanist enterprise” of knowledge production (see Martin and West 2012), whereas others have simply sought to widen the scope of knowledge production in a more “inclusive” manner. Currently, a number of conflicts and struggles revolve around the uneven intellectual/academic divisions of labour within the modern knowledge economy in which African studies is located and imbricated. The issues range from exclusionary networks of journals and publishers, limited and restrictive funding policies and the ongoing privileging of (Western) “theory” over (African) “empirical data”, to matters of partnerships, collaborations and the co-production of knowledge (Hountondji 1990; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Seesemann and Vogt-William 2022).

In this volume, we address these institutional matters in various ways: by paying attention to more recent experiments in institutional collaboration against many odds (see Greven and Naumann) or through the close documentation and analysis of African autonomous institutional spaces, such as the Ghana Historical Society and its journal *Ghana Notes and Queries* (see Mark-Thiesen) or the Institute of African Studies, also located in independent Ghana (see the chapter by Adjei, Ntewusu and Ampofo). The latter chapters, especially, show how some of the hopes and visions of political independence led to the founding of independent academic institutions that often combined a cultural nationalist focus with a more pan-African outlook. These institutions were and continue to be vibrant spaces of intellectual exchange and education. As in the case of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA), which was launched in October 2013 in Accra, Ghana, they were also foundational for more recent initiatives that continue to challenge the hegemony of the Western academy as the privileged location of knowledge production and critical debate.²

But the existing hierarchy of knowledges in and between institutions of higher learning is not the only challenge that faces contemporary African studies. On a more general level, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017) has identified three major problems that confront the university as a longstanding model institution of thinking, teaching, learning and researching. The first is the *hegemonic crisis*, which arises from the university having lost its previous

2 There are other examples of independent networks and institutional innovations that have shaped the field of African studies, on the African continent and globally. The most significant among these is perhaps the Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA), which was founded in Dakar in 1973 (<https://codesria.org>). Another, more recent, initiative outside the space of the university is Les Ateliers de la Pensée, also established in Dakar, in 2016 (<https://www.lesateliersdelapensee.org>).

monopoly of being the key site of knowledge production. A critique of this hegemony and its close links to Eurocentric epistemology is evident in contemporary politics of knowledge. At the same time, the current conjuncture is characterized by multiple sites of knowledge generation, some of these enabled by the Internet and online platforms. It is within this context that the possibilities of digital African studies emerge (see the chapter by Greven and Naumann for an analysis of the practical challenges – and limitations – of digitization). What Santos designates as the hegemonic crisis is compounded by the difficulties that universities have in reconciling their traditional mission, in which the institution was home for only a few select and elite groups, with the current demands for it to be accessible to many more people with different backgrounds, interests and conception of knowledges.

The second problem is the *legitimacy crisis* that troubles many universities, especially in Europe and North America but also in South Africa and elsewhere. This crisis concerns the university's long complicities in racism, enslavement, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, capitalism and apartheid and their reverberations in the present. Consequently, across the contemporary world, universities have been pushed to repurpose themselves, redefine their missions and reclaim legitimacy. At the same time, while engaging with decolonial, feminist and indigenous critiques, universities are under pressure from within a global context of neoliberal coloniality where knowledge and education have been commodified. Consequently, demands for the decolonization of knowledge have become intertwined with demands for the “decorporatization” and “depatriarchization” of universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Tamale 2020).

The Ugandan feminist scholar, Sylvia Tamale (2020: 9), has posed some difficult questions about how to transcend the “poisoned gaze of the Western reader”, how to cultivate “critical consciousness to counter racist patriarchal power”, how to reflect on intersections of “racism, colonization, capitalism, sexism and heterosexism” for the purposes of enhancing a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges, and how to “navigate” Euromodernity “without losing ‘Africanness’”. These issues continue to haunt the academy, and not only in the West. As Catherine Kiprop highlights in this book, African women's journeys and experiences in academia are often particularly difficult, in that they experience intersectional forms of marginalization and exclusion. What emerges poignantly from Kiprop's intervention are gendered power relations and toxic institutional cultures in African institutions of higher education.

As a result of the “continuities in discontinuities” of inequalities and power asymmetries within modern institutions, the resurgent and insurgent decolonization of the twenty-first century has taken us back to basic epistemological and existential issues. Taken together, the chapters in this volume by Edwin Adjei,

Samuel Ntewusu and Akosua Adomako Ampofo (Institute of African Studies in Ghana), Cassandra Mark-Thiesen (Legon School of History and Historical Society of Ghana), Catherine Kiprop (the question of gender, patriarchy and sexism in African universities) and Katharina Greven and Lena Naumann (Ulli Beier's photographic estate in Germany and Nigeria) address various aspects of institutions and transformation. These nuanced interventions and critiques take us to the third crisis identified by Santos (2017), which is the university's *institutional crisis*. The existence of the university as an ivory tower is heavily challenged as demands grow for universities to embed themselves in society.

At the centre of this demand are issues of education as a public good and the thirst for relevant knowledge. The question of the relevance of knowledge and education, in Africa and other places that experienced colonialism, is not reducible to utilitarianism. It is an existential issue for people who suffer imposed alienation – from the self, history, culture, language and knowledge. Seeking relevance becomes part of the painstaking process of transcending the experiences of dehumanization and dismemberment (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). The establishment of centres of African studies within universities in Africa has not resolved the hegemonic, legitimacy and institutional cultural crises. This is partly because these centres have suffered enclavement and reduction into “townships” (isolated entities) within the “city” (university). Alternative spaces outside the university, such as the Sowetan BlackHouse Kollektive, introduced in the chapter by Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (this volume), are important correctives in this state of crisis. How these initiatives and other research endeavours address thinking as movement is elaborated in the next section.

4 Thinking as Moving: Future Knowledges

Conceptually, thinking as moving and its gesturing into future knowledges demands what Julian Go (2016: 1) proposed as the reconciliation of “social theory” (institutionalized as social science) and “postcolonial thought” (institutionalized as a humanist project); Go also saw decoloniality as a force of transcendence of analytical bifurcations (see Gandhi 2006 on imperial binarism). This movement transcends the “putative Eurocentric parochialism, theoretical stagnation, and seeming irrelevance of our neo-imperialist present” (Go 2016: xi). It is also about a shift from the nationalist and nativist articulations of African studies, with their cultural relativism and essentialist orientations. At the centre of thinking as moving is imagination: “to imagine different types of knowledge, new ways of seeing and perceiving, and

alternative conceptual forms and tools for better understanding the world around us" (Go 2016: 17). What is also important here is the decolonial imperative of cultivating "a strategic second sight" that takes into account the realities of Africa as part of the world and the world as part of Africa (see Maher 2022 on the concept of second sight drawn from W.E.B. Du Bois).

Some time ago, Toyin Falola (2001) addressed the criticism that African scholars contribute to African studies by repeating certain arguments and perspectives. The criticism was that there was not much movement in perspectives or shifting of paradigms in African studies. Falola offered two responses. First, "the fact that the issues appear constant should not be misread as an indication of intellectual poverty in thought and choices" (Falola 2001: 20). Instead, Falola pointed out,

if the issues have remained constant and unresolved, how can one theory replace another so fast, how can scholarship resemble fashion and weather, changing so rapidly? Why should scholars of Africa follow and accept all fast-changing academic trends, if their conditions are either constant or changing for the worse? Why should they keep replacing one mode of analysis with another if they are yet to overcome their own limitations, both practical and intellectual? They can do so in order to participate in a "global academy", but they must consider the consequences for Africa.

FALOLA 2001: 20

The reality, though, is that there is repetition and a movement of ideas and perspectives in African studies, which reflects the complexities of the epistemic challenges. The question is whether these movements really amount to paradigmatic and epistemic shifts in the discipline. Reference can be made here to shifts from colonial scholarship to African nationalist and Black radical scholarship; shifts from African nationalist thought to embrace Marxist and political economy perspectives; and shifts from Afro-radical Marxism to postcolonial thought and its critique of metanarratives. The feminist and gender studies interventions in African studies are delivering a movement of thinking and ideas, from androcentrism to a scholarship that embraces feminist theorizing, gender analysis and intersectionality perspectives (Mama 2007). Perhaps what we need to address is, if indeed African scholarship is characterized by a movement in thinking, albeit mediated by repetitions, how does repetition become part of thinking as moving in African studies and what are the crucial issues, questions and perspectives that are repeated?

At the same time, the ongoing critique of African studies transcends issues of institutional politics and representational matters. It touches on complex existential and epistemic issues of what it means to know Africa, who should be heard, what the content of what is being said is, and how we know what we know about Africa and its multiple entanglements with global and planetary matters of concern.

For example, Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo (2020) critically assess the very knowledge practices that need to be examined in the process of “decolonizing African studies”, identifying structural, epistemic, personal and relational dimensions in this process (see also chapter 2 in this book by Elelwani Ramugondo for an extension of this argument). Similarly, throughout this volume we explore what a decolonial horizon could entail for African studies at the crossroads. Calling into question the asymmetrical global economy of knowledge and its uneven division of academic and intellectual labour, we are interested in ways of thinking that remain open and relational, enabling new connections instead of integrating, appropriating or imposing a body of authoritative knowledge. This does not mean completely doing away with the archive on which contemporary knowledges are built, but rather to question, unsettle and potentially undo well-trodden paths of knowledge in an undisciplinary, wayward and creative manner. Therefore, we have assembled a group of authors who are engaging with the question of knowledges. Throughout our introduction we have used *knowledges* in the plural, indicating the situatedness of knowledges (Haraway 1988), the multiple ways of knowing and the distinct worlding practices that go along with them. Just as Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo have noted in their joint reflections on “Learning to Unlearn”, we encounter the following:

We just wrote “knowledge’s” in plural but it came out automatically (Microsoft Word did it) as a possessive case. Word’s thesaurus does not accept it. It does not admit the plural of “knowledge”, because knowledge is supposed to be singular: It is the singularity of agents and institutions who control and dictate what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. We disobey; we delink from all totalitarian epistemology and claim epistemic equity.

TLOSTANOVA AND MIGNOLO 2012: 11

These authors are explicit in their decolonial outlook, which they link to the epistemic principles of pluriversality, transdisciplinarity and unlearning, inspired by the Ecuadorian indigenous *Amawtay Wasi* (“House of Learning”).

Mignolo in particular has popularized the notion of undisciplining as a way to overcome the classificatory politics of defining an “object of study” as standing outside the scope of the knowledgeable expert. Arguing against the hierarchical understanding of (scientific) knowledge as an authoritative truth-claim that is detached from experience, positionality and mutual learning, Mignolo and other decolonial authors have made strong assertions towards a new understanding of knowledges as a collaborative, relational endeavour. As some of our contributions show, this goal demands careful listening (see the chapters by Njovane and Hlengwa, and by Kiprop), methodological innovation (Ramugondo, Schaumann) and the preparedness to give up control (Greven and Naumann). Methods of unknowing and unlearning (in order to know differently) also demand the critical examination of well-established knowledge practices and their historical genealogies in disciplinary fields *outside* of African studies (see the chapters by Hanke and Schaumann, but also by Arndt). In this volume, we hope to contribute to new pathways in research that remains conscious of its standpoint and critical potential but is also open to revisions, new connections and worlding practices. With studying Africa conceived in terms of a dancing masquerade that cannot be viewed from any stationary vantage point, it becomes necessary to take into account repetitions within movements and constantly shift positions to comprehend their multiple sides. At the centre of this are the complex habits of knowing/unknowing amenable to understanding a moving subject of study.

5 Chapter Overview

The chapters we have collected in this volume have emerged from our engagements in the institutional framework of the Cluster of Excellence “Africa Multiple: Reconfiguring African Studies” at the University of Bayreuth, more specifically in the Research Section Knowledges.³ They represent the beginning of a conversation, not its final outcome. As laid out in this introduction, we have organized our book in three parts. Part I deals with the question of the canon; Part II tackles the politics of institutions; and Part III explores some of the empirical prospects of thinking as moving.

In Part I: *Un_Doing the Canon*, we seek to engage with the question of the canon in historical and epistemological ways. What are the genealogies of knowledge that we should build on for a decolonial practice to emerge? What

³ <https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html>.

needs undoing and what is the basis for our critical practice? How do we situate ourselves in relation to knowledge production in African studies? How do we know – and how can we unknow – well-established forms of research, comparison and theorizing?

In chapter 1, “African Studies, or How to Make the Canon Apocryphal”, Elísio Macamo offers a critical reflection on African studies and the matter of the canon, not so much in terms of marking a disciplinary field but rather as a methodological reflection on the social sciences more generally. Drawing on a fictive conversation with Immanuel Kant, he unpacks a hidden story behind the European Enlightenment, its universalist claims and the idea of a Western canon. Macamo claims that the challenge of *undoing* the canon consists in recovering the critical edge of the social sciences. In his exposition, it is not enough to come up with an alternative or “Africanized” body of knowledge; the challenge is to bring into existence something that was not there before. In other words, African studies should not be understood simply as producing knowledge *about* Africa, but rather as the careful reflection on the conditions under which knowledge is at all *possible*. Through the concept of the biblical Apocrypha, a body of texts that once formed part of the canon but is now excluded, Macamo draws attention to what is dubious about our ways of knowing so that we can be in a position to know better, or at any rate, to know what we cannot know now because of what we know.

Whereas Macamo’s chapter starts from the field of African studies to reflect more generally on questions of epistemology, critique and the limits of knowing (and ultimately unknowing), Elelwani Ramugondo approaches the question of the canon from a different angle. In chapter 2, “Dissecting and Transcending Enduring Fallacies”, she identifies a number of problems in the field of African studies that make it difficult for a decolonial practice to emerge. While the assumption that we can think without the body is a key fallacy, which has endured empiricist perspectives in African studies and beyond, there are many others. Some of these include: a belief in the role of the disciplines in saving or uplifting humanity; interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity as adequate tools with which to decolonize the academy; colonial languages as indispensable instruments in knowledge generation; and, conversely, that simply inserting indigenous languages within the canon is sufficient to bring about decolonization. This chapter explores what needs undoing in the African studies canon as a basis for ongoing decolonial practice. Among other things, Ramugondo raises the question of language as a problem of institutional and epistemic hierarchies and exclusions, thereby drawing attention to the double bind that characterizes the dominance of colonial languages (English in particular) in African studies, which at the same time restricts and enables. The

very fact that all our contributions are in English confirms that there is no easy way out of this conundrum.

Chapter 3 by Susan Arndt, “Knowledge Matters: Racism and Its Wording as a Tool for Reconfiguring African Studies”, throws light on yet another issue in relation to our use of language – namely, the ongoing and sticky legacy of racist terms in everyday speech and public discourse. How can we speak about and address the toxicity of racist words without reproducing their destructive power? The author approaches “race” as an ideological construct born out of greed and brutality and spelled out by racism as backed up by *white* supremacy’s power. In constructing this ideology, racism has built simple narratives that have relied on modes of generalizing the “Other” as nature beyond culture and being (fully) human. This narrative is pillared by racist terminology that rests on two possible sources: either terms from biology or pre-modern times in Europe were transferred onto new societal contexts, or new terms were coined to transport the idea of colonized people representing “nature” and thus inferior to whiteness, alias “culture”. African studies had a major role in shaping racism, pillaring *white* gazes on and narrations about Africa and inventing and implementing racist terms. Arndt’s chapter revisits the history of colonialism and racism as platforms for racist terminology in the German language. She criticizes African studies, for being at the forefront of implementing racist concepts and terminologies that still haunt us today and yet remaining largely reluctant to take responsibility for subverting *white* supremacy and undoing racist epistemologies and respective terminologies.

No canon exists by and of itself; it is bound to institutions, including the university, as the main playing field in which “the canon” is established, debated, reshaped and potentially undone. Indeed, the question of knowledge production is closely linked to institutional cultures and the politics of knowledge they represent. In many ways, African studies has been shaped by forms of racist, patriarchal, sexist and classist exclusions that are increasingly called into question and thus have come to trouble such institutions as universities, professional associations, funding bodies and even governments. In Part 2: Institutional Challenges and Transformations, we pay closer attention to the ways in which conceptual debates around social inclusion, epistemic freedom and decolonial thought are mirrored and impact on institutional spaces and disciplinary settings within African studies and beyond. What are the concrete experiences of critical interventions and institutional transformations in different academic spaces? What frictions emerge, what new horizons open up? None of these questions is new, even though they seem to reappear with new vigour and rekindled energy in the current moment.

As shown in chapter 4 by Edwin Adjei, Samuel Ntewusu and Akosua Adomako Ampofo, “The Ongoing Tune of the African Genius: Past, Present and Future”, ideas that emerged from the hopeful moment of independence have continued to shape institutional politics and epistemological and curricular orientations in African studies centres like the Institute of African Studies, Legon, Ghana. Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, saw the need for the establishment of such an institute that would prioritize Africans telling their own stories from an African-centred perspective and evaluate the place of Africa in global affairs. African scholars were charged to do exactly that in Nkrumah’s famous speech on “The African Genius”, delivered at the opening of the Institute of African Studies, in which he exhorted them to perform in-depth, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research into all aspects of African history, arts, culture and technologies, including Africa’s diaspora. The outcome of such research was to be the foundation for the regeneration of Africa and African people through knowledge production, dissemination and preservation.

In their chapter, Adjei, Ntewusu and Ampofo focus on the institutional and intellectual journey of the Institute of African Studies from 1962 onwards, culminating in its role in the establishment of the pan-African African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA), in 2013. Their chapter concludes with a vision of the Institute of African Studies and the ASAA in today’s global intellectual and political economy.

Indeed, Ghana remained one of the intellectual hubs for the field of African studies on the African continent. A major site that shaped conversations about African historiography was the Historical Society of Ghana and its journal *Ghana Notes and Queries*, which is the focus of chapter 5 by Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, “Written in Water: The Legon School of History and the Publication of the Past”. Focusing on the history and memory of the Historical Society, this chapter explores the project of an Africa-based African studies and its search for philosophical and historical principles that would not only explain but also reinforce societal change. It highlights the society’s self-understanding of possessing futurity in the 1960s and 1970s and the moment of commemorating 50 years of political independence in 2007. Moreover, it explores this sense of creating possibility by moving forward, via the society’s print publications. By means of a review of *Ghana Notes and Queries* and another of the society’s publications, the chapter pays particular attention to possibilities related to the coproduction of historical knowledge and teaching.

Whereas the chapters by Adjei, Ntewusu and Ampofo and Mark-Thiesen trace the development of alternative institutions and research agendas from

the time of independence to the present moment, chapter 6, by Catherine Kiprop, takes a different turn. In her analysis of “Gender, Feminism and Politics of Knowledge Production: An Interrogation of Institutional Cultures of Africa’s Institutions of Higher Learning”, she critically discusses the many overlapping problems that female African scholars endure in academia. African women’s narratives about their journeys in academia demonstrate how the power and politics of knowledge are intrinsically linked to gender. The organizational and institutional cultures in African institutions of higher learning, like those of Western-style universities in general, were established to meet the needs of male faculty and students. Gender inequalities in universities have an impact on the production of knowledge in these institutions. While addressing gender issues in education, the role of feminist thinking in shaping the theory of equality and equity cannot be ignored. This chapter discusses the institutional and intellectual challenges that female academics in African universities have encountered, examines feminism as part of the intellectual discourse and explores the imperatives necessary to move the discourse on gender in African scholarly communities beyond the normative policy rhetoric to tackle the gendered configurations of academic institutions.

In Kiprop’s chapter we see the many institutional and personal hurdles that female African scholars have to scale to participate equally in the process of academic knowledge production. Equal opportunity and affirmative action measures are important, but they can do only so much to change institutional cultures. This is a point that is taken up and deepened in chapter 7 by Thando Njovane and Mandy Hlengwa, “Transformation Beyond the Surface: Race, Power and Young Academics After #RhodesMustFall”. Clearly, this movement and the wider student protests around it brought into stark focus long-abiding issues of justice, race, epistemologies and institutional cultures, particularly within historically white universities in South Africa. These issues are closely related to the historical context of a nation in the grip of a desire to create a more just future while also living in the shadow of a traumatic past that is not yet resolved. Higher education institutions constitute at least one of the sites of contestation in that they contain deeply embedded forms of structural and systemic oppression.

More recently, universities have tended to highlight issues of race, gender and curriculum design in their transformation agendas. However, with the impetus of transforming both the student and staff profiles, little to no emphasis has been placed on power, or what Foucault calls “phantom power”, and its reproduction through those racial bodies that may be read as historically oppressed. This chapter analyses the university as a particular type of social body, where the bodies of those who inhabit it are vested with legacies of

power that can be reproduced regardless of how those bodies are racialized and gendered. The chapter argues that race and gender alone cannot be taken as the sum total of the transformation agenda, especially because both have the potential to reproduce and uphold the very structures they are supposed to dismantle. The issue becomes less about the kinds of bodies we find within institutional walls and more about how power is distributed and accounted for inside them.

The challenges of institutional transformation concern not only the complex configurations of power and visibility; they also come to the fore in the attempts at doing things otherwise. A concrete example of a proactive change in institutional politics towards serious collaboration is discussed in chapter 8 by Katharina Greven and Lena Naumann, “On Access and Responsibility – Questioning Ulli Beier’s Legacy Through Collaborative Approaches”. The Ulli Beier estate archive came to the Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth, Germany, in 2012, shortly after Beier passed away in 2011. The estate was added to the existing art collection that the Beiers had brought to Bayreuth in 1981, which is still one of the most extensive collections of African modernism worldwide. The photographic estate, comprising around 40,000 pieces, documents Ulli and Georgina Beier’s image of Africa during the time they lived in Nigeria, and manifests how they perceived their own role within the cultural and political environment of independent Nigeria. At the same time, it is a historical asset of Nigerian and Papua New Guinean (art) history, which was, until recently, not available for viewing by the respective communities nor for anyone outside of Bayreuth. To change this situation became the core of a restitution project, in which both Greven and Naumann were involved as part of the Iwalewahaus staff. Their chapter discusses the change in attitude towards the newly arrived material that eventually led to the estate being moved to the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU) in Osogbo, Nigeria, in 2020. The authors describe some of the new possibilities for critical intervention that were opened up by the relocation of the materials. They reflect on the collaborative and sensual work that emerged in the process, also adding a critical note on digitization, its conditions, possibilities and limitations.

Movement, circulation and a shift in vantage point are also thematic and methodological issues for empirical research and new epistemic practices. In PART 3: Thinking as Moving: Future Pathways, we are interested in critical reflections on the circulation of knowledges across disciplines and fields, including the interface of academia and activism but also the multiple forms of translation as well as irritation between science, policy and practice. Another dimension of thinking as moving concerns the process of reflexivity as it emerges in relation to research, (institutional) location and audience.

What does it mean to say “I am where I think” (Mignolo 1999), and how does thinking as moving unsettle primordialist understandings of knowledge and being? How can we un_know “Africa” through its global embeddedness? This approach necessarily includes a critical historical perspective on the ways in which knowledge, power (and subversion) are connected, thereby addressing hegemonic forms of knowledge and knowledges that emerge outside well-established institutional spaces. Finally, we note that subversive concepts often make us uncomfortable because they are hard to categorize and tame. They are never neat – if we want to smooth them out, they may lose their cutting edge. We take up the challenge to move out of the comfort zone and ask what new knowledges may be generated and born from this space of friction.

This section begins with chapter 9, a contribution by Anthony Okeregbe and Muyiwa Falaiye, who interrogate the gendered dimensions of philosophical sagacity. This important stream in contemporary African philosophy was introduced by the Kenyan philosopher, Henry Odera Oruka. Arguing that the project of reconfiguring African studies must include a critical examination of African intellectual systems, the authors shift our attention to the ways in which our very modes and terms of analysis as well as people’s (and in this case women’s) practices of living and knowing the world are closely entwined. In their chapter “Women Sages in Male Epistemic Spaces: an Analysis of Patriarchal Forces in Female Knowledge Production”, they focus on the modes of relationality that characterize female agency in male epistemic spaces. The chapter identifies and interrogates modalities of relations, such as suppression, acquiescence and control, in the epistemic agency of a body of African women who are considered as sages in their own right.

The chapter demonstrates how the Orukan framework fails to account for women’s positionality and agency in patriarchal regimes of being and thinking. In their responses to questions that border on fundamental issues of existence, most of the interviewed women did not meet the empirical and normative criteria for philosophical sagacity or didactic sages in the Orukan sense. Although this indicates the dominance of patriarchal regimes in women’s lifeworlds and beliefs, it also signifies the multiple nature of sagacity within patriarchal knowledge production systems. To recognize indigenous African women as philosophical thinkers in their own right might require a different framework from that of philosophical sagacity. Okeregbe and Falaiye reiterate a point that is also made by Ramugondo and others – namely, that it is not enough to simply replace one body of knowledge with another and assume that this will resolve the deep entanglement of coloniality and being. The authors engage with the notion of wisdom as a particular form of epistemic (as well as social and political) authority.

In chapter 10, “Knowledges in Conflict: Conceptualizations of Age in Colonial Letters”, Eric Anchimbe revisits an interesting debate between colonial authorities and indigenous Cameroonians during the colonization of the British Southern Cameroons by Britain (1916–1960). Reading the archive of colonial letters along and against the grain (Stoler 2009), he examines strategies of linguistic subversion and political claim-making through the differing conceptualizations of age. Whereas for the British, being old signified senility and a time to retire, for the Indigenous population it was considered a mark of experience and wisdom, qualifying a person for further administrative authority or power. This difference in understanding of age embodies a conflict of knowledge repertoires and how these fit into the natural order of growing old or ageing. Using letters exchanged between British colonial authorities and Chief Manga Williams of Bimbia, British Southern Cameroons, the chapter asks about the concrete conceptualizations of age adopted in these colonial letters. What repertoires of knowledge were driving their production, rejection and perhaps co-construction? Overall, the chapter concludes that, in spite of the conflicting conceptualizations, both perspectives of age continued to co-exist during and after colonialism but within different spheres of power: the political and the hereditary.

Christine Hanke’s contribution in chapter 11, “Haunted Numbers: the Lingering Legacies of Colonial Statistics and Measurement”, critically examines another form of colonial knowledge production. Her focus of study is not the realm of politics and administration but the interface of nineteenth-century biological and statistical sciences in the nascent discipline of physical anthropology, at the core of which was the production of race. The chapter proposes a critical engagement with the genealogies and legacies of colonial modes of knowledge-making and epistemic violence. Besides the inherent racism that underscored the hierarchical ordering of human difference, the chapter argues that epistemic violence lies in the very scientific practices of mechanical-objective and metric-statistical procedures that the discipline purported. To discuss the coloniality of this knowledge regime with respect to its genealogy and its epistemology, the chapter interweaves two argumentative steps. First, it situates the analyzed practices of knowing in a broader transformation of European knowledge production and its relation to “modernity”, industrialization and colonialism. Second, it undertakes epistemological reflections on the specific approaches of measurement and statistics by focusing on the practices of metric-statistical knowledge production in colonial anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century, to render visible the epistemic violence that lies in this very modality. Arguing from a media-theoretical background, this contribution invites a reflexive critique of this hegemonic, seemingly self-evident

mode of knowing, by unpacking the underlying power structures and lasting effects of this colonial epistemic form(ation).

Scientific knowledge was never isolated but in many ways was connected to very practical realms of (colonial) governance, economics and epistemic hierarchies that continue to reverberate in the present. In chapter 12, “‘Lamb Description’ – a Circulation of Knowledge Practices”, Eleanor Schaumann takes us to another site in which a contemporary (agricultural) practice is deeply entangled with colonial modes of knowledge and economic production. Her contribution traces the knowledge practice of “lamb description” in the Namibian Swakara industry, one of the most significant economic sectors in (Southern) Namibia over the past 100 years, which is currently in massive decline. Schaumann considers the different ways in which the Swakara sector mobilizes actors and their relations in a co-constitutive world-making practice. The farmers’ ability to look at and feel a lamb is intrinsically entwined with standardized perception and the terminology, categories and description standards of the Swakara industry. This ability links individual farms to the studbook registry, norms committee and the grading committee. Furthermore, it is positioned within a constantly shifting context, the legacy of apartheid and colonialism and the industry’s current crisis. The chapter engages with the concept of thinking as moving to make sense of the knowledge practices around lamb description in the Swakara industry, and to illustrate how standpoint, the physical position and relations of the subjects and objects of lamb description, and the worlds they enact, are in dynamic flux. These movements offer us ways to destabilize the binaries of academic and practical, aesthetic and economic, scientific and intuitive knowledge, of objectivity and subjectivity. Moreover, they open our reflections on epistemic politics and the multiple movements engendered within it, to include relations with beings as others, in this case, Swakara lambs.

The volume closes with chapter 13, a collaborative piece by Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, on the political stakes of decolonial thought and action. In their chapter “Combative Decoloniality and the BlackHouse Paradigm of Knowledge, Creation and Action”, they reflect on their engagements with the Soweto-based community organization, the BlackHouse Kollektive (BHK). Against the effects of certain accommodation and commodification of the concept of decoloniality within the limits of the liberal academy, their chapter offers an account of what the Frantz Fanon Foundation has referred to as “combative decoloniality”, which forms the backdrop of what the authors refer to as the BHK paradigm of knowledge, creation and action, which they pursue in their transatlantic collaborations involving South Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. The work of the BHK is grounded in

Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and decolonial thought, which it brings together in its educational, direct-action, artistic and theoretical endeavours. The BHK is a post area studies paradigm that is connected, and seriously responds, to the challenges raised by student-led movements that demanded the decolonization of the university, including #RhodesMustFall and #Fees-MustFall in South Africa and the Third World Liberation Front in the US.

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PART 1

Un-doing the Canon



African Studies, or How to Make the Canon Apocryphal

Elísio Macamo

1 Introduction

Let us imagine that a solitary man back in 1784, on September 30 to be more precise, who kept regular habits that enabled those who lived in the same town to check their clocks based on his everyday routine, had written the following in response to the question concerning what the Western canon was:

[The Western canon] is the imposition of one's understanding of the world as the hallmark of superiority, enabling those who so describe themselves to condemn others to immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of those who hold themselves to be the masters of the universe. This immaturity is forced upon them, not incurred if its cause is not a lack of understanding. Still, lack of autonomy and recognition to use their knowledge as they please and without the guidance of another. The motto of the [Western canon] is not, therefore: Sapere Aude! (Have the courage to use your understanding!) It is rather Audere in propriis verbis sapere non est optabile! (Daring to be wise on your terms is not desirable.)

[Colonialism and oppression] are why such a large proportion of men unwillingly remain immature despite holding them in bondage, claiming to subscribe to the values of human dignity, solidarity, and justice, which their practices betrayed. Subject peoples can't emancipate themselves from alien guidance by the freedom nature bestowed on them (naturaliter maiorennes) because the claims to absolute truth made by the canon would not allow it. For the same reasons, it is too easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians owing to the colonial condition. It is not convenient to be immature; instead, it is hard to escape from it under colonial circumstances! If I have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, because my knowledge and way of life are held to be inferior, and as standing in the form of progress, it is not the case that I need not make any

efforts at all. It is simply more complex. It is not that I need not think so long as I can pay; the reason others will soon enough take the tiresome job over is that I have been reduced to the condition of the Subaltern who cannot speak as centuries later an Indian scholar would claim (Spivak 1991). The guardians who have [cruelly] taken upon themselves the work of supervision will soon see to it that if by far the most significant part of humanity (including the entire fair sex) were to consider the step forward to maturity, this would endanger the privileges of those who held them in subjection. Having first infatuated their domesticated animals and carefully prevented the docile creatures from daring to take a single step without the top strings to which they are tied, they next show them the danger that threatens them if they try to walk unaided. This danger is indeed very great, for if they were to learn to walk eventually after a few falls, they would be able to mount a formidable challenge to the epistemic might of their oppressors. But an example of this kind is intimidating and usually frightens their oppressors, who block any attempt at emancipation.

Thus it is difficult for each separate [culture] to work its way out of the immaturity that has become almost second nature to Western canon's epistemic power. Subject cultures have neither grown fond of it nor are they incapable (for the time being) of using their understanding because they were prevented from doing so by colonialism and oppression; those mechanical instruments that prevent them from using their natural endowments are the ball and chain of their permanent immaturity. And should the day come when they would throw them off through the anticolonial struggles for self-determination, they would boldly jump over even the narrowest of trenches, for they would know this kind's value of free movement. Thus, only a few who cultivated their minds have succeeded in freeing themselves from immaturity and continuing boldly on their way because the world built by Europeans seemed to be premised on preventing the majority from emancipating itself.

There is more chance of an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable if only the public concerned is left in freedom, for there will always be a few who think for themselves, even among those appointed as guardians of the common mass. Once they have thrown off the yoke of colonial arrogance, such guardians will disseminate the spirit of rational respect for personal value and for the right, not the duty, of all men and women to think for themselves. The remarkable thing about this is that if the public, which was previously put under this yoke by the guardians, is suitably stirred up by some of the latter who are incapable of living up to

their values of enlightenment, this may subsequently compel the guardians themselves to respect the right that all have to whatever good things the Enlightenment promises. It is very harmful to propagate prejudices because they finally avenge themselves on the people who first encouraged them (or whose predecessors did so). Thus the public can achieve enlightenment. A revolution may well end autocratic despotism and rapacious or power-seeking oppression. Still, it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking if colonial ways of thinking are not confronted head-on. Instead, new prejudices, like the ones they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great mass that is prevented from thinking.

For enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is freedom. And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all freedom – to make public use of one’s reason in all matters. But I hear on all sides the cry: Don’t argue! The [philosopher] says: Don’t argue; learn to think like a Westerner! The [sociologist]: Don’t argue; think about how to make the world compatible with Modernity! The [intellectual]: Don’t argue, have faith in Western culture! (Only one ruler in the world says: Argue as much as you like and about whatever you want, but obey!). All this means restrictions on freedom everywhere. But which sort of restriction prevents enlightenment, and which, instead of hindering it, can promote it? I reply: The public use of [one]’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among [humans]; the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one’s sense, I mean that use which anyone may make of it as someone of learning addressing the entire critical reading public. What I term the [decolonial] use of reason is that which a person may make of it in the particular position or context they find themselves in.

2 Making the Canon Apocryphal

The man whose imagined response is illustrated above would have been the great eighteenth-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. This long excerpt is based on the first two pages of Kant’s celebrated essay, “What is Enlightenment?” (Kant 1784). I took the (creative, or destructive) liberty of introducing words and arguments to subvert the original meaning of Kant’s text. Instead of preserving the idea that the Enlightenment was a historic moment because it purportedly signalled humankind’s courage to know by

exercising not only reason, but above all freedom, I tried to uncover a hidden story behind the Enlightenment.

I did so by portraying the Enlightenment as the repository of an account of a widely circulated story held to be true, but one of doubtful authenticity. It is the story of the “Western canon”, a library of knowledge allegedly preserving all that humankind needs to know to be able to know. The biblical Apocrypha was a collection of ancient books that were originally accepted within the canon of scripture but later were excluded. The use of the concept in this text aims to draw attention to the hidden side of the account that grounds the conceptual vocabulary that informs knowledge production today.

By putting forward this understanding of the Enlightenment, I do not wish to undermine its epistemological worth. Rather, I seek to offer a reflection on African studies as a critical introduction to the methodology of the social sciences. The claim is that the challenge of undoing the canon consists in recovering the critical edge of the social sciences. I associate this critical edge with the idea of *poiesis*, that is, bringing into existence something that was not there before. In line with this, African studies should be understood not as the production of knowledge about Africa but rather as the careful reflection on the conditions under which knowledge is at all possible. Making the canon “apocryphal” suggests exposing what is dubious about our ways of knowing so that we can be in a position to know better, or at any rate, to know what we cannot know now because of what we know.

If, as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues, a decolonial perspective inquires critically into the constitution of a “Cartesian subject” and “African subjectivity”, then this chapter is part of this critical perspective. However, making the canon apocryphal means confronting two challenges. One consists in standing up to the claims to truthfulness that the deployment of the vocabulary of the social sciences may encourage us to make. The other is to seek to find in the critique ways of advancing knowledge production in general. Both challenges boil down to the task of rethinking translation in a very broad sense.

Much of what we have to discuss in the study of Africa revolves around translation, its role in the production of knowledge, and the methodological challenges it presents. It is fair to argue that, fundamentally, the decolonial discourse deals politically with methodological issues that it may perhaps confuse with epistemological issues. If that is the case, then it would seem to compromise the important intellectual agenda that it represents. Towards the end of this chapter I will try to be more constructive and propose some ways out of the paradoxical position in which the discourse finds itself.

My parents’ mother tongue, Xitsua, is spoken in southern Mozambique, more specifically, in parts of Gaza and Inhambane provinces. They have a

saying, which goes, “The grandson burned his belly, his grandmother burned her back, so she cannot carry the grandson on her back”.¹ This is not a good translation because the original concludes that the two of them, the grandson and the grandmother, cannot carry each other. In other words, the original saying makes no distinction between those who carry and those who are carried. “*Ku velekana*” (the suffix “*ana*” is reflexive) conveys the idea that it is the two who carry each other, not just the grandmother who carries her grandchild on her back. The saying is a metaphor for the relationship between the canon and those parts of the world it has helped to constitute and describe. How the canon can be accused of having misrepresented Africa corresponds roughly to the difficulty of carrying one another when the grandchild has burned his belly and his grandmother her back. They still need each other, but they need to repair the relationship first.

There is a sense in which one could take this translation challenge to mean not only that the English language is limited but that it can lead the translator into misrepresenting meaning. The problem with saying this is that I am the one who is responsible for the translation. Attempting to render something intelligible in another language entails making decisions that draw from one’s knowledge of the original and the target context. Furthermore, and perhaps because of taking certain decisions, every act of translation entails a loss. There is probably no way to translate from one language to another without the danger of losing some meaning.

The question is to know if what is lost is important enough to worry about. In this particular case, we may ask whether it makes any difference to convey the idea that both grandmother and grandson can carry the other on their back. I come back to this question later, in the conclusion. For the time being, I draw attention to the fact that translation entails not only the loss of meaning. It exposes the richness of one language and, conversely, the poverty of another. This is at least the way we are used to thinking about things, especially in the social sciences, which are heir to a historically and politically specific vocabulary. This vocabulary emerged at a particular moment in European history, to describe the world of Europeans. From an epistemological point of view, the question is: to what extent is this vocabulary able to adequately recover the experiences of other cultures and societies?

Our epistemological habitus has instilled in us the idea that the world fits into the vocabulary of the social sciences. What this vocabulary cannot account for constitutes, so to speak, an anomaly, something that escapes the

1 The original: “*Ntukulu u tshwile khwiri, kokwana u tshwile nhlana, a va koti ku velekana*”.

norm and therefore needs to be disciplined. There are echoes here of the work of the Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, on epistemicide (Santos 2014), and of Walter D. Mignolo's discussion of how literate writing was used as a criterion of historical devaluation (Mignolo 1992).² This is part of a large epistemological movement that, of course, does not begin with the decolonial perspective. It begins, forcefully, with subaltern studies and its opposition to the way certain voices were silenced; with postcolonial studies and the way it rebels against the idea that we can look at life today, after colonialism, as if nothing had happened. The epistemological movement also goes back to a critical tradition that is proper to intellectual activity, farther back in time, to Karl Marx, for example, whose approach has been one of the greatest supports for the criticism that we make today from the periphery. It reaches back further, to people like Montesquieu or Montaigne who are, for me, despite being dead white men, important precursors of decoloniality. For example, when Montaigne (1877) used the example of Tupinambá cannibalism to put the cruelty of Christianity in perspective or when he exalted Indian sexuality to criticize the repression and oppression of women in European society, he was making a decolonial critique *avant la lettre*.

The problem that the translation of the Xitsua saying presents corresponds roughly to something that the late Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, pointed out several years ago. Wiredu spoke of translation, but in a curious way. He spoke of what he called "untranslatability" (Wiredu 1984). He was a philosopher, and his concern, therefore, was whether concepts developed within the philosophy practised in Europe could be translated into other cultures and not only retain their meanings but also respect the worldviews of other cultures. His response was to say that translation was impossible. But he set a condition. He said that translation presupposes understanding. In other words, for anyone to be able to translate something into another language, they need to be sure that they understand it.

And that is the problem. How do I know that I have understood? Is not understanding an illusion that leads me to confuse what I do not understand with what is familiar to me? How often does this happen to us? How often is it that what we think to be the faithful description of other experiences and worlds is not, in fact, the recovery of our limited world? As Wittgenstein, the Austrian philosopher, said: "My language is my world" (Wittgenstein 1933). Kwasi Wiredu suggested that, ultimately, the challenge posed by translation is not so much to make a concept intelligible as to help us identify the limits of

² See also Boone and Mignolo (1994).

our understanding and, therefore, the limits of our world. In other words, for translation to be possible, it needs to satisfy a curious condition: incomprehension. In a sense, then, failure to understand, or rather, reaching the limits of understanding, is a precondition for translation. It is as the Malian historian, Amadou Hampaté Bâ (2000), used to say: If you know that you do not know, you will know (*Si tu sais que tu ne sais pas, tu saurás*).

There is a very interesting piece by Ludwig Wittgenstein about a great anthropological work (Wittgenstein 1979). I am referring to James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890 (Frazer 1998). Wittgenstein wrote notes to the book, which were later published. He commented on an explanation Frazer gave of what he called the magical thinking of primitive peoples. Frazer considered irrational the act of sticking needles into a puppet that represented an enemy, in the hope that this person would feel the pain. Wittgenstein noted that the savage who does this is the same person who builds a real house to sleep in, cooks real food to eat, etc. Put another way, the villain here is possibly Frazer, not the savage. Frazer's mistake was to force what he did not understand into what he did understand. This is why Wittgenstein (1958) also said that understanding becomes an act of violence that we commit against that which we want to understand. This is an interesting idea, but at the same time extremely disconcerting.

The explanation lies in what Wiredu was saying, which I repeat here using the language of deconstruction: there is always the danger of integrating what is different into the similarity of the same. This is, once again, the problem that the social sciences create when they apply this to the Rest (with a capital R) as opposed to the West. Note that this danger does not present itself only to those whose minds have not yet been decolonized. It is also a danger pertinent to intellectual activity that can do no other than be, I have to say, colonial. To produce knowledge is to colonize. We can do this consciously, of course. Producing knowledge is seeking knowledge and seeking knowledge is a form of coexistence, or to use a term used by a Cameroonian colleague, Francis Nyamnjoh, a form of conviviality (Nyamnjoh 2020). Conviviality is based not only on understanding. It is also based on our ability to dispel misunderstandings and, above all, to correct ourselves.

In this sense, then, the epistemological challenge posed by translation – which is another way of talking about the challenges posed by the methodology of the social sciences – is not necessarily the ability to produce faithful and truthful accounts. The problem with the canon as it manifests itself in the social sciences is not that it has misrepresented other realities. That may be a false argument, for it would imply two improbable things: one, that there is such a “truth” about us, for instance, and us or the Other; and because of who

we are, we would have privileged access to that “truth”. This explains, perhaps, the identity politics that sometimes rears its head in critical scholarship – the idea that I, by being who I am, speak truth about myself, and that the knowledge someone else produces, and which is not sanctioned by me, cannot be consistent with truth.

The epistemological challenge is to create a space within which we can work together to produce accounts on the basis of criteria that we can be comfortable with. This is a methodological challenge because it has to do with the procedures that we should follow to propose accounts of reality. I address this problem in a forthcoming book (Macamo forthcoming). I argue that to study Africa is not to acquire the ability to speak the truth about it. Rather, it is to acquire the ability to develop ways of speaking about it by inviting others to participate in the conversation. I give this process the name “before we begin”, inspired by what seems to be a widespread habit in public meetings in Africa. Because speaking time is controlled, when people in meetings take the floor, one of the first things they say is: “Before I begin, I would like to say this, plus that ...”. Producing knowledge is always about creating the conditions to produce knowledge. Studying Africa is creating the conditions for studying Africa.

3 Reservations

This is where it may become clear why it is important to be careful about the precise sense in which we deploy the notion of decoloniality. Making decoloniality more precise means, perhaps, to pay more attention to the creativity of critique. Perhaps the notion of *poiesis* is more appropriate in this regard, for it invites us to reflect on the epistemological challenges that the critique of knowledge production poses. *Poiesis* is used in philosophy to describe an activity in which one creates something that did not exist before. There is a certain sense in which decoloniality – and indeed, postcolonialism before it – should be understood in this creative sense. It is not simply about saying what is wrong about received ways of producing knowledge and, in the process, rejecting precisely that which makes critique possible. Rather, the idea is to elaborate on the implications of critiquing knowledge production by looking at how knowledge, in general, would be creative whenever it allows us to appreciate the world in other ways. The question is to what extent criticism meets this aspiration. My fear is that if a decolonial critique is understood as an epistemological enterprise and not as a methodological one, it might fall short of its larger calling of helping us to use critique as a creative moment.

The Xitsua saying I mentioned above is a brilliant metaphor for this problem. The belly of the grandson and the back of the grandmother are the contact points that allow someone to carry another person on their back. They burned, which therefore made carrying not possible. It is the same thing with science. From the moment we discover that the vocabulary of the social sciences is not innocent, we also lose our innocence concerning our own place in science. Although it is legitimate to reject the canon because it is apocryphal, to the extent that it pursues the hidden agenda of colonialism and perverse modernity, it would be unwise not to see in such rejection an opportunity to be creative.

This is done by not taking “Africa” for granted when one studies “Africa”. The study of Africa should not commit us to the view that we know what Africa is from the start. What is relevant as a definition of Africa is not Africa itself but the interest that constitutes its study. As everyone knows, the overriding interest has been colonial. The validity of what we have been able to say about Africa has always been conditioned by how we position ourselves in relation to this colonial interest. In speaking of a “colonial interest”, we are not making any value judgement. We are simply acknowledging the context within which “Africa” became an object. To acknowledge a context is to commit oneself to the view, eloquently expressed by Michel Foucault (1980), that the standards of truth and legitimate discourse in a particular epoch determine the intelligibility of our claims about the world.

It is in this sense that making the canon apocryphal should imply a view of African studies as a sort of social science methodology. One cannot study Africa without being interested in how one studies anything. As a sociologist, I can study Germany or Switzerland without worrying about knowing what knowledge means in that context because the conceptual vocabulary of reference retrieves a familiar world. Likewise, I can study white South African society without worrying about knowing what knowledge means in that context because the conceptual vocabulary of reference, especially the conceptual vocabulary that emphasizes the language of social structure, recovers a world about which the dominant social ideal in that country is articulated.

It is only those social phenomena that are constituted at the margins of the familiar world, and which are therefore difficult to recover without inscribing them in a register that potentially misrepresents them, that constitute a challenge to knowledge itself. For this very reason, the study of these phenomena can never be their description, or even criticism, but rather the reflection on the conditions of possibility of any such study.

Curiously, it is in this conception of the study of marginal phenomena as a methodology of social science that the critical potential in the sense of *poiesis*

resides, that is, when the production of knowledge helps us to construct something that did not exist before. Colonialism produced a specific, rich idea of Africa without which Africa would not have come into being. For this reason, Africa cannot exist outside the final colonial vocabulary.³ Our attempts to recover an Africa that is different from colonial Africa are doomed to failure because they are not based on an alternative vocabulary. This is not necessarily a problem, because the critical look that we bring to the constitution of knowledge about Africa can enable us to produce a new concept of Africa that is not indifferent to history.

The very idea of knowledge loses its innocence from the moment we recognize what is done in our culture – say, in an “African” culture – as also being “science”. Why science? It could be something else, say, art! As it happens, even art could be something else, such as science. Who knows? It could be just play. In other words, there is a certain sense in which a decolonial stance places us in a serious epistemological dilemma: either we speak, and if we are understood by those who misrepresent our reality we are left with the obligation of reformulating the problem because we are part of the same register, or else we keep silent and, because we are silent, we become complicit to mental colonization.

Perhaps there is no obvious solution to this problem. Yet, this seems to be the problem that a critique of the canon needs to address and solve. There is a great paradox here: if we critique the social sciences from our place of enunciation and we are understood, then our critique cannot be as radical as we think it is.⁴ It could be that the problem lies in essentializing Western epistemology. Although there is indeed a canon that can be subject to critical inquiry, there may not be any such thing as Western epistemology. There are various perspectives on knowledge in the West. In two books, Stephen Toulmin (1990, 2003) gives an account of the development of science which documents a tension between those who sought to impose rationality as the standard for knowledge production and those who resisted them. Many of the critical perspectives that we promote among ourselves to criticize “Western epistemology” embrace historical materialism, for example, which is “Western” by any account. I mentioned Montesquieu and Montaigne above. Most critiques draw from Karl Marx or Michel Foucault, both of whom are decidedly “Western” while at the same time not being “Western” in the sense of the canon, because they took a stance that enabled us to imagine different worlds.

3 I use “final” in the sense deployed by Richard Rorty (1989).

4 This is, in fact, the problem of “double consciousness” that W.E.B. Du Bois discussed in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Du Bois 1968).

In 2020, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, the Senegalese philosopher from Columbia University, New York, gave a keynote address at the launch of the Pilot African Postgraduate Academy (PAPA) in Bamako, Mali.⁵ He cautioned the listeners about an epistemological problem. The problem was that, increasingly (according to him), the production of knowledge is articulated with identity and therefore with who is speaking. Consequently, intelligibility is reduced to the manifestation not of what is but of what the observer is. For example, what I say in this paper is not necessarily a reflection on the object I myself defined for this intervention but rather the revelation of who I am.

Diagne argued that the problem with reducing intelligibility to identity was that any critique ceased to be a contribution to a better understanding of a given phenomenon and instead became an attack on the person. Prefacing any speech with ethnic references as a form of protection against, but also exposure to, criticism, seems to confirm Diagne's fears. What Diagne is gesturing towards is the meaning that critique should have. In other words, what does it mean for social scientists to criticize anything at all and what challenges does the need to make this critique pose to us at the methodological level? No one can deny the legitimacy of reservations concerning the ability of the conceptual vocabulary of the social sciences to produce reliable representations of African reality. Indeed, this suspicion is part of the critical menu that makes up the intellectual agenda of postcolonialism, postmodernity and, now, decoloniality. The question, however, is how to validate the critique when one of its premises is increasingly the rejection of criteria of validation that would commit the critic and the criticized to a scientific ideal. One does not need to appeal to the idea advocated by Jürgen Habermas (2001), about a transcendent communicative reason. It suffices to refer to a criterion that acknowledges the simple fact that we understand each other, even if we do not agree with something. But why do we understand each other? How is it possible that we understand each other?

This is a problem that "creolization studies" have successfully addressed. It starts from the simple idea that we should not be dealing with essences but rather with the results of processes of the constitution of things. This insight was very well developed by Eduard Glissant to whom we owe this idea of "results" (see Bird-Pollan 2015). The argument is that if we confuse a specific scientific discourse with the essence of scientific discourse in general, we risk depriving ourselves of a legitimate position of enunciation since the specificity of our counter-discourse gains coherence by postulating a general scientific

5 PAPA is generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Düsseldorf.

discourse above its specific manifestations. It is on this basis, for example, that Stefan Bird-Pollan (2015) says:

The position I advocate opposes, for instance, Homi Bhabha's claim that for Fanon "the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that 'naked declivity' it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning." My point is simply that what Bhabha finds to be Fanon's enigmatic questioning must itself come from a position that makes that very questioning a possible critique of concepts of willing or freedom. Similarly, it cannot be more than a metaphor for Gayatri Spivak to say that "the subaltern cannot speak". Spivak's claim suggests in an even more radical way than does Bhabha that there can be a systematic marginalization of subjectivity such that the term of subjectivity itself becomes meaningless. But without a meaningful notion of the subject as one that *ought to speak*, the claim that the subaltern does not speak loses its normative force.

BIRD-POLLAN 2015: 2

This is what concerns me about the legitimate critique that is made of the Western canon. It is made possible not only by the conflation of a specific scientific discourse with general scientific discourse but also by the illusion that it is possible to speak outside the canon when it is on the basis of its theoretical and conceptual resources. Here the paradox manifests itself violently. Basically, no person who criticizes the "Western canon" in this way can be sure that his or her own critique is not a product of that canon. In this sense, such a critique is not necessarily the freedom and emancipation that is hoped for and projected. This is all the more so since we know, for example, that there have always been counter-discourses in the context of the "Western canon".

The idea that "Western humanism" would be true only if it were representative of everything problematic and atrocious that Europeans have done for the world would be a fallacious way of approaching these questions. But it is possible precisely because of the confusion we make between specific and general scientific discourse.

There is an idea of Africa that ensues from the critique of the canon, which, although legitimately challenging the representations of the continent, appears to be functional to the social reproduction of those who criticize as a social entity. The resulting methodological problem arises around the validation of knowledge. Suddenly, the knowledge we produce is not necessarily valid because it obeys the proper scientific criteria, which we place under

suspicion through our critical stance, but also because it meets certain beliefs we may wish to nurture.

This has been happening more and more frequently in the social sciences and humanities. Whereas anthropology used to be famous for validating its knowledge by resorting to the general argument that whoever speaks knows because he “has been there”, as if the truth of things were there, today there is a widespread attitude in African studies towards the validation of knowledge based on recourse to the idea that the conclusion best serves certain interests that we want to protect and promote. It is almost as if what Caliban had to say suddenly became more truthful than what Prospero said, not because of an objective standard of truth allowing us to converse but rather because we have equipped Caliban with a long-denied and withheld history that validates history in general. The problem with this, of course, is the idea that Caliban was right because he suffered at the hands of Prospero. Perhaps we need to consider the ways in which we can enable Caliban to be right because what he said makes sense.

In some sense, therefore, making the canon apocryphal entails inquiring into the conditions of any dialogue at all. It should, of course, be “decolonial”, but how should we understand this? As a conversation between like-minded people? As a conversation between people who share the same epistemological sensibilities? As a conversation between people with a common political agenda? What is “decolonial” about an event that defines itself in this way? Are we not, once again, in the problematic situation of defining ourselves based on the views others have of us and on what others have done to us? Can there be emancipation under such conditions? Indeed, does the very idea of emancipation make sense from the moment it becomes a project? Can it be true? What do ideas of Africa or Europe – or Asia and America, for that matter – describe if not history itself and its contingent nature? Why should we extract from each of these ideas an intellectual – or political – agenda that essentializes us as much as the colonial discourse essentialized us?

4 Conclusion

Making the canon apocryphal would be meaningless if the purpose were to show that it is wrong. Criticizing colonialism for having been bad, for having created a perverse world, for having committed atrocities is ethically legitimate but intellectually unsatisfactory. Intellectual criticism seems useful only when it is creative, that is, when it helps us build something that did not exist

before. Colonialism produced a specific, and rich, idea of Africa. Whether we like it or not, it is against the background of this idea – the content, as it were, of the colonial library, to use Mudimbe’s terminology (Mudimbe 1994; see also Wai 2015) – that it makes sense to speak of Africa.

My parents’ saying describes a situation where sadness and pain is so great that people cannot even console each other. That is why the verb “to carry on one’s back” is reflexive. Consolation is a collaborative act. Notice, too, something I have not said yet: the verb “*ku velekana*” etymologically refers also to the act of giving birth, although in this case the bilabial implosive “*ku b’elekana*” is used. So the idea here is to lament the impossibility, or rather the difficulty, of re-enacting the most profound and sublime creative moment that exists: child-birth. I think, but perhaps I am exaggerating, that the usefulness of the decolonial discourse lies precisely here. The decolonial discourse has value because, through its critique, it helps to define a moment of creation, the moment in which it becomes necessary to heal the wounds of history, to help them heal through the projection of a world that transcends the limits imposed by “global imperial designs” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). The decolonial discourse is worthwhile not because it helps us to assert more and more particular identities but, rather, because it indicates how this profusion of particular identities announces a new concept of humanity.

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Dissecting and Transcending Enduring Fallacies

Elelwani Ramugondo

1 Introduction

There is a need to dissect and transcend enduring fallacies within the canon for a decolonial practice to emerge. Of course, it could be any canon, beyond African studies. This is necessary for as long as we are dealing with knowledge that is produced by and resides within the academy as we understand it, the Western university, founded on colonial conquest (Ajayi 1996; Grosfoguel 2013: 83; Zeleza 2006). Acknowledging the academy's colonial roots and by extension its canon, remarkably, there are African studies scholars who still strive for a decolonial practice to emerge out of this very same, otherwise colonial, university. This desire to salvage the hope and promise of the academy in a globalized and increasingly unequal world, on one hand, appears almost delusional. But on the other hand, it reflects a refusal by the human spirit to be defeated. It is at once a resolve to confront concrete material realities of injustice and a commitment to rethink the perennial question about what it means to be truly human.

As a Black woman scholar in the academy and a current member of the senior management team at a university ranked the highest on the African continent, I firmly locate myself in this ongoing struggle for Africa to make meaning of its histories and current realities in dialogue with the world. This, while forging a future where humanity thrives regardless of geopolitical location or racialized individual or collective identities. My hopes for a world and an academy that ceases to be anti-Black, informed partly by African studies in ongoing engagement with realities on the continent and beyond, is the beginning of knowing/unknowing and decoloniality.

I therefore agree with Macamo in chapter 1 of this volume, that African studies should not be approached and understood as “the production of knowledge about Africa but rather as the careful reflection on the conditions under which knowledge is at all possible” (p. 34). It is in attending to the impossibilities of knowing within the constraints of the Western canon's constitution and description of the continent that new ways of understanding Africa in relation to the rest of the world may emerge.

Although the focus of this chapter is to explore what needs *undoing* in the canon, particularly within African studies, implicitly there is also concurrent doing, being and becoming – building and creating towards a more humanizing praxis. This underscores that, while there is the necessity and a responsibility to *undo* aspects of the canon that seek to dehumanize, there is also a commitment to simultaneously create opportunities for more humanizing ways of doing, knowing and being.

A question to be asked, however, is to what extent can unjust practices and assumptions within the canon be exposed and alternative ways of embodying and performing the academy be found, within the constraints of the Western university? This chapter explores this very question, through conceptual lenses that are informed by five enduring fallacies: the assumption that we can think without the body; a belief in the role of the disciplines in saving or uplifting humanity; interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity as adequate tools through which to decolonize the academy; colonial languages as indispensable instruments in knowledge generation; and, conversely, that simply inserting indigenous languages within the canon is sufficient to bring about decolonization. Macamo also raises the hazards of translation in African studies.

2 Thinking without the Body

A key fallacy that has endured empiricist perspectives in the social sciences, including African studies, is the possibility of thinking without the body. This fallacy rides on the coattails of a long-esteemed goal for the Western-led pursuit of knowledge to yield universally agreed-upon truths. Although René Descartes (1960) is credited with being the father of mind-body dualism, based on his seminal work, *Discourse on the Method* (1637), and his famous dictum, “*Cogito, ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”), Jerry Jennings argues that this dualism in fact emerged as a by-product of Descartes’s original goal of establishing what should count as knowledge, which is an epistemological question (Jennings 1985). The problem starts when Descartes posits that there are two distinct entities (the thinking mind and extended matter or body) to be understood separately before one can understand how they interact. This ontological preconception about the mind and the body existing as separate entities laid the basis for the method Descartes adopted in his phenomenological analysis of rational thought.

When examining his own mental state, free from the influence of real-life sensory experience, imposition by established authorities (particularly the

Church), faith and human habits of poor thinking, Descartes experienced mental existence as acute self-reflection. He then formulated a set of qualities that necessarily defined mental being or existence as non-bodily, episodic and autonomous from external influence, having different modes and able to recognize itself as engaged in various mental acts. For Jennings, it was the method Descartes adopted that ultimately precluded him from understanding thinking as “a continuum of conscious awareness, ranging from the full clarity of understanding to mental experience that is barely aware of itself” (Jennings 1985: 368). In adopting a strict method that required him to experience mental existence as being fully attentive and self-aware, Descartes contradicted his own observation that real-life experiences and feelings, such as pain, hunger and thirst, reminded him that he (the essence of who he *is*) did not only reside within the body, as “a pilot in his ship”... but that he was “intimately connected with it [the body], and that the mixture is so blended that something like a single whole is produced” (Descartes 1960: 134–135).

Notwithstanding criticism, Cartesian dualism continues to pervade the pursuit of knowledge. This immediately takes us into the realm of undoing within the canon. In dispelling the myth that there is little known about how to decolonize the academy, Sandew Hira (2020) argues that articulating the difference between Eurocentric and decolonial epistemology is key to decolonizing universities. At the centre of Eurocentric epistemology is the production of ideas and concepts that enable us to understand reality in a way that requires us never to judge what these mean when confronted with lived experiences. The main argument here is that knowledge, consistent with Descartes’s commitment, is about seeking the truth. If one understands the truth, one can simply then just act on it. Hira’s argument is akin to Lewis Gordon’s explanation of disciplinary decadence:

Failure to appreciate reality sometimes takes the form of recoiling from it. An inward path of disciplinary solitude eventually leads to what I call disciplinary decadence. This is the phenomenon of turning away from living thought, which engages reality and recognises its own limitations, to a deontologised or absolute conception of disciplinary life. The discipline becomes, in solipsistic fashion, the world.

GORDON 2014: 86

By separating the knower and their judgement from an understanding of reality, Eurocentric epistemology allows for the production of lies as objective knowledge. To drive this point home, Hira uses the concept of “discovery” as an example. This notion is strongly embedded in the narrative of science and

Western civilization as the triumph of humanity, even though what “explorers” from Europe called discovery had a counternarrative for indigenous people, who called it “occupation” (Hira, 2020; Trouillot, 1995). The question we then need to ask is whether lived experience is indeed antithetical to the idea of the academy or the university. Is it really all experience or is it some people’s experience?

The idea of a university lies in the creation and formulation of “a form of expertise that often asks us to abandon other ways of knowing, sensing, and expressing information” (Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020: 272). Yet, the lie of discovery and the projection of scientific knowledge as “inherently and necessarily rational, objective, and universal” (Kessi et al. 2020: 274) perpetuates imperial interests. A starting point in exemplifying the inevitability and generative advance of thinking through the body lies in how marginalization often breeds activism. It is precisely because knowers are social beings and knowing is an interdependent process (Dotson 2014) that epistemic oppression becomes intolerable and is sometimes challenged. We see this in how faculty and students who understand Blackness and are rooted in an African and Afro-diasporic experience see, think and act in the world, and begin to embody the idea of African studies and a decolonial orientation to the politics of location, representation and praxis. This begins to reflect an emerging body of thought rooted in ontology through struggle (see Maldonado-Torres and Radebe in chapter 13 of this volume).

Black faculty and students sympathetic to the cause of marginalized populations, which they often come from themselves, however, are in a precarious position within the academy. On one hand they aspire to be part of the educated elite, while on the other they are acutely aware that the Western university is deeply and intimately intertwined with the anti-Black racist system that needs to be dismantled before the university can be of true service to all humanity.

Marchais, Bazuzi and Lameke (2020), and Madsen and Adriansen (2021), for instance, show how intractable hierarchies of racism and Americo-European centrism in research and “capacity building” are in reinforcing exclusionary practices. Ssentongo (2020) illustrates how faculty promotion policies can prejudice Africa-based publication initiatives and choices, and instead incentivize publishing in the West, thus limiting local access to knowledge marketplaces and shrinking the space for epistemic pluralism. Inspired by the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement, which was launched at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015, RMF Oxford sparked debates at universities across the United Kingdom, highlighting colonial iconography and exposing the complex interconnectedness between British colonial history, racial injustice and the role of elite universities in the globalized modern world (Chigudu 2020).

Conversely, Adonis and Silinda (2021) observed that critics of the RMF student activists at UCT often framed them as anti-intellectual, and in so doing, perhaps unwittingly, deployed the narrative of Black bodies being “incapable of identifying, reflecting, articulating and actively fighting against social injustices” (Adonis and Silinda 2021: 82). This fits the usual racist trope of “Black bodies” lacking rational thought and agency and is in contrast with Antonio Gramsci and Edward Said’s insistence that intellectualism, rather than being a function of cognitive processes alone, is in fact an expression of intellectual thought, often in persistent dialogue with a commitment towards equality and justice as material goals for society (Gramsci 1999; Said 1994). This is congruent with Platzky Miller’s (2021) theory of thinking through rupture, in which he draws on Frantz Fanon’s meditations on the Algerian anticolonial revolution (1954–1962), as a paradigmatic rupture, extending this analysis to the RMF and #FeesMustFall (FMF) student-worker movements, and the *primavera secundaria* (student uprising) in Brazil, also in 2015.

The intellectualism that Gramsci (1999) and Said (1994) espoused is perhaps best captured in the following extract from the RMF’s mission statement, under the subheading: Centering Black Pain:

At the root of this struggle is the dehumanisation of black people at UCT. This dehumanisation is a violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges whiteness. Our definition of black includes all racially oppressed people of colour. We adopt this political identity not to disregard the huge differences that exist between us, but precisely to interrogate them, identify their roots in the divide-and-conquer tactics of white supremacy, and act in unity to bring about our collective liberation. It is therefore crucial that this movement flows from the black voices and black pain that have been continuously ignored and silenced.

UCT RHODES Must Fall Mission Statement 2015: 1

For RMF, thinking through rupture starts with disrupting the silence around everyday shared experiences of exclusion and marginalization. Silencing marginalized voices is one of the most effective mechanisms of killing liberatory thought. Auma, Otieno and Piesche (2020) illustrate how marginalization in the academy operates through exclusion and erasure, even in academic programmes and scholarly activities purported to centre Blackness and African scholarship. As a group of activist scholars who organized themselves in 2015, under the banner “Present_Tense Scholars Network: Black Perspectives and Studies Germany”, at the University of Bremen, they had to confront attempts to inaugurate Black studies without the participation of Black scholars. This

was soon followed by another group of activist scholars, of Somali heritage, who initiated the #CadaanStudies debate in response to the launching of the *Somaliland Journal of African Studies* by a group of predominantly European academics.

Even though the struggles of Black academics often converge, the implication of thinking through the body is that as they become relatively secure in their jobs, some are gradually co-opted by the system and begin to abandon the struggle. It is therefore not surprising that student activists have been key agents of political and social change, with conscientized faculty often playing mostly facilitatory or supportive roles.

Thinking through the body, inevitably, brings with it its own trappings. There is a long-standing critique of tokenism in how African studies departments are constituted, and in who is centred in the canon, particularly in the diaspora (Pailey 2016). In this regard, Auma et al. (2020) seek not only to excavate how Black studies and African studies are impacted by the exclusion and marginalization of African people and Black thought but also explore Black and African scholars' own entrapment and complicity as complex and layered realities. These trappings explain the slow change in university institutional culture, held back as it is by privileged stakeholders.

Whereas history has seen a cyclic pattern of student-led uprisings, the current era has seen these protests take on a decidedly feminist turn, challenging anti-Black racism and cis-heteronormative patriarchy, with Black women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and students with disabilities constantly refusing erasure. Okech (2020), for example, argues for feminist pedagogic practices and epistemic communities, which are fluid and activism-oriented, and sees these as a "critical lifeline for surviving and thinking through power relations between knowers and the ecosystem that shapes the construction of knowledge" (Okech 2020: 314).

By drawing from their own everyday experiences, activist scholars dismantle the fallacy that it is possible to theorize meaningfully without the body. In giving themselves permission to speak back to power within the academy, exposing hierarchies that are sustained through white supremacy, cis-heteronormativity and the centring of Eurocentric thought, they begin to lift the proverbial veil from the human face that otherwise projects itself to the world as rationality personified, capable of attaining universal truths. However, in centring their struggles as part of reimagining the academy, activist scholars also reveal that thinking through the body has its own shortcomings. What may appear palatable and ideologically congruent in the world that Black faculty imagines may not necessarily be sufficient for Black students and marginalized communities.

This, then, calls for an intergenerational approach to thinking through the body, allowing for knowers who are differently positioned and located within the academy and beyond to continuously share their reflections as they navigate through unequal power relations and shape the construction of knowledge. Positionality, or situatedness, thus, does not have implications for Blackness only. It applies broadly along the lines that Jennings (1985) and Hira (2020) espouse, challenging the mind-body dichotomy and its ability to produce universal truths. Macamo's Xitsua idiom (see chapter 1), translated to mean that since the grandson burned his belly and his grandmother burned her back the two cannot carry each other, applies here too. Eurocentric epistemology must learn to co-exist with other epistemologies, and vice versa. But to what extent is the Western university really concerned about generating knowledge that serves humanity in all its diversity?

3 Disciplines: A Real or False Promise for Humanity?

Many are attracted to the academy for its promise to serve humanity, with corporate branding for most universities highlighting their ability to deploy their best minds to help resolve societies' intractable problems. As an interdisciplinary field, African studies offers hope that the people of Africa and the African diaspora will have their histories, cultures and politics fairly represented through scholarship and their humanity restored. These efforts can be seen, for instance, in W.E.B. Du Bois's intensive academic efforts to reconstruct African-American history and identity,¹ which continue in other parts of the world where they include the establishment of gender-focused and feminist-led institutes that advance scholarship in and of Africa. These efforts to centre Africa and its various feminist-oriented disciplinary articulations are often accompanied by student activism that demands that relevant departments and curricula be established. Black faculty at the forefront of these developments often face resistance, in the form of denied financial support or deliberate administrative suffocation. Therefore, should the struggles for Africa to have its stories told and its people seen and heard come as a surprise?

The Western university has always preoccupied itself with the classification and hierarchization of knowledge, from the inception of the idea of the university in Europe, anchored on theology, medicine, law and the arts, starting with the University of Bologna in the eleventh century and throughout its

¹ See, for example, Du Bois (1896).

expansion and secularization into the mid- to late nineteenth century.² By the time African studies entered the scene in the 1920s and into the 1960s (Martin 2011; Van der Merwe 1979; Coquery-Vidrovitch 2006),³ academic disciplines had already found a way to organize themselves within the Western university, in ways that satisfied various internal specialized interests and expertise yet were poised to serve corporations and the state in relative terms. The classification and hierarchization of knowledge, however, does not stop at the level of disciplines but extends to human beings. Michel Foucault, in his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1995), observed that in their ability to characterize, classify and specialize, disciplines distribute and hierarchize along a scale and around a norm “individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” (Foucault 1995: 223). Foucault thus argues that academic disciplines serve to sustain the mechanisms of societal control. Key questions that emerge in this regard are: Societal control on whose behalf, by whom and to what end? To address these questions, one needs to dispel the myth that disciplines are grounded on the ideal of humanity for all.

In a world where human rights are celebrated, with countless academic disciplines purporting to advocate for them, what might explain the failure to see them realized for all? To dissect the fallacy that disciplines can save or uplift all of humanity, we must track how humanism came about in the first place. A historical mapping of the founding of academic disciplines reveals that the racist civilizing project, kicked off by The Enlightenment and Humanism, was based on the false premise that being human is a given for all (Kronenberg 2018; Wynter 2003).

Humanism emerged in western Europe during the seventeenth century, was declared the Age of Reason and developed during the eighteenth century. It is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment or, simply, “The Enlightenment”. This was a period of great intellectual and philosophical development marked by a proliferation of ideas centred on the value of human happiness, freedom and progress, secularization and democracy, and the pursuit of

2 See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/University-of-Bologna> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_European_universities.

3 This genealogy of African studies reflects links between the academic project and colonial British, French and North American interests, which over time evolved in response to global political moments such as World War II and the sequential attainment of national independence on the African continent (political decolonization). The study of Africa by Black intellectuals, notably in North America, however, precedes this period, often sparked off outside the formal academy through grassroots activism led by Black students. A key milestone of this is the establishment by Carter G. Woodson of the Association for the Study of Negro (now Afro-American) Life and History.

knowledge based on rationality (Outram 2006; Zafirovski 2010). The publication of Descartes's *Discourse on the Method* is often viewed as the beginning of The Enlightenment. Ironically, this period followed two centuries during which white Christian settlers led the European expansion, spearheaded in part by Christopher Columbus in 1492, who erroneously landed in the Americas, believing it was India. The colonization of the Americas ran parallel with the Atlantic captive human trade between Africa and the Americas, starting in the 1480s, when the Portuguese began shipping captured Africans to the Cape Verde and Madeira islands as enslaved labourers on the sugar plantations. Following Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Britain, France and Belgium also controlled parts of the Atlantic captive human trade, spanning three centuries (sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth). This effectively coincided with the emergence and growth of Humanism during The Enlightenment.

Whereas the colonization and land grab of the Americas was largely driven by the civilizing project centred on Christianizing “the Indians”, whose refusal would lead to them being murdered, the Atlantic captive human trade was primarily driven by Europe, Britain and North America building their economies; laying the foundation for their position as global superpowers today. The religious racism that found expression through “Convert, or I kill you”, for the Indians mirrored the colour racism that helped justify the capture of Africans to serve the Empire. This colour racism became the predecessor of the eugenics movement, which advanced scientific or biological racism – the pseudoscientific belief that empirical evidence exists to support or justify racism and racial inferiority or superiority. Coined during the 1800s by Francis Galton, the term “eugenics”, deriving from Greek for “good birth”, inspired a movement throughout the Progressive Era (towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century) that coincided with the founding of many disciplines within the academy.

If it is indeed the case that the Western university and its disciplines exist primarily to promote societal control and serve colonial interests, to what extent, then, can disciplines in African studies advance Africa's humanity? To respond to this question, first we must contend with the power that universities, by their nature, hold. The authority to bestow qualifications makes the academy uniquely powerful. The ivory tower is indeed the place where knowledge can be edited or excluded entirely (Kessi et al. 2020). The university is ordained with the power to legitimize or delegitimize knowledge, with senior bureaucrats and administrators managing resources in ways that determine which knowledge thrives or dies. It is within these disciplines that academics serve as gatekeepers, determining what shall be taught, or excluded.

Decolonizing, thus, “means interrogating why we read some texts but not others, and truly confronting the knowledge they represent and the knowledge they elide” (Kessi et al. 2020: 272). Furthermore, decolonizing calls on us to reassess what we mean by academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and includes reconfiguring academic accountability and authority, such that academic freedom derives from mutuality and rigorous plurality, leading to epistemic justice and freedom not only for faculty but also those they teach and the communities whose lives intersect with what is constructed as knowledge. This orientation to knowledge production acknowledges the fact that “normal” ways of doing business within the academy “have often been extractive and inequitable, serving and perpetuating previous systems of hierarchy and power” (Kessi et al. 2020: 273).

Acknowledging that the colonial legacy on which academic disciplines are built also implicates African studies, Kessi et al. (2020) point specifically to the origins of area studies as the foundation for disciplines such as anthropology and history, and their complicity in perpetuating dehumanizing practices and the erasure of African agency. Auma et al. (2020) extend this argument by highlighting the roots and general characteristics of early German African studies from 1914 onwards, describing the self-serving nature through which “missionary workers, Africanist explorers, anthropologists, ethnologists, doctors, military personnel and investors liaised to either facilitate or benefit from knowledge of/on the African continent” (Auma et al. 2020: 340).

This colonial heritage continues to contaminate African studies. Disciplines within the Western university often create faculty and students who are devotees of scientific paradigms borrowed from the Empire, rendered unable to question what is sold to them as academic authority. This, even in the face of demonstrable failure and contradictions when these colonial academic templates are applied to contexts with their own unique histories and complexities. Crucially, because of the disciplining function of the Western canon, academics and their students often find themselves serving the Empire, sometimes unwittingly so. Within this context, it takes great effort to find one’s voice as an academic or student, to challenge accepted dogma and to begin to advocate for meaningful change.

Rasool and Harms-Smith in this regard describe how faculty and students of social work at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, embarked on a project of decolonizing their department and curricula, directly after the RMF and FMF protests. Through this process, social work, a discipline and profession avowedly established to serve the most marginalized in society, found itself under scrutiny regarding its ultimate purpose. Patently clear to the authors was the fact that social work education in South Africa continues to struggle “with

its roots in the project of European colonial expansion and ‘White’ nationalism in Apartheid South Africa” (Rasool and Harms-Smith 2021: 58). A crucial aspect of this was that the very formalization of social work as an educational programme was a result of the 1932 report of the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the Poor White Problem, which helped entrench white Afrikaner-Nationalist dominance. Furthermore, social workers who were products of this educational programme often found themselves becoming useful instruments of oppression in the hands of colonial and apartheid authorities, complicit in racist policy implantation and discriminatory welfare services.

Tellingly, the autoethnographic piece by Rasool and Harms-Smith, reflecting on initial attempts to decolonize social work, reveals that these efforts could not generate sufficiently deep, consistent and meaningful change. Their limitations reflect a failure to connect attempts to decolonize disciplines with the relevant activism that is informed by how marginalized communities often respond to injustice in the real world. Reading about social work in South Africa before and after democratic South Africa, without encountering Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa in the 1950s and the first Black social worker to hold such a position in one of the world’s largest hospitals, for instance, perhaps betrays what the authors themselves describe as the role that positionality, centred on racialized identities and relative proximity to power, plays in perpetuating asymmetrical power relationships and coloniality. Here, decolonial efforts, only within disciplines and without attending to what those disciplines are seeking to address in society, end up being about coloniality reinscribing itself (Ramugondo 2018).

Auma et al. (2020) also note how colonial knowledge producers in West German African studies genealogies, such as Carl Meinhof, August Klingenhoben, Johannes Lukas and Ernst Dammann, have been reframed as unproblematic historic figures, “despite their violent legacies as members of the Nazi Party whose attempts to bend their scholarship to fit their racist views, or whose status as intellectual benefactors or beneficiaries of colonialism (or as both) have not been adequately refuted” (Auma et al. 2020: 338). On one hand, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, with her long track record of activism, remains invisibilized within a profession that purportedly existed to serve the marginalized; on the other hand, problematic colonial figures are reinvented as benevolent historical actors through African studies.

Sungusia, Lund and Ngaga (2020) extend these decolonizing debates beyond the usual landscape of humanities and social sciences. They explain how Tanzania’s premier agricultural university, Sokoine University of Agriculture, has perpetuated scientific forestry principles that originate in eighteenth-century central Europe, despite their demonstrated inadequacies

when applied in settings with complex socioecologies. These principles systematically undermine local community agency and Indigenous knowledge systems and suppress students' sense of curiosity and capacity for critical thinking.

Expanding decolonizing discussions to law, Harrington, Deacon and Munyi (2021) describe how national legal instruments, instead of advancing and protecting the interests of communities and their traditional knowledges, often undermine those very interests through dialectics of national sovereignty and development that are premised on neoliberal logics. The authors demonstrate that this is the case in Kenya, drawing on parliamentary, governmental and media archives that curated the country's processes towards the Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Act of 2016. They argue that these processes towards legislation reform, supposedly responding to the threat to traditional knowledge from abroad, put "the nation state at the heart of the legal regime, limiting enforcement to the national territory and giving authorities ultimate power to override community decisions" (Harrington et al. 2021: 95). Notably, in their analysis, they found that what is at the core of development problematization and legislation through a Western lens,

perpetuates an understanding of traditional knowledge as discrete, ownable and tradeable and assumes that there are simple frameworks for identifying and empowering decision makers within communities, both of which are at odds with a more messy and negotiated reality.

HARRINGTON ET AL. 2021: 97

These authors then offer as an example the Maasai, a transboundary and pastoral people who have lived for centuries in the Great Rift Valley that straddles Kenya and Tanzania, and who continue to depend on traditional knowledge for survival. Through them they illustrate how using strategies beyond legal instruments can be effective in addressing problems associated with foreign misappropriation. These strategies include putting pressure on foreign companies to conduct themselves ethically, awareness campaigns centred on moral arguments for redress, and insisting on fair and just licensing agreements. This ability by the Maasai to circumvent state-sponsored systems of redress, to reassert their claims to community ownership of their traditional knowledge, may reflect the long history of exclusion and oppression they have suffered under the Kenyan authorities. It exemplifies how Indigenous communities, when organized as a collective, are capable of fighting for their rights, sometimes without having to rely on the academy or disciplinary tools that operate in society.

Exposing further the limitation of disciplinary tools, particularly legal instruments, in protecting the rights of marginalized populations, including Indigenous communities, Mathew (2021) examined how intellectual property regimes bear the stamp of Eurocentric, patriarchal and capitalist systems. She then presents a manifesto, which aims to liberate knowledge from these oppressive histories and hierarchical structures, locating it instead in the public domain, and inviting those within dominant structures or who enjoy proximity to levers of power to “affirm alternative mediations of intellectual value rooted in feminist and decolonial theories of community, commons and exchange, rather than legalistic and capitalist property regimes that favour corporations and hyperindividualism” (Mathew 2021: 115).

4 The Promise and Limitation of Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity

An extension of the fallacy that disciplines can uplift humanity is that interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity on their own, without attending to what they are responding to, are adequate tools with which to decolonize the academy. Interdisciplinarity involves drawing insights and perspectives from more than one conventional discipline to explore social phenomena (Miller 2017). It emerged as a response to the fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge into an ever-increasing number of disciplines that sometimes overlap, tied to the notion of progress and development but ineffective in addressing the problems of society as a whole (Miller 2017; Ramadier 2004).

Interdisciplinarity may be understood as a continuum, starting with multidisciplinary at one end, which may or may not extend to cross-disciplinary, and transdisciplinarity at the opposite end. Multidisciplinary approaches involve several conventional disciplines that work in parallel towards tackling a common theme or problem. Cross-disciplinary reflects some attempt by conventional disciplines to interact, allowing for some knowledge transfer that enables, to varying degrees, the integration and synthesis of concepts and methods. Transdisciplinarity seeks to transcend the often-limited conceptual lenses and frameworks offered by current disciplines, allowing for new articulations and theorizing possibilities. The promise of interdisciplinarity, or transdisciplinarity, thus, lies in the possibility to transcend conventional disciplines, concepts, methods and conceptual frameworks in tackling societal problems. Gordon (2014) has described transdisciplinarity as a hopeful move towards addressing disciplinary decadence. However, he has also warned that without bringing reality into sharp focus, it too will remain susceptible to decadence.

Kessi et al. (2020) describe African studies as transdisciplinary knowledge production that focuses on Africa or Africans. However, they also observe that the scholarly community in this discipline is often entrapped and entangled in systems of oppression. Partly, this has to do with the extent to which the colonial roots of the Western canon remain entwined with African studies. This entrapment and entanglement, as well as Eurocentric knowledge's inability to engage with reality as is (Hira 2020; Gordon 2014), is where the limitation of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity begins. A pertinent question to ask as well is this: Exactly what reality is African studies as transdisciplinary scholarship responding to? Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo (2021) engage with this teleological question, arguing for the advancement of humanity and all life as the ultimate purpose. But what does this actually mean?

The answer to this question lies in the power to name and theorize reality as experienced and processed by the body. Here, the fall of the first fallacy – the possibility of thinking without the body – becomes relevant again. For Kessi et al. (2020), naming and theorizing around what is witnessed, in advancing humanity, involves identifying epicoloniality as a multisited, multidimensional, hierarchized superstructure, parts of which are mutually reinforcing and adaptive. It also entails diagnosing the racist and sexist core that lies at the centre and sets the tone for unequal relations of power that play out in all social systems and formal institutions. Similar observations have been made by Ramon Grosfoguel in his analysis of racism as essentially systemic (Grosfoguel 2016).

Similarly, Adonis and Silinda (2021) identify race as pivotal in continuing to shape social life in contemporary South Africa. They use critical race theory to interrogate why transformation in South Africa's higher education sector remains elusive – this, in the face of what may be regarded as modest expectations that followed the fall of the apartheid government and the establishment of a newly democratically elected government in 1994. These authors examine how South Africa's historically white universities, in particular, conceal racism, normalize institutional whiteness – often hidden behind claims of neutrality, colour-blindness and meritocracy – and help to perpetuate social inequalities. It is in this context that even I, in my role as a member of the senior management team at a premier historically white university in Africa, can face disciplinary action for calling out institutional racism. Auma et al. point to similar realities for Africans and Black scholars in the diaspora, which “reflect the tense and demoralizing ongoing struggles around knowledge production and distribution, influence, control and unequal power relations” (Auma et al. 2020: 332).

To name and theorize reality as witnessed by a diversity of bodies, particularly those who have historically faced exclusion within disciplines, is

ultimately about the possibility of developing counternarratives to the dominant colonial gaze. This, at the very least, allows for an expansion of what it means to be truly human, beyond the master code of symbolic life/death that arose out of successive narrow descriptive statements in medieval Latin-Christian Europe; statements whose foundation is theocentric and continue to find expression through the rational human/irrational animal dichotomy, as well as biocentric (racial) and natural scarcity (economic) modes (Wynter 2003). This would help to fulfil the promise of interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity in advancing all life.

The next and possibly last question to ask is: Can African studies centre Africa and Africans without attending to language?

5 Colonial Gifts of Twisted Tongues and Scrambled Thoughts

“The problem with repressive regimes is that they like to starve the imagination. They don’t want you to think or imagine the possibilities of a different future.” These words are by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in his conversation with Rohit Inani (Inani 2018), having observed that modern colonialism always involves the imposition of the language of the colonizer onto the colonized. Ngũgĩ described this as a war zone, noting that “the acquisition of the language of the colonizer was based on the death of the languages of the colonized”. The language of the colonizer is glorified just as the language of the colonized is demonized. Similar observations were made by Raphael Lemkin during Hitler’s occupation of Europe – that forbidding people in occupied territories from using their own languages was a key part of the technique of cultural genocide (Lemkin 1944). Ngũgĩ, in his interview with Steve Paulson, further noted that in Africa the language of the colonizer becomes the language of power, “the language of intelligence, of education, of intellectual exploration”, whereas African languages remain “good for speaking, but not good for ideas, not good for politics” (Paulson 2021).

Colonial languages thus become indispensable instruments in knowledge generation, unless sufficiently challenged. For much of the world, the colonized see progress in speaking, writing and being published in English or French, yet these languages continue to sustain the colonial umbilical cord to Africa. The political elite in the former colonies often entrench the hold former colonizers continue to have on the colonized. Mathew (2021) noted how, in India, English was used by the Brahmin class to sustain their supremacy and monopoly over education and scientific inquiry, to the exclusion of the majority population, made up of the Dalits, Indigenous and other caste groups. In doing this, the

Brahmins fulfilled Thomas Babington Macaulay's wish to "do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay 1835).

Macaulay's template for colonization through language has been used successfully in many parts of the African continent. Adonis and Silinda (2021) describe how, in South Africa's institutions of higher education, it is often the case that Black students still prefer English as the language of instruction rather than Afrikaans.⁴ Tellingly, for their part, conservative Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans continue to insist on Afrikaans-supporting language policies at historically white Afrikaans universities, demonstrating their understanding of the ethnonationalist significance that lies in a language.

Language is important for imagination, but it is also an important tool for meaningful interpretation. Marchais, Bazuzi and Lemeke, citing Sartori, show how empirical and even participatory methods conducted in a foreign language "provide erroneous empirical validation to concepts that have limited validity, thereby generating 'conceptual misinformation'" (Marchais et al. 2020: 387). Problems with interpretation are not limited to research but extend to teaching and learning. Sungusia et al. (2020) noted that students of scientific forestry in Tanzania often admitted to rote learning, with the expectation that meaningful learning for understanding would come later. Seeking to capture this unsatisfactory experience of learning, these students came up with a new term in Kiswahili, *simbi*, which refers to reviewing past examination papers to simply pass the test and graduate. For teachers, teaching to the test became the norm.

It turns out, as well, that simply inserting indigenous languages within the canon is insufficient to bring about decolonization. Marchais et al. (2020) found that translating concepts and expressions based on Eurocentric ontologies exacerbated conceptual misinformation. What then is to be done when meaning is lost in translation as part of the colonial gaze, or when minds and bodies colonized by language produce twisted tongues and scrambled thoughts?

Salley (2021) offers a glimpse of what may be possible in decolonizing knowledge and African studies, by analyzing the creative works of Kemang Wa Lehulere. Tellingly, Wa Lehulere insists on using his indigenous language, isiXhosa, in the titles of his artworks and communication about these works. The objects he typically uses in his installations include bones. In Wa Lehulere's

4 Afrikaans is a West Germanic language spoken mostly in South Africa and Namibia. It has its roots in the Dutch Hollandic dialect. See, for example, Kloeke (1950).

own words, “the bones become the motif for a violent confrontation between the myths of the past and the fictions of the present”, and the act of digging “a metaphor for the pathology of history”. Site, therefore, describes not only a location but a process (sight), simultaneously conveying a scene and the act of digging (Salley 2021). Salley shares a striking story, in which Wa Lehlere responds to curator Khwezi Gule:

Did I tell you that after I slaughtered those cows at home, everyone was employed after that? I learned something from this ritual, that the bones of the cow cannot leave the home. For spiritual purposes that is. I don't know what to believe anymore! I must say the more I observe my work it seems that it has been predestined for me and I am not really in control anymore. Or maybe I never was, to begin with.

SALLEY 2021: 30

Doing art thus becomes self-work – at once a duty to remember and an “active engagement with tradition and ritual in daily life” (Salley 2021: 30). Here, perhaps, rests the possibility for colonized bodies and minds to transcend twisted tongues and scrambled thoughts, where words and everyday language come with limitations. Here rests the promise of knowledge that emanates from labour, spirit, tradition and ritual that invokes ancestors. For Salley, “I am not really in control anymore” could “imply a rupture, an utterance, a disruption to coherent understanding, perhaps it is even an ethical whisper or call to arms” (Salley 2021: 38).

6 Conclusion

This chapter explores what needs undoing in the African studies canon as a basis for ongoing decolonial practice. Central to this exploration is dissecting and transcending fallacies within the canon around rational thought, disciplinarity and language. Although the fallacy that we can think without the body can easily be dismantled, thinking through the body, inevitably, brings its own trappings. This, then, calls for an intergenerational approach, allowing for knowers who are differently positioned and located within the academy and beyond to continuously share their reflections as they navigate through unequal power relations and shape the construction of knowledge.

The false promise of disciplines in saving humanity, being a function of their entrapment in the colonial project, in turn urges those within them to unlearn

and resist the urge to perpetuate coloniality, while at the same time curating new ways of seeing, theorizing and knowing that challenge the accepted dogma. This requires that knowledge be liberated from its oppressive histories and hierarchical structures, locating it instead in the public domain and inviting those within dominant structures or who enjoy proximity to levers of power to affirm alternative mediations of intellectual value. Without attending to systemic anti-Black racism, interdisciplinarity, or even transdisciplinarity, only belie the academy's ability to centre Africa and Africans, including those in the diaspora. Centring Africa and Africans without the continent's indigenous languages, in turn, will continue to shrink the possibilities of imagination. In the meantime, while tongues remain twisted and thoughts scrambled in the colonial grip of English and French, what may hold some promise is art as self-work, demonstrated through labour, spirit, tradition and ritual that invokes ancestors.

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Knowledge Matters: Racism and Its Wording as a Tool for Reconfiguring African Studies

Susan Arndt

1 Introduction

Knowledge matters. It matters because it turns matter into meaning. Any time that matter becomes meaning, some aspects are stressed whereas others are silenced. This does not just “happen” but is done – by collectives and individuals situated in intersectional social positions that are moulded by power constellations. Consequently, knowledge displays the history of power and the interests of those thus privileged. Therefore, knowledge is very much about canonizing meaning and the white heteropatriarchal supremacist makers of the knowledge. Yet no matter how strong a canonization and its canon may be, knowledge lives beyond its control, ready to be accessed and lived in. In as much as canon and knowledge are also informed by resistance and respective agencies, canons can be done and undone in a constant mode of power and resistance. Thus, the narrative matters just as much as the lexicon and its mobilization by human actors.

Wording matters, too – because, like knowledge, it turns matter into meaning. This is, however, about favouring some criteria or attributes over others. For example, you know what an apple looks like. In the end, however, we distinguish between green, yellow or red apples, even though most apples are shades of several of these hues – and each Braeburn apple, for instance, looks different. However practical it may be to order a green apple to get the very one that is predominantly green (rather than the one that is, above all, reddish), you have to ignore the fact that the green apple has yellow and reddish spots all over. Indeed, naming is about gazing and describing that gaze at the cost of ignoring other matters of matter. Thus, naming as meaning-making is always also about silencing certain aspects of matter. Once coined, terms stick and yet they are not set in stone. Often, they are adapted to new contexts while being resituated or even left behind. Of course, the terminology one uses is optional. Language is what speakers decide to do with it. Accordingly, words always display a worldview; therefore, using racist words is as political as not using them.

Victor Klemperer's sharp analysis of National Socialism's vocabulary, in *Language of the Third Reich: LTI: Notebook of a Philologist* ([1947] 2006), holds that racist words are like "tiny doses of arsenic. They are swallowed unnoticed, they seem to have no effect, and yet after a while, the poisonous effect is there" (Klemperer [1947] 2006: 30). This poison is also spread by the terminology that has been moulded by racism as the shield and sword against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) and Jews, which I have abbreviated in the following text as BIJPOC.¹ Thus, existing words are neglected so as to canonize the terminology of a racist worldview.

This chapter intends to revisit the history of how colonialism implanted racist terminology into the German language. Defining racism as *white* supremacy, its policy of othering is discussed genealogically. Therefore, I start from history. After all, as the Igbo saying popularized by Chinua Achebe suggests: "For drying one's clothes, you have to go back to where the rain began to beat you" (Achebe 1994). After exploring the implementation of racism through and in language, the chapter aims to show how racism keeps affecting contemporary epistemologies, while focusing on terminology.

Delving into the wording of racism, this chapter also traces some efforts to ban racist wording in the German language. I draw from Black German resistance movements that have been intersecting with the resistance of wording in the US and the UK. As a *white* scholar activist, I have been socialized by many racist terms, allowing them to mould my worldviews and research. It was my journey into decolonizing my own wording that eventually set me off on a path to understand what it means to reconfigure a white German woman as a scholar of African literature. Therefore, the chapter looks at the respective role of the reconfiguration of African studies and its agency in contemporary debates about decolonizing language and subverting whiteness. In conclusion, I explore other pillars of reconfigured African studies and their efforts to undo lexical canons.

2 European Colonialism and the Politics of Othering

The year 1492 has become a symbolic caesura. This was the year in which, after many centuries of conflicting conviviality, Muslims, Christians and Jews in Al-Andalus, on the Iberian Peninsula, started to colonize parts of the globe. Queen Isabella I of Castile won the war against the Nasrid dynasty's Emirate of

1 For an extension of this argument, see Arndt (2021).

Granada. In violation of the peace treaty with Abu Abdallah Muhammad XII, the Spanish Crown decreed the destruction of Muslim libraries and the appropriation of Muslim buildings, and ruled that Muslims should pay high taxes to avoid being expelled along with the Jewish population. The money that was gained was invested into Columbus's voyages and thus began the endeavour for territorial expansion. Colonial spaces were conquered. Other people's lives, lands and resources were taken – violently, not even shying away from genocide. While endowing *whites* with economic and political privileges at the cost of BIJPoC all across the globe, colonialism was eager to sell its own cruelty as a weapon against the alleged “barbarism” of those who lived outside Christianity. To legitimize this action, popes and royals issued bills, decrees and laws that set the tone for colonialist diplomacies and policies, moralities, knowledges and narratives. This ideological lead was entrusted to the pan-European project of racism and its invention of human “races”.

All respective European theories of “race”, however diverse they might have become throughout the centuries, agreed on one single message that was plain as well as fatal: the “white race” that embraced Christianity and was located in Europe and its settler colonies was the only superior one, ever. Thus, racism means *white* supremacy. Pillared on *white* interests as framed by *white* structures of domination, it was designed to define whiteness as normality. Accordingly, colonialism needed racism to claim that the colonized people were different – that is, they were “the Other”.

2.1 *The Politics of Othering*

States, societies and communities have always distinguished themselves from outsiders in order to assert their identity, while also building social orders as hierarchies within societies or states. Power defines a norm by setting it apart from the “Other”. In “Othering”, the suffix “-ing” emphasizes that it does not simply happen but is ongoing in a way that keeps serving those in power and their structures of domination.

Being in need of a formula that proved that Europe and its Christianity were superior, European Christianity claimed to be a “norm/ality” that was antagonistic to the Other situated outside Europe and Christianity. Said's Orientalism and Morrison's Africanism are very clear about this. Said's Orientalism demonstrates how the politics of othering Africa and Asia into the racist “O-container” was first and foremost about the *white* Christian Self in Europe (Said 1979). Morrison argued that Africanism is about white gazes on Black people: “[T]he subject of the dream is the dreamer” (Morrison 1992: 17). In other words, European gazes on Africa and Blackness did not say anything about Black people, yet they are most suggestive of *how* white Christianity needed to invent itself.

Both Orientalism and Africanism share narratives that are neither about the “Orient” nor Africa. Rather, these narratives are merely suggestive of the *white* supremacist subject that narrates the Orient and Africa, in general, and Islam and Blackness in particular. In other words, whiteness has been a most powerful actor and norm-setter in knowledge production in general and in Africanism in particular. The subject of Africanism is whiteness (as Morrison and critical whiteness studies would put it) and the subject of Orientalism is the invention of the “West” (as Said and Walter D. Mignolo’s critical Occidentalism would put it) (Said 1979; Mignolo 2012).

These racist constructions were spread widely by disciplines such as theology and philosophy, natural sciences and anthropology, as well as by art and literature. The English eighteenth-century poet and painter, William Blake, stressed: “[T]he Foundation of Empire is Art and Science. Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is no More. Empire follows Art and Not Vice Versa as Englishmen suppose” (Blake 2008: 636). Likewise, to conquer and rule, colonial officials and missionaries, traders and soldiers, settlers and royals needed knowledge about their respective subjects. This had a paradoxical effect: while local knowledges were identified, learned and taught to enable colonial governance, othering them simultaneously silenced them. An epistemic violence was at work that eventually sought to overrule and overwrite local knowledges.

This attempt to Europeanize the world did not happen in a vacuum. Even though colonized spaces were invented as empty landscapes, they were not – and not even the *tabula rasa* violence could ever undo local histories. Western power defined this encounter and colonialism eventually fragmented local histories, cultures, economies and political structures. But they did not kill them. The epistemologies of the global South were silenced, but not for good.

2.2 *Othering the Body*

The colonial politics of othering relied on “race”. One of its most influential ingredients was to map bodies while imbuing them with all sorts of mental, intellectual and cultural differences (Memmi 1994). This started with “skin colour” and then with the shape of the skull, skeleton and bones, and genes.

Relying on the long-standing claim, dating back to antique theories, that climate affects complexions and mentalities in a congruent way, “skin colour” turned out to be a most fitting ingredient for the making up of “races” and the claim of the superiority of whiteness. After all, Christian colour symbolism taught that the colour white was good, divine and pure, whereas black was evil, devilish and a peril. Through abstraction, this antithetical agenda was written onto human bodies – onto “skin colour”, to be precise. In opposition

to *whiteness*, blackness was linked to sunburned skin and hair and the drying out of the brain, draining its reason and virtue, which was then linked to the culture-versus-nature paradigm. Along the lines of the “great chain of being” (Lovejoy 1964) that put minerals, plants and animals at the bottom of being and the divine at the top, humans were subdivided into those closer to animals and those closer to the divine (and, thus, “culture”). In fact, the racist culture-versus-nature paradigm was all about claiming that the Other lacked full humanity. Suggesting that “the more nature, the less human/inferior” and “the more culture, the more human/superior” was about “culture” being entitled to tame “nature”.

Regarded as uncultivated “nature”, colonized societies were claimed to be “uninhabited” or “uncultivated”, “unshaped”. This very rhetoric allowed the disguise of the genocidal politics of *tabula rasa*, of repeopling the allegedly uninhabited *terra nullius*. By viewing humans as “nature”, they also could be dehumanized, declared as lacking (full) humanity. To imagine colonized people as close to animals and monkeys was a famous colonialist trope (Mudimbe 1988). One of the strongest demonizing allegations was that of cannibalism, serving the claim that those who eat people cannot be human. It was dear to colonialism’s intent to declare that BIJPoC were not entitled to human rights. This fatal rhetoric led straight to the insinuation that colonized people were the “quintessence of evil” and, as such, disrespected humanity. Fanon summarized it in *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) as follows:

Et, de fait, le langage du colon, quand il parle du colonisé, est un langage zoologique. On fait allusion aux mouvements de reptation du jaune, aux émanations de la ville indigène, aux hordes, à la puanteur, au pullulement, au grouillement, aux gesticulations. Le colon, quand il veut bien décrire et trouver le mot juste, se réfère constamment au bestiaire.

FANON 1961: 31

At the other end of dehumanising people by equating them with nature is exoticisation, while drawing the same statement the other way around. The othered people were represented as close to nature, a colonialist representation which denied them the ability to be part of culture.

The binary setting of culture versus nature was also, among other parallels, linked to a juxtaposition of reason and emotion. This had been identified by Aristotle but became the centrepiece of racism especially in the period of The Enlightenment. Its noble ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity were tied to beliefs in the human capacity for progress and reason. Yet these ideals were the privilege of *white men* only. In the ideological circle of racism, colonized

people were assumed to act only intuitively. A statement by the English philosopher David Hume is an example of this argument (Costelloe 2013: 101). He spoke of having met a Jamaican who was educated and added that this was an exception and nothing but intuitive imitation, anyway (Hume [1742] 1987: 123). Rather, only those who represented “culture” were fully capable of reason. In racist words, Europe and its *white* settler colonies were the only ones capable of acting as subjects of history. This way of thinking was described by the American philosopher Arnold Farr (2004), who stated in his book chapter, “Whiteness Visible. Enlightenment Racism and the Structure of Racialized Consciousness”, that, “[A]s bearers of the spirit, *white* people of European origin are fully human and entrusted with the task of humanizing the rest of the world” (Farr 2004: 150). In this light, the rest of the world was close to nature, emotion-driven and therefore incapable of progress and making history.

In his lectures about the history of the world, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (1837), the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, wrote little about Africa because, according to him, it had neither historical change nor social dynamics. He stated: “the way we [that is, “we whites”] see them [Africans] today, is the way they have always been” (Hegel 1837). He added that Africa was not a historical part of the world, since it had no movement and development to show. Hegel understood Africa as a geographical space only, from which he unceremoniously removed the north of the continent (Hegel 1837: 49) and incorporated “into the Asiatic and European world”. As a result of the puzzle he cut to size, he claimed: “[W]hat we actually understand by Africa is that it is history-less and unenclosed, which is still entirely caught up in the natural spirit, and which merely had to be presented here at the threshold of world history”. This inability to progress or, depending on the century, modernize, was similarly attributed to other colonial spaces.

This argument holds that colonized people keep living in the past of Western civilizations. Seen the other way around, Europe is always in the future of the “not-yet” cultures, which remain stuck in the “waiting room of history”, as Dipesh Chakrabarty put it in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Chakrabarty 2009: 8). In “developing” colonial spaces, Europe elevated itself to the normative role model. And whereas Europe was supposedly always developing, all *white* efforts at civilizing those who were allegedly closer to nature than to humanity were held back by their inability to “progress”. Thus constructed, racism’s vicious circle argued that Europe and the *white* colonies were entitled to get paid for the “work of civilisation”, be it with enslaved labour or stolen territories and resources, while the colonists “segregated” themselves from BIJPoC.

To translate this claim into popular knowledge, Europe's colonial powers used dehumanizing practices that were designed to make white people see Africans as not human. Among these practices was to exhibit Africans at marketplaces or in zoos, just as animals were. Given the force of white supremacy, there was next to no resistance to these exhibitions. Africans were gazed at and humiliated. One of the many people thus violated was a woman called Sarah Baartman (though this was not her given name), who was exhibited naked to white gazes and suffered sexual abuse. Her body was displayed even after her untimely death; it was only after apartheid ended in South Africa that she was eventually buried in her homeland.

These major ingredients of racializing BIJPoC – “skin colour”, presenting them as being closer to nature than culture, animalistic, a threat to humanity and stuck in the waiting room of history – informed the colonialist terminology. For one thing, the terminology defined what colonialism meant. But the term “colonialism”, strictly speaking, was a trivializing euphemism. It was not about “farming” or “settlement” (as derived from *colonia* in Latin) or “farming”, “cultivating” or “shaping”, as meant by the Latin *colere*, or about “living”, “building”, “refining” or “cultivating” (after the Latin *cultura*), because all this was already taking place in most parts of the world before the colonizers arrived. Rather, colonialism meant conquering foreign territories and establishing structures of rule and, often, new settlements (Mudimbe 1988: 1).

However, “conquering” was often used synonymously with “discovery”. Yet “discovery” is all about coming across something yet unknown to human beings, and what became Europe's colonies had been known about for centuries. The term “New World”, for example, is too handy as a synonym for “the Americas”. After all, they were only “new” to those who came later, building their futures by destroying those of the alleged Other.

3 The Colonialist Politics of Silencing Knowledges and Languages

Besides being synonymous with colonialism, racism also defined how to speak about colonized peoples, their societies and their environments. A new lexicon was generated, informed by a racist servitude to colonialism. The very claim that colonized people were closer to nature than humanity necessitated the claim that BIJPoC had no (fully fledged) languages. Just as Hume declared that an educated Jamaican could only intuitively imitate knowledge, he also likened the Jamaican's ability to speak to that of a parrot (Hume 2018: 170). Analogously, the German author Ludwig Büchner argued in his book *Kraft und*

Stoff (1885) that black people (he used the “N-word”) most strikingly resemble the ape, and lack any higher spiritual life.

And although the belief was widespread that apes were a lower species of man, who refused to speak only lest they be enslaved, conversely, the denial of language had the effect of locating colonized people as remote from humans (Koller 2009: 18). The Greeks called all those who could not understand Greek, “barbars”, deriving from “barbarophonous”, that is, “brr-bbr-sayer”. German antisemitism, in turn, referred to the Hebrew language as “*mauscheln*”, which translates as “mumble”. Somewhat analogously, the Dutch colonisers of southern Africa imitated various local languages there to create a vernacular, which they called “Hottentot”, which was said to “sound like” horse trappings. At most, Indigenous languages were called dialects as opposed to proper languages. While claiming that BIJPoC had no languages, though, in fact they were prohibited. What was declared to not exist was not allowed to exist. Thus, the languages of the colonized were suppressed and forbidden while the languages of the colonizers were imposed on the colonized in almost all areas of life, even under the threat of violence. Many local languages survived but many died out as a result of genocidal violence.

This is how the field of African studies was born out of colonialism – being, above all, about understanding African languages and societal dynamics, linguistics and anthropology while claiming the absence of history or literature, for example. And even though oral literature became a relevant source for these disciplines, its essence as literature, in the sense of art, was denied. Rather, epics or folktales were summarized in English, French or German, thus erasing the aesthetics and deep knowledge of these narratives.

The fact that local and indigenous languages were dismissed as non-existent in turn meant that, when mapping and naming the conquered worlds, whites systematically had to ignore local terms. In naming people and their environments, livelihoods, religions and political systems, colonialism could not borrow from local languages because doing so would have endangered the racist denial of full humanity, order and reason. Consequently, Europe invented its own terms, and since colonialism and racism were a pan-European endeavour, the terms often travelled from one language to another.

4 Linguistic Othering and Racist Neologisms

Yet Europeans could not simply transfer their own lexicon to colonized societies. Obviously, this would have contradicted the racist rhetoric of othering. Therefore, two major strategies were applied – reconceptualized borrowings

and neologisms – which squeezed diverse cultures or religions into one term. These terms did not care about historically evolved self-understandings. Instead, they blurred diverse places and governances, for example, into over-stretched containers of derogatory generalization – even across continents.

Given terms were borrowed and reconceptualized to express backwardness and/or nature by resituating them. “Bastard” and “mule” are two respective examples. Both share a rootedness in flora and fauna, while claiming the “illegitimacy” of children born to “white” and BIJPoC parentage. “Tribe” (“*Stamm*”) is also a reconceptualized borrowing of a nature-based term that is otherwise used in reference to a long-ago time. The term has been used to designate some types of societies, irrespective of their size and political profile. Reconceptualized borrowing, however, is also practised by attributing a hypernym. For example, German terms such as “*Naturvolk*” or “*Naturreligion*” give “*Volk*” (people) or “*Religion*” the attribute of “nature”, while using the hypernym plainly to refer to non-Christian societies. Christians are, thus, positioned as the “norm/ality”, whereas the attributes are subordinated – even more so since “nature” is the added ingredient.

Completely new terms, or neologisms, also were coined to feature a racist othering. Being racist, they employed and suggested ideas of “race” (often with reference to “skin colour” constructions) and “nature” beyond having culture and reason, with no right for the BIJPoC to own land or be human. Consequently, such neologisms insinuated backwardness and barbarism. One example is the German term “*Häuptling*” (a portmanteau word consisting of an ancient German word for head/head of family and the suffix -ing), which is used to designate, somehow, all types of political leadership, irrespective of the political nature of the society, the number of inhabitants and whether the person referred to is the king/queen, eldest or mayor. “Bushmen”, too, is a neologism designed to situate Africans as “part of nature” and as a threat to culture. It refers to South African hunter-gatherer societies and to the fact that it was difficult to subordinate them to colonial rule.

The German term “*Eingeborene*”, which is somewhat analogous to “*Aborigine*”, suggests a similar viewpoint. Such people may have been born in these places, yet they were regarded as closer to nature and hence not able (that is, not entitled) to own and govern the land of their birth. This idea also informs calling all Indigenous peoples in the Americas “Indian”. Columbus’s error in mistaking the Caribbean as India was detected soon afterwards but the nomenclature persists. “Indigenous”, the I-word, has become a derogative container-word that is very much indebted to colonialist fantasies. Other neologisms echo pillars of race theories by referencing to “skin colour”. Both the n-word and the m-word are vivid examples.

5 The M-word and the N-word

The “m-word”, Moor, goes back to the Greek word “*mauros*” or “*mavro*”, which can be translated as “black”, “blackened” or “charred”, while echoing Greek conceptions of “skin colour” and “norm/ality”. The Greek term for “skin colour”, *andreikelon*, translates verbally as “manlike”. In other words, to look like a Greek man was allegedly the only normal complexion for a human being – somehow at the centre between whiteness and blackness, just as Greece was the world’s geopolitical centre. What is more, “white” was attributed to Greek women and even philosophers.

Mavro, however, was considered the colour of evil, especially of spirits and demons, as well as of death and sorrow. It denoted black things but it also served Greek constructions of “skin colour”. People referred to as *mavro* lived south of Greece or in the southern Roman Empire, respectively – that is, in what is the continent of Africa today. To the ancient Greeks and Romans, the African continent was subdivided into Egypt (whose merits in medicine, mathematics or architecture could not be denied easily) and the rest, namely “Ethiopia”/“Aethiopia”. Etymologically, the latter is rooted in the Greek *aethio* (I burn) and *ops* (face), thus meaning people with “burnt faces”. It fitted the ideological claim of climate theories, that hot climates would burn the skin and dry out the hair and brain (Isaac 2004: 185).

Mavro also has the connotation of being bereft of reason and intelligence while also indicating ugliness, evilness, sin, death and the horrors of “barbarism”. Although to the Greeks people constructed as black were described as “barbarians” who lacked full humanity and could hence be enslaved, the emergence of Christianity set a new tone. It consolidated the antique notion of black while revising whiteness. White was now associated with heavenly innocence, transcendence and ultimate beauty. This colour symbolism was then transferred onto bodies, or “skin colours”, to be more precise.

Whiteness, as the colour of Christianity, was meant to mark what we know today as “modern Europe”, whereas blackness was core to the othering of Europe’s east and south and their respective religions. To this Christian framing, the m-word in the Middle Ages was above all a dissociation from “heathens”, which included Islam and geographically meant the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean but radiated as far as eastern Asia, which was absorbed into the term “India”.

This narrative is represented in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s early thirteenth-century chivalric romance, *Parzival*. Parzival’s father, Gahmuret, had fallen in love with Belacane before he met Herzloyde, Parzival’s mother. While Herzloyde is described as white and godlike, Belacane is constantly referred to

as “black” and “moorish”, terms that mark her as being a Muslim and living in India. Gahmuret’s attachment to Belacane is indicated in the words “*süezer mine*”, or sweet love, which could suggest that space, religion and “skin colour” do not matter. Yet they do – as seen in the immediate disclaimer, which states: “*ungelîch war doch ir zweier hût*” (yet their skin was different). This insistence on difference is heightened when Gahmuret leaves Belacane once she is pregnant, because she is a Muslim. He stresses that this is not due to her blackness. Why would Von Eschenbach mention this at all if not to make the point that, indeed, Islam is intersected with blackness and both are incompatible with Gahmuret’s “whiteness”. This is echoed in Von Eschenbach’s characterization of their child, Feirefiz, as being born “both black and white [...]. His hair and all his skin were particoloured like a magpie” (Von Eschenbach 2004).² Future “race theories” are anticipated here, even more so since Von Eschenbach describes Belacane as kissing the baby’s white patches only, thus conveying that she favours whiteness above her own blackness and that of her son’s.

In due course, after reaching adulthood, Feirefiz strives to travel to and belong to Europe. He meets Parzival, fights and later joins him in seeking and finding the Holy Grail. When he cannot see it, though, he accepts Parzival’s wish that he be baptized, as a result of which he is able to see the Grail and goes on to marry the keeper of the Grail, Repanse de Schoye. But despite his total dedication to integration, to mobilize this as the contemporary terminology for the medieval context, in the end Feirefiz is expelled by Parzival, who tells him to return to where he belongs, meaning where he comes from, the “Orient”.

In the centuries to come, the m-word was used to label non-Christians as Others. In the centuries-long war between the Portuguese and Spanish Christians (supported by other European powers) and Muslim dynasties on the Iberian Peninsula, the m-word became a word weapon for Christian Catholics. According to legend, the Patron Saint of the Spanish crown, Apostle James (the Elder), appeared to the Spanish army under Ramiro I of Asturias in 844 to assist him in the battle against the army of the Emir of Córdoba. Years after the Spanish victory, Saint James became known as Santiago de “Matamoro”. Composed of “*matar*” (“to kill”) and the m-word, the descriptor states that his “virtue” was that he killed Muslims. The fact that Santiago still has a network of Christian pilgrimage routes dedicated to him throughout Europe remains disturbing.

2 “*Wîz und swarzer varwe er schein .../Als ein agelster wart gevar/sîn hâr und ouch sîn vel vil gar*” (I.1 57 17, 27–28, S. 100/101).

The year 1492 ended these wars. The Spanish crown expelled Muslim and Jewish people and invested in Columbus's voyages and the subsequent colonization of the Americas with maritime and cartographical knowledge stolen from the expelled Muslims (see Quintern 2021). Along with the colonizers, however, the m-word also migrated. It came to mean, primarily, Muslim societies and – geographically speaking – mainly North Africa. But it was now also vaguely applied to BIJPoC of all non-European continents.

The m-word persisted but underwent a slight change in meaning without losing its pejorative sense or disappearing completely from the vocabulary for “black” (in the sense of the skin colour construct) or “Africa”. Until the early seventeenth century, the m-word could also mean African people who were not Muslims. Accordingly, we find many examples of merging both words to “Black(a)moor” for Africans. The m-word could also refer to a lighter complexion. In fact, colonized First Nations, who had a lighter complexion, were sometimes referred to by the m-word – again often in linguistic compounds or attributions. As with the ancient Greek subdivision of Europe and Ethiopia, colonialist ideology was eager to claim that Africa had no history and, hence, needed to set it apart from Egypt and Arabic history. This resulted in using the m-word for North Africans (while making the idea of a lighter complexion resonate in the m-word). It was even used pejoratively in European literature, for example, in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The white characters in the play use the term “Moor” only when Othello is not present or when their determined purpose is to insult him.

When Europe began to enslave Africa, Portuguese enslavers used their own word for black stemming from the Latin word “*niger*”, which subsequently travelled into all other European languages as a derogatory label for enslaved Africans. Deeply rooted in the Christian usage of “black”, it served the need to attest to Africans' lack of (full) humanity. The new “n-word” became a descriptor of people from African countries and those of African origin. The more European enslavement penetrated the heart of Africa by systematically deporting West Africans to the Americas, the more the n-word was established to designate enslaved blacks. The pseudoscientific attempts of identifying and naming “human races” played a significant part in making the n-word denominate the invention of an “African race”, now also living in the African diasporas in the Americas and Europe. The n-word was specifically designed to portray blackness and enslavement as supposedly mutually dependent qualities. It has become the symbol of the European enslavement of Africans. Such enslavement, which resulted in the Maafa, led to the deportation of more than 18 million individuals. This, in turn, caused a new change in the meaning of the m-word.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the m-word and the n-word were used more interchangeably again. The m-word continued to denote Asian spaces and especially Islam but was also increasingly used for blacks (from Africa) and stood as a colonial metaphor for the belief that the “Moor” was born to serve. Many historical sculptures remind us of this, but also phrases such as the one from Schiller’s play, *Fiesco’s Conspiracy in Genoa*: “The Moor has done his duty, the Moor can go”. The most decisive difference was that the n-word, unlike the m-word, was mobilized for “race theories” and spread into twentieth-century everyday speech. In fact, between 1930 and 1960, Black resistance, like *négritude* or the Black civil rights movement, tried to abrogate or appropriate the name. This project, however, was shattered by *white* supremacy’s ongoing derogatory usage of the term.

6 The N-word and the M-word and Contemporary German Debates

To this day, the n-word is an insult used to attack Black people. For example, on November 24, 1990, about 60 neo-Nazis stormed a party attended by many Black people in Eberswalde in Germany, shouting that they wanted to “slap a n...”. Many were injured and Mozambican-born Amadeu Antonio was murdered.³ And even though it is widely known that racists use the n-word, many people who claim to not be racist keep insisting on their right to use the term in a non-racist way.

In 2013, the German journalist, Denis Scheck, used his TV-show “Druckfrisch” on Germany’s state-owned channel to fight for keeping the n-word in Astrid Lindgren’s children’s book series *Pippi Longstocking*.⁴ As if it were not absurd enough to try to stop a new translation from adapting a literary text to a contemporary mood (which is what translations always do), Scheck did so by dressing up in the racist tradition of blackface and minstrel shows.

Besides criticism, there was also much support for Scheck’s action throughout Germany. A survey by the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research in 2019 showed that 75% of respondents were against removing the n-word from children’s classics, such as *Pippi Longstocking*.⁵ Most disagreed that the n-word perpetuates racism. Ignoring the structural and systematic design of

3 <https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/migration/ghis:image-129>.

4 <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-fight-in-germany-over-racist-language>.

5 <https://www.ndr.de/kultur/Rassismus-in-Kinderbuechern-Was-duerfen-wir-Kindern-zumuten,literaturmachtkunst04.html>; https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/fileadmin/user_upload/FAZ_Mai2019_Meinungsfreiheit.pdf.

racism, to them racism was an idea and a person saying a word may decide whether a word is racist. This is even more absurd given the fact that Germany largely discourages critical debates about colonialism and racism and their (linguistic) impact on the present.

Nevertheless, the anti-racism activists Ruth and Thomas Hunstock started an initiative in Kassel to outlaw the m-word, which is still a part of German city landscapes. In 2021, their citizens' petition was passed by the city council with a narrow majority. This made Kassel the first German city to recognize that any use of the m-word is racist. Therefore, the word should be outlawed, meaning it should no longer be used (Hermann 2021).⁶ Although some renaming projects and official political pronouncements in Germany largely shy away from using the word, numerous pharmacies, city emblems and streets all over Germany have the m-word in their name. Consequently, many Germans still believe that this word shows respect to black people. This is another error that they celebrate rather than challenge.

One example is the reverence for St Mauritius and his association with healing. Mauritius is said to have commanded the Theban Legion at the end of the third century CE. According to legend, many of the legion were Christians. When the Roman Emperor Maximilian ordered the legion to kill Christians in what is now Switzerland, the soldiers are said to have defied the order and paid for this with their deaths. Mauritius's tomb became a pilgrimage site where the sick are purportedly healed. However, St Mauritius was not a doctor but a martyr. And he is honoured not because he was a black man but because he died for *white* Christians. Seen in this light, this legend in no way contradicts the fact that the m-word continued to be a tool of discrimination in the Middle Ages.

Although many companies have given up the m-word (often rather halfheartedly), it is still used in the names of chocolates and cafés. For example, in 1992, Claus Häring named his restaurant Mohrenkopf.⁷ Facing protests, he insisted that he was being discriminated against. In August 2022, Häring posted on Facebook that he “will not give in” and would stick with “his right” to keep the name of his café. Within just a few days his posts were shared and liked ten thousand times, many of the comments celebrating him as a freedom fighter while expressing hate-speech against those who spoke up against this term. Ever since, Häring has posted racist logos and symbols (disguised as sweets) on a weekly or even daily basis, including black-faced versions of himself.

⁶ <https://www.hna.de/kassel/kassel-aechtet-auch-das-wort-90810272.html>.

⁷ <https://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/neuburg/ingolstadt-caf-mohrenkopf-rassismusdebatte-um-den-namen-eines-ingolstaedter-caf-s-id63722091.html>.

Another example is the Bayreuth carnival society, founded in 1994, which named itself the Bayreuther Mohrenwäscher (washers of the Moors), referring to a local folk tale. In the nineteenth century, citizens of Bayreuth were mobbing a black traveller by dragging him to a nearby river, as if to prove the biblical saying: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin?” (Jeremiah 13:23). It refers to the “guilt” imbibed in blacks or non-Christians that cannot be washed away and on which, consequently, baptism would have no effect – that is, they could never advance to become “fully fledged” Christians (or humans).

7 The If Debate

Despite decolonial and civil rights movements, Germany on the whole is not debating racism to any meaningful degree. Rather, it debates if racism should be debated at all. This goes along with gaslighting. The repetition of single events is negated while each event is stated to be an exception to the rule. Consequently, structural racism is ignored and those who criticize structural racism are accused of dividing society, as if this is not what white supremacist segregation is all about. Not to blame racism for dividing people(s) and rather blaming those who criticize it (and most criticism still mostly comes from BIJPoC) is a white, racist (micro)aggression. It seeks to silence BIJPoC while accusing them of being too “affected” to be able to talk “objectively” about racism.

But since when have whites, who invented and profit from racism, not been affected by it? Racism is not an opinion. It is a mode of supremacy embedded in power and respective structures and discourses, which cannot be altered by just wanting to change it. And the systemic complexity of racism can be countered only by combatting it systemically. To intervene in racism systemically means to address it all at once and all of it in every detail. This also means that dealing with racist language is not an additional “nice-to-have” in the fight against racism but an integral part of antiracist work. Because we are what we say and how we say it, there is agency in fighting racism through language. In as much as speakers act through language, any insistence on holding onto racist terms reinforces the far-too-long history of racism.

Ultimately, it is not words that keep poisoning societies, it is the people who use the words who do so. Conversely, any renunciation of racist terms can intervene in racism. For example, by deciding independently which words to choose or avoid, people shape which words remain active in the language system, which go down the drain or which new words become available. Therefore, every speech and all the words mobilized for it display a perspective on

the world and its people(s). Changes in perspective also shape the language system as a whole. Every critical evaluation of the racist vocabulary shifts traditional perspectives on people and enables new views that are indispensable for a paradigm shift against racism. Seen in this light, a political reflection on how to speak correctly is a step towards social justice that resists the divisive logic of racism.

8 Decolonizing Language as a Pillar of Reconfiguring German-Based African Studies

German-based African studies has contributed to building colonialist castles of poisonous racist words. After having implemented this vocabulary for centuries and with epistemological force, most *white* German scholars of African studies do not mind using racist words. Overcoming this racist legacy and contributing to societal debates by sharing and multiplying the knowledge needed to identify and overcome racist words is core to the project of reconfiguring African studies. In accordance with the active role of inventing, moulding and advancing racist terminology, African studies has to take the lead in uprooting and undoing the terminology society-wide. For this, respective knowledge has to be shared and arguments have to be developed, probed and adjusted while pursuing an ethics that manages to speak about racism without reproducing its terms and respective codes.

In Germany, decolonial literacy can be supported by the terms of resistance generated by local civil rights movements and their global allies. Black and postcolonial studies and such figures as Frantz Fanon (2017), Toni Morrison (2007), Edward Said (1979), Walter Dignolo (2012) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) have identified how othering violates epistemologies of the global South and the respective role of language in this outcome. Racist terms have become a battlefield of decolonial resistance movements⁸ and civil rights movements have offered competencies and strategies for identifying and intervening in racist terminology.

9 Resistant Terminology

Colonialism has generated racist terminologies while ignoring local terminologies. And yet it has never managed to defeat them. They are still out there,

⁸ For more information about such debates, see Arndt (2021, 2022) and Sow (2018).

ready to be mobilized in German and other Western languages. Civil rights movements have reflected and fought racist vocabulary by abrogating it or and appropriating it into new meanings. This is a very complex fight and cannot be won with every racist term. Moreover, such transformations are dynamic and often under construction. But they have generated a reliable vocabulary for racism-coded social positions, while resisting them. Just as Anglo-American debates on racism have been influential on German ones, many resistant German terms are borrowed from English.

One strategy of resistance is to modify racist terms and the attributions they contain, thereby repositioning them. While the reference to “black” in the German n-word was about dehumanization, the German term “Schwarze Deutsche” emphasizes blackness as a social position. The capitalization of the adjective marks the resistance that is needed in surviving and fighting racism. In other cases, the racist word is supplemented by other word components, such as prefixes or suffixes, or complementary adjectives or nouns. The fact that the word “colour” was used to deny people full humanity is critically subverted by prefixing it with “people of”. Another procedure is to defend self-designations against racist appropriations – such as the German term “*Jude*”. Racist words usually throw different spaces or societies into one container by using one term for many. In order to decolonize them, new terminologies should be moulded. One example is Rom*nja or Sinti*zze now used instead of the racist label “gypsies”.

10 Naming Whiteness as a Positionality (of Knowing and Knowledge Production)

Talking about *race* as a social position on “racism as *white* supremacy” needs symmetry to counter racist othering. “Races” were invented by *white* people to claim *whiteness* as the norm/ality of superiority. This has also affected language. There are many German terms that explicitly exclude BIJPoC – for example, the word “*hautfarben*”, which refers to white people’s complexions only. Because of the close interlocking of European intellectual and political history with racism, many terms imply or carry a *white* norm without reflecting it in this way. These include, for example, words like “democracy” and “Germany” or “feminism” and “woman”. What is more, speech acts are shaped by historical power-led codes that have a major impact on who speaks (not) and who is (not) heard accordingly. For example, “whitesrupting” and “whitesplaining” refer to the long-standing tradition of *whites* setting the tone in structures and institutions while, thus, also moulding what is said and how. This includes feeling entitled to be the only ones who are able to understand, explain and name the world while systematically preventing others from doing so.

Whiteness is a powerful position within racism that needs to be named. Yet while the politics of marking people as Black or Muslim or Person of Colour is omnipresent in societies in the global North, in German-speaking contexts you would automatically assume that a person is *white* because it is not explicitly emphasized. Whiteness is reinforced as normality to the extent that it is not even spoken about. Yet not speaking about whiteness reinforces its supremacist notion of being the norm. Thus, to silence *whiteness* is just another manifestation of white supremacy. This even extends to the fact that many *white* people (in Germany and elsewhere) feel uncomfortable when labelled *white*. Indeed, many tend to believe that to position oneself as *white* is a racist attitude. But it is the other way around. To name one's social position means to acknowledge racism's longevity in the now, whereas not naming it is all about a racist asymmetry that reinforces the belief that it is "normal" for Germans to be *white*. To insist that whiteness does not matter for a white person's positionality is what Toni Morrison called "evasion". "Myth of sameness" is bell hooks's (1997: 167–168) respective phrasing. In the end it is all about denying racism and the respective *white* agency and responsibility. Any "we are all equal" or "I do not care that you are black" statement obscures the fact that BIJPoC are discriminated against by *whites* regardless of their individual will – and that whiteness is a historical legacy that cannot simply be discarded. Ignoring whiteness only serves to reinforce it as an "invisible prevailing normality", as psychologist Ursula Wachendorfer puts it (2001: 57).

Thus, to address whiteness means to address racism with a keen awareness of who is responsible, privileged, in power and therefore needed to join the project of decolonization and antiracist transformations. And just as much as whiteness has performed as Africanism and African studies, and African studies has nourished the *white* Africanism, any reconfiguration of African studies needs to address what whiteness has done to the knowledge production. Locating *white* gazes and approaches as milestones of African studies is part of a decolonized research ethics within and beyond the discipline and its reconfiguration. Inasmuch as Africanism and respective constructions of "Africa" have been heavily coined by colonialism's African studies, the discipline needs to take charge of identifying Africanism and the whiteness in African studies, in order to resituate and undo their epistemic violence. Or to put it another way – to study racism's impact on African studies cannot be done without delving into how whiteness has affected the research priorities, objectives, theories and methodologies of *white* scholars of African studies. In forcing African studies to again talk about *white* gazes, this is not about recentring whiteness. It is about decolonizing African studies.

11 And Now? Concluding Considerations

The Igbo proverb quoted at the start of this chapter, that one needs to know where the rain began to beat him (Achebe 1994), suggests that memory is core. Whereas Walter Benjamin's Angel of History (1969: 357) symbolizes that the atrocities of the past paralyse new futures, the Akan knowledge of the inter-connectedness of past, present and futures as displayed by *sankofa* suggests that memory is about canonization. Remembering is about not forgetting just as much as about undoing the knowledge so as to delve into futures, undeterred. In other words, what will be depends on knowing one's roots and routes of becoming – and on knowing how to abrogate the past on behalf of more even futures. In order to shape the future, the past must be known to be undone.

11.1 *Remembering*

African studies has contributed to colonialism and racism, enabling these phenomena to be actors and norm-setters of knowledge production about Africa and blackness. Until the late twentieth century, African studies was controlled primarily by a white-dominated think tank indebted to the histories of Western humanism and (in)humanities. Thus framed, African studies built racism, which also means that racism has affected the research priorities, objectives, theories, methodologies and toxic terminologies of white scholars of African studies. This knowledge production has moulded white Western narratives about African and anti-Black racism, right into the present. White Western epistemologies and their “gentrification of African studies has insidiously altered the revolutionary potential and goals of knowledge's decolonization” (Haytem 2018). To name this, to remember this, is crucial to the essential reconfiguration of African studies. This article argues that decolonizing African studies means to name and stop the agency of whiteness in knowledge production as well as its pool of racist terms in African studies.

11.2 *Towards New Futures*

The project of reconfiguring African studies should, of course, be much broader and richer than leaving white (epistemic) supremacy behind. It should be complemented by a wider agenda of “moving towards”. Western epistemologies have prevailed, silencing and erasing othered epistemologies, and yet the European humanities have never encountered any vacuum – neither during colonialism nor after. Europe's project to “Europeanize the world” (Reinhard 1994) was aggressively loud but never reached its eugenic goals. Rather, the history of colonialism is also a history of Western epistemologies being resisted

and revised. The epistemologies that were seemingly silenced by the West have always been loud and clear to the global South. The presence of these epistemologies needs to be uplifted by structures and institutions, universities and libraries, canons and discourses.

In doing so, African studies needs to be cross-regionalized and deregionalized, redisciplined and cross-disciplined. For the de-/cross-regionalization, the container labelled “Africa” needs to be redesigned. At its most conventional, African studies is an umbrella term for the study of societal, economic, cultural and religious processes throughout history in today’s 54 African countries. All these countries are diverse within and diversely related to each other and other parts of the world. Examples include Pacific East African Indians, Kenyan-Chinese relations and West Africa’s outreach into the Americas. African diasporas are another global African presence. For example, the Somali diaspora has spread from its origin country to create a global network, while reaching out rhizomatically to other African diasporas, like the Kenyan one. The Somali diaspora also, of course, affects Kenya itself. Diasporas complicate the idea of the nation-state, offer supranational structures of identity and belonging and affect societal, economic, political, cultural and religious structures in African nation-states just as much as elsewhere. The reconfiguration of African studies will be able to focus on specific places on the continent while rethinking them in context with other places within and beyond Africa.

Yet becoming more global is just one way of thinking outside the continent-container logic. This wider gaze needs to be complemented by a narrower focus on the continent. Nigerian studies, for example, could include Hausa studies, Yoruba studies, Igbo studies or Anglophone Nigerian studies. In thus deregionalizing Africa, given entanglements should become part and parcel of cross-regionalizations.

The same applies to African studies being redisciplined and cross-disciplined. To date, African studies follows an area-studies logic as a container for studying the global South. There is no equivalent for European studies. Of course, European cultures are studied. Yet this is done according to disciplines that stress a methodology, like history or sociology or literary studies. Here, the core approaches and methods inform the discipline’s name. Many of these disciplines pursue a focus on the global North without even bothering to mark this “unwritten normality”. African studies, though, takes a region as a discipline, while hosting history, sociology or literary studies approaches.

This is not a plea to end African studies. The academic silencing of Africa cannot be undone by dissolving African studies. Nevertheless, societal and cultural dynamics in African societies and countries should become a “normal” part of disciplines such as sociology and history, albeit using the expertise

developed by African studies. Dialogues and collaborations between area studies and so-called systematic disciplines should be intensified. This could have the effect that African-based case studies would also be covered by conventional disciplines, in dialogue with epistemologies from African societies as systematized and discussed by reconfigured African studies. Thus, reconfigured African studies would revise the old notion of area studies, while transforming it into redisciplined and cross-disciplined fields such as African history, African law or African literatures (again, possibly deregionalized into smaller societal or linguistic units).

The reconfiguration of African studies is a project that will not only redirect given disciplinary epistemologies but also host a revolutionary transformation of knowledge-making. In the conversation between epistemologies it would offer space to provincialize Kant while giving new emphasis to the work of Amo and Fanon. What is more, intersectionality suggests centring African feminist and womanist knowledge production as a reliable host of innovative future-making against injustices and for equality in freedom. To me as a *white* scholar it means to provincialize my privileges in terms of knowledge production. To ask myself, what do I know and why, is a call to look for knowledge that I have ignored. But to provincialize my privileges is also about investing in them to eventually decolonize them and sow them into the given complexity of rhizomatic knowing that keeps growing by overcoming the canons of racism.

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PART 2

Institutional Challenges and Transformations



The Ongoing Tune of the African Genius at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana

Edwin Asa Adjei, Samuel Ntewusu and Akosua Adomako Ampofo

1 Introduction

In 1961, the Institute of African Studies (IAS) was set up by Ghana's first president, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, as a semi-autonomous, multi- and interdisciplinary research institute at the University of Ghana. The British Professor T.L. Hodgkin was appointed the institute's first director in 1962, Professor J.H.K. Nketia was deputy director and A.S.Y. Andoh was its administrative secretary. At that time, the institute had 16 teaching staff in four sections: African Music and Arts, African Historical Studies, African Languages and The Study of African Modern States. This number increased to 23 in the 1964/1965 academic year.¹ The main academic programme was a Master of Arts degree; the first batch of students – nine men and two women – were admitted in 1962. In 1965, Professor Nketia was appointed the first African and Ghanaian director and served until 1974.

The appointment of Nketia was followed in the 1967/1968 academic year by the expansion of the institute's teaching mandate to teach courses at undergraduate level, which were made compulsory in line with the institute's vision to ensure that all students were introduced to Africa, as it were. The goal was to familiarize students with the past and present social and economic histories of Africa and the diaspora, the languages and art forms, and past and contemporary challenges and accomplishments. The course was presented to first-year students, who could graduate from the university only if they had passed the examination in their chosen discipline in African studies. The main courses on offer at the onset included history, economic organization, sociology, and music. Further flagship contributions and projects of directors are discussed later in this chapter. Currently, the institute offers two core courses in the first year at master's level and 13 elective courses per semester that students can choose from based on their interests. At PhD level, two core courses are made

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the first 16 faculty members.

available in the first year and 10 elective courses that students choose from based on their areas of specialization.

Over the years, the IAS has carried out its mandate, taken from the “African Genius” speech that Nkrumah made at the institute’s formal opening in 1963 – to conduct research into the history, culture and arts of Africa and its diaspora. The IAS has achieved this mission through its research agendas and practices; dissemination through teaching, scholarly and public engagements; national, regional and global policy engagements; and preservation of knowledge through documentation in various forms in the institute’s archives, library and museum. This chapter provides a description of, and insights into, the journey and activities of the IAS. We do not seek here to enter into debates with others who may have been on similar journeys, or to reflect on the synergies or conversations going on globally and in the African world at the time. That would be beyond the scope of this chapter and has been dealt with well by many others (for example Gikandi 2000; Gyamfi 2021; July 1987; Quist-Adade and Chiang 2012; Wauthier 1967). We simply seek to show how the African Genius speech delivered by Kwame Nkrumah guided the research, teaching and dissemination of information of the work of IAS significantly, and propose it as an important decolonial teaching manifesto.

In the rest of this chapter, we discuss in further detail the institute’s seminal role at the University of Ghana, on the continent and globally, since its founding. Belonging to different “generations”, we – Edwin Adjei, a past student and fellow since 2020, Samuel Ntewusu, a past student and the institute’s director since 2022, and Akosua Adomako Ampofo, a fellow since 1989 and a past director – have tried to weave together what we consider to be the main ingredients of the IAS story, especially as it relates to the “African genius” and its relevance to current debates, especially on decolonization. We come from and are located in different academic disciplines and backgrounds: language and literature (Adjei), history (Ntewusu) and gender/social sciences (Adomako Ampofo).² This eclectic mix, a reflection of the inter- and multidisciplinary work of the IAS, informs our composite approach to the subject matter of this chapter.

The IAS tune was composed in a particular era, when the Pan-Africanist spirit was very much alive in the postcolonial academy, in places like the University of Ghana and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana; universities in Nigeria, such as Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ahmadu Bello University, the University of Lagos and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Makerere University in Uganda; Fourah Bay College

² Adomako Ampofo also has a background in architecture and development planning.

in Sierra Leone; Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar in Senegal; and Cairo University in Egypt, to name a few.

2 From Pan-African Beginnings: Research in and on Africa

Two years after the establishment of the Institute of African Studies, in 1961, Kwame Nkrumah formally opened it, on October 25, 1963. The speech he gave on that occasion reflected an unambiguous decolonial agenda for the work of the institute, which he defined as follows:

When I speak of the African genius, I mean something different from Negritude, something not apologetic, but dynamic. Negritude consists in a mere literary affectation and style which piles up word upon word and image upon image with occasional reference to Africa and things African. I do not mean a vague brotherhood based on a criterion of colour, or on the idea that Africans have no reasoning but only a sensitivity. By the African genius I mean something positive, our socialist conception of society, the efficiency and validity of our traditional state-craft, our highly developed code of morals, our hospitality and our purposeful energy.

NKRUMAH 1963: 5

There were three key aspects of the speech. Firstly, Nkrumah recognized and highlighted the need for a reinterpretation and a new assessment of the factors that make up the African past. He also stressed the importance of providing analyses that depart from some of the modes of interpretation of Africa's history by scholars in Western universities and research centres. Secondly, he referred to the kind of education that was required for this African genius. Thirdly, he made recommendations for the ways in which the work of African scholars should be disseminated. Below is an excerpt from the speech, which underscores Nkrumah's vision for a decolonial approach to the institute's work and which became the institute's epistemological and methodological foundations:

What sort of Institute of African Studies does Ghana want and need to have? In what ways can Ghana make its own specific contribution to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa through past history and through contemporary problems? ... One essential function of this institute must surely be to study the history, culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in

new African-centred ways – in entire freedom from the propositions and presuppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those Professors and Lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment. By the work of this institute, we must re-assess and assert the glories and achievements of our African past and inspire our generation, and succeeding generations, with a vision of a better future.

NKRUMAH 1963: 3

Soon after the establishment of the IAS, the diversity of disciplines of its fellows, from the departments of Political Science, Philosophy and Economics, the School of Languages, the then Institute of Languages and the Ghana Bureau of Languages, designed and led several research projects that sought to centre the African, and especially Ghanaian, experience. One of the earliest works the institute concentrated on was the recording of Asante stool histories and the collection of traditional court records. The data collected also included historical accounts on migratory and settlement patterns, political leadership, wars, religions, economic factors, rites-of-passage practices, such as funerals and marriages, and politicoreligious practices, such as oaths.³

Similar research projects were later pursued in other Akan-speaking areas, such as among the peoples of Fanti and Brong states, where histories were collected through interviews with the traditional leaders – that is, the chiefs and elders of the town or division. Classified lists of these oral histories and court records appeared in the institute's *Research Review*, which at that time was published three times a year (Goody and Arhin 1965: 1).⁴ For example, the Ashanti⁵ Research Project was launched in 1963 to promote research in the various disciplines to understand the social, cultural and political life within the Ashanti sphere of influence as a result of the political power the kingdom had wielded in the past and continued to wield. Research projects also took place in the northern part of the country. Through the Oral Traditions of Gonja Project and the Kete Krachi Traditions, the IAS was able to provide comprehensive information on the Guans in the Middle Belt zone of Ghana, and the Gonja and Nawuri in Northern Ghana (Kumah 1969).

3 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1 (n.d), Report on fieldwork by research fellows.

4 In 2011, the *Research Review* was rebranded the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* (CJAS). It comes out twice a year and is now open access.

5 The colonial spelling has been Ashanti. As with many indigenous words, the British and other Europeans created their own spelling of indigenous names and words. In the rest of this paper, when not alluding to a reference, we use the preferred spelling, Asante.

In the years immediately after independence, there is a clear link to the content of the African Genius speech regarding the essential function of the institute, as far as the study of the history, culture and institutions of Ghana is concerned. In most cases, such studies were conscious of the need to be “carried out in entire freedom from the propositions and the presuppositions of the colonial epoch” and avoid or evade the very distortions that Kwame Nkrumah spoke about. Nkrumah was insistent that the work of recovery was required. He recognized that the spaces where African studies were being carried were not necessarily interested in projecting the truth about African peoples. In some cases, these centres were set up to serve the interests of their respective countries (see Adomako Ampofo 2016). Nkrumah had noted:

We have to recognize frankly that African studies, in the form in which they have been developed in the universities and centres of learning in the West, have been largely influenced by the concepts of old style “colonial studies”, and still to some extent remain under the shadow of colonial ideologies and mentality. Until recently, the study of African history was regarded as a minor and marginal theme within the framework of imperial history. The study of African social institutions and cultures was subordinated in varying degrees to the effort to maintain the apparatus of colonial power. In British institutes of higher learning, for example, there was a tendency to look to social anthropologists to provide the kind of knowledge that would help to support the particular brand of colonial policy known as indirect rule. The study of African languages was closely related to the practical objectives of the European missionary and the administrator. African music, dancing and sculpture were labelled “primitive art”. They were studied in such a way as to reinforce the picture of African society as something grotesque, as a curious, mysterious human backwater, which helped to retard social progress in Africa and to prolong colonial domination over its peoples. African economic problems, organization, labour, immigration, agriculture, communications, industrial development – were generally viewed from the standpoint of the European interest in the exploitation of African resources, just as African politics were studied in the context of the European interest in the management or manipulation of African affairs.

NKRUMAH 1963: 2–3

Over the years, the IAS actively worked to present the “African story” from the “African perspective”. Some of these early studies included the history of the Brew family (as a case study in the development of a coastal bourgeoisie),

the history of the Tijani order in West Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Mamprusi history and institutions. It is important to point out also that Nkrumah's charge was that the research should not be limited to Ghana:

But you should not stop here. Your work must also include a study of the origins and culture of peoples of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean, and you should seek to maintain close relations with their scholars so that there may be cross fertilization between Africa and those who have their roots in the African past.

NKRUMAH 1963: 4-5

According to the IAS 1963/64 annual report, research fellows did pay attention to other parts of Africa and the diaspora, such as studying the economic roots of apartheid in South Africa and the concepts of international law in precolonial Africa. In part as a result of the influence of the Arabic and Hausa languages and cultures on Ghana's social and cultural life, the IAS tried to collect a substantial body of Arabic and Hausa documents, which were duly acknowledged by Nkrumah in his speech. The Arabic and Hausa collections in the institute, as he pointed out, revealed a tradition of scholarship in Ghana and other parts of Africa regarding the history of Africa, about which little was known at the time. The documents contain information on themes that include Al-Tarik (history), Al-Tawid (theology), Al-Tasawuf (mysticism), Al-Figh (jurisprudence), Al-Adab Al-Arabi (Arabic literature), Ilm-al-Falak (astrology), Al-Saydala (pharmacopoeia) and Ar-Rasa'il As-siyasiyya (political treaties). The Arabic manuscripts were assembled in the 1950s and 1960s and amount to approximately 500 manuscripts. Ninety per cent of the documents are in Arabic, with the rest in African languages, especially Hausa, Fulfulde and Mamprule (Opoku-Boateng et al. 2020: 379).

Soon after its establishment, the IAS coordinated the creation of the Ghana Institute of Linguistics Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) in 1962. This followed from an agreement between the University of Ghana and the Summer Institute of Linguistics International (SIL) to set up an institute to complement the state's efforts to develop the languages in the country (GILLBT 2022: 6). Apart from the IAS, the following units at the University of Ghana were also involved: the Linguistics Department; the Language Centre; and the Institute of Adult Education, renamed the Institute of Continuing and Distance Education (ICDE) in 2010 in recognition of its expanded scope. By 2022, through its collaboration with the University of Ghana, especially the IAS, GILLBT had contributed to the development of 40 hitherto undeveloped languages in the

country and provided the University of Ghana with phonologies, grammars, dictionaries and other anthropological material in these languages. Indeed, GILLBT, through its intellectual and academic work, is the largest contributor to the documentation and analyses of the minority languages of Ghana (Adomako Ampofo 2022).

We should note that Nkrumah acknowledged the work of some of the other pioneers of African-centred work at IAS and beyond.

I also regard as important the work which you are doing in the collection of stool histories and other forms of oral tradition – of poetry and African literature in all its forms of which one admirable expression is Professor Nketia's recently published book entitled "Folk Songs of Ghana", and Kofi Antubam's latest book on African culture. Other Ghanaians have done equally admirable work in this field. I may mention here Ephraim Amu whose work has created and established a Ghanaian style of music and revived an appreciation for it. Our old friend J. B. Danquah, has also produced studies of Akan culture and institutions.

NKRUMAH 1963: 4–5

In the 1970s, the assistance of the institute was sought by the Eastern African Centre for Research on Oral Traditions and African Languages in Zanzibar, Tanzania, to provide experts and ideas to enable the collection of oral traditions, including languages. Experts recognized that the systematic study of oral traditions and the promotion of African national languages as vehicles of culture and instruments of education could not be properly effected without an assessment of the work that had already been done. The document that established the centre in the 1970s notes: "To date very little evaluation is known to have been done on the Eastern African region whose researchers and related institutions have little opportunity if any at all to work together because of the almost complete absence of any meaningful exchange of experience".⁶ The centre adopted the IAS model and designed a project that sought to create a bibliography and documentation project aimed at collecting as much information as possible and making this available to researchers. The implementation of the project was also meant to lead to a broader exchange of information among researchers and contribute to a coordinated system of cooperation, which was evident in the early years.

6 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70, IAS E. 25, Institute of Intercultural Research 1974–1975.

Based on its extensive research in the 1970s, the IAS became part of the Institute of Intercultural Research, with its headquarters in Heidelberg, Switzerland. A multidisciplinary group of scholars was composed, led by Professor Nketia, to implement a project titled “The Traditions of Black Africa: Their Tasks and Possibilities”. The IAS was responsible for handling collaborations between the Institute of Intercultural Research and Ghanaian universities, academics and institutions. As part of the protocols regulating research and colloquia, funding was sought from non-public funds to avoid any influence from specific political, ideological, confessional or racist ideas in furthering the work of the Institute of Intercultural Research. Therefore, the sole source of funding was the Intercultural Cooperation, an international association of foundations with its centre in Switzerland and with donors, mostly free thinkers and philanthropists, from West Germany, Swiss Citizens, Japan, Hong Kong, India, the Arab World, France, the US and Canada. For several years research covered diverse topics, such as the meaning of sickness from different cultural perspectives or the understanding of time and history from an intercultural framework.⁷

We concede that the Western funders could have had a sectarian influence on the work but can find no concrete evidence of this. It does signpost, however, the ever-increasing reliance on foreign grants as state funding for higher education and research declined. It is important to add that the collaboration with the Institute of Intercultural Research was meant to provide support in the development of higher education and research capacity in Ghana and Africa, at a time when the continent was facing a severe shortage of faculty members and resources and a general brain drain due to economic crises. The contribution of the collaboration to the decolonial debate lies in the fact that an important network was developed, which created synergies in capacity by strengthening and shaping intercultural dialogue.

3 Teaching: Developing Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes

Although the institute’s mandate includes the teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students, it is principally a research institute. But the need to incorporate teaching as part of IAS core work emanates from the philosophy that governed its establishment, namely, that an important area of dissemination and one way of making the work of decolonizing sustainable across

7 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70, IAS. E. 25, Institute of Intercultural Research 1974–1975.

generations is through teaching. Of course, in any university, teaching and research have a symbiotic relationship. However, this was found to be even more critical in an environment where publications and textbooks were being written from a Eurocentric perspective. Nkrumah was clear that education must be about more than the collection of knowledge:

This institute must help to foster in our university and other educational institutions the kind of education which will produce devoted men and women with imagination and ideas, who, by their life and actions, can inspire our people to look forward to a great future. Our aim must be to create a society that is not static but dynamic, a society in which equal opportunities are assured for all. Let us remember that as the aims and needs of our society change, so our educational institutions must be adjusted and adapted to reflect this change. We must regard education as the “gateway to the enchanted cities of the mind” and not only as a means to personal economic security and social privilege. Indeed, education consists not only in the sum of what a man knows, or the skill with which he can put this to his own advantage. In my view, a man’s education must also be measured in terms of the soundness of his judgment of people and things, and in his power to understand and appreciate the needs of his fellow men, and to be of service to them. The educated man should be so sensitive to the conditions around him that he makes it his chief endeavour to improve those conditions for the good of all.

As you know, we have been doing a great deal to make education available to all. It is equally important that education should seek the welfare of the people and recognize our attempts to solve our economic, cultural, technological and scientific problems. In this connection, it will be desirable for your masters degree courses to be designed with such problems in mind.

NKRUMAH 1963: 6

In a report on the 1962 UNESCO Conference on “University Development in Africa”, the conclusions and recommendations of the University of Ghana representatives resonate with Nkrumah’s African Genius speech: “The need for the use of African material in the teaching of all subjects and at all levels of students, and the introduction of carefully organized courses in African studies to be taken by all students should be recognized”.⁸ Students who enrol

⁸ https://www.act.uni-freiburg.de/en/what-we-are-doing-1/act-science-communications/act-in-video-1?set_language=en.

at the University of Ghana must pass the first-year university examinations, now the University of Ghana Required Course in African Studies, otherwise they cannot graduate. The purpose is to enable students graduating from the University of Ghana to acquire knowledge in aspects of Africa's history, culture, philosophy, science, language and literature, so that they are introduced to a way of seeing the world from a perspective relevant to their realities, early in their career as university students (see Appendix 2 for a list of the courses taught in the 1960s and currently).

The postgraduate training provides masters and PhD students the opportunity to be introduced to various aspects of Africa's history and culture; to explore and interrogate Africa's contemporary social, political, economic and cultural systems, including its languages and literature; and to apply complex analytical and methodological skills to issues related to Africa. From the onset, the courses have sought to challenge students to understand the African condition and consider practical ways to respond to its experiences in their personal and professional lives. In Nkrumah's speech, he stressed this kind of Afrocentric form of education, which for him was important in developing men and women with imagination, ideas and the courage to reflect on the dynamic changes that Africa and African societies were undergoing, and to contribute meaningful solutions for the wellbeing of the peoples of global Africa.

As far as the study and teaching of Africa was concerned, the African genius called for a pan-African approach. This approach was implemented at the initial stage through the establishment of courses in African languages, African history, African sociology, politics and economics, African arts and literature and West African music.⁹ Over the years, many other courses have been offered and new courses have been introduced based on the availability of faculty with expertise in diverse areas.¹⁰ It is important to point out that one of the

9 Specific courses included Arabic, Hausa, Twi-Fante, Ewe, Ga-Adangme and Dagbani; Introduction to African linguistics; Ghana history to AD 1900; History of Western and Central Sudan to AD 1900; Economic history of West Africa; Islamic history with special reference to Western Islam – Egypt, Magrib, Andalus; Historical methods; West African religion and philosophies; West African political systems – Precolonial period; Comparative African government; Problems of economic development in West Africa; Urbanisation and social change in 20th century Africa; West African social structures; Introduction to West African music; Introduction to West African sculpture; African literature with special reference to literature in French or African languages.

10 New courses introduced since the 1990s include Culture and gender in African societies; Gender and development in Africa; Methodologies for constructing art history in African societies; Rural development; Environment and modernity in Africa; Government and

documents added to the readings for the African studies courses by the acting director, Dr A.K. Quarcoo, during his tenure, was the African Genius speech. Over the years, this text fell below the radar but was reintroduced by the director, Akosua Adomako Ampofo in 2013, when the IAS celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The first graduate students were a truly international mix, coming from countries as diverse as Poland, the US, Nigeria and Japan (Nkrumah, 1963).¹¹

The IAS was always intended to operate in community with other institutes with a pan-African and decolonial agenda. Indeed, a few years after its establishment, several universities within Africa relied on the IAS to provide blueprints for the establishment of similar institutes in their universities. Evidence of this is contained in several articles of correspondence between the institute and universities in Africa. In 1978, the director of the Educational Research and Curriculum Development Unit of the University of Zambia wrote to the director of the IAS, Professor Nketia, as follows:

There is no doubt at all to my mind that your institute is a prominent one in the development of African Studies in African Universities. My reason for writing to you is therefore in connection with this important topic of African studies. Our Unit is currently engaged in doing some research on the status of African studies in the University of Zambia. We believe that we cannot do justice to this issue in isolation. As an African University, we have a duty, a responsibility and indeed an obligation to consider the state of affairs with regards to particular subject areas within the context and with reference to the experiences of other African Universities. We therefore think we could benefit a great deal from your experiences. ... We would be very grateful for any light thrown on these and any other questions. We would also be grateful if you sent us examples of the programmes you offer in your institute.¹²

In a letter dated June 9, 1980, W.J. Kambe, vice principal of the University of Zimbabwe, wrote: "We are looking into the possibility of establishing a Centre of African Studies in this University. I should be grateful if you could be kind enough to let me have as soon as you can any information about the running

politics in early post independent Africa; Colonial rule and African responses; The slave trade and Africa; and the history of Pan Africanism, among others.

11 See Appendix 3 for a complete list of current masters and PhD courses.

12 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70; IAS, Zimbabwe, 1980.

of the Centre which you think might be useful".¹³ In response, the director of the IAS stated:

We are happy to note that you have found it necessary to establish an Institute of African Studies in your University and I wish to send you some information about our institute. I am obliging by sending you the selected literature listed on the attached. I should, however, suggest that it would be good if you could consider sending someone interested in the field to observe on-the-spot what we have discussed in cold print. Alternatively, if you so desire you might invite us to send a representative from here to discuss the papers with you on-the-spot with you at your university. I have a feeling such strategy would yield fruitful dividend. Face to face discussions and explanations will bring out the whole concept of African studies ... Long live Africa.¹⁴

The establishment of the institute in Zambia had no political personalities involved. In contrast, its establishment in Zimbabwe received backing from presidents Hilla Liman of Ghana and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ghana was also involved in facilitating the establishment of the Institute in Zimbabwe.

However, attempts at establishing an IAS in Zimbabwe were not followed through. In part, this was because following the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe, the country's educational and ideological goals shifted a little away from that of Ghana. At the time of engagement with the institute, the relationship was based principally on political and diplomatic solidarity and not necessarily educational cooperation in the technical sense. Also, the government at that time did not give support to African studies because the regime had become disenchanted with academics, who were considered a part of Zimbabwean society that, largely, had been less than enthusiastic about national liberation (Satyamurthy 1982).

The University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, requested three ethnomusicologists for immediate employment in their music department. Even though the institute was not able to assist with this request because of a shortage of qualified personnel in that field, it nonetheless was able to help establish a research centre.

By the 1980s the IAS at the University of Ghana had responded to several requests from universities based in Africa to provide blueprints for the

13 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70; IAS, Zimbabwe, 1980.

14 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70; IAS, Zimbabwe, 1980.

establishment of institutes and centres, offered responses to the nature of African studies or provided faculty to fill positions. In 2014, Director Adomako Ampofo was invited by the director of the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza, to assist in designing a required course in African studies similar to the one being run by the IAS. Working with colleagues at UCT, Professor Adomako Ampofo workshopped the IAS model and discussed possible formats, methodologies and texts that might be applicable to the South African context.

4 **Documentation: Archives, Library, Museum, Dance Ensemble and a Journal**

A third area that Nkrumah paid attention to (albeit listed second in the speech), was the collection, documenting, recovery, preservation and dissemination of African-centred work, including formal academic papers as well as more “everyday” materials. He exhorted:

The second guiding principle which I would emphasise is the urgent need to search for, edit, publish and make available sources of all kinds. Ghanaian scholars who at an early period were actively concerned with the study of Ghana’s history and institutions and helped to prepare the way for the creation of this institute such as Carl Reindorf, John Mensa Sarbah, Casely-Hayford, Attah-Ahuma, Attobah Cogvano, Anthony William Amu – understood how much the development of African studies depended on the recovery of vital source material. Indeed, the search, publication and our interpretation of sources are obviously processes that must go hand in hand ... I would therefore like to see this institute, in co-operation with Institutes and Centres of African studies in other African States, planning to produce what I would describe as an extensive and diversified Library of African Classics. Such a library would include editions, with translations and commentaries or works – whether in African, Asian or European languages – which are of special value for the student of African history, philosophy, literature and law. I can think of no more solid or enduring contribution which the institute could make to the development of African studies on sound lines during the second half of the Twentieth Century, or to the training of future generations of Africanists.

In line with this objective, a documentation centre was established to house unprocessed field material, and in 1962 the institute's library was founded. The initial holdings concentrated on African music and arts, African historical studies, African languages and African modern states. There were also country-specific collections from South Africa, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya. Today it is one of the most important resources for Africana studies in Ghana. The institute's library has processed 22,525 books and 232 dissertations. In addition, it has a special collection that includes newspaper catalogues from 1954 to the present.¹⁵ The library staff regularly offer orientations to introduce students to the methods of library research and reviewing literature.¹⁶ The intent of IAS is to build an extensive and diversified library of African classics.

The institute has two archives. On the University of Ghana campus is the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archive, so named in 2014; the Manhyia archive is held in Kumasi, the capital city of the Ashanti Region. The first has gone through various transitions. It began as a sound archive, with the holdings of various field studies and collections from various parts of Ghana, mainly by J.H. Kwabena Nketia while he was in the Sociology Department of the University of Ghana. Most of the holdings were assembled from 1952, but steadily increased from the 1960s to the 1970s, when Nketia and a team of ethnomusicologists recorded exclusive stories, songs and dances and other oral and performance traditions from across the 10 regions of Ghana. The sound archive was augmented by the contributions of other ethnomusicologists, research fellows, staff and visiting researchers of the IAS, including Professor Mawere Opoku, Patience Kwakwa, Professor Melrose, Professor Kwame Arhin and Ampon Darkwa.

The archive currently holds material from the International Centre for African Music and Dance (ICAMD), photographic collections and paper archival materials. Some of its holdings are numerous examples of folktale sessions from various parts of Ghana; Mmoguo; Odurugya music (unique music performed at the court of the Asantehene); Fontomfrom music; rare recordings from Konkomba, Mamprusi, Frafra, Dagarti and Kasena tribes; funeral dirges; occupational songs; hunters' songs; witches' songs; storytelling; possession music; cult music; music performed during initiation rites; old highlife music; old brass band music; documentation of the coronation of chiefs like Otumfuo Osei Tutu and Nana Ofobi Kroppa III; final funeral rites of prominent people and royals in Ghana like the Asantehene Otumfoo Opoku Ware and the

15 The newspapers include state-owned newspapers *The Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times*.

16 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/120, IAS Library Committee 2004–2006.

Chief Priestess of Akonnedi Shrine, Larteh Akwapim; music and dance forms in Ghana (from the 10 regions of Ghana) from 2005 to 2008; the JVC Smithsonian Folkways series; the Herskovits film study on West African (1931); and traditional music from other parts of the African continent and the world.

The holdings were housed in a small room, did not have a professional archivist to manage them, and the collections were not easily accessible to scholars and the public. At the time, the university was of the view that aside from the lecturers in the Department of Archival Studies there could be only one professional archivist on its Legon campus to manage the archives. This position was assumed by Thomas Anning, who had hitherto been in charge of the Manhyia Archives in Kumasi. In 2012, under the directorship of Professor Adomako Ampofo, the university was persuaded to allow the IAS to employ a full-time archivist, in the person of Judith Opoku Boateng. With her arrival, it was possible to properly envision and conceptualize a professional archive. In 2014, the existing archives were refurbished, modernized and expanded to include a production unit, a viewing room, a graduate study office and staff offices. It was named the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Archive in honour of the first African director and his role in providing the core of the initial collection.

The Manhyia Archives are located at the Asantehene's palace at Manhyia, Kumase.¹⁷ This is the seat of government of the Asante kingdom and the place of residence of the Asante king. The archive was established in 1963 as part of the IAS "Ashanti Research Project", to provide in-depth studies of the social, political, economic and cultural institutions of the West African region from precolonial times to the present. The project's aim was also to offer a fruitful basis for cooperation between the University of Ghana and the University of Science and Technology at Kumasi, give support for traditional leadership through access to information, promote accountability and transparency, and support research, teaching and learning of Asante history and culture. The archive has several documents, including traditional records, colonial government publications and stool histories. The Asante stool histories, which number more than 200, contain valuable information on Asante rulers. Within the stool histories are also references to major events, such as the founding of the Asante kingdom, wars fought and how some towns and communities in the kingdom or state were established.¹⁸

The institute is home to a museum which houses a collection that includes artifacts that represent some of the diverse art forms in Ghana. The art historian,

17 The preferred spelling is Kumase, whereas the anglicized spelling is Kumasi. Where we refer to official documents using the latter, we retain that spelling.

18 <https://ias.ug.edu.gh/content/manhyia-archives>.

Roy Seiber, and his assistant, Kwabena Ameyaw, began the museum collection in 1964 as a way of preserving ethnographic works about Ghana and providing information on them. Their collection was used for teaching and served as the foundation upon which the IAS graduate programme in visual arts was built, by Dr (now Professor) Kwame Amoah Labi. The donation of 1,000 gold weights in 2005 by Oyeeman Owereko Ampem II, the late chief of Amanokrom and then chancellor of the University of Ghana, greatly enhanced the number of exhibits in the museum. Gold weights are beautifully crafted artifacts made of brass used to weigh gold. This led to a major installation, the publication of a museum catalogue on the gold weights, and the production of a documentary on the ancient art of brass-making, by Kwame Amoah Labi, in 2007.¹⁹

The collections enable the museum to serve as a practical teaching resource and a space for reflection, inspiration for innovation and a place where African wisdom, art, history and philosophy can be preserved for posterity. The museum acts as a gateway, linking research with objects. Over the years, several exhibitions have been curated in the institute and other strategic locations in Ghana, such as Sekondi-Takoradi, in 1999, and Kumasi, in 2000, 2002 and 2004. Visual expressions are necessary because they offer a reinterpretation of Africa in terms of its technological and cultural development. More importantly, such exhibitions are conceived as a continuation of the “state of the field” with the aim of interrogating current research interests and objectives, including the methodological dimensions of fieldwork, especially the trends, prospects, problems and strategies.²⁰

As part of its dissemination agenda, IAS set up a journal, *Okyeame*, in 1961. The Ghana Dance Ensemble was established as the national dance company through a collaboration between the state Institute of Arts and Culture and IAS in 1962. The dance ensemble was meant to promote the music and dance heritage of Ghana undergirded by solid fieldwork and experimental research (Adinku 2004: 49). Its founding director was Professor Mawere Opoku. The Ghana Dance Ensemble has a tradition of identifying young, talented artists with a mastery of particular dance forms from different parts of the country and training them to express a dazzling variety of dances. The ensemble was also created as a training ground for performers who could go on to found their own dance groups. Even though the intent was for the ensemble to concentrate on Ghanaian dances, under the leadership of subsequent directors, such as Professor Nii Yartey, dance forms from other cultures outside of Ghana

19 <https://gs.uwpress.org/content/11/1/175>.

20 Kwabena Nketia Archive, IAS, University of Ghana, IAS 3/1/70; “The Arts of Ghana”, UCLA Museum of Cultural History, October 9, 1977.

were included. Currently, the Dance Ensemble offers classic Ghanaian performances from across the country, which include Adzogbo, Akom, Adowa, Kete, Kpanlogo and Boboobo, to name a few.

In 1969, under the directorship of Professor Kwame Arhin, the IAS journal *Research Review* was established; Arhin was also its first editor. The first issue gave the rationale for its inception as a way of documenting and disseminating research conducted by the research fellows and students at IAS. Between January 1966 and December 2022, 76 issues were published. Subsequently, Professor Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, Professor Albert Awedoba and Dr Stephen Acheampong served as editors.

In 2011, as part of rebranding efforts at IAS generally, the director, Professor Adomako Ampofo, challenged the publications office to come up with a new name and direction for the journal. It came to be known as the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies (CJAS)*, and since 2014 has been open access and free. The *CJAS* publishes academic and scholarly articles, and book and film reviews and interviews that set forth the findings of new research in any branch of African studies or discuss and re-evaluate earlier or current research or publications.²¹ The current editors include IAS fellows and scholars from elsewhere around the world.²² In 2017, a journal manager, Dr Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, a historian and information science scholar at the University of Ghana, was hired to help coordinate the work of the editors and further professionalize the journal to bring it more in line with current praxis.

5 Selected Contributions to the Institute's Academic and Intellectual Projects, Infrastructure and Collaborations

Given the limitations of space, this section can offer only a very brief discussion of the multitude of contributions to the IAS's academic and intellectual projects and infrastructure and collaborations. The selection is informed more by our assessment of contemporary concerns and interests than any systematic

21 <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/contjas>.

22 The current editor in chief is Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo (University of Ghana); the co-editors are: Professor Akinola Odeunmi (University of Ibadan, Nigeria), Dr Faisal Garba (University of Cape Town, South Africa), Professor Michael Kpessa-Whyte (University of Ghana), Dr Peter Narh (IAS, University of Ghana), Dr Genevieve Nrenzah (University of Ghana), Dr Oghenetoja Okoh (Loyola University, USA), Dr George Bob-Milliar (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana), Dr Sylvia Bawa (York University) and Professor Grace Musila (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa).

prioritization. As already stated, the 1960s and 1970s saw pioneering research into African music, dance, history and African languages, including Arabic. The 1970s also saw linkages between the IAS and universities in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania to help establish centres for African studies in those countries. The 1990s saw higher education in many African states suffer because of structural adjustment programmes. In Ghana, support for higher education declined as a result of the World Bank's stipulation that funding be moved to basic education. However, by the late 1990s, a slow improvement began thanks in part to the establishment of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETfund), which was especially helpful in improving infrastructure.

Under the leadership of acting director, Dr Irene Odotei, the Kwame Nkrumah Complex was completed in 2002, with support from the Danish government and the Ford Foundation. The building had been conceptualized by Odotei's predecessor, Professor George Hagan, who was director from 1996 to 1998.²³ The building houses offices for the director, research fellows, the Kwame Nkrumah chair, graduate students, the drivers, an accounts staff, ICT staff and academic affairs. It also hosts the museum, the media lab, a conference room, a bookshop and a research fellows' common room. Around 2009, a set of chalets, initially built to serve visiting scholars, was expanded and converted into a full-service lodge under the directorship of Professor Takyiwaa Manuh. The lodge was formally opened in December 2010 under the directorship of Professor Adomako Ampofo. It was named Yiri lodge; in Dagari, this means "home".

In this same period, research into various aspects of chieftaincy in Ghana led to the publication of some foundational texts: one on chieftaincy in Ghana (Odotei and Awedoba 2006), another on gender (Manuh, Cole and Miescher 2007) and a textbook for the introductory African studies course (Manuh and Sutherland-Addy 2013). The new millennium saw the IAS finally begin to enjoy an intellectual renaissance after the setbacks of the structural adjustment years. In 2009, under the directorship of Professor Takyiwaa Manuh, the institute managed to launch a long-time dream to institute an endowed chair in African studies, the Kwame Nkrumah chair. The bulk of the initial support for the chair was provided by AngloGold Ashanti Ltd. The first chair, Professor Kofi Anyidoho, a literary scholar and poet, was installed in 2011. He was followed by Emeritus Professor Jacob Gordon, a historian, in 2013; Professor Horace Campbell, peace and justice scholar and professor of African American Studies in 2017; and feminist scholar Professor Amina Mama in 2022. Under the auspices of the chair, AngloGold Ashanti also supported an annual lecture.

23 <https://www.modernghana.com/news/26493/new-african-studies-building-outdoored.html>.

The maiden Annual AngloGold Ashanti Lecture on Business in Africa was delivered by Mark Cutifani.²⁴

The years from 2010 to 2022 saw the hiring of several young scholars from diverse disciplines from Africa and the diaspora, leading to a significant growth in the number of faculty publications, grants, honours and awards. During this time, the IAS undergraduate courses were restructured, from an existing set of courses that students were simply required to pass, and which did not count towards their final grade, into one of the current University of Ghana Required Courses, UGRC 220, Introduction to African Studies. These are now two-credit courses, which count towards a student's final GPA.

With support from the Carnegie Foundation's Diaspora Fellow Programme, in 2013 Professor Pius Adesanmi became one of the first fellows to join the University of Ghana. He was hired to help the institute develop a new set of graduate courses on African thinkers and thought, which were launched by Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo during the celebration of the IAS's fiftieth anniversary at the international conference held in 2013. The conference was opened by the president of Ghana, H.E John Dramani Mahama, and brought together more than 150 participants from all over the world, including keynote speakers Fatou Sow, the renowned Senegalese feminist scholar, the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and director of UNECA, Carlos Lopes. The conference culminated in a publication, titled *Revisiting African Studies in a Globalized World* (Awedoba et al. 2016). At the opening of the conference, Director Adomako Ampofo invoked Nkrumah's call to the African genius in her exhortation to participants to be intentional about completing the unfinished project of a renaissance for African peoples.

Over the years, the IAS has hosted several international conferences, though the number declined sharply during structural adjustment. In this era of intellectual renaissance, the IAS has begun to host important gatherings again. In 2009 it held the prestigious international conference, "Revisiting Modernization". This conference delved into the resonance of modernization in relation to the contemporary lexicon of globalization and the shifting parameters of development. The period from 2010 onwards saw the organization of several international conferences. Besides the IAS fiftieth anniversary conference in 2013, there was the Asian Studies of Africa conference (2015) that began the process of setting up the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Ghana, and the sixth African Evaluators Association conference, held in partnership with the African Evaluators Association (AFREA) in 2012. A conference to

24 See <https://ias.ug.edu.gh/> for a full list of all current lecturers.

recognize the contribution of Emeritus Professor Nketia was organized in his honour in 2011, which culminated in the publication of a Festschrift (Ampene et al. 2015).²⁵ The All-Africa Peoples' Conference, under the theme "Revisiting the 1958 All-Africa Peoples Conference – The Unfinished Business Of Liberation And Transformation", was held in 2018. The institute hosted the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) Second Biennial Conference under the theme "African Studies and Global Politics" in 2017.

The Covid-19 global pandemic hit Ghana hard, as it did many countries in the so-called economic South, and once again the spate of international gatherings declined, although several online gatherings were held. The AngloGold Ashanti Africa Business Lectures resumed in 2020 under the theme "Building a Resilient, Sustainable Organization During A Global Pandemic – Lessons from Covid-19 for Africa". Probably the most significant among these was the Kwame Nkrumah International Virtual Festival (September 20–24, 2021) under the auspices of the Kwame Nkrumah chair, Professor Amina Mama. The theme was "Pan-Africanism, Feminism and the Next Generation: Liberating the Cultural Economy".

The period from 2015 to 2022 saw the initiation of several local and international collaborations for research, and PhD training. In 2021, the erstwhile journal, *Feminist Africa*, relocated to the IAS with Professor Dzodzi Tiskata, then director, as one of the editors, along with Charmaine Pereira (Nigeria), Hope Chigudu (Zimbabwe), Sylvia Tamale (Uganda) and Sandra Manuel (Mozambique). The Master of Arts/Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy programmes were reviewed. Additionally, a proposal for the introduction of specialization courses is currently under review at the Graduate Studies Board, before being processed for accreditation by the national regulator.²⁶

6 Linkages and an Agenda for Global Africa

From its beginnings, the IAS agenda has been to extend its reach beyond Ghana through continental and global collaborations around the "African condition". It has always viewed the study of Africa and the contributions to this knowledge as part of a larger global project to "inspire our generation and succeeding generations with a vision of a better future" (Nkrumah 1963). Since the

25 <https://www.ug.edu.gh/news/j-h-kwabena-nketia-festschrift-officially-launched>.

26 Additional insights and perspectives on the years after 2015 were provided by William Asare, on November 24, 2022. Asare is a senior assistant registrar at the University of Ghana and administrator of the IAS.

inception of the IAS, various institutions, organizations and associations with a similar objective have drawn inspiration from this speech. Of these, the story of Pan-Africanist research on the African continent cannot be told without reference to the foundations laid by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The council was conceived around 1964 by mainly Marxist scholars, such as Samir Amin, Herbert Onitri, Omer Osman and Abdalla Bujra, and the directors of various economic and social research institutes across the African continent. It was formally established in 1973.

CODESRIA remains the continent's most deep-rooted Pan-Africanist institution, having played a key role in telling the story of Africa and its peoples (Hoffman 2017). Over the years, through conferences, publications and documentation centres, CODESRIA has promoted relationships between African scholars, facilitated research and the dissemination of research by African scholars and created an enabling environment for dialogue and the nurturing of African scholars (Nesbitt 2008; Ndlovu-Gatssheni 2018). Although this paper is principally about the IAS, we find it important to comment on the work of CODESRIA and its relationship to the institute.

At various times, the IAS has been a member of CODESRIA, and over the years many of its fellows have been members, attended its conferences, facilitated its workshops and served on its scientific and other statutory and ad hoc committees. Additionally, the council supported the CODESRIA African Humanities Institute at the University of Ghana, which was run by Professor Kofi Anyidoho, the inaugural Kwame Nkrumah chair at the institute. Professor Dzodzi Tsikata, a past director of the institute (2016–2022) served as president of CODESRIA between 2015 and 2018. Executive secretaries of CODESRIA have also supported the work of the IAS in diverse ways. In 2017, when the ASAA partnered with the institute to hold its second biennial conference at the University of Ghana, Dr Godwin Murunga, CODESRIA Executive Secretary, was a plenary speaker.

The decolonial and radical work of founding members of CODESRIA, such as Samir Amin, have featured prominently in the teaching, research and publications of the institute's fellows. CODESRIA, like the IAS, embraced the sentiments conveyed in Nkrumah's African Genius speech in its work, studying the "African condition" from perspectives born out of African experiences and African worldviews, often overtly or inadvertently contesting and critiquing Eurocentric epistemologies and replacing them with what was "authentically" African. Although it would be difficult to identify a specific, single theoretical school of thought, it would be accurate to say that these institutes have maintained a decolonial approach.

For years, professional associations for scholars who considered the focus of their research, teaching and outreach to be about the African condition have existed outside the continent: the African Studies Association (ASA, in the US), the Canadian African Studies Association, the UK African Studies Association, Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS, Europe) and the African Studies Association Germany (VAD), to name but a few. Although a series of congresses had sought to provide something of a formal space for “African studies professionals”, the ASAA was not established until 2013.²⁷ It was born out of discussions among directors and scholars of various centres and institutes of African studies in Africa. These discussions led to an initial agenda-setting colloquium at the Centre for African Studies at UCT and a follow-up meeting at the University of Ghana in 2012. Building on the successes and recommendations of these meetings, the ASAA was launched on October 25, 2013, during the international conference on African studies organized by the IAS, University of Ghana. The secretariat of the ASAA has been at the IAS, University of Ghana, since its inauguration. As Adomako Ampofo (2019: 295) notes, “The ASAA sees itself as being that space where we enrich and protect our work; nurture the next generation; provide professional support via workshops and counsel; and celebrate the achievements of our ancestors as well as our children”.

7 By Way of a Conclusion

The IAS has always had a vision of working on Africa, for Africa, through African eyes and of being a global leader for scholarship on Africa and its diaspora. As prophesied by Dr Kwame Nkrumah, one institute cannot be the sole bearer of the task of telling the story of Africa. It is our hope that this summary of the IAS story will encourage other scholars to set up and nurture similar centres, and work in collaboration across national, sectarian and other borders. The fulfilment of Kwame Nkrumah’s African Genius vision will continue as long as we are part of that mission.

²⁷ See <https://as-aa.org/index.php/about-asaa>.

Appendix 1

Research and Teaching Staff – 1962/63

Mr. T.L. Hodgkin	Director
Mr. A.S.Y. Andoh	Administrative Secretary

African Music and Arts

Professor J.H. Nketia	Professor of African Music
Mr E. Amu	Senior Research Associate (African Dance)
Mr A.M. Opoku	Senior Research Associate (African Dance)
Mr A.A. Mensah	Research Fellow (African Music)
Mr J.C. de Graft	Research Fellow (Drama)
Mr George Awoonor-Williams	Research Fellow (African Literature)

African Historical Studies

Professor I.G. Wilks	Research Professor of African History
Mrs M.E. Humphreys	Senior Research Fellow (Trade & Trade Routes)
Mrs S. Ibrahim	Research Associate (Arabic)

African Languages

Mr J.M. Stewart	Research Fellow (Akan Language)
Mr W.A.A. Wilson	Research Fellow (Northern Ghana Languages)
Mr G. Ansre	Research Fellow (Ewe and Volta Languages)

Study of Modern African States

Professor K.A. Jones-Quartey	Associate Professor (West African Political History and Institutions)
Mr Peter Morton-Williams	Research Fellow (West African Social and Political Systems)

Appendix 2

IAS Undergraduate Courses

Current University of Ghana Required Courses (UGRC)

Course Code	Course Title
UGRC 220	Appropriate Technology for Development in Africa
UGRC 221	African Art, its Philosophy and Criticism
UGRC 222	African in the Contemporary World
UGRC 223	Africa and the Diaspora
UGRC 224	African Popular Culture: Festivals and Funerals
UGRC 225	African Dance
UGRC 226	African Drama
UGRC 227	African Music
UGRC 228	Chieftaincy and Development
UGRC 229	Culture and Development
UGRC 230	Gender and Culture
UGRC 231	Gender and Development
UGRC 232	Issues in African Population
UGRC 233	Our African Heritage Through Literature
UGRC 234	Philosophy in African Cultures
UGRC 235	Proficiency course in Dagbani
UGRC 236	Ewe
UGRC 237	Ga
UGRC 238	Twi
UGRC 239	The Social Framework of Economic Development

Appendix 3

Masters and PHD Courses

Masters Core Courses

Course Code	Course Title
AFST 601	Research Methods
AFST613	Social and Political Systems in Africa

(A) First Semester Elective Masters Courses

Course Code	Course Title
AFST 603	Theories of Development in Africa
AFST 605	Government and Politics in Early Post Independent Africa
AFST 607	Africa Oral Literature: An Introduction
AFST 609	Drama in African Societies
AFST 611	African Literary Traditions
AFST 615	Traditional Religions in Africa
AFST 617	Traditional African Music
AFST 621	African Historiography and Methodology
AFST 623	The Slave Trade and Africa
AFST 625	Coastal States in Ghana in the Seventeenth Century
AFST 631	Culture and Gender in African Studies
AFST 633	Survey of African Art
AFST 641	African Family Studies

(B) Second Semester Elective Masters Courses

Course Code	Course Title
AFST 602	Advanced Research Methods
AFST 604	Issues in African Development
AFST 606	The Military in African Politics
AFST 608	Topics in African Oral Literature
AFST 610	African Theatre
AFST 612	Trends in African Literature
AFST 616	Islam and Christianity in Africa
AFST 618	African Music in Contemporary Perspective
AFST 622	Ghana since 1945
AFST 623	The Slave Trade and Africa
AFST 624	History of Pan-Africanism
AFST 626	Colonial Rule and African Responses
AFST 628	Islam and Christianity in Africa

AFST 632	Gender and Development in African Studies
AFST 634	Methodologies for Constructing Art History in African Societies
AFST 636	Rural Development, Environment and Modernity in Africa

First Semester PhD Core Courses

Course Code	Course Title
ARTS 701	Philosophical Foundations of the Humanities
FSSP 701	Philosophy of the Social Sciences
AFST 727	Topics in Research Methods

Candidates from IAS belonging to units specializing in the Arts or Social Sciences (formally the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, now subsumed under the College of Humanities) are required to take and pass the appropriate core courses ARTS 701 and FSSP 701 respectively, in addition to Topics in Research Methods.

First Semester PhD Elective Courses

Course Code	Course Title
AFST 613	Social and Political Systems in Africa
AFST 701	Historiography of African Art
SREL 703	Theories in the Study of Religion,
AFST 705	Critical Perspectives on Performance Theories
AFST 707	Political Economy of African Development
AFST 709	New Directions in Ethnomusicological Discourses
AFST 711	Pan-Africanism and African Unity
AFST 713	Gender and Sexuality in African History
AFST 715	Politics and Culture in African History
AFST 717	African Folklore
AFST 719	Religion and Politics in Africa
AFST 721	Special Topics in African Oral Literature
AFST 725	African Women Speak

Second Semester PhD Elective Courses

Course Code	Course Title
AFST 702	Contemporary African Art
AFST 704	Political and Social Movements in Africa
AFST 706	State and Politics in Africa

AFST 708	Sound, Sense and Identity in Black/African Art Music
AFST 712	Water Resources, Livelihoods and Development in Africa
AFST 714	Establishment of Colonial Rule in Africa
AFST 722	Ethnography of Community Conflicts in Ghana
AFST 724	African Theatre: The Classical and the Popular
AFST 726	Development Discourses in Africa

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Written in Water: the Legon School of History and the Publication of the Past

Cassandra Mark-Thiesen

1 Introduction

The current reflexive turn in African studies calls for a look back at some of the field's past endeavours and trajectories. But rather than conceiving of African studies as too "global" and monolithic an entity, this chapter approaches this task by considering geographical and temporal specificities, as stressed throughout this volume. In the decades immediately following independence, the local and certain foreign scholars who made up Africa-based African studies urgently set out to make their mark on a biased and unequal field. They used a multitude of channels and practices to do so while remaining overwhelmingly globally engaged. But although their approaches were heterogeneous and, at times, contradictory, research and philosophising typically coexisted with the aim of society-wide transformation and empowerment.

The trickiness of conducting "engaged" work while maintaining a healthy degree of scholarly detachment from the immediate present was lost on few. Yet, these tensions were typically generative. As a trained historian, I take some inspiration from this ethos as I reconstruct a short history of Africa-based historians and history practitioners through two of the Historical Society of Ghana's print publications. The first is a journal, *Ghana Notes and Queries*, which I focus on from the 1960s and 1970s. The second is a self-published leaflet portraying the society's history, published during the commemorative events that took place 50 years after independence. Thus, different practices, namely institutional memory and historiography, will be foregrounded, including their particular capacities in terms of future-making. On this point, Aleida Assmann states,

While until fairly recently people were convinced that the past was closed and fixed and the future was open to change, we are now experiencing that the past is constantly changing and the future proves to be heavily determined by the past. The past appears to be no longer written

in granite but rather in water; new constructions of it are periodically arising and changing the course of politics and history.

ASSMANN 2008: 57

This observation, inescapable in the field of memory studies, is also becoming more widely established in historiography.

When recalling schools of historical thought, historians have typically foregrounded individual professional historians, if not individual history departments. In the case of Africa in the decades immediately after independence, this positioning has reinforced the notion of African studies/History in Africa as a mere discipline. In contrast, this chapter shines light on the diverse intellectual community – professional historians, history practitioners, chiefs and lawyers, and men and women – who made up the fabric of the “Legon School of History”. With this demographic composition in mind, and in defiance of the image of the always-alooft historian, the chapter is particularly curious about the change imagined in regard to the contemporary relationship between science and society at the two moments in Ghana’s past under investigation.

Founded in 1951, the Historical Society of Ghana placed itself (and continues to place itself) at the critical intersection of public outreach and scholarship. It has published everything from journals and books to documentaries and sponsored dissertations, in the hope of instilling historical awareness in Ghanaian society. This chapter begins by revisiting the society’s endorsed production of the past in *Ghana Notes and Queries* during the 1960s and 1970s. It then recalls a key moment of institutional memorialisation for the society during the celebration of Ghana’s fiftieth anniversary of independence. Different ways of knowing the past appear inside and outside the academy, along with their possibilities and limitations, interactions and incommensurability.

2 Historiography in *Ghana Notes and Queries*

Ghana Notes and Queries (GNQ) is an underappreciated, though certainly not unique, historical example of what is possible when editors embrace their creative capacity. Every publication has its readership, and in the 1962 editorial of the *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, the fifteenth issue of this publication, professional historians Albert Adu Boahen and Ivor Wilks introduced their readership to GNQ, which was “intended as a ‘clearing house’ for the ideas and comments of historians both professional and amateur” (Boahen and Wilks 1962: v). “When *Ghana Notes and Queries* was founded, we

expressed the hope that it would attract contributions from outside the professional historical world”, noted the editors in its fifth edition (*GNQ* 1963: 5). To break class ranks and hierarchies of expertise, and to optimise the kind of new Africa-centred knowledge that was being developed, they solicited contributions from “homegrown” historians and from other disciplines.

In the first edition, editor-in-chief G.W. Irwin, professor of history at Legon and president of the society at the time, invited submission by “amateurs’ in the best sense of that word, who might not have the time to devote long hours to research, nor the opportunity to visit overseas archives or libraries, but who nevertheless could contribute, materially, to the elucidation of historical problems in Ghana” (Irwin 1961: 3). Irrespective of material limitations, Irwin was enthusiastic about the potential of unique contributions to shape ongoing debates in the field of history, given their embeddedness in different strata of society. The nonacademic writers had direct access to information from members of their family, lineage and ethnic group. Equally valuable was their particular sensory experience of the places in which they lived. Engaging with individuals and places shaped by different conditions of belonging and knowing lent itself to raising new questions and opening up uncharted territories of debate about the Ghanaian, regional, continental and human past. In the editorial, Irwin asked,

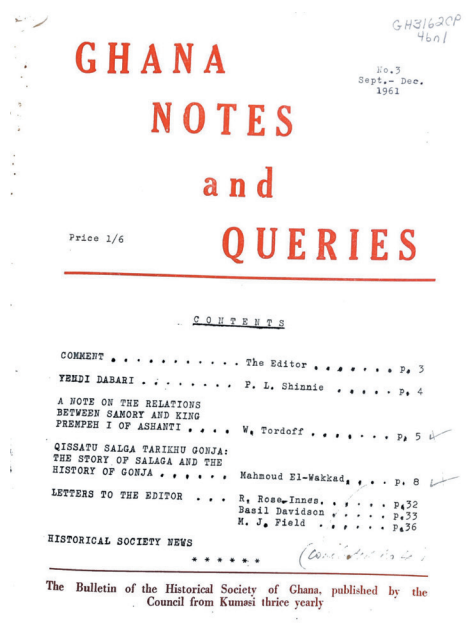
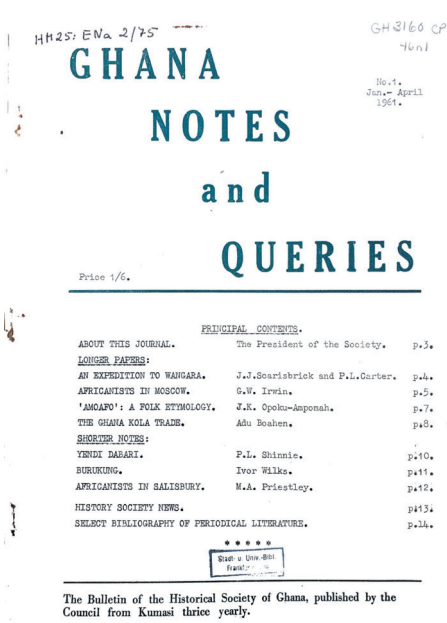
... is there an archaeological site in your neighbourhood, and do you wish to know more about it? Have you noticed statements and works on Ghanaian history with which you disagree? Do you have information which the author clearly did not have? Do you possess family papers or relics which are more than, say 50 years old? Do you have access to oral tradition in respect of your lineages, town, tribe or state question?

IRWIN 1961: 3

With that said, it is indisputable that these contributions were eventually filtered through scientific processes of critique. Irwin, for one, worked under the assumption that nonprofessional historians necessarily wanted to “know more about methods of historical research” (Irwin 1961: 3). In this way, as we still see today, epistemic inclusivity within the framework of science typically morphed into a debate about methodology. And yet, through this process, new sources and other approaches to knowing the past entered the pantheon of the human sciences, inevitably having global implications for historiography itself, including its underlying practices (and thus challenging current understandings of human history).

For example, a common feature of *Ghana Notes and Queries*, alongside longer articles, was the more accessible short essay or “note”. Unlike longer journal articles, which had the disadvantage of requiring a larger investment of time and occasionally overstretched the researcher’s familiarity with things, places and people, short notes could illustrate concrete observations and highlight unanswered questions in a succinct manner. The authors of such texts were likely less squeamish about publishing less-polished ideas, observations and “works in progress”. The two formats appeared with equal frequency, as can be seen on the covers of two 1961 editions of the journal, in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2. In addition, each issue contained more conventional sections, ranging from the society’s news to book reviews and calls for papers.

Next to ensuring the flow of information between Ghana’s history practitioners, the editors of *GNQ* initially also tried to overcome disciplinary boundaries. This was so coveted an achievement that when the fifth edition of the journal was printed in 1963, they celebrated with, “No historian is represented here” (*GNQ* 1963: 3). Instead, the issue featured an economic geographer, an agricultural scientist and a sociologist. Generally speaking, the editors solicited notes “on general archaeological, ethnographical and historical topics”



FIGURES 5.1 AND 5.2 Covers of the first two issues of *Ghana Notes and Queries*, both from 1961; Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. IMAGES TAKEN BY CASSANDRA MARK-THIESEN

(Irwin 1961: 3). They also treated language matters with care, publishing documents such as ancient Arabic scripts from Africa in their original language and format.

The decision to publish nonprofessional and professional historiography side by side may seem odd from the perspective of today's academy. But it was perfectly in keeping with the Historical Society's ambition to serve a broad spectrum of society, from the public arena to the quaint centres of scholarship. The society's ambition to bridge a widening gap between the production of written history within the university and that in the wider society, albeit remarkable, lasted just under one decade.

GNQ appeared between 1961 and 1972. After publishing three separate issues in its first year, the journal became an annual publication. It grew from around 17 pages in 1961 to roughly 40 pages in the early 1970s. During this period, the cover price rose from 1 shilling 6 pence to 1 cedi per issue (roughly the price of two daily newspapers), after the introduction of new legal tender in the late 1960s. But the editors were soon to target an even more specialised audience. The annual general meeting of 1972 brought with it the crucial decision to merge the Historical Society of Ghana with the Ghana History Teachers Association, crystallising the society's focus on teacher training. According to one interviewee, who I communicated with via email and who referred to the journal as *Ghana Notes and Queries and Teachers Journal*, it eventually served primarily as a scholarly forum for secondary school history teachers.¹

2.1 *Flattening Difference through Teaching*

The "imagined community" of the Ghanaian nation figured prominently in the society's work from a very early stage. However, when Irwin insisted in his 1961 editorial that the success of the journal "will depend on the support of the public of Ghana", there was no specific reference to teachers (Irwin 1961: 3). Indeed, the only mention of history teaching in the very first issue of the journal was as a topic at the Leverhulme History Conference. This was held at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in Salisbury (Southern Rhodesia), in September 1960, and was attended by a number of historians from African universities.

By 1963, however, educating teachers had become an important part of the journal's mission. Mass education through teachers' colleges aimed to feed the country's public education system with the new genre of African history.

¹ Interview with anonymous person, 2022.

Before long, *GNQ* was serving a strictly pedagogical purpose, feeding a growing number of African history teachers who shared the urgent burden of re-educating the new postcolonial state.

During this shift, the society thus cemented its place as a central force linking various institutions within and outside the government to address postcolonial, national and pan-African, cultural and intellectual themes, many of which would be echoed in the society's self-commemoration several decades later. In the 1963 issue of the journal, readers learned that the society was "planning to organise a conference on the Teaching of History in Secondary Schools and Colleges in Ghana from 5th to 8th April 1963" (*GNQ* 1963).

A series of lectures at the Legon campus raised three issues surrounding contemporary history education. The first was the need to review existing structures and resources for teaching history. Emerging from colonial rule, there was little debate about the urgent need to develop "appropriate textbooks" for the independent Ghanaian state (*GNQ* 1963: 28). Indeed, the overwhelming consensus was that there were as yet "no suitable textbooks written from the African rather than the European standpoint" (*GNQ* 1964 1). Secondly, a revised syllabus would give greater weight to African history without neglecting "World, European and English history" (*ibid.*). "We are convinced that this change in emphasis is proper and indeed long overdue", stated the editors (*ibid.*). The third theme was a review of trends in African historiography (*GNQ* 1963: 28). To this end, the conference invited representatives from "the Ministry of Education, the West African Examinations Council, The National Council of Principals of Training Colleges, Conference of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools, The Ghana Academy of Sciences" to join the conversation (*GNQ* 1963: 28). A large number of school principals and senior masters of history from various secondary schools and training colleges also took part in the debates.

African studies today is largely seen as the realm of scholars, as a result of professionalization processes, also advanced by historical societies. In contrast, the importance of teaching, especially on the continent, has been largely overlooked. However, the Historical Society maintained a longstanding interest in not just historical research but also nation-building via the teaching of history in secondary schools and colleges. Articles dealing with the challenges of the history classroom had already featured in early issues of *Transactions* (see, for example, Conton 1958).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the stakes were simply too high to keep the new genre of African studies knowledge at arm's length. Against the backdrop of

lingering developmentalist ambitions, its transformative potential demanded rapid application. It is therefore fundamental to remember, when we speak of the transformation of African universities during the era of decolonization, that teachers were just as much part of the process as professors. Teachers regularly moved between secondary schools and undergraduate teaching. They also interacted with a growing number of visiting scholars from abroad. The role of non-governmental institutions, which were actively engaged with the public and in the formulation and dissemination of, for example, school history, provides a more accurate glimpse of the priorities and practices of Africa-based African studies in the decades immediately following political independence.

Finally, it is also worth contemplating how external forces altered these kinds of engagements. For example, how did the growing authoritarianism in Ghanaian politics under Nkrumah affect the Historical Society's activities in transmitting public and school history? In the early 1960s, Nkrumah adorned the University of Ghana, Legon, with political purpose:

He wanted a socialist order in Ghana heading the African revolution to drive every vestige of imperialism out of Africa and to liberate the colonially occupied portions of Africa. He wanted Legon to become the intellectual centre of the African revolution, of socialist Ghana, and of international study of Africa's past and future as one of the world's great continents and not as an appendage of western history, culture, economy and civilisation.

HYMAN BASNER, cited in Biney 2011: 116

It may well be, however, that the growing repression of the Nkrumah administration, or "negative Nkrumahism", a few years later, marked by a growing mistrust of the academy as it was, simply made public history too politically sensitive an arena for the Historical Society to engage in (Mazrui, cited in Biney 2011: 174).

How did the society's sense of futurity change between the tumultuous 1960s and 2000s? And can an analysis of its media output, which includes different forms of historical narrative, help us to answer such questions more accurately? Low-cost journals became the most important tools for forging intellectual communities across borders and for disseminating national historical consciousness within individual nations immediately after independence. Revisiting the production and movements of history journals published by the Historical Society gives us some insight into a set of ambitious nation-building practices that had a restricted scope nonetheless. The Historical Society's second-most important periodical in the immediate post-independence

decades, *Ghana Notes and Queries*, initially had a reputation as a vehicle for the dissemination of African-centred historiography between professionals and nonprofessional. But this was short-lived. The equally, if not more, important task of school teaching lived on in its stead.

3 Self-Commemoration and the Historical Society of Ghana 50 Years after Independence

In 2007, as Ghana celebrated its “Golden Jubilee”, the Historical Society of Ghana under the leadership of historian Irene Odotei was ready and able to address the local public. It organised a series of roundtable events, at which scholars, politicians and civil society groups were invited to reflect on the country’s past, present and future 50 years after independence. The sub-themes of the two-day conference included good governance, institutional and political stability, economic growth and the civil service, to name a few. The proceedings of the event on the day of its opening, on December 17, were partially captured in a report published by the digital news and entertainment outlet *Ghanaweb* (GNA 2007).

Inevitably, this moment called for a certain amount of self-commemoration on the part of the Historical Society itself. The result was a leaflet, which was first circulated prior to the event for fundraising purposes and was later reproduced in various corners of the Internet – from the full version found on the webpage *DutchCulture*, an organisation aiming to strengthen Dutch international cooperation in the areas of culture, media and heritage, to abbreviated versions located on JSTOR.

At one point during the roundtable discussions, Professor Odotei made the point that history has a role to play in charting a course for the nation’s future. She noted that “Without knowing where we have been we cannot understand why we are where we are; and without understanding why we are where we are, we cannot properly determine where we ought to go” (GNA 2007). While sounding somewhat trite given the obvious reference to the *sankofa* principle (see, for instance, Schramm 2010), which also features on the group’s logo, the statement perfectly encapsulated the continuing role of the organisation. At that time, the Historical Society was involved in training historians at all levels of education, in parallel with hosting public events relevant to Ghanaian history. Furthermore, its members forecasted a future in which they could both “whip up students’ interests in history” and build a bridge between the university and society by “establish[ing] a history village where academics and the general public could interact on a regular basis and share ideas on

Ghana's history" (GNA 2007). The leaflet encoded this agenda, and although it reflected on the society's past it was at least equally concerned with the commemoration-infused present and the future.

3.1 *Flattening Difference through Memory*

According to Lentz and Budniok (2007), the overwhelming focus of the celebrations that marked "Ghana@50", scattered throughout the year as they were, was pride and unity. This priority facilitated ironing out underlying tensions over who "the 'heroes' to be honoured for their efforts towards Ghana's independence" actually were. Were they, for instance, the government in power or parties loyal to Nkrumahism? the marginalised North or the politically dominant South? the people or the VIPs? (Lentz and Budniok 2007: 534). This was hardly a moment for the kind of complexity or awkward facts that only a critical empirical historian could provide in a moment of national remembrance (Burke 1989: 110). Therefore, in addition to presenting concrete evidence in the form of the date of the founding of the society in 1951, the date of its dissolution in 1983, and the year it finally rose from the ashes in 2001, the leaflet emphasised the presentation of content affective enough to make "the nation manifest in the hearts and minds of [Ghanaian] citizens" in line with the many other events taking place in celebration of "Ghana@50" (Lentz and Budniok 2007: 531). In sum, the leaflet's author(s?) crafted a bold narrative about the organisation's continual cohesion against a backdrop of intellectual pluralism.

The text recalled the "founding fathers" of the society as John D. Fage, Alexander Adum Kwapong, Albert Adu Boahen, J.B. Danquah, Kobina Sekyi, Nana Kobina Nketsia "and others", all recognisable and highly influential players in the echelons of Ghanaian historiography across time. More importantly, those familiar with the field of Ghanaian historical studies would register the broad, even contentious, political and intellectual spectrum represented by the men named, in the context of an early post-independence Ghana. Their opinions differed widely in debates about what kind of history writing and education the newly independent state needed in the first place: emancipatory, empirical or something in between. There was, for example, Nana Kobina Nketsia, the paramount chief and political activist who was closely associated with Nkrumahism in the 1950s, so much so that he was the only chief to be imprisoned for the Positive Action Strike led by the Convention People's Party (CPP) under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah in January 1950, a campaign often cited as a precursor to the struggle for independence (Nkrumah 1949). Kobina Sekyi, on the other hand, stood out for his insistence that an independent Ghana should return to a political system rooted entirely in precolonial Akan-Fanti institutions and values (Saah and Baku 2011). According to R.L. Okonkwo, "Sekyi became an isolated figure in Ghana as his concerns were

for the preservation of the African traditions rather than for modernization” (Okonkwo 1985: 259).

The remaining four – Boahen, Danquah, Kwapong and Fage – were considerably more closely aligned in their anticolonial politics, while standing for variations of cosmopolitanism and “deploring the civil liberties excesses of the [Nkrumah] regime” (Lewis 1999: 57). In addition, it is important to know that the men mentioned had not in fact simultaneously held leadership roles within the society, and certainly not from the organisation’s start, nor at the moment of Ghana’s independence. The constructed lineage of “founding fathers” thus reflected an alignment between the society’s institutional values and the national priority of democratic unity and pride.

The society presented an image of a socially engaged, internationally conscious organisation that had long catered for a wide range of intellectual and political thought.² On closer inspection, however, the silence in these practices of remembrance deserves some attention. (Science has entered the room!) Whether as a result of the author of the pamphlet’s own gender bias or because the pamphlet was aimed at a readership with the means to make generous donations (which was therefore likely to be predominantly male), or for some other reason altogether, it is staggering that women were completely excluded from this founding narrative, echoing Kiprop’s observations in this volume. This is despite the fact that a minimal amount of empirical research would have unearthed stories such as that of the British academic Margaret A. Priestley, who was a lecturer in history at the University College of Ghana (later Legon) and who served on the publications committee of the Historical Society for several years from 1957 (after the annexation of British Togoland). While such a story would have endeared the organisation to many, it was not prioritised as the most pertinent to tell at the time.

4 Conclusion

Ongoing debates about inequalities in global knowledge production have drawn considerable attention to the differences and inequalities that characterise African studies globally, including at the intersections of class, gender, race and nationality. A central point of contention is the situatedness of knowledge (Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020; Mignolo 2009;

2 It was made up of lecturers and students from the five public universities, including the University of Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the University of Cape Coast, the University of Education, Winneba, and the University of Development Studies, Tamale, as well as teachers from secondary schools and training colleges.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Posholi 2020). This insight raises questions about the material, epistemological, methodological and political trends of the field in different corners of the globe. Particularly as it concerns post-independence Africa, there has been a growing awareness of the emergence of an Africa-centred historiography (Schulte Nordholt 2021; Atieno-Odhiambo 2017; Cooper and Morrell 2014). However, it needs to be understood as incorporating different practices, producers of historical narratives, and forms of knowing the past.

This chapter has looked at the production of history and memory by the Historical Society of Ghana. In both cases, it has explored its sense of futurity and practices of nation-building (e.g. through teaching and memorialisation). The society's print publications, situated between society and scholarship, provide an excellent basis for exploring the organisation's ventures between academia and public opinion, historiography and memory, past and future. In addition to showing how the Historical Society's members sought to activate these spheres in 2007, through the much simpler publication of a leaflet, the chapter has focused on its periodicals from the 1960s and 1970s, *Ghana Notes and Queries* being a history journal aimed at history practitioners and professional historians. These documents need to be read as having emerged with different purposes in mind. The question of how and among whom these narrations of the past were intended to travel, and what happened once they were in motion, cannot be underestimated in this context. However, as the chapter has shown, different ways of knowing the past can also serve important complementary functions where holistic knowledge is a priority.

The Historical Society, with its inbuilt sense of the future, emerged with a firm understanding of the need to preserve heritage and the important role that history should play in the regeneration of (African) society. As part of this reappraisal, both teaching and the promotion of engagement between the university and the academy emerged as the society's two main areas of activity. Within the academy, it sparked diverse discussions of global relevance about historiographical methods as well as of the African, postcolonial and human past.

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Gender, Feminism and Politics of Knowledge Production: an Interrogation of Institutional Cultures of Africa's Institutions of Higher Learning

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1 Introduction

Knowledge production is the practice of creating, researching, analyzing and documenting critical ideas that can provide some observation about worldly phenomena (Nketia 2019). However, the idea that knowledge is infused with power and politics may sound abstract. Academia has been characterized as traditional, hierarchical and selective, founded on patriarchal, imperial and colonial values that construct and maintain gendered roles and regulations (Phillips, Dzidic and Castell 2022). This has been observed to disadvantage how women experience, and identify within, academia. African women's narratives about their journeys show how power and the politics of knowledge are intrinsically linked to gender (Chege 2006). Thus, intellectual work is understood as the work of those in positions of power.

Despite the adage that "knowledge is power", insofar as knowledge arms you with the capacity to make better, more informed choices in the world, power also determines *who and what can be known* and who is allowed to be a "knower". In this way, power is knowledge. Much of the work of feminist intellectuals, then, has been to disrupt all the ways in which institutionalized patriarchy has denied, invisibilized and exploited the very necessary and long-standing intellectual work of women and minoritized communities (Nketia 2019: 1).

Gender disparities in higher education institutions is a global phenomenon (Davidson and Burke 2004; Airini et al. 2011). The relatively low numbers of women enrolled in universities and employed as faculty members is a starting point for understanding patriarchal university cultures. As Guzura (2012) observes, women's limited participation in knowledge production should be viewed from a colonial context, which was further reinforced by patriarchy. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, in her work *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (1997) critically examines how colonialism influenced and shaped gender identities in Africa. She argues that Western

gender categories were imposed on African societies, leading to the marginalization of women and the erasure of indigenous gender roles (Oyěwùmí 1997).

Another important perspective comes from Mahmood Mamdani, particularly in his book *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996). Mamdani discusses how colonial policies created new forms of authority and governance, often relying on existing power structures, which were predominantly male-dominated. The debate around the extent to which African men collaborated in marginalizing women during colonialism is ongoing, and scholarship on the subject continues to evolve. Some argue that blaming colonialism should not absolve African societies from addressing internal issues of patriarchy and gender inequality. Others emphasize the need to recognize the nuanced ways in which colonial legacies continue to impact on gender dynamics in contemporary Africa.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which power and politics circulate in Africa's institutions of higher learning, undermining radical feminist projects where they exist, or excluding conversations altogether through institutional norms and practices (Tsikata 2007). It is worth noting that African feminists have been instrumental in shaping nationalist independence movements across the continent and the struggle against patriarchal violence and global economic imperialism that threatens the lives of women and girls in their communities. And yet, despite these long intellectual traditions across Africa and its diasporas, there is still a perception that African women do not have the time for, or are disinterested/disengaged from, intellectual labour.

The chapter also explores the challenges faced by women in academia as a result of the institutional cultures of African universities. Mama (2005) observes that Africa's universities remain steeped in patriarchal perspectives; women are generally vastly outnumbered and their intellectual contribution is relegated to the fringes or steadfastly ignored. African feminists who have historically engaged in intellectual labour have been accused of being Westernized elitists (Nketia 2019). Certainly, this seems a betrayal for any well-intentioned African female intellectual engaged in this labour in pursuit of social justice for her people.

The history of African feminist organizing was understandably assumed to be anti-intellectual. That is to say, our feminist foremothers did not have the luxury or access to pursue seemingly bourgeois endeavours like "research" or "theory". African women were said to be more concerned with "pressing issues", such as poverty, disease and nation-building and development. And the Indigenous knowledge they may have accessed on a daily basis was not considered "intellectual work" – it was simply the way they did things based on their spiritual inner life. Besides these misunderstandings, the identity of the

intellectual was often masculinized, creating a perception that African women did not have the mental acumen to engage in the male-dominated world of knowledge production (Nketia 2019: 1).

Finally, I look at feminist perspectives to examine the marginalization or exclusion of women from knowledge production, and propose strategies that can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive academic environment that values diverse perspectives and ensures that knowledge production is not only gender-sensitive but also actively works towards dismantling systemic gender inequalities. I argue that in the context of limited funding resources and lack of institutional and public support, feminist knowledge production in the region is almost fully dependent on the personal commitment of local scholars. Without this, many are discouraged from articulating and defending feminist ideas, methods and approaches within a gender-hostile academic and sociopolitical environment.

2 Gender and the Politics of Knowledge Production

Unlike industrialized countries, where significant research takes place in specialized types of institutions, in Africa most research is conducted in universities, which are thus the main sites where research knowledge is dispensed, acquired and produced (Assié-Lumumba 2006). Intellectuals have argued that for many years the continent's universities and school systems in general reproduce(d) their colonial legacy. In other words, although the overwhelming majority of institutions of higher learning in Africa today were created after their nations acquired independence, the current landscape and practices of higher education essentially still reflect the colonial legacies (Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo 2020). This situation puts Africa at a disadvantage, because within these institutions of higher learning its scholars follow and imitate the Western education paradigm that emanated from European/Western organic evolution.

Although Africans in general had limited access to education in the colonial era, the situation seems to have been worse for women (Chege 2006). A second layer of colonial education was the drive to contain African women through deliberate policies of "domestication", purposeful exclusion and marginalization by means of carefully designed programmes and institutions with less-valued formal/non-formal education (Assié-Lumumba 2006).

Further, women's ability to pursue education has been constrained by a lack of financial resources and support. Many parents in Africa have for a long time preferred to educate a boy child, and not a girl child who will get married

and thus be considered not to benefit the family. Therefore, women are often forced to depend on their male counterparts in decision-making from an early stage in the educational sector, where they are often subordinated to men (Zvavahera et al. 2021).

As a result, simple observation, scientific/empirical research, academic publications and various types of reports show that African women are overwhelmingly underrepresented in institutions of higher learning, with two main contributing factors: their underrepresentation in the formal system, and their larger number in the Indigenous system that has endured different forms of “epistemicide” (Paraskeva 2016), in which local knowledge has been deemed irrelevant and targeted for suppression.

Aina (2010) observed that although some institutions have formally complied with gender equity goals by increasing numbers of female students and faculties, their institutional cultures continue to be male-dominated, with entrenched male-privileged relations of power and governance and a refusal to accept feminist scholarship as part of teaching programmes. Several factors contribute to the way gender dynamics shape the production, dissemination and recognition of knowledge in academia. For example, the underrepresentation of women in academic positions, particularly in senior and leadership roles, limits women’s influence in shaping research agendas, curricula and institutional policies related to knowledge production (Aina 2010). The individuals and groups with the power to set research agendas often influence the direction of knowledge production. If decision-makers are predominantly male and hold certain perspectives, it may result in a bias towards topics that align with those perspectives, potentially marginalizing research on issues relevant to women or gender. The recognition and visibility of scholarly work is crucial for academic career progression (Zvavahera et al. 2021). Gender biases may affect the evaluation and visibility of women’s contributions to knowledge production, leading to disparities in promotions, awards and other forms of recognition.

Furthermore, gender bias can manifest in publishing and citation practices, where female scholars face challenges in having their work published or cited at the same rates as their male counterparts. This can impact their academic reputation and career advancement. Moreover, collaborative research is common in academia and power dynamics within research teams can influence whose perspectives are prioritized and whose voices are heard. Women may face challenges in asserting their views or having their contributions overlooked. There may be a gendered division of labour in academia, with women often undertaking more teaching and administrative responsibilities than

men. This can limit the time and resources available for women to engage in research and knowledge production (Rathgeber 2013).

Institutional policies related to research funding, grant allocation and tenure can have gendered implications. If these policies are not gender-sensitive, they may inadvertently disadvantage women in their pursuit of research opportunities and career advancement (Zvavahera et al. 2021). Gender stereotypes and biases may influence perceptions of competence and expertise. As a result, female scholars may have to overcome additional hurdles to have their ideas taken seriously or to be seen as leaders in their fields (Onsongo 2006).

Addressing the gender and politics of knowledge production in African higher education requires concerted efforts at various levels. Institutions need to adopt and enforce policies that promote gender equality in hiring, promotion and resource allocation. Efforts should be made to diversify academic leadership and decision-making bodies to ensure a variety of perspectives are considered. Establishing mentorship programmes and support networks for women in academia can help address challenges related to career progression and knowledge production. The curriculum should be critically examined to determine that it reflects diverse perspectives and addresses gender-related issues. Establishing equal access to research funding and resources is crucial for promoting a more inclusive and equitable research environment. By addressing these issues, institutions can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive academic environment, fostering a diverse range of perspectives and enhancing the overall quality and relevance of knowledge production.

The following sections explore how the social relations of gender and institutional structures in Africa's institutions of higher learning influence women's entry, retention and progression in their careers and knowledge production.

3 Gender and Institutional Cultures

The university is a social space, where matters of governance and leadership significantly affect knowledge production and transfer. Knowledge production, much like other areas of human life, is laden with power relations. Thus, knowledge production is never neutral, neither is it objective nor power free (Chege 2006). Organizational and institutional cultures of African universities, like those of Western-style universities in general, were established to meet the needs of male faculty and students (Rathgeber 2013). Patterns of leadership, beliefs, symbols, structures, ceremonies, power and information flow (Carroll and Mills 2006) are modelled on masculine expectations and experiences.

Gender inequalities abound in various aspects of life: in gender-blind governance policies; student, worker and faculty numbers; and institutional cultures that objectify women as sexual (Britwum, Oduro and Prah 2015).

Mama writes that women have never been excluded from Africa's post-independence universities, a fact to be proud of. However, one cannot take pride in the fact that universities have remained highly male-dominated spaces, culturally and numerically (Mama and Barnes 2007). Morley (2005) affirms that, globally, very little is being done to promote the participation of women in knowledge production in institutions of higher learning. Some of the challenges that female researchers face pertains to lack of support from their universities and peers (Fathima et al. 2020).

The contests around gender in the African university are evident not only in management, curricular and pedagogical issues. Sadly, they also involve the bodily expressions of inequitable power relations. Attention is increasingly being paid to the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence (GBV) on African campuses (Zvavahera et al. 2021). This can be explained by the fact that many African societies, traditionally, have been patriarchal, with men holding positions of authority and power. This power dynamic can contribute to the normalization of male dominance and control over women, potentially fostering an environment conducive to sexual harassment and GBV. Also, traditional cultural values that prescribe certain behaviours and characteristics as masculine or feminine may lead to toxic masculinity, which can contribute to the perpetuation of aggressive and violent behaviour, including sexual harassment (Aina 2010).

In their examination of institutional cultures and the career trajectories of female faculty, Odejide (2007), Prah (2002) and Tsikata (2007) noted differences in the experiences of respondents relating to the existence of a gender climate capable of slowing down women's academic progression. Women's disadvantage with regard to time availability for their careers is particularly related to marriage and child-bearing, which for the majority occurs while they are still in postgraduate education (Beoku-Betts 2004). In most African contexts, women are socially identified as wives, mothers and carers, and spend on average significantly more time caring for children and the elderly than men (Beoku-Betts 2004).

Reproductive responsibilities reduce many women's opportunities to take up options to study or work internationally, which can be an important source of academic capital and networks that support progression. For example, a study in Rwanda reported that many women "stuck" at junior levels turn down scholarships for studying abroad because of concerns about the impact on their marriage or having young children whom they are unable to leave behind

as a result of lack of support at home (Masanja 2010). Professional women are therefore constrained in competing with their male counterparts in terms of allocating time to activities that contribute to career progression, such as grant- and scientific-writing and publication (Beoku-Betts 2004). Since women are expected to play their traditional gender roles in the family, it becomes difficult to balance work and family life (Ngure et al. 2016).

There is empirical evidence for how gender power relations within academic institutions further intersect with gender power relations within the family and wider society to disadvantage women, in ways that may be exacerbated or mediated by other social power relations (Liani, Nyamongo and Tolhurst 2020). Institutional power relations are manifested in operational policies and power structures (formal rules); institutional practices and culture (informal rules); access to the necessary research infrastructure or resources; and inclusion in and expectations of research activities (Liani et al. 2020). Studies contend that female faculty advancement in academia is militated against by various sociocultural and structural factors, such as multiple roles, gender stereotypes, feelings of isolation and discriminatory promotional rules (Kanake 1998; Curtis 2011; Zimmer 2003).

Nonetheless, Onsongo (2006) points out that there is no open discrimination in the university, but subtle discrimination, disguised in promotion procedures and organization culture. Onsongo further observes that requirements for advancement include high academic credentials, lengthy service and productivity (publishing articles, journals and writing books). Morley (2005) affirms that very little is being done to promote the participation of women in institutions of higher learning in Africa. Gender discrimination can manifest in many forms: for instance, limited access to resources, fewer opportunities and assignment to inferior roles like teaching and supervising in undergraduate programmes. Gender discrimination is, thus, the worst impediment to the progress of female researchers in Africa.

Despite increased publicity and discussions surrounding the inequalities that women face in the workplace, there remains a tremendous amount of work to be done to close the gender gap, especially in university management (Onyambu 2019). Women are rare in senior management posts because of the normative masculinity of management (K'Odipo 2013), which is attributed to the fact that, in the past, top management and leadership positions in African countries carried the notion of masculinity and the overall belief that men make better managers and leaders than women (Kiamba 2008). Little wonder that there is a wide gender gap in university Senate (the highest decision-making body that brings together senior academic and administrative staff of the university).

This critical finding supports Mutunga's (2015) assertion that women's low participation in decision-making is as a result of low academic and professional qualifications, confining them to lower level academic and administrative positions. Thus, it is clear that the traditional societal conventions regarding gender and institutional management have always excluded women from occupying managerial positions (Maurtin-Cairncross 2014). Even in contemporary times, culturally, in most African societies it is believed that men should lead and women must oblige (Kiamba 2006).

Finding an appropriate balance between career and family is problematic for many female academics. A study of economists in Ghana and Liberia found that women cited family responsibilities as the single greatest obstacle to their professional growth. The Association of African Universities' (AAU) Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit (2006) observed that, in most African societies, women were considered "home builders" and had a higher level of responsibility for their children and homes than their husbands. The disadvantaged position of women was reinforced through negative stereotypes towards their abilities. For example, they were seen as unmotivated, incompetent and likely to leave institutions prematurely. Yet, when women portrayed masculine traits like assertiveness and independence, they were negatively assessed (Williams, Phillips and Hall 2015).

The paucity of women in the leadership levels of HEIs compounds the lack of gender-responsive policies. Where there are policies in place, their translation into practice is not adequately or effectively done or monitored, resulting in the maintenance of the status quo (Forum for African Women Educationists [FAWE] 2015). Without bodies or persons designated to ensuring that these policies are acted upon, they often remain reference documents that are used to show that efforts have been made to address gender inequality rather than demonstrating commitment to action (FAWE 2015). Women's capacity to participate in and influence the decisions that affect their lives – from the household to the highest levels of political decision-making – is a basic human right and a prerequisite for responsive and equitable governance. Increasing women's representation and participation at all levels is essential for advancing issues of importance to women on national and local agendas.

Studies have shown that even though academic institutional cultures in many African contexts are visibly opening up to women's participation they continue to perpetuate working cultures that are not favourable to women's social and cultural experiences (Mabokela and Mlambo 2015). The literature that exists suggests that gaining an academic position in an African university is challenging for women and that maintaining it is even more difficult (Barnes 2007). This has been matched by a lack of respect demonstrated to them in

what Morley and others have termed micropolitics – the “subtext of organizational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions” (Morley 1999: 25).

Reflecting on their early career experiences in a public university in Ghana, female participants in a study stated that they experienced some form of belittling or discrediting as women, including a female assistant professor being addressed as “Mrs” whereas male colleagues were addressed as “Doctor” (Beoku-Betts 2005: 16). The gender relations of family are also carried over into the workplace. Female academics reported that male colleagues took a negative attitude towards women who prioritized their careers over marriage and family obligations (Beoku-Betts 2005), and undermined their status and expertise by expecting them to “serve them like their wives would at home” (Mabokela 2003: 22).

Many women face obstacles in the pursuit of academic careers and in achieving promotion once they have been hired (Liani et al. 2020). To some extent, the concentration of women in the lower academic ranks can be explained by the fact that they tend to take longer to complete their PhDs, spend less time on research and often have fewer publications. Research in Kenya found that men were promoted more quickly than women, especially in public universities, even when they had joined the university at the same time and at the same rank. Interview panels for promotion are usually male-dominated, and female candidates for managerial or professorial positions are often subjected to irrelevant, gender-biased questions (Onsongo 2006).

In Kenya, several studies have identified the importance of male power and patronage networks in promotion decisions (Raburu 2011), which include non-merit factors, such as tribalism, nepotism and political loyalties (Onsongo 2006). Female candidates for academic positions sometimes endure harassment from senior male faculty members who are hostile to women. The promotion criteria also disadvantage female faculty in placing more focus on research at the expense of teaching and postgraduate student supervision activities, which faculty members engage in on daily basis (Malelu et al. 2017).

Traditionally, women also do not get support from their male counterparts or their employing institutions (Cohn et al. 2014). Social and professional capital and networks, including peer groups/collegial networks, mentors and role models, are highly influential in scientific career progression (Liani et al. 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that, compared to men, women tend to have weaker social capital and networks, particularly as a result of limited mobility for conference attendance because of their reproductive responsibilities (Obers 2015). Nixon (2017) observed that female academicians lack access

to influential organizations and informal career networks, whereas men have learned the unwritten rules of success. Women face exclusion in such networks through overt ridicule when informal meetings are held in social places traditionally perceived not fit for women, such as bars. This perception of women has affected their access to research funding and mentorship by their male counterparts and superiors who make decisions on these matters.

In addition to the constraints on taking up networking opportunities, “old boy” networks tend to exclude women when discussing career progression matters such as promotions and scholarships informally over lunch or evening drinks, as reported by a study in Kenya (Raburu 2015). Men also want to co-author and publish with other men, which leaves women with no male mentors and so they end up publishing alone. Unequal access to research funding and resources can limit women’s ability to engage in knowledge production. If women face challenges in securing research grants or accessing the necessary facilities, it can hinder their contribution to academic scholarship (Rathgeber 2013).

However, it is also important to appreciate how managers in African universities argue for or against this exclusionist atmosphere and condition. And their perspectives are varied, based on several factors, including institutional culture, local context and individual beliefs. Some managers may argue that maintaining certain exclusionist practices is essential for preserving cultural or traditional values within the institution as well as for contributing to stability and order within the university, suggesting that a more homogeneous environment might be easier to manage. Others may argue that limited resources, financial and infrastructural, necessitate focusing on specific priorities, potentially leading to exclusionary practices (Assié-Lumumba 1996).

Even with these kinds of arguments, it is important to note that there are managers who have made strides in creating diverse and inclusive environments, by fostering creativity, critical thinking and a broader range of perspectives among students and staff. This is as a result of the need for African universities to be globally competitive and the fact that inclusivity can attract a diverse pool of talent, including international students and faculty. The arguments may also be based on legal and ethical grounds, as mandated in national and international laws that promote equal rights and opportunities in education, for example (Teferra and Altbach 2004).

Gender issues in African higher education are thus complex and require and deserve further study. As discussed above, a variety of initiatives have been implemented to remedy this unhealthy scenario. Although a few of these initiatives have been productive, others have yet to achieve any real change. These

initiatives continue to be plagued by subtle resistance, implicit and explicit oversight, a lack of serious recognition, and ignorance.

The following section discusses feminist perspectives in knowledge production and proposes strategies that may contribute to a more equitable and inclusive academic environment – one that values diverse perspectives and ensures that knowledge production is not only gender-sensitive but also actively works towards dismantling systemic gender inequalities.

4 Feminist Perspectives and Knowledge Production

While addressing gender issues in education and knowledge production, the role of feminist thinking in shaping the theory of equality and equity cannot be ignored. Feminism is a global phenomenon that addresses various issues related to women across the world in a specific manner as applicable to a particular culture or society (Mama 2017). Feminist theory is an approach to understanding and conceptualizing gender roles and advocates for the inclusion of women's interests in social organization. It is an understanding of gender inequality in structural and systematic terms and is committed to a transformation of intersectionally unequal power relations (Bustelo, Ferguson and Forest 2016; Stachowitsch 2018). Feminist knowledge as we see it is also situated, plural, political and contested, reflexive and a product of engagement by feminist researchers, practitioners and activists (Bustelo et al. 2016; Stachowitsch 2018).

I chose to write from a feminist perspective because feminist theories, first of all, explain and suggest directions for change in social and environmental factors that create or contribute to dilemmas and problems experienced by women. Second, they explain and propose interventions for women's intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns. Third, feminist theories provide a perspective for evaluating social and environmental experiences of groups and individuals, regardless of sex or gender. The emphasis placed on each of these three areas, along with the centrality of additional factors that influence marginalization, oppression and unwarranted constraints, depends on which feminist theory is used (Okoli 2021).

There are different strands of feminism (liberal, radical and Marxist), all acknowledging patriarchy as an oppressive force against women's freedom but varying in relation to how to create possibilities of change (Haralambos and Holborn 2000; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). All agree on the importance of gender equality but they disagree on how to achieve it (Freedman 2002).

The first wave of feminism, liberal feminism, emerged in the early 1900s and advocated primarily for the equal rights of women (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Liberal feminists were concerned with women's rights in the public spheres, such as receiving fairer access to education and careers (Delamont 2003). According to Haralambos and Holborn (2000), liberal feminism aims for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of Western societies, with a focus on its cultures and the attitudes of individuals rather than on structures and institutions. Liberal feminism, however, ignores racial and class oppression and fails to address the entrenched nature of patriarchy. It fails to analyze the innate levels of oppression and discrimination that are perpetuated by major patriarchal institutions within society. By not addressing this power issue, it fails to acknowledge the varying degrees of women's oppression (Haralambos and Holborn 2000).

The emergence of Marxist and radical feminism sought to improve women's rights through empowerment, emancipation and transformation (Delamont 2003; Hughes 2002). Radical feminism brought to light the idea of "the personal is political" (Morley 1999: 3), a strong commitment to understanding a woman's personal experience in relationship to existing power structures and the oppressive forces within society at large. Marxist feminism does not attribute women's exploitation entirely to men, but sees capitalism as the principal source of women's oppression rather than patriarchy. Like radical feminism, it views women's unpaid work as housewives and mothers as one of the main ways in which women are exploited. Marxist feminists desire a revolutionary change, a society where gender inequalities disappear (Haralambos and Holborn 2000). Marxist feminists further believe that women's oppression is a consequence of capitalism and that their role within the family keeps them in a dependent position (Delamont 2003).

The realization that women's experiences are to a large extent influenced by their location and context has led to feminists like Spivak (2000) advocating the use of different feminist perspectives in the analysis of women's oppression. The diversity of women's location has meant that feminists have developed different strategies to overcome their oppression. This has led to the emergence of other feminist perspectives, such as postcolonial feminism, postmodern feminism and African feminism (Beasley 1999). This paper draws on African feminism because there are certain aspects of African culture that continue to play an important role in determining women's participation in the continent's social, economic and political development. Another reason for drawing on African feminism is that, often, assumptions are made – especially in early Western feminist writing – which imply that women in low-income countries lack organized forms of addressing issues that affect women (Mama 2017).

It is important to highlight the diversity in African feminism, just as there are different strands in Western feminism. Nnaemeka (2005) observes that the plurality of African feminism reflects the fluidity and dynamism of the cultural imperatives, historical forces and localized realities that condition women's activities and movement in Africa. However, Nnaemeka (2005) further notes that there are commonalities, too, and shared beliefs among the different African feminisms. Because African feminism is based on African culture and is resistant to Western feminism, it has different characteristics and objectives. For example, African feminism is distinctly pro-natal, meaning that African feminism values the reproductive roles of women, and the ability to give birth is not considered subordinate to other roles women play in society (Mikell 1997). This pro-natal aspect is reflected in the fact that, in many parts of Africa, women strive to bear and rear children in addition to having economic and political roles (Mikell 1997).

Whereas Western feminism tends to emphasize autonomy for women, African feminism has tended to emphasize culturally linked communal forms of public participation (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). The language of African feminism is one of collaboration and negotiation with men and sometimes involves a compromise. It therefore "does not seek to disrupt, deconstruct and eliminate patriarchy as is advocated by radical western feminism" (Nnaemeka 2005: 6). The underlying framework for African feminism points out that the forces of patriarchy that pervade most African societies skew the balance of rights to mainstream development in favour of the male gender (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000).

Although there have been attempts to redefine the concept of gender in African development, to include more than the direct and overt violations of the rights of women, these have been hindered by the dominant patriarchal ideologies of governments and communities (Mama 2006). However, postcolonial feminism in Africa is characterized by the fight against male domination and inequality. It is typified by the fight against gender-based violence and traditional practices that are harmful to women, and promotes property and inheritance rights, equality in education and equal participation in governance. A major tool is advocacy, lobbying and activism. It was during this era (between 1975 and 1985) that the African continent noticed the springing up of several civil society groups and non-governmental organizations that sought to promote the rights of women (Olutayo and Yalley 2019). The line of argument in this paper has been to identify and discuss the impact of the various feminist movements in Africa on knowledge production.

University education is an ideal environment for the production of scholarship on women's and gender issues. Women's studies was the academic arm of

the women's movement in the 1960s and still exists in tandem with feminist scholarship. It is a key example of a new intellectual arena emerging in many universities in Africa. Women's studies functions to develop a woman-oriented understanding of the world, to seek out the causalities for the oppression of women and examine the strategies for change. The field has been motivated to transform society in order to achieve equality for women (Mama 1996). Gender studies emerged out of women's studies. Feminists, especially liberal feminists, contended that the total liberation, equality and development of women can best be achieved when men and women are considered in the development process. Thus, the philosophy of gender and development has become prominent in the quest for women's development (Olutayo and Yalley 2019).

It is important to note that numerous universities have made efforts to increase the participation of women as students and faculty members. Often, these efforts have come as a result of lobbying and activism by feminists. Affirmative action strategies undertaken by public universities have included reducing the entrance requirements for women; providing remedial courses for women; and/or providing financial assistance specifically for female students. However, assessments of the value of affirmative action strategies have been mixed. On one hand, they have led to slightly higher levels of female participation, but on the other hand they have sometimes backfired, with men accusing women of favouritism and female intellectual inferiority (Pereira 2017).

Despite the growth in feminist scholarship, masculinist thought continues to dominate intellectual work and this has restricted the character of knowledge produced. Gender continues to be absent from the analysis and this is seen, firstly, by simply not placing women's presence and concerns on the agenda of intellectual work or by doing so in ways that are limiting and distorted. Secondly, it involves ignoring how masculinities may be inscribed in structures, processes and practices of domination. Pereira (2017) notes that most scholars show astoundingly little or no awareness of concepts and perspectives that arise out of feminist scholarship. Contributions also reflect highly uneven levels of gender awareness, with only one or two writers demonstrating far more sensitivity than most to theory and concepts that focus on gender. What this suggests is that feminist thought and imagination are permeating the work of some among the present generation of scholars but remains relatively rare. It is important to acknowledge the potential for feminist scholarship to transform the ways in which African realities are understood, with attendant implications for progressive social change. However, this possibility has patently not materialized, despite the rapid expansion of feminist intellectual work inside and outside the academy since the early 1980s (Pereira 2017).

These criticisms notwithstanding, many universities have established programmes in gender studies and/or women's studies and/or centres. The programmes were set up to meet different types of needs. Although the number of women's and gender studies centres at universities has grown, they have had limited impact on changing gender relations at these institutions. They often operate in isolation from other departments and the mainstream activities of the universities; they lack adequate staff and resources to run gender sensitization programmes; and their directors sometimes have little knowledge of or interest in gender issues (Rathgeber 2013). As Diaw (2007) and Shackleton (2007) observed, these centres were established in ways that muted their effectiveness and were symptomatic of the low institutional priority accorded gender in universities. Such low prioritization arises out of ignorance about gender issues and an absence "of serious engagement with the realities of gendered power relations or theorization around gender in the workplace" (Shackleton 2007: 36).

These attitudes, which underscore institutional cultures, result in a persistent institutional reaction that tends to neutralize attempts to confront "specific gender challenges" (*ibid.*). This confirms that, in spite of official approval, gender centres have to continuously engage with institutional cultures expressed in the personal attitudes and actions of key individuals within the university administration in order to avoid marginalization or outright rejection. Notwithstanding such problems, over the past two decades these centres have produced a cadre of trained feminist scholars and activists who now bring their skills and knowledge to different facets of their societies (Adomako Ampofo et al. 2004; Onyango 2007).

5 Strategizing Gender Equity in African Universities

As we think about our universities as sites of knowledge production in the twenty-first century, we ask: If the universities remain unequal and difficult places for women, what kind of male or female citizens are they now turning out? Has enough been done to decolonize the structures, expectations and horizons of our universities? If social burdens imposed on female students and faculty, which prevent them from taking their places in traditionally configured academies, are actually increasing, where should our priorities now lie? It is clearly time to rethink and act and support the work of transnational feminist networks and organizations (Mama and Barnes 2007). It is imperative, therefore, that rigorous feminist work adopts considerable reflexivity about

the assumptions used to make sense of “what is”: social realities and the ways in which these realities are re/presented in knowledge production.

The necessity for gender and feminist studies to deal with masculinist and patriarchal domination in an environment where substantive representation of women is shunned and administratively stifled cannot be overemphasized. Thus, applying a feminist perspective is crucial for addressing equity and equality in knowledge production in universities in Africa (Carotenuto, Kirin and Prienda 2014). Universities have the potential to accelerate this process by undertaking a set of strategic activities, which include adopting an intersectional approach that considers the interconnectedness of gender with other social categories, such as race, class, ethnicity and sexuality (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000). This perspective recognizes that individuals may experience, simultaneously, multiple forms of discrimination and privilege, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics and helps in addressing multiple dimensions of inequality. In the same vein, feminist perspectives encourage a critical examination of power structures within universities. This involves questioning and challenging hierarchical systems that perpetuate gender-based inequalities, in academic positions and decision-making roles.

Implementing critical feminist pedagogy within academic programmes to challenge traditional gender norms and power structures is essential (Amaefula 2021). This involves creating curricula that closely examine patriarchy, masculinist ideologies and their impact on various aspects of society. It also means developing inclusive curricula that incorporate feminist theories and perspectives (Bennett 2002). The implication of this is the integration of diverse voices, acknowledging the contributions of female scholars and addressing gender-related issues in various disciplines.

Conducting research that exposes and analyzes gender inequalities within the academic environment can serve as a basis for advocating policy changes and raising awareness about the need for substantive representation of women in academia (Pereira 2017). Engaging in institutional advocacy and activism to challenge gender-based discrimination as well as launching visibility campaigns that showcase the contributions of female scholars in various fields may help to highlight the achievements of women and challenge stereotypes, contributing to changing perceptions about women’s capabilities and expertise. This may involve collaboration with women’s rights organizations, student groups and other stakeholders, to press for policy changes and institutional reforms (Bennett 2002).

Establishing networking and mentorship programmes that specifically support female scholars can provide women with the support and guidance needed to navigate a hostile environment (Carotenuto et al. 2014). This could

involve advocating for and working towards the implementation of gender-inclusive policies within academic institutions, which includes policies related to hiring, promotion and tenure, and addressing gender-based discrimination. Creating awareness by organizing workshops and training sessions on gender sensitivity, inclusivity and the impact of masculinist and patriarchal ideologies is a much-needed strategy (Bennett 2002). Media platforms and public outreach can be utilized to raise awareness about the challenges women face in academic settings. This can create public pressure, draw attention to the need for substantive representation of women in academia and contribute to raising awareness and fostering a more supportive and respectful academic culture (Rathgeber 2013).

Legal avenues to address gender-based discrimination could also be explored. Depending on the context, legal action or the threat of legal action may sometimes be effective in compelling institutions to address issues of inequality (Gaidzanwa 2007). Collaborating with allies who share the goal of challenging masculinist and patriarchal domination can amplify the impact of advocacy efforts. This could include building alliances with like-minded individuals and groups, both within and outside the academic community, and encouraging men within academic institutions to actively support gender-equality initiatives (Rathgeber 2013). Engaging men as allies is essential for challenging and changing the norms and structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

The ways in which power and resources circulate serve, on one hand, to undermine feminist projects where they exist in universities, or to exclude gender conversations altogether through institutional norms and practices (Gaidzanwa 2007; Tsikata 2007; Bennett 2002). Addressing masculinist and patriarchal domination requires persistence and a commitment to long-term systemic change. By employing a combination of these strategies, gender and feminist studies can contribute to transforming institutions and creating environments that are more inclusive, equitable and supportive of the substantive representation of women.

6 Conclusion

It is evident that there is a huge gender gap in knowledge production in African universities and that the existing organizational structures of universities are not conducive to bridging it in the near future. The limited participation of women in knowledge production results from their limited access to education and related resources. Writing about gender relations in Africa, Okeke

states that women are still struggling to be accepted as citizens, let alone being enabled to practise and enjoy the rights of citizenship (Okeke 2003). In the current global climate, African women's movements that seek participation in nation-building processes and activities are actually losing ground, in some instances (Barnes 2007). Thus, institutional cultures in modern African universities maintain the ability to produce and reproduce ways of knowing that privilege certain kinds of maleness and sideline and marginalize other ways of knowing and of knowledge production.

The affirmative action activities undertaken by several universities have not made an obvious difference in enhancing the participation of women. However, there is a growing number of trained and articulate female social scientists, many of whom have the potential to be role models for female students and junior researchers. In time, as the critical mass of female social scientists grows, they will make their way into existing male networks and find a more powerful voice. Universities in Africa have the potential to accelerate this process by undertaking a set of strategic activities, which include enacting and implementing policies that advance the interests of female researchers and creating communities of researchers to assist women in sharpening their skills so that they can fully participate in research, leading to economic development. More introspection, research and activism are required to put additional flesh on the existing theoretical and descriptive bones of this situation, so that new generations of academics in Africa may conceptualize and participate in fuller, and more meaningful, transformative institutional policies and practices (Barnes 2007).

More important is the fact that feminist gains in intellectual work cannot be taken for granted. The challenge presented here is one of developing and consolidating autonomous spaces that are sufficiently supportive of critical interventions for sustaining feminists in their work. There is a clear need to find ways of broadening and deepening spaces for feminist scholarship on Africa. Mobilizing and capacity- and theory-building among feminists are strategic priorities here. There is also a need to promote forums for exchanging ideas and engaging in collective intellectual work. Masculinist domination of scholarship on Africa will simply not deliver the goods in producing knowledge that is up to the task of transforming our institutions and our societies in the direction of gender equality and social justice.

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Transformation beyond the Surface: Race, Power and Young Academics after #RhodesMustFall

Thando Njovane and Amanda Hlengwa

1 Introduction

Like Euro-American universities, postcolonial historically white institutions (HWIs) were created by white men to serve the intellectual needs of white men. On a global level, this history has meant that white men have had a head start on women and, more recently, the black majority, in terms of perceived competence and intellectual prowess. In South Africa, the situation is further complicated by the dual legacies of colonialism and apartheid, out of which emerged distinct types of universities divided along racial lines. The desegregation of higher education (HE) since the dawn of democracy in the early 1990s has come with its own set of challenges – specifically within historically white liberal institutions that have had to contend with institutional cultures that have emerged from the country’s racist legacy.

Nevertheless, South African state legislature has attempted to address this legacy, through policies such as the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA 1995) and the Department of Education’s (DoE) White Paper on Higher Education (DoE 1997), both of which envisioned greater and more equitable access to higher education for all South Africans, together with producing highly qualified graduates by regulating the quality of curricula. Of course, widened access has not always correlated with success for the vast majority of the poor and working-class students who enter the academy, a state of affairs that has also affected the changing demographics of staff. Moreover, Saleem Badat (2010a, 2010b) has argued for the need to maintain the balance between transformation and quality in the higher education landscape, while also emphasizing that transformation in HWIs is often read as compromising the latter. It is evident from the above that the transformation of higher education in South Africa has been framed around issues of access, quality and racialized access (DoE 1997), with very little attention given to what happens to the historically marginalized once they enter HWIs.

Most of the insights from this chapter emerge from our positioning as two black female academics working within an HWI in South Africa. In the chapter

itself, we problematize the issue of transformation when conceiving of the historically white South African university as a particular type of social body in which those who inhabit it are vested with legacies of power that, in fact, can be reproduced, regardless of how those bodies are racialized and gendered. We argue that race and gender alone cannot be taken as the sum total of the transformation agenda, especially because both have the potential to systemically reproduce and uphold the very structures they are supposed to dismantle. The issue becomes less about the kinds of bodies we find within institutional walls and more about how power is distributed and accounted for. In so doing, we propose an understanding of the transformation agenda that accounts for difference while also complicating the limiting, assimilative vocabulary that characterizes it.

2 Historically White Universities and the State

All universities are structured hierarchically and thus participate in the mechanisms of power. Globally, notions of diversity and inclusion (which fall under the general umbrella of “transformation”), as discussed by Radebe and Maldonado-Torres in Chapter 13 of this book, attempt to acknowledge the impact of inequalities within the academy. In the South African setting, transformation is almost exclusively shaped by considerations of race and gender. Over the years, there have been a number of ministerial task teams and commissions (usually following undeniably racist incidents) that have interrogated higher education’s structural processes related to progress in the recruitment, retention and progression of black South African academics.

Recommendations from these commissions feed into national policies and thus have contributed to shaping systemic responses to multifaceted challenges in academic staffing, which include the “slow pace of transformation, the ageing workforce, and the relatively under qualified academic staff workforce” (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2015). The systemic interventions account for observable and quantifiable structural transformation. However, the cultural transformation of HWIS is less overt and is therefore susceptible to further scrutiny.

The efforts of HWIS to eradicate structural and systemic oppression have focused largely on constructing an optical illusion, by increasing the participation rates of black and women’s representation in higher education without paying careful attention to the daily practices and cultural values of these universities. The illusion here lies in the mistaken assumption that increasing black faces in the academy solves the problem of diversity. Although we

cannot overlook the achievements made within the sector since 1994, it is worth exploring how current issues that arise as a result of historical forces influence contemporary reality.

Emerging scholarship within the first 10 years of democracy, such as David Cooper and George Subotzky's "The Skewed Revolution: Trends in South African Higher Education" (2001), paints a compelling picture of the impact of social class on the participation rates of black students in higher education. Policy documents that have signalled substantive efforts towards redressing historical inequalities in the sector include the White Paper (DoE 1997), National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education [MoE] 2001) and the Report of the Working Group (MoE 2019), all of which have largely affected transformation efforts, at least at the level of representation.

Black Africans, who had restricted access to education in the apartheid years, with the intent of preparing them for working-class occupations, have increasingly gained access to higher education in the last three decades. Despite this progress, the vast majority of black students entering the academy have not been adequately exposed to literacies that would ensure their success in the sector as it currently stands. Students from working-class backgrounds participating in formerly white institutions that, more often than not, are embedded in white, middle- and upper-class cultural norms, belief systems that sustain the practices of those institutions, and literacies they were not exposed to in the schooling system, often experience HWIs as exclusionary. As demonstrated by the #RhodesMustFall movement and the calls for decolonization of the curriculum, for instance, HWIs continue to present as self-aggrandizing ivory towers predicated on exclusion well into the contemporary era.

Although most black Africans are classified as working class, the black middle class has always existed (though it was contained during apartheid) and continues to increase. The South African middle class enjoys educational advantages that translate into being exposed to literacies that better prepare and support learners for entry into higher education. The stratification of access to literacy according to social class highlights the importance of thinking about transformation as more than a racial justice project, because an increase in black participation can also become exclusionary in practice if it privileges only those who already have the privilege of epistemic access. This is just one of the ways that the limiting language of race risks trapping us in transformation agendas that continue to marginalize poor and working-class students.

An overemphasis on race and gender alone might lead us to mistakenly deduce that any HWI that adopts any transformation strategy as one of its core intentions expresses a commitment to rocking the proverbial academic

boat, so to speak. Nevertheless, transformation interventions may themselves become mired in the maintenance of the status quo. One way in which HWIs may be implicated in this is through the recruitment of black and female academics who are “safe bets” (Hlengwa 2015): people who possess the kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that is aligned with the established values of a university and, therefore, are likely to reproduce rather than transform its dominant institutional cultures. These “safe bets” are not only easily assimilated into institutional life but also come to embody stratification by class, by coming into these spaces with the “correct” and, therefore, more palatable cultural practices. In this sense, cultural capital comes to denote middle- and upper-class mobility that reinforces structural and systemic inequality at an institutional level and a social one. “Safe bets” are thus safe in that they inadvertently (or even unconsciously) ensure the comfort of the establishment.

Nevertheless, scholarship on the changing demographics of the academy in South Africa would have us believe that diversifying race and gender representation shifts universities’ organizational cultures, requiring the “old” academic guard to be open to co-developing variations of cultures that the “new” academics usher into the academy (Fourie 1999). However, it is precisely this kind of surface-level understanding of transformation that limits the implementation of truly transformative policies and procedures that insist on being practised in the daily life of an institution. As demonstrated by “safe bets”, the introduction of new academics into established institutional spaces does not necessarily indicate transformation. Instead, new academics are less likely to disrupt the status quo precisely because doing so is not only tantamount to career suicide but also comes at immense personal and emotional cost.

Transformation discourse does not account for the psychologically corrosive nature of antagonistic and dysfunctional academic spaces, primarily because these discussions happen informally, behind closed doors, between friends and trusted confidants, or when junior academics decide to leave academia altogether. Although changing staff demographics is unequivocally necessary, not enough care or accountability (apart from policies) is taken and practised to ensure the safety of young, black academics once they are in the system. It would appear that transformation ends once the numbers that confirm representation rise. Representation matters, but safety should be a high priority even within the exceptional society of the ivory tower if the purpose of transformation is to have any efficacy on the ground. The corollary here is those new academics who (perhaps unconsciously) have a vested interest in maintaining spaces of privilege precisely because the “elite” social body of the academy is almost exclusively predicated on hierarchy and, therefore, power.

Louise Vincent's work on "the limitations of 'inter-racial contact'" (Vincent 2008) is instructive here, since she problematizes the widely practised liberal assumption that transformation involves opening up universities to different races, by pointing out that racism continues to circulate and reproduce itself despite measures taken to increase "diversity". Vincent is referring to students in her article, but her observations may easily be applied to staffing.

Advancing her observations a step further would also imply that intraracial contact within institutional spaces cannot be taken for granted. In other words, the diversification of staff profiles in HWIS does not necessarily mean that perceived transformation agents cannot themselves be agents of violence. In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek (2008) maintains that there are two forms of objective violence: symbolic violence, which refers to the ways in which language can be instrumentalized in the service of violence, and systemic violence, which refers to "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (Žižek 2008: 2). If we apply Žižek's definitions to the operations of power within the hierarchical system of the academy, we see that symbolic violence is already embedded in the concept of diversity, a concept that maligns those who have earned their way into the academy in the same way as everyone else but are inscribed with otherness through the ways in which their very presence is defined and read. The one who represents diversity is made other, hence the debates around maintaining standards while transforming the academy.

According to this logic, those who are read as "diversity" arrive at HWIS already deficient and have to earn a perception of efficiency among students and their colleagues. By the same token, the good transformation story is a story of numbers, of representation, the "smooth functioning" (Žižek 2008: 2) of a system and not a narrative of the personal or individual cost thereof. Violence is inevitable in any hierarchical system. It is most covert in a system that assumes innocence and camaraderie within intraracial contact but neglects structural and systemic inequalities that are part of institutional life.

3 Power and the Politics of Intraracial Contact

According to Foucault, every aspect of human life is shaped by relations of power (Foucault 2020: 8) and the social body is "the effect ... of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" (Foucault 1982: 785). In speaking about power in the South African higher education sector, we are also speaking about its (re)production through those racialized individuals

who constitute the social body of any university. We are still speaking about what transformation is and what it does because we have a limited vocabulary for what diversity and transformation mean.

Transformation has largely come to mean the presence of black and brown people “around the table”. This literal-mindedness has unfortunately led to the dilution of transformation for instrumentalist purposes, focusing primarily on representation along gender and racial lines at the expense of a more holistic interpretation of the issue at hand. Without diminishing the importance of changing the surface profile within institutions, the emphasis on these two markers obscures one aspect of existence in institutional life: power. Foucault, in another context, tells us that power is implicit in all social contracts. On the one hand, it can be a useful tool for regulating society (Foucault 1982). On the other hand, however, power can also be used in the service of maintaining dominance over another. For Foucault,

power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.

FOUCAULT 1982: 781

The relationship between power and subjectivity established by Foucault here is extended to all institutions in his later work, and is thus relevant to our present purposes. Njovane (2015) reflects on the ways in which racism is covertly reinforced through exploitative and abusive relations of power in the academy despite overt policies meant to guard against its reproduction. She argues that this state of affairs is mitigated by the difference between overt and covert forms of racism, the latter of which may be concealed beneath the appearance of inclusion on the surface (Njovane 2015: 118). South African higher education is neither exceptional in its dealings with racism nor is it immune to power relations that infect personal and institutional ways of being. Those who are read as representing transformation arrive in institutional spaces already mired in the politics of power, delimited and defined from without.

Talking about the whiteness of universities in the UK, Sara Ahmed analogizes that a university is like “an old garment”, which has “acquired the shape of

those who tend to wear it, such that it is easier to wear it if you have that shape” (Ahmed 2018). She goes on to expand:

Privilege is an energy-saving device [since] less effort is required to pass through when the world has been assembled around you ... If you arrive from dubious origins, you are not expected to be there, so by getting there, you have already disagreed with an expectation of *who* you are and *what* you can do ... then the institution can feel like the wrong shape ... If you are the wrong shape, you have to make more of an effort to fit ... when you do not fit the requirements of a space you become a *misfit* [and] fitting becomes work for those who do not fit.

AHMED 2018

These observations may be read as an account of the ways in which institutional identities and cultures ossify (or become fixed) in established patterns of being, particularly when these patterns have historically facilitated the smooth passage of certain kinds of bodies. In applying Ahmed’s observations to South Africa, the smooth passage through historically white institutional spaces is determined by race and gender, and by age, class, ableism and a myriad of other intersectional determinants. The gradual transformation of student and staff demographics in HWIs does not always come with the challenge of transforming the ossified patterns themselves, precisely because “safe bets” are easily assimilated into the existing system. The problem arises when the obverse is true, when “misfits” are introduced into a system designed to malign them. Although “safe bets” and “misfits” may both represent diversity, there exists a volatile conflict between them since at stake is either the maintenance or disruption of the status quo, respectively.

While the conflict may remain ideological, it is easily complicated by the introduction of power into an already unstable intraracial dynamic, an introduction that can lead to abuses of power that are not easily identified or accounted for because there has yet to be a vocabulary for doing so. It is simpler, even easy, to explain abuses of power by white agents in HWIs, because we already have the vocabulary of racism to explain these. When abuses of power are intraracial or are enacted by those who represent transformation, however, the vocabulary provided to us by the language of racism arrives at an impasse. Our language skirts around the phenomenon, and this is telling, since it exposes the naive assumption that intraracial contact in HWIs falls outside the power structures that govern the entirety of human life.

There is a parallelism between Ahmed’s analogy of the institutional garment and Mamphela Ramphele’s argument, that it makes sense that South Africa’s

historically white universities “founded by white males for white males ... have very strong male cultures ... Racism, sexism and authoritarianism are deeply embedded in the cultures of many institutions” (Ramphela 2008: 201). Ramphela’s contention emphasizes the ways in which HWIs are not only founded on the racial negation of those who do not present as white and male but are also predicated on the functionality of power. Although her observations tend to repeat the prevailing gendered and racialized understandings of transformation, they also gesture towards a need to further investigate how whiteness can be instrumentalized by *any body* with the potential to weaponize power in destructive and abusive ways within the academy.

The imperative brought about by our proposed intersectional understanding of transformation through its relation to (ab)uses of power is not only to introduce “misfits” into an institution but also to dismantle the old garment of assumed innocence in the service of co-creating a new one. HWIs have yet to shed the old garment, and this is not without reason, since shedding it is dependent on the acknowledgement that such a garment exists in the first place. Inasmuch as the assimilation of female, black and brown bodies into higher education has been the doctrine, systemic changes have been slow in – or else hindered from – explicitly disrupting established “authoritarian” cultures. As the gradual increase of “misfits” in HWIs reaches a critical mass, their presence and dis-ease are politically suggestive, since they challenge us to oppose the smooth functioning of institutions predicated on authority without accountability.

A reductive preoccupation with whiteness, patriarchal and paternalistic liberalism and the ageing professoriate of universities delimits a more intersectional approach to transformation that holds individual academic citizens accountable for the ways in which they exercise power, regardless of their race. Additionally, since higher education institutions constitute at least one of the sites of contestation in the redress of deeply embedded forms of structural and systemic oppression in South Africa, it would be irresponsible not to broaden our vocabulary about all the ways in which the sector needs to transform. We need a larger linguistic base to draw from.

The vocabularies of race and gender that underpin contemporary discussions around transformation in this context are far too restricted, since they do not fully account for the reality of how power is mobilized within institutional spaces. This is largely because, on its own, power does not have an inherent utility. In fact, “power exists only when it is put into action” (Foucault 1982: 788). This means that although higher education institutions can indeed be shaped by their respective institutional cultures, power relations reveal themselves through the ways in which individuals and groups assert their

(inter-)subjectivity within these spaces. Understood in a Foucauldian sense, power has a latent potentiality; it “acts upon [people’s] actions: an action upon action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future” (Foucault 1982: 789).

Understood in this way, power arises from a constellation of individual actions within institutional spaces, actions that have a bearing on how the communal body of the institution functions through time. If we extend Ahmed’s metaphor of the “old garment”, we see that it is not only the existence of the garment that should inform our deliberations on institutional life, but also the action of putting it on and taking it off, because the latter reveals how power gains and retains its efficacy. Similarly, when our understanding of power is limited to the literal whiteness of HWIs, we stand to miss its arguably more destructive discursive potential. Without diminishing the destructive impact of overt and covert racism within the higher education system, it is imperative that our conversations about transformation face the reality that the old adage, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, applies to the academy too.

Working within the Foucauldian framework allows us to see how the pervasive narrative of inclusion blinds us to the profound fact that even those bodies that are supposed to represent transformation can have a stake in the maintenance of the proverbial “old garment” denoted by whiteness in HWIs. On a discursive level, the destructive potentiality of whiteness relies on the power differential between the agent of violence and “the other (the one over whom power is exercised)” (Foucault 1982: 789). In other words, our preoccupation with racial inclusion has, unfortunately, limited our capacity to understand or explain how black academics can be agents of violence also, much like their white male predecessors and/or counterparts.

There appear to be several reasons for this. One potential reason appears to be the hierarchical nature of the academy, which explicitly reinforces relations of inequality through its very structure. This means that those who are in positions of power are always subject to the temptation to mobilize this power for either good or nefarious ends. Secondly, although institutional policies meant to mitigate abuses of power may be in place, the hierarchical nature of institutions limits their usefulness precisely because academics who are abused in the powerplay are often those who are also in precarious positions, such as postgraduates, contract staff, young academics and sometimes even white academics. Thus, power reveals itself to not only corrupt the powerful but also absolve them of accountability in a manner that mimics the exclusionary mechanisms of the apartheid university. Thirdly, for better and for worse, the essentialization of race within prevailing understandings of transformation

has the unintended result of equating racial and gendered identification with ethical practice.

A similar phenomenon has been observed in newly liberated postcolonial states, where the liberated heads of state and government officials tend to inherit the brutalist, authoritarian methods of their oppressors. If we conceive of the state as a hierarchical system, predicated on the exercise of power over individuals and groups, we can see how the postapartheid white university is built upon a similar model. Black academics in HWIS might hope, as civilians in postcolonial states do, that superficial measures meant to ensure transformation would be transformative, but the reality is that the story is far more complicated than it would appear to be on the surface. While we cannot underestimate the importance of representation, we also must not lose sight of the nuances of our universities as psychosocial bodies that should (at least in theory) be predicated on ethical practice in the service of a transformation that is constructive in its practice.

The mechanics of power, together with the assimilative discourse surrounding transformation in HWIS, ostensibly means that black people are inducted into the status quo rather than joining the academy as agents for the co-creation of new cultures. An example of this can be observed in the mechanisms of mentorship programmes. The increasing entrance of young academics into the South African higher education sector – usually young black women and men – mitigates the ageing professoriate, who are engaged in providing mentorship to these early-career academics. But despite their good intentions, mentorship programmes are underpinned by notions of integration. Sabelo Ndwandwe (2020), for instance, reminds us that the invitation to integrate within models of mentorship rarely acknowledges the set of values and codes of behaviours that institutions require and how these are historically linked to colonialism and other forms of domination.

By definition, mentorship is about making people “fit” an institution rather than making room for them to exist within it. Ultimately, it is not institutions that demand certain ways of being from young academics but rather the individuals that make up these institutions who do this. It is not so much Ahmed’s proverbial garment that stands in the way of true transformation but rather the individuals who instrumentalize this garment.

Also drawing on Sara Ahmed (2000), Ndwandwe argues that an assumption exists that higher education institutions themselves are neutral and can accommodate differences. This becomes the breeding ground to “cunningly reproduce colonial structures of power and at worse, colonial subjects” (Ndwandwe 2020: 15). The reproduction of subjection through power is hardly cunning, however, since it constitutes the very fabric from which the institution is made.

It is a social fabric fully invested in the politics of power. Moreover, HWIs of the liberal inclination in particular are far from neutral – no institution is – since they also participate in the politics of optics. They are invested in *being seen* as progressive, so the introduction of transformation agendas, particularly in the guise of mentoring programmes, must fit this image.

By virtue of participating in a transformation programme, those who are mentored are also positioned as transformation agents, and those who present as “misfits” bear the brunt of the responsibility of advocating for, conceptualizing and demonstrating innovative ways of responding to the changing academic climate. Those who are mentored contribute to the optical illusion of embodying the desired demographic representation to legitimate academic departments and institutional committees. Given the language used to describe young academics – words like “junior staff”, “younger staff”, “mentees”, etc. – it is clear that their contribution to and agency within departments and committees is largely theoretical rather than real, more symbolic than actual.

4 Conclusion

If the social bodies of HWIs are truly committed to transformation, they need to become realistic and intersectional about the ways in which they define and implement diversity measures. This would involve more pragmatic interventions that not only invite certain people into institutional spaces but also ensure their relative safety by mitigating the ways in which power is (ab)used within the system. It is worth noting that we do not conceive of institutional spaces as akin to a home – we do not think that the academy needs to be “safe” in the same way that a home is. Rather, we conceive of safety as active steps to eradicate violence from academic spaces and institutions. Additionally, an intersectional approach to transformation holds accountable all those vested with power, regardless of what they may appear to represent on the surface. While useful, the limiting language of whiteness leads to the misrecognition and misrepresentation of interracial and intraracial interactions inside institutional walls by essentializing race and being naïve about the corrupting power of power.

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On Access and Responsibility – Questioning Ulli Beier’s Legacy through Collaborative Approaches

Katharina Greven and Lena Naumann

1 Introduction

The photographic estate¹ of the art patron and linguist Ulli Beier (1922–2011) and his wife, the artist Georgina Beier (1938–2021), came to the Iwalewahaus at the University of Bayreuth in Germany from their residence in Sydney, Australia, in 2012, after Ulli’s death in 2011. This private collection of about 40,000 pieces contains not only photographs and negatives (which form the largest part), but also slides, scans, publications, flyers, posters, letters, handwritten notes and further documents, such as recordings and films (in short, images in their various materiality) (Figure 8.1). The material had been mainly accumulated and organized by Ulli Beier, who also took most of the photographs, documenting his surroundings and positioning himself in a new environment. It contributes to the Beiers’ visual memory of the respective places they lived in but also adds to a narrative that the couple built up over the years, about their cultural work, their collective strategies and political agenda.

Most of the collection is from Nigeria, particularly the Southwest, with a focus on Osogbo, where the Beiers lived for several years. But other places of residence, such as Papua New Guinea, Australia and Germany, are also documented. The estate arrived packed in boxes, partly organized, partly mixed up, showing previous organizational traces of the collection’s growth over the years and its relocation every time the Beiers moved house. Repeated transport caused some damage, which, together with the effects of the respective climates, left traces on the material.

With its arrival in Bayreuth, the material underwent yet another level of organization. Boxes were unpacked and files were arranged in order to be digitized. The digital process itself not only challenged the material in transforming it to digital copy but also revealed its potential. The organization, its inherent structures and the personal attachment of the researchers handling

1 Hereafter also referred to as “the estate”.

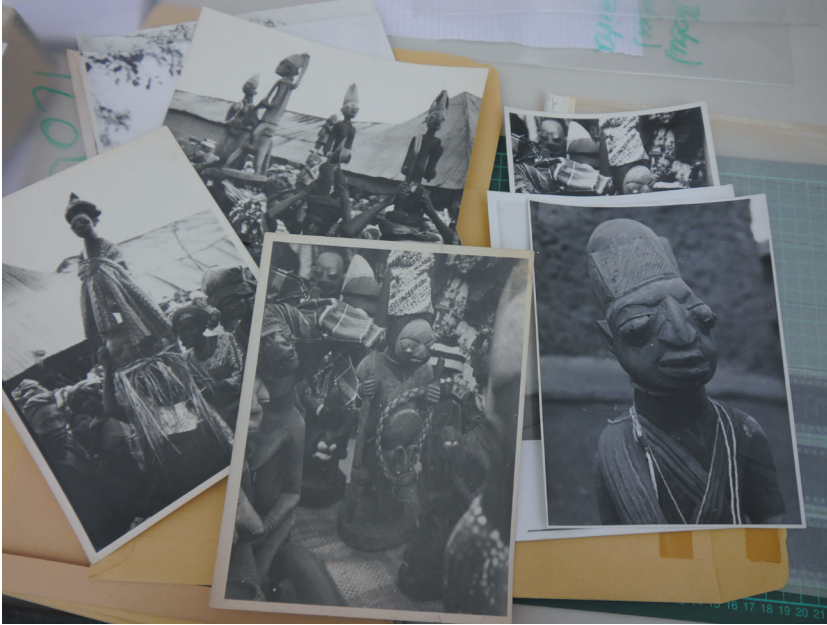


FIGURE 8.1 Various black and white photographs of Yoruba carvings on paper
© CBCIU & IWALEWAHAUS. PHOTO BY LENA NAUMANN

the estate as well as their own situatedness towards the material, needed to be resolved in order to see the possibilities of redoing the archive in a collective way. This process included the two authors of this chapter, who packed the material in Sydney with Georgina Beier. They scanned and worked with it in Bayreuth, their place of employment, and had unhindered access to the estate, which was the foundation of their PhD projects, based on not yet accessible or known material.

Furthermore, the estate added to the existing art collection that the Beiers had brought to Bayreuth in 1981, when they opened the Iwalewahaus there, thus augmenting the African studies course at the university. It seemed that gaps were being closed, as information about artists appeared and collecting strategies became more evident. The photographic estate also revived interest in the art collection and its history. With it came privileges (for the authors of this chapter, on the one hand, and for the team of the Iwalewahaus, on the other, who had unhindered access to a history that was not their own and was to a large extent constructed). It also brought a new responsibility in how to treat, how to (re)think and how to open (in a physical and metaphorical sense) the archive, to question established opinions and stories, perceptions and access. It was and is a constant unlearning of the institutional past, with its enforced ideologies and power relations and modes of thinking, by actively listening to

the voices of the respective communities in order to care and repair, an “undoing of the ontology of the document” (Azoulay 2019: 554).

The term “archive”, which entails not only the strategy of collection but also the emotion of accumulating excess, is used here in two ways: firstly, to mean the material manifestation (the classified and accessible archival objects); secondly, to refer to the condensation of material and mental images that are arranged rhizomatically and differently depending on individual perceptions. The archive includes the estate and the art collection.

This chapter explores the change in attitude towards the newly arrived material; the necessity and the possibilities of collaborative and sensual work as critical interventions in the whole of the material (the estate and the art collection) and therefore in the Iwalewaha; the accessibility and downfalls of digitization; and the final relocation of the estate to the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU) in Osogbo in 2020, as one way of equalizing a partnership and reconfiguring the global North–South relationship. It describes, in particular, the practical and workable handling of an estate, its immanent structures and the challenges of shared responsibility among the institutions in which both authors are involved. These negotiations of cooperation are not complete but continue to be a process, the successful implementation of which, according to the formulated goals, is still subject to constant exchange.

2 Established Narratives: the Construction of an Insider

This essay does not reproduce established narratives around the art patron, collector and art lover Ulli Beier and the artist Georgina Beier (Figure 8.2). However, a short introduction into the Beiers’ cultural work and their understanding of modern art is necessary, in order to recognize the system within the art collection at the Iwalewaha today and Ulli Beier’s drive to document his environment, strengthening and manifesting his role as insider and expert.

There is no doubt that the influence of European art patrons and collectors was considerable during the period of independence declarations in Africa. They initiated the founding of schools, galleries and collections of traditional artifacts and modern and contemporary art (Fall and Pivin 2002; Förster and Kasfir 2013; Kasfir 1999; Probst 2011; Okeke-Agulu 2015; Savage 2014). With regard to the Beiers, their collecting activities (in Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Germany) were particularly connected to Nigeria, where they spent a particularly long time of their lives in the 1950s and 1960s, during the independence movement. Their kind of art patronage was thus a phenomenon that was practised by other privileged Western immigrants in various African countries



FIGURE 8.2 Georgina and Ulli Beier at the Berlin Theatre Festival in 1964
 © CBCIU & IWALEWAHAUS. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

at that time. Among other reasons, these immigrants came to Africa in search of a new homeland where they could reinvent themselves and which, they thought, they could (co-)shape.

Ulli and Georgina Beier came to Nigeria as self-declared outsiders, as people who did not fit into the European cultural scene.² In Nigeria, they found

² Their move to Africa seemed to be an escape from Western rationalism and the emerging cultural pessimism after World War II. Ulli's loss of his home in 1933, the move to Tel Aviv

a way of living that suited them, which they adapted to and, to a certain extent, shaped and appropriated. Ulli Beier approached his new surroundings through the lens of his camera and immersed himself fully into his new life, mainly outside his job at the University of Ibadan. Georgina found her way through communal cultural work in which she practised as an artist (Tröger 2001; Okeke-Agulu 2013; Greven, Naumann and Onwuegbucha 2022). They carried their way of life in Osogbo to various places, such as Papua New Guinea and Bayreuth, where their lifestyle was more secluded, involving friends and colleagues from their past.

On November 27, 1981, the Beiers founded a house for art and science in Bayreuth at the invitation of the university. It was anticipated as a self-critical museum, as a space for encountering works and artists with a strong connection to Africa. Both shaped its profile in the first years, which included the artist’s residency programme, a way to invite extended families, friends and artists mainly from Nigeria and Papua New Guinea to Bayreuth to change the narratives, albeit carefully curated by the Beiers themselves (Ogundele 2003; Mutumba 2012; Greven 2021). They gave the museum for modern and contemporary art its programmatic name, *Iwalewaha*.³

The Beiers’ collecting activities started in 1950, when Ulli and his first wife, Susanne Wenger,⁴ lived in Nigeria and worked with the inpatients of the Lantoro Mental Home in Abeokuta, whom they later declared to be artists (U. Beier 1959).⁵ This beginning informed their cultural activities and collecting

and his resettlement in a camp as an enemy alien, arranged by the British, made him feel like an outsider. He took on this characteristic in Ibadan, on the one hand intentionally, when he did not want to identify with the lifestyle of his European colleagues, and on the other hand unintentionally, when he was not yet part of his new environment (Ogundele 2003). Georgina, especially in retrospect, never felt at home in England and went to Nigeria when she was 24 years old, ready to immerse herself in a new way of living and creating (Tröger 2001).

3 “*Iwalewa*” describes a Yoruba philosophical concept; it can be translated as “character is beauty”, where beauty means not only the purely physical appearance but the inner essence of every creature (Abiodun 2001, 2014; Lawal 2005): “Each creation, be it divinity, person or thing, possesses its own beauty as a necessary consequence of *iwà*” (Abiodun 1983: 15). For Ulli, *Iwalewa* also stood for the complexity of non-European thinking.

4 Susanne Wenger (1915–2009) was an Austrian artist and co-founder of the Vienna Art Club. In 1950, together with Ulli Beier, she migrated to Nigeria, where she lived and worked until her death. Besides her artistic activities, Wenger was a high priestess within the Yoruba community. Her main artistic work, the restoration and construction of the shrines and sculptures in the Sacred Groves of Osogbo, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005. For in-depth research on Wenger and her artists’ collective, the New Sacred Art Movement, see Naumann (forthcoming).

5 For additional details regarding this material and its significance to the *Iwalewaha*, see Böllinger (forthcoming). Böllinger focuses on disability, specifically exploring the creations

strategies. They both wished to find a “raw and unspoiled” artistic expression, a formal way out of the European artistic traditions: “Thus these artists were able to produce highly original work, because there was neither an inhibiting social pressure, nor had they been prejudiced towards tradition by a form of Western education” (U. Beier 1959: 30).

According to the Beiers, the “modern artist” in Nigeria and, later, in Papua New Guinea should work with new materials and be socially distanced from traditional materials, which often had and have a clear social use. Further, they should not follow academic or cultural rules but should be aware of them, and should relate to themselves and their intuition, mixing reality and fantasy (U. Beier 1960; G. Beier 1977; Okeke-Agulu 2013, 2015). All the Beiers’ activities in Ibadan, and especially in the workshops in Osogbo in the early 1960s, aimed to support emerging “modern artists”. The Mbari Clubs promoted the “modern artist” from an academic background in Ibadan, who, however, worked against the academic curriculum, and “outsider artists” in Osogbo, who were untainted by any academic influence. Two museums in Osogbo accompanied that idea: the Museum of Popular Art showed mostly “academically untrained” artists who fitted their definition of the “modern artist”, and the Museum of Antiquities displayed a nostalgic view of the past, creating a necessary distance from traditional forms, which were used as inspiration. The Beiers’ understanding of the “modern artist” influenced not only the selection of artists for their collaborations but also the body of works in their art collection, which they built up over the years.

The Iwalewahaus started as a reinforcement of the African studies department at the university, to strengthen its location in Bayreuth. It was proposed that the Beiers sell their art collection to the university and that Ulli would be employed as director and curator of a museum focusing on Africa.⁶ Beier initially rejected this proposition but agreed later, when it was clear that he could realise their vision of a museum, a gallery and a combination of past experiences (U. Beier in Obafemi 1993):

Here we want to show how African art has developed through interchanges with – as well as in opposition to – European art forms and artists. More

of patients from the former Lantoro Mental Home in Abeokuta (now the Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital Aro Abeokuta).

6 Prof. Dr. Klaus Dieter Wolff (1935–2007), who was appointed the founding president of the University of Bayreuth in 1973, was one of the many people who supported Ulli Beier in his activities and is thus part of the founding history of the Iwalewahaus. It is quite interesting how many individuals took some kind of responsibility for the opening of this institution. See, among others, Riesz (2002).

than political manifestos the arts of Africa reveal the African fight for independence, the reevaluation of tradition, the conflict with European ideas and the search for identity.

U. BEIER 1982: 4

Beier wanted to bring the periphery – from a Eurocentric point of view – into the centre (Riesz 2002). This was a positioning or even canonization counter to the established narratives of the West, which regarded and marketed traditional images in many ethnographic museums as the only authentic ones: “He had for long decried museums as mausoleums and, even though this one was not to be a museum of antiquities (of which there were far too many in Germany, all full of stolen object), he did not like the idea” (Ogundele 2003: 214).

One way to avoid this and to promote a supposedly permanent and equal exchange between different actors, in the sense of a contact zone (Clifford 1997), was to present a rich programme of events where people, ideas and concepts could meet. This ideal, developed from the perspective of the global North, had good intentions but was often impossible to execute: “The center [the Global North] constantly generalizes, constantly summarizes, constantly standardizes” (Boast 2011: 65). In the Iwalewaha, a dialogue seemed possible at first. Artists went in and out and were always in close contact with the Beiers. The university combined artistic and academic practice and thus opened the door, at least theoretically, to an interdisciplinary and international discourse. At the same time, it seemed challenged by the presence of artists and researchers from the global South, who visited Bayreuth to (re)build their own narratives. In fact, it primarily reflected the Beiers’ very personal view of non-Western cultures (with a focus on Nigeria), therefore manifesting a hierarchization of knowledge (see Ramugondo in chapter 2, this volume, on the challenges to truly decolonize African studies).

Certainly, Ulli Beier’s self-dramatization as an outsider, as a connoisseur of the artists, did not allow for democratic dialogue.⁷ Even if one accepts the agency of the artists, who pursued their own agendas under the circumstances (an invitation to the Iwalewaha, marketing their own works, the reunion of old friends), it was Ulli Beier who, in consultation with Georgina, decided who to invite, which seminars to offer and which exhibitions to show. “Thus, always, the contact zone is an asymmetric space where the periphery comes to win

7 Most exhibitions were accompanied by a publication produced in-house, which dealt more with the artist as a person than with the paintings themselves (Mutumba 2012). Here, personal contact was emphasized, and with it Ulli Beier’s unique selling point as the person who knew the artists so well and over so many years.

some small, momentary and strategic advantage, but where the center ultimately gains” (Boast 2011: 66). The domination of the grand narrative around Ulli, which to a large extent excluded Georgina, the artist, still hovers over the Iwalewahaus, though, with changes in directorship over the years, the content and concepts have altered and the collection itself has grown bigger.

Today the Iwalewahaus is a collection of modern and contemporary art from Africa and the diaspora. It includes a variety of artworks as well as popular culture and a small number of ethnographic objects, from African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, South Africa and Kenya, and from Australia, India and Papua New Guinea. The Iwalewahaus has gone through some major conceptual changes in the last three decades mainly due to its directors and its directional teams, but its foundation and therefore its main legitimacy lies in the Beiers’ collection of modern African art and Ulli Beier’s documentation (especially the photographs) of his and his wife’s surroundings. Unfortunately, the recognition of Georgina Beier as one of the founders of the Iwalewahaus took place only after her death in July 2021 and shows how persistent the patriarchy (of her husband) was with its inscribed narratives.

3 Owing Responsibility: Opening the Archive

When the photographic estate arrived in 2012, the boxes were unpacked in a small office at the Münzgasse, the former address of the Iwalewahaus, where the Beiers had lived during their stay in Bayreuth. Here, the digitization process started (unfortunately with few resources). Initially, the importance of the material and the possibilities it offered for (self-)reflection within the institution and for reinforcing or questioning established narratives were not recognized. Access was open to only a limited number of people, who started the digitization. There were many reactions from the predominantly German team, ranging from establishing a stronger bond with the Beiers and the potential for the institution to reflect on its history, to being overwhelmed by the huge amount of material and the goal to produce a comprehensive digital overview (Bounakoff and Greven 2015). The Beiers had sold the photographic estate in 2007 to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to be included into the CBCIU⁸ under the umbrella of UNESCO, a clear recognition and awareness

8 The Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU) was established in 2009 as a non-profit organization under the auspices of UNESCO and a hub for the preservation and promotion of intercultural dialogue and knowledge. Located in Osogbo, Nigeria,

of its cultural heritage and its belonging to that respective place. The material had come to the Iwalewahaus with the intention of its full and comprehensive digitization, a wish that the Beiers had formulated before Ulli's death and which was inscribed within a memorandum. The final goal was to return the physical material to the CBCIU in Osogbo.

While working towards an organized, functional and especially accessible set of up to 40,000 photographs, letters, publications, official papers, press-clippings, films and recordings, all aimed at documenting and keeping trace of a life and cultural and artistic work, it became clear that the transformation from haptic and sensually charged objects, especially the photographs (Edwards 2005, 2010), to digital copy was, at first, a very rational and utilitarian process. There were some losses, because the boxes and folders with handwritten notes in which the slides and photographs were stored were (re)labelled (Figure 8.3). Thus, the narrative structure of this insight into “the mind” of the Beiers was lost, since such a structure is simply not part of the digitizing



FIGURE 8.3 Files in the Beiers' photographic estate, showing envelopes with handwritten notes

© CBCIU & IWALEWAHAUS. PHOTO BY LENA NAUMANN

it offers a wide range of cultural events, such as conferences and educational programmes. The premises also house the Duro Ladipo Museum and archives of important Nigerian personalities involved in arts and culture (see Raheem 2019).

process. In this case, files with numbers, names and locations substituted this structure but made networks, connections and different agents visible:

[...] we regard the estate as a site where diverse forms of knowledge are created and negotiated as well as a field where historical and contemporary agency emerges. As a resource, it does not only consist of the various physical documents but also of all the entangled agents and stories involved in its emergence. Hereby we refer to the concept of archives as networks, and every object in the photographic archive is thus understood as part of a cluster with potentially infinite possibilities of relations.

GREVEN ET AL. 2018: 149

While working on the transformation of the estate from analogue to digital, the Iwalewahauss changed its address in 2014. The move to the new building and the long process of wrapping and packing each and every object of the art collection and the photographic estate in foil and cardboard raised the question of who may actually access the archive and therefore its connected knowledge (Figure 8.4).

At the same time, the project “Mashup the Archive”⁹ took place (2013–2015) at the Iwalewahauss, between the old and the new buildings and inside the unpacked and packed archive. It incorporated two mini-festivals, exhibitions and roundtables and explored issues of access to and narration of the archive, working with a series of artist’s residencies and exploring practice-driven research. Mashup was understood as a curatorial intervention, an unlearning experience, artistic praxis and emerging sensibility (Hopkins and Siegert 2017). It incorporated working with and on actual pieces of the art collection and the photographic estate, transforming them into 3D copies, wearing them as headpieces, collaging them into prints and videos and music performances. “Our idea was to recombine elements of the archive, to establish new connections between the objects, to disturb relationships between the objects and its index, to produce the archive anew” (Hopkins and Siegert 2017: 12).

The experience was transformative for the institution. It became evident that unpacking the collection and the overall archive, in a literal and metaphorical sense, removed many supposedly personal rights and attachment to the material (including those of the authors of this chapter). It became increasingly clear that collaborative and creative work on the material could reconfigure personal narratives and established views, since the archive and

9 https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/bild_und_raum/detail/mashing_up_the_archive.html.



FIGURE 8.4 Packed objects from the art collection at the Mash Up Festival in 2013
© KATHARINA GREVEN

the collection itself are places of entangled agents and histories, where knowledge is created and negotiated, a process which can happen only in a collective manner. The emotional and sensual approach was evident and resulted in counternarratives, allowing a liberation from the material's inscribed histories.



FIGURE 8.5 Installation by Sam Hopkins and Simon Rittmeier, Mashup exhibition, 2015, Iwalewahaus

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The objects of the art collection were a starting point for 3D prints in the installation of Sam Hopkins and Simon Rittmeier (Figure 8.5), digital collages in animations by Miss Eve and visuals by Nita, to name a few, making it evident what the transformation of the actual to the digital object could entail and its potential.¹⁰

Délio Jasse was one of the few artists who worked exclusively with the photographic estate. He used photographs of Brazilian houses in Nigeria, mainly in Osogbo and Ibadan, and portraits of the Yoruba community, all taken by Ulli Beier. Jasse's large print series, *The Kings*, 1–8 and *The Face of the Gods II*, 1–3 (2017) are the result of combining these portraits with the images of the Brazilian houses (Figure 8.6).

This methodical and considered technique merged images with analogue and digital methods. The actual origin became secondary but was still respected and deconstructed an embedded truth. Even though the project faced some institutional and political challenges, such as accessibility of the

¹⁰ For detailed information see Hopkins and Siegert (2017).



FIGURE 8.6 Installation by Délio Jasse, Mashup exhibition, 2015, Iwalewahaus
© KATHARINA GREVEN

material (because of presumed conservation restrictions) and entry requirements for the artists in residence, it managed to not only question the material and the legitimacy of the Iwalewahaus, but challenge, at least for a period of time, most of the team to work and think collaboratively, allowing multiple points of reference to recognize and explore the “unmarked vantage point of whiteness”, as stated in the introduction.

With the help of digitization, new archival objects were invented – for example, 3D prints and digital collages – and new histories were written as the original and social function disappeared or was not even important anymore. These practices (with)in the archive were decolonial statements by the artists. They ignored the epistemology that comes with the naming, defining and categorization of African cultural practices by European institutions and questioned colonial and Western structures of order and the “truthfulness” of archival material, which is just as subject to specific discourses. The digitization also pointed to a future way of dealing with archives, with images and with one’s own thinking. The digital object can create a free space “[...] that is no longer defined by categorization or ownership” (Al-Badri and Nelles 2018: 67), and thus becomes another place of knowledge production. The digital can be a decolonial practice, but one has to be careful because it is also linked to

issues of access (to the digital) and influenced by who actually creates these digital spaces.

With the critical intervention of Mashup, the change in attitude of the institution itself and the physical and digital presence of the material, several projects were launched and the photographic estate of the Beiers as well as the Iwalewahaus art collection increasingly became a resource for collective academic and artistic research from different disciplines and perspectives. The research project “African Art History and the Formation of a Modern Aesthetic: African Modernism in Institutional Art Collections Related to German Collecting Activities” examined three collections that host particularly rich examples of African Modernism, one of them at the Iwalewahaus, with a focus on the single artworks, the artists and the collector or patron him/herself. The researchers, who saw the collections as networks involving several agents, examined collecting strategies and the estate itself as an object, which also revealed “processes of selecting, collecting and representing the artworks” (Greven et al. 2018: 141).

To ensure a transcultural perspective and to reflect on and question the role of the researchers based in the global North, a series of exchanges and workshops brought together international scholars, museum professionals and art practitioners from Germany, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, the UK and the USA, who worked collaboratively across their respective areas of specialization. These included art, art history, art studies, curatorial work, museum and archive studies and anthropology. This combination allowed for the cross-pollination of concepts and research agendas in an international and transdisciplinary setting.

One of the most important projects for the team was the “Icon Lab”, developed as part of the “Revolution 3.0” project (2012–2018) at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies and designed to focus on and discuss images that had been selected by invited research fellows with the overarching theme of “revolution”, digitally projected onto a wall. Later, this method was introduced at the Iwalewahaus for PhD students and researchers, and although the material component was missing, an attempt was made to perceive images holistically: the room was dark, the images were enlarged and everyone was invited to share their thoughts. The individual and associative experiences of images in “Icon Lab” sessions often allowed established perceptions to be challenged and the obvious to be questioned. This enabled the researchers to perceive and experience images outside of their own encodings, preventing their mere reproduction. Though the digital seemed to miss out on the haptic experience, it provided an opportunity to share knowledge from researchers across the globe in a digital space, which needs to be further explored.

These projects, whose central focus was the examination of the archive and the respective art collection and, beyond that, the actors involved, such as the artists, collectors, museum employees, archivists, visitors and others, also supported the indexing of the materials from the Beiers’ estate. A significant difference, however, lay in the fact that the Beiers’ estate was much more fragmented and, though it closed gaps in the art collection, it contained less information than the documentation on the artworks and their provenance. It became clear that indexing the content of the material would not be possible without context-based expert knowledge within and beyond academia. This was later reflected primarily in the knowledge of Nigerian colleagues, who were able to attribute approximate dates and information about contexts and locations to the material, based on their observations of the photographs and documents.

4 Shift of Access: the Return of the Photographic Estate

In November 2019, the estate left Iwalewahaus and made its way to the CBCIU in Osogbo. After several months, the material reached its destination. In February 2020, the photographic estate was ceremoniously and officially handed over by the staff of the Iwalewahaus to Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and his team. Of importance was also the handover of the digital copies, carried on a hard disk and given to the responsible persons on site. The ceremony was framed by a symposium and an exhibition with the title “Existential Fantasies – The Monkey On Your Shoulder” (Figure 8.7), which had been shown at the Iwalewahaus in 2016. The exhibition gave an insight into the fragmented archive and into the Beiers’ excessive gathering and production of images not only as testimony to their artistic and political agenda but also to their personal search for a “new home”: a place of belonging and existence, where they could live out their fantasies and fulfil their desires (Greven 2021).

The handover was preceded by a year of preparations, starting from the selection of the transport company to the planning of the presentations at the symposium. In spring 2019, Iwalewahaus and the CBCIU cooperated in the design and implementation of training for archivists and the proper handling of archival materials. Iwalewahaus invited two colleagues from the CBCIU – an archivist and an IT technology specialist – to participate in the training programme for six weeks, learning how to handle the material contained in the estate. The Iwalewahaus staff, mainly involved with collection custody and the digital database, led several sessions. First, the colleagues were introduced to preservation guidelines, restoration, the handling and packing of

for example, that the colleagues from the CBCIU, as experts in a cultural context, could not only substantially but also almost exclusively close the gaps in knowledge that existed about the material at the content level. It should be emphasized that the Iwalewahaus team did not intend to implement standardized Western archival techniques but always tried to consider, together with the colleagues in Osogbo, which structures were desirable, necessary and useful to support the preservation of the archival material in the long term, and to respond to the given structures.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the proposed handling of the archival material was shaped and defined by a Western idea of preservation, maintenance and protection of the material, which the employees of the German institution had partly learned in their scientific training. Behind these ideas are hidden clear requirements and guidelines. The idea of absolute protection of the archive and its materials also contains aspects of privileged situations (which include constant, reliable climatic conditions, financial security and prospective planning possibilities). Neither Iwalewahaus as an institution, nor the CBCIU, fully met standardized requirements for the preservation of archival materials, which may have had several reasons: lack of space and of human, financial and technical resources. However, from the very beginning, the common goal, which was at the forefront of the cooperation, was the complete digitization of the estate to ensure its accessibility to international researchers. This refers above all to the digital space, which enormously, but not completely, increases the possibilities of accessibility in a transnational context, one big step that needs to be taken in the process of decolonizing Western institutions, with all its challenges when it comes to issues like copyright, technical mishaps and the curated decisions of the respective institutions not to show certain files online.

Up until now, it has not been possible to implement a jointly shared database for the estate, but the cooperation between the two institutions has borne fruit in other ways. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, collaboration was strengthened and expressed in the form of joint online events, such as book presentations, readings and smaller conferences. There was a lively exchange between the researchers of both institutions, on the specific research fields of the participants and on the overall institutional context. For example, papers that related to common research interests were shared for mutual proofreading, research was conducted in the collections of both institutions to gather information, and symposia were jointly hosted. In June 2021, for example, the Iwalewahaus and the CBCIU hosted an online symposium on the Nigerian artist Twins Seven Seven, an important artist and pioneer of modern art in

Osogbo.¹¹ The Iwalewahaus houses some 70 works by the artist in its collection and presented a cross-section of these works at the symposium.

These collaborative events have not only strengthened the cooperation between the two institutions but contributed significantly to the development of a network from which the researchers of both institutions can benefit. These include field and dissertation research, publications on art-related topics linked to the content of the institutions, and the conception of exhibitions or advanced training programmes, bringing multiple voices together.

Nevertheless, these relationships are primarily linked to personal and friendly connections among the researchers and staff of the institutions. Through various research visits, the relationships were intensified. In addition, informal communication on social media, via WhatsApp, for example, enables a direct connection, which may be about inquiries or arrangements concerning the physical material of the estate. In exhibition productions of the Iwalewahaus, queries and information were repeatedly clarified in this way.

The advantage of short, direct communication is obvious, but still bears the risk that this contact could flatten out following the departure of employees in the institutions. Until now, a Memorandum of Understanding officially defines the contents of the cooperation between the Iwalewahaus and the CBCIU, but this is not manifested in the institutional structures. The cooperation remains tied to the interpersonal relationships among the employees on both sides and runs the risk of being interrupted by structural fluctuations. In addition, this approach to communication carries the risk that information will again be subject to exclusive access to the material, whether physical or digital. If there is no publicly accessible database, only those who know about the material and its content can thus make concrete inquiries about research content, a problem that not only Iwalewahaus as an institution has to actively address and push forward. Doing away with this exclusivity must be a top priority in the coming years of cooperation in order to fulfil the demands of shared responsibility, towards the material and especially towards an international community within academia and the public, in order to guarantee access to this unique material.

11 Twins Seven Seven (born Omoba Taiwo Olaniyi Oyewale-Toyeje Oyelale Osuntoki, 1944–2011) is a well-known artist from Osogbo, partly because Ulli Beier published a lot about him and he was the prototype of the “modern artist” for the Beiers: “Seven Seven’s subjects are bizarre variations of Yoruba mythology and legend. They are interpreted by one who is no longer part of the culture, but who feels affected and sometimes threatened by the forces he has not learned to control” (U. Beier 1968: 114). For details on Twins Seven Seven’s life and work, see his autobiography (Seven Seven 1999).

5 Decolonizing as a Collaborative Process

In the projects we have listed, in connection with the photographic estate, the art collection of the Iwalewahaus (which is based on the Beiers’ collecting activities) and the concept of the archive in general, the immanent institutionalized structures that pose challenges to scholarly and artistic explorations and their underlying possibilities and restrictions of accessibility are repeatedly evident. In the course of the processes, it has become clear that only a collaborative approach will make it possible to pose questions from different perspectives that examine the Beiers’ legacies critically. Accordingly, decolonizing is here understood as a practice to critically question given structures, to challenge inherent colonial, patriarchal and, in this case, European knowledge systems, their production and their connected material manifestation. It is also about constantly questioning one’s own role within the whole process – in the authors’ case, being white female researchers within a European institution, who benefit from privileged and structural positions. We understand a decolonizing approach as a collaborative, collective process that can open structures to different demands, perspectives and intentions and reflectively look at existing, sometimes unquestioned, structures and power imbalances.

The institution of the Iwalewahaus today is based on structures and ideas that were implemented by the Beiers. Ulli Beier’s documentation especially fills knowledge gaps within the structure of their art collection, in particular through the photographic estate and the countless publications that he published during his career. The estate has developed into a conglomerate of scholarly and artistic sources that are invaluable for many research projects and contain information especially on artistic developments in Nigeria after its independence in 1960. But one must always keep in mind that these manifestations are not neutral productions – the structures and ideologies of the Beiers are inherent. These are still discussed and partly implemented in the work and ideas of the Iwalewahaus – for example, in the residency programme and, in general, the close collaboration with artists and researchers from all over the world. By examining and questioning the Beiers’ legacy, the Iwalewahaus opens its doors (metaphorically and physically) to share knowledge and experiences, reflecting on its position in the global North and facilitating corrections along the way.

Revisiting the art collection of the Iwalewahaus, the photographic estate and the archive in general should not undermine the Beiers’ enormous contribution to “African Modernisms” and their cultural work in several countries. The Iwalewahaus today exists because of Ulli and Georgina Beier. But to constantly open up the discourse of questioning one’s own role, access to the

archive needs to be discussed and restructured (again, we would like to highlight Ramugondo's chapter on the "undoing in the African Studies" in order to work towards sustainable decolonial practices). The digital, with its manifold possibilities, seems to be one solution for international cooperation, but it is still mostly dominated and conducted by the global North.

Regarding the physical archive of the Beiers' photographic estate, it makes sense to locate it on the African continent with their owners and thus reverse the conditions for research, since, even in postcolonial times, African researchers still have to travel to the North to visit relevant archives and collections (most of them stolen or acquired under questionable circumstances). Reversing research conditions and power relations is a particularly important step in reconfiguring and decolonizing African studies, unlearning inherent power structures. The goal of a collaborative shared database, implemented by the CBCIU and the Iwalewahaus, will enable researchers from the global South and the global North to participate in collective knowledge production around the photographic estate.

This aim calls for stronger cooperation in these processes than practised at Iwalewahaus before, to enable a research situation where, in the best case, the digital document with its metadata can communicate a content that is very close to that of the physical original. In any case, the possibilities of neither the digital nor the physical material have been exhausted – the projects listed serve as examples but also as signposts for what can be possible. They are the first milestones in the process of dealing with the material, in digital and analogue form; they are foundation stones for the collaborations that in future will question the material even more critically and intensively in its historical, ideational and institutional contexts. These critiques will function as a breeding ground for creative artistic research and interventions and thus reinforce the far-reaching significance of the materials – regardless of the institutions that host them.

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PART 3

Thinking as Moving: Future Pathways



Women Sages in Male Epistemic Spaces – an Analysis of Patriarchal Forces in Female Knowledge Production

Anthony Okeregbe and Muyiwa Falaiye

1 Introduction

Ever since the late African philosopher, Odera Oruka, put forward his concept of philosophic sagacity as an authentic African philosophy (Oruka 1983, 1990), widespread discussion on this position has given it such authority that it is proposed as one of the most reliable sources of African knowledges (Mosima 2016). Perhaps owing to the influence of Paul Radin (1927) and his gender-restrictive reference to “man” in the discovery of African knowledges, Oruka and his followers, save for one female sage, Peris Njuhi Muthoni, seem to have excluded women from the category of sages (Presbey 2021: 2).

Thus, despite the possible existence of many female powerhouses of wisdom in Africa, and despite the global push for equal opportunities and recognition for women, the sage philosophy project is still predominantly chauvinistic. Though some recent works in African philosophy are interrogating the marginalization of women in African intellectual history (Chimakonam 2018; Matolino 2018) and the possibility of feminizing epistemologies in African gender studies (Amadiume 2005; Marcano 2010; Oyewùmí 2011), the generation, documentation and analysis of a corpus on female sages has yet to gain serious academic attention. A few works have expressed the possibility of an inclusive sagacity project that involves female sages in knowledge production and ideation (Mosima 2018; Presbey 2000, 2012, 2018, 2021). However, a fundamental shortcoming in these works is the lack of empirical data on the life and times, influences and reflective corpus of ideas and wisdom creditable to such female sages. Thus, the female sage is still significantly marginalized in a predominantly male-dominated space of indigenous knowledges.

The project on which this paper is based sets out to explore the nature and value of feminine wisdom in an agenda-setting manner, seeking to investigate the possibility of women sages, the nature and content of the form of knowledge they produce and the value of such knowledges to contemporary Africa and the world at large. The research also unpacks the multiple ways

of knowledge production, characterization, transmission and recognition through heuristic investigation of the epistemic agency of female sages, until now ignored in the documentation of indigenous knowledges. Since ideas, knowledges and wisdom are purveyors of civilization and societal development, reconfiguring the scales of indigenous knowledges and wisdom through female agency is pivotal in holistically deploying indigenous knowledges, practices and wisdom to expand Africa's epistemic space.

The research is significant because, by investigating women's epistemic powers and feminine wisdom, it counterbalances the privileged masculinity accorded to the epistemic enterprise and promises to provide another perspective to the male-dominated production, management and dissemination system of indigenous knowledges in Africa. In this way, this chapter contributes to the literature on feminism, gender studies and related fields. Drawing insight from Pius Mosima's (2016–2018) critical postmodernist analysis of philosophic sagacity, this chapter maintains that Oruka's sage philosophy project is founded on a hegemonic Western *ratio* socially situated in a patriarchal cultural setting. As a result, it does not accommodate female epistemic agents as candidates for philosophic sagacity.

Oruka's Sage Philosophy Project leaves open gaps in the articulation of what wisdom entails and who is wise. Although he insisted that being a philosopher and being wise were mutually exclusive, he made ratiocination (as abstract reasoning) a condition for philosophic sagacity. Furthermore, notwithstanding his submission on candidates for philosophic sagacity, there seems to have been a deliberate exclusion of female agency in the entire project as Presbey rightly observed (Presbey 2012: 117). A gender-sensitive reading of the mechanics of the project reveals that "all named student assistants are male (Oruka 1991: Acknowledgements). Of 12 sages whose interviews are quoted at length in the book *Sage Philosophy* (1991), only one is a woman. In an earlier part of the book, where Odera Oruka gives brief excerpts of interviews with eight sages, all these are also men (Oruka 1991: 37–40). Nine sages asked about equality of the sexes were all men (Presbey 2012: 117). We wonder if this seemingly embarrassing oversights are not premeditated or rooted in the masculinist mindset to pave way for a position that both panders to the philosophical tradition of a colonial knowledge system and entrenches a patriarchal epistemic order.

In spite of the oversights, we agree with Oruka not only that philosophy should be sought in sagacity but also that what sagacity entails should not be dictated in advance. We hold that the concept of women as sages is rooted in the idea that women have a unique and valuable perspective on the world that has been historically overlooked and undervalued, albeit by agencies of patriarchy and colonial heritage. What informs this position is our assumption

that since wisdom pertains to practical understanding of quotidian dealings, sagacious knowledge “is not esoteric, for it is within everyone’s reach; nor does it require a special skill or talent (Kekes 1983: 280). Furthermore, in view of the fact that *phronesis*, a Greek term which translates as “practical understanding” or “prudence in everyday dealings”, is a veritable correlate of wisdom, this paper argues that female sages indeed exist in contemporary African societies.

In furthering the reflection for this chapter, two assumptions foreground our conceptualization of knowledge. One is the philosophy of difference, a fundamental principle of which is the engagement with marginal issues in mainstream philosophical traditions, examination of constitutive exclusions and appraisal of deviations from the hegemonic norm in philosophical scholarship (Imafidon 2020). The other assumption contemplates the ontogenesis of knowledge from the postmodern theorizing in Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome epistemological model, which envisions theories and research works that allow for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 6–10). It also adopts the neo-African epistemic temperament of insurgent and resurgent decolonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 2021). Methodologically, it adopts an African phenomenological approach (Olivier, Lamola and Sands 2023), which studies the phenomena of African lived experiences by letting the expressions of these women’s lived experiences be “seen” in the way they are.

In light of these assumptions, knowledges cannot be conceptualized in advance because knowledge can take any form in so far as it is an individual’s description of a reality experienced or witnessed, a proposition of an idea emanating from one’s interiority, or an expression of an embedded feeling or culturally transmitted mentality. By decentering the canons of philosophic knowledge that arise from colonial intellectual heritage, namely the thinking that knowledge could be acquired only through rational inquiry from the colonial library, this chapter calls for unthinking the ways in which Africa has been constructed and represented in the past, and creating new ways of knowing Africa from the inside out (Okeregebe 2018; Hountondji 2009). In this way, it not only “shows that studying knowledge and forms of knowing implies exploring forms of unknowing and ignorance” (Hoeyer and Winthereik 2022: 217) but also that thinking shifts with new experiences, new encounters and new awakenings. Thus, this chapter resonates with the theme “thinking as moving”, by translocating the context of female epistemic agency from the imperial citadel of the colonial academe to the self-created sphere of ownness of the African woman.

This work contributes to feminism, gender studies and related fields by challenging female epistemic marginalization, creating a space for women’s

voices to be heard and valued in the creation of knowledge. By centring the experiences and perspectives of women, and by availing space for women to express their thoughts about their experiences in all their rawness and modest authenticity, this chapter aims to create a more inclusive and just epistemic regime.

2 Field Trip Findings

Adopting a similar (not necessarily identical) research approach to the one used by Oruka in carrying out his Sage Philosophy Project, we purposively made the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria our research area. These zones are the North West, North Central, North East, South West, South South and South East. We thereafter randomly selected communities in each of these six geopolitical zones from which female sages could be identified. We further built on this mapping process by carrying out surveys and interviews in these locations with the aim of identifying female sages across certain age brackets. Importantly, the choice of the six geopolitical zones in modern day Nigeria was to discover and advance the multiplicity and relationality of knowledges among female sages, knowing that these zones may not be culturally homogenous. We restricted the age bracket (to 50 and 80) to ensure that respondents had not been influenced by formal school education, among other influences. This transethnic cultural survey, which formed the primary method of data gathering, was necessary to provide content to the research, even as it expressed the multiple nature of knowledge.

For even distribution, nine to 12 randomly selected respondents from each of the six geopolitical zones were interviewed. A provincial state was also randomly selected from a geopolitical zone, and three communities were isolated in that provincial state for the study. In each of these three communities, three to four respondents were interviewed. In all, 66 potential female sages were interviewed individually, using open ended questions for critical conversation. They reflected multiplicity and diversity in terms of the sampled local government areas (LGAs), religious orientation, age grade, educational status, professions and roles in the community. Although the respondents were chosen based on community recommendations, their availability and their interest in participating in the project, the team experienced serious resistance from some members of the communities and some of the identified potential female sages, who expressed concerns about exploitation.¹ Since knowledge

1 As city-dwelling male researchers educated in the philosophical traditions of the global North, embarking on a research project that has elderly women from a provincial setting as

production presupposes some relationship between the researcher and the researched, the notion of positionality (namely, indicators of contexts and relational locations such as nationality, race, class, education, epistemological perspectives and philosophical orientations) is a consideration in the value accorded the knowledge produced (Anyidoho 2008: 28). Often, there is the misunderstanding (emanating from past anthropological research works) that field research borders on extractivism, and thus researchers are seen as harvesters of encrypted knowledge of some cults or secret societies. Because our research project interviewed mainly elderly women, there was the tendency to think that way too. However, when we explained our motivations for the project, the respondents became favourably disposed towards it.

Given the political situation in certain parts of the country, the women had to be constantly reassured that this project was purely academic in nature and would not be used for political purposes. In one provincial state, the political tension in some communities was so intense that we were asked to remove our facemasks while moving around, to avoid drawing attention. This was shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, and the ban had been lifted in some states on the wearing of facemasks. Apparently, like other areas far from the state capital, this town paid little heed to wearing a mask. Thus, our masked appearance gave us away as “outsiders”.

The administration of the consent procedures before the interview sessions, difficult as it was in some instances, allayed concerns and fears over exploitation, and the *prima facie* lack of trust in “strangers” seeking indigenous knowledge from the “natives”. Besides, when they realized that we were seeking women’s perspectives on being and existence for academic and educational purposes, some connection was established. For the fieldwork, the principal investigator worked with a female research assistant, and both were accompanied by two pre-established field assistants (one of whom had to be female) who also acted as translators in some cases. The gender balance created an

subjects of research was fraught with unease and agonizing awakening. The motivation for this project stems from a criticism directed at the pervasive currents of patriarchal hegemonic epistemology that underlie Orika’s sage philosophy project, assumptions of which we took for granted. When the question was asked, during one of our presentations on Orika’s philosophic sagacity, if the project admitted only male epistemic agencies, it dawned on us that the wave of the twenty-first century insurgent and resurgent decolonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 2021) had not caught up with us; that there was a need to expurgate the *known* African mentality from the thralldom of colonial epistemic heritage and disciplinary captivity. Thus, we set out to let women – as suppressed voices and marginalized epistemic agents – tell us things we did not know. Being non-feminists, we do not explore any feminist theory in framing our submission but rather let the expressions of these women’s lived experiences be “seen” in the way they are while we examined them from a “purified” positionality.

auspicious environment for interviews of this nature to run smoothly. Largely, the respondents spoke in their native language, but in communities where language posed a barrier in communication, the researchers relied on the translators. After a series of focus group discussions, the number of sages was pruned to nine.

3 Criteria for Sagacity

Odera Oruka, who made the ambitious project of Sage Philosophy Project his life-long contribution to the global philosophical enterprise, set out to show that the problem of the traditional African was not that of abstraction, logic and scientific inquiry and that written literature was not a condition for authentic African philosophy. He premised his justification for authentic African philosophy by arguing that within the ambit of communal philosophizing, there was the possibility of individual reflection. He argued:

Some sages go beyond mere sagacity and attain philosophic capacity. As sages they are versed in the beliefs and wisdoms of their people. But as thinkers, they are rationally critical and they opt for or recommend only those aspects of their beliefs and wisdoms which satisfy their rational scrutiny. In this respect they are potentially or contemporarily in clash with the diehard adherents of prevailing common belief.

ORUKA 1991: 51

By referring to “some sages” Oruka meant sages whose intellectual activities did not qualify as philosophic sagacity. Sages in this category appear in the works of Sodipo and Barry Hallen (Hallen and Sodipo 1986), and include Ogotemeli, Marcel Griaule’s interlocutor (Griaule 1975). According to Oruka, their activities qualified as culture philosophy at best (Oruka 1991: 52). Culture philosophy, according to Oruka, indicates the underlying ideas and beliefs of a culture seen in one totalizing repertoire as its mythos or folk wisdom. Familiarity with a culture philosophy or folk wisdom presupposes allegiance to that culture. On the other hand, philosophic sagacity is the outcome of the re-evaluation of culture philosophy, a critical assessment of communal beliefs. In the words of Oruka, “using the power of reason rather than celebrated beliefs of the communal consensus and explanation, the sage philosopher produces a system within a system, an order within an order” (Oruka 1991: 52). In other words, whereas culture philosophy, which is philosophy of the first order,

absolutizes and glorifies the truth claims of a culture, philosophic sagacity is a second-order scion sprouted from the first order, through the rigours of ratiocinative scrutiny or open-minded, rational scepticism. In carrying out his epistemic quest, the sage philosopher acts as an individual, for it seems that only as an individual would the sage be able to transcend communal philosophizing.

Pius Mosima, who has extensively and productively engaged with Oruka and his philosophic sagacity, explains why Oruka was fascinated with the individual as the quintessential philosopher. He asserts that this rests on Oruka's thinking that "in a modern context, the individual is the subject, the author. He is the one who produces books, articles, and pamphlets" (Mosima 2016: 115). Moreover, being a specialist, the individual as a philosopher "has a superior position to educate, instil moral values or enlighten the reader, who is not held in high regard". All this is because the individual philosopher is supposed to have "privileged access to truth, reason, and scientific knowledge" (ibid.).

4 The Reality of Women as Sages

Given the criteria put forward by Oruka, are there female philosophic sages in Nigeria? To ascertain whether or not our respondents were candidates for philosophic sagacity, we posed some ontological questions to them, such as whether God existed, and considered their responses.

Gladys Okpoagu was a 77-year-old widow who was educated up to Standard Five. A Christian and trader by profession, Madam Gladys, at the time of this interview, had just relinquished her position as Woman Chairlady of the Umuduru Akwakuma/Okporo community in Orlu, Imo State. Barring the infelicities associated with conducting interviews with an interpreter, these were her responses.

4.1 *On the Origin of the World*

Interviewer: What does existence of the world mean to you? How do you think the world came to be? You know, what's your view about the world? Is it possible for things to exist at all? What's your view?

Sage Gladys: What I am thinking in my mind is that God created the world. After creating the world he discovered that was good. He then created human beings and allowed human beings to be in the world. So, God wanted human beings to be. I am thinking this world is exactly how God wanted it to be. It is good the way it is and I like it like that.

Okay. That means you believe in God.

Yes. There is God. There is God.

Where does this your belief in God stem from? How? From where did you believe God?

I believe there is God with my faith. From my faith, I know there is God because anybody who doesn't have faith won't believe there is God. But if you have faith, you will believe there's God. It's just faith! Then you will hope in God and your faith will be strong in him, and then you will know there's God. When you don't faith, you won't believe there's God. But with faith, you will use your spirit man and know that there's God. You and the spirit of God will be working hand in hand.

How I believe there is God is this: One, something may happen. Like, as I am a woman, I might get pregnant. If that woman is pregnant, you won't know how the child formed in the stomach and she will carry it for nine months and deliver it. It is God that made it possible. Do you understand? God made it possible. So everything is all about faith. If you believe in God, anytime you have challenges, God will fight for you. Help you and you will be strong again. Take me for instance; I once had Stroke nine years ago. It's my faith in God that saved me. That is why I believe strongly that there's God and he does things for me.

What it means is that the ability for her to carry a pregnancy for nine months shows that there's something that is responsible for it and that's God?

Yes.

Yes! That's why I strongly believe that there's God. Do you understand? There's God and that God we are serving. Anyone who doesn't believe in God, one, doesn't understand what he's doing. My faith is God, that there's God, he created everything in this world. He's God that can do all things. No one can do all things except God.

We interviewed another female sage, a 77-year-old who called herself Mother Angelina Oguaju. Madam Angelina, who died two days after this interview, was educated up to Standard Six. She was Christian, a housewife and community leader. Her response to the same question on being and the cause of existence seems quite similar to the above.

Interviewer: The universe, how did it come to be?

Sage Oguaju: The way I understand this world?

Yes.

There is no other way I understand it. It is created by God.

It is God that brought this world into existence; no one will claim that he knows how this world came into existence except God. It is God that brought the world into existence and also made us (human) to be in the world and behold the things in the world.

It's alright! Ok. So the world didn't just originate by chance?

Yes.

Ok. Let me take it to the other one. If God made it to be, it means you believe God exists?

Yes, I believe there is God.

What informs your view? Hope it's not...

Why I believe that there is God is that it is not easy. It is God that made humans. Something without form in the womb all of a sudden, turns to human being. From there it grew and came out as human. In the womb, it is alive and it is eating food. Without God, it won't be possible. Again, sometimes you might be alone calling on God, telling him some stories, asking him for something, when you are done, by mistake, God will do it for you but there was no one there when you were making your supplication and no one heard it. It is God that will bring those things to pass. No one else can do it.

4.2 *On the Question of Leadership*

On the question of leadership, sage Gladys Okpoagu submitted the following:

Interviewer: What do you understand by being a leader having been a chairlady before? What do you understand by leadership? Is a leader born or made?

Sage Okpoagu: To start with, a leader is born. It's also made. From my family, from my father's family, my father led his village people for 13 years. Then, my

brother is preparing to be king. My eldest brother is the chairman of his kindred (*umuduru*). The other male in Owerri as a civil servant was the youth leader before he left and my humble self was a chairlady. My first daughter staying in Aba is the chairlady there. So, what's in leadership as a leader is truth. If you see evil, you call it evil, don't be partial. When someone does evil even if it's your mother, father, husband or your kinsman, tell him that what he did is bad. Next time, the person won't repeat such, but if you keep silent, the evil will continue. So, when it comes to leadership, you must be truthful, you must be upright, you must be advising your subjects. If any one does evil or when you come to the public, I used to advise my subjects. Don't allow your children to steal, or become promiscuous. The house belongs to the woman. I will be telling them, don't allow your children to impregnate a lady, if they do, they will marry the person. If there's anyone that's doing evil, call the person privately and advise her. If someone that's having marital challenges, call her and advise her and let her know that marriage is patience. Those are the reasons I personally ran away from leadership even when they were begging me, but I told them I was okay.

What system do you think should be used in the selection of leaders? That is, we want to select leader now, what system do you think should be used to select leaders?

The best method? As we are in this our kindred, that is, *Umuduru*, everybody knows each other. If there's a need for selection of men or women leaders, we in this kindred know each other. For instance, before I handed over, I had looked round and know who will be strong enough to condemn evil. Some were like, "look at this person. She is qualified for the position", but I said no. I selected the right person and she's there now. What's there is that if you want to select a leader either in the village or in anything. It's expected that the people who know each other, they know who to select as a good individual. Do you understand?

Having explained the relationship between power and leadership, and power as an instrument of control, the interview continued:

How do you see power and human nature?

How I see it? Like the power of leadership is truth. If the leader is truthful who doesn't condone evil, just to ensure that you tell your subjects the truth. Don't lie to them. For instance, it may be said, this land belongs to an individual but another person takes it. If this type of matter is brought and you are given a bribe, don't take the bribe. Say the truth. If you say the truth and do it

repeatedly, next time nobody will bother giving you bribe because they have known you to be truthful. Leadership is all about truthfulness. Always say the truth. Stand on your ground and say the truth no matter the pressure, be firm. You may even be threatened with money so that you will pervert justice, reject it if you know yourself because if you accept it, your leadership is messed up already. It's truth, truth is leadership.

Another sage, Rhoda Benjamin, a farmer, Christian from Gonin/Gora Federal Housing Layout, Ungwan Waziri Southern Kaduna in northern Nigeria made this submission.

Interviewer: Let us discuss leadership.

Sage Benjamin: Every human being created is a leader of himself or herself. So long you are not able to take care of yourself; you are not a good leader. Much less, give you two or three people to lead. If you cannot take care of yourself, how can you take care of the people under you? Leadership is very good. It can be good for some people and some will not find it funny. To be a leader, one needs to be patient, tolerant and carry people along. He should be a person that gives listening ears to his people, not a leader that dictates to them; person who gives his people a listening ears.

Are leaders born or made?

I think leaders are born. Most times, if you are training children, and you found out that one or two are outstanding. From there, you will be able to identify good leaders among them. Most of our children are stubborn, but one or two always obey your instruction. It means they are leaders from the womb. Those who get leadership through struggle don't normally succeed.

4.3 *On the Issue of Gender Relations/Equality of the Sexes*

Martina Samuel Brown was a 58-year-old leader in Afaha Atai village, in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. She was a Christian and educated up to sixth grade in primary school.

Interviewer: Can a woman be wiser than a man? If so, why then should a woman be submissive to the man?

Sage Brown: A woman can be wiser than a man in certain aspects, for example in situations where the woman knows that certain decisions can be fatal

and destructive. But if the man refuses to listen at that point, he is foolish if he refuses the counsel of a woman because she is a woman, the man is foolish then.

Why then should women be submissive?

Because God created it to be so; that women should be submissive to the men.

On the same issue as above, here is the conversation with Comfort Akinkúnmi from Ilé-Ogbó village in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State in North Central Nigeria. She put her age at between 75 and 80. She was illiterate and a petty trader.

Interviewer: What is your view about male and female responsibilities? Is it the same?

Sage Akinkunmi: There was no such life in the days of our mothers. We have not seen such. Females these days are stronger than men.

Do you think such a thing is proper or is it right to be like that?

Ha! It is not right. The female should contest, the male should contest, the male will always win. But the reverse is the case now. Men are no longer succeeding. Females are stronger than the male gender these days.

Do you prefer how it was when we only saw males leading and we barely heard the females, and females must follow the command the males give? Do you prefer it?

There is no such command our husbands give to us that we must obey in our time again. It is bad. That is why the world is not settled. Now, the male talks and the female disobeys. It is really bad.

5 Female Sages as Non-candidates for Orukan Philosophic Sagacity

From the Orukan standpoint, given that these women fulfilled other conditions for being sages, the question remains whether the postulations they made or the sage views expressed were philosophic in the sense of being critical. Did these female sages think or know that they were sages? Were they deliberate,

conscious philosophic sages? As Oruka and his team asserted that to be critical as a philosophic sage demands that the sage in question subjects communal consensus, prevalent worldviews and established positions to ratiocinative scrutiny. Oruka also seemed to suggest, by his emphasis on this demonstration of critical individuality, that the operative virtue of the philosopher sage is the ability to be continually critical.

If the above is the case, since the women who responded to the questions seemed devoid of perceptible criticality by Oruka's standards it follows that they do not qualify as philosophic sages in the Orukan sense. Many of them neither problematized their treatment of questions raised nor engaged the interlocutors in the polemical manner popularized by the analytic tradition, for which many anglophone philosophical traditions are known. This position should not go unquestioned because it calls for critical engagement with the Orukan criteria for sagacity in their axiological underpinning and methodological stance.

6 Analysis: Patriarchal Forces in Female Knowledge Production

Generally, female sages within the age brackets interviewed tended to adhere to the dictates of their traditional cultures when expressing views about self, nature and society, notwithstanding their religious affiliations as Christians, Muslims and Orisa adherents. Though such views may be critical of folk wisdom, they expressed them with a subtlety and caution that would not upset the epistemic balance of their respective Indigenous cultures. However, it is worth considering that this ability to maintain such epistemic integrity, though suggestive of the level of practical wisdom that these sages possessed, subsists on patriarchy.

The prevalence of patriarchy reveals certain modes of relationality between the activities of these sages and the cultural environment from which their philosophic or sagacious postulations emanate. As used here, modes of relationality refers to the various forms, qualities and outcomes of relating. It entails both the presence and absence of relating (Spies and Seesemann 2016: 136) as well as the overall philosophical underpinning of relationality (Powell 2013). The epistemic modes of relationality, among other things, concern the axiology and politics of knowledge production as well as the structures, historicities and the social networks associated with it. In analyzing the statements of the female sages, we identify the following modes of relationality: control, suppression and acquiescence.

6.1 *Control*

Deliberate control through customary practices, domination of spaces of influence and familial contestations are some of the most veritable expressions of patriarchy (Familusi 2012; Olabode 2009; Adebayo and Kolawole 2012). Recent studies tend to support the view that epistemic spaces also are the privileged arena of masculine domination. Apart from the home, the marketplaces and certain agricultural spaces (Pérez-Terán 2017: 7), contemporary African communities still exist in epistemic spaces controlled by male actors and agencies. Following the relational setting of philosophic sagacity, it is likely that Oruka operated within a patriarchal epistemic space bequeathed to African scholarship by an intellectual tradition that undermined the role of women in philosophical knowledge production.

At the time that Oruka flourished as a philosopher, from 1970 until his death in 1995 (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1995: 12), there were very few prominent female African philosophers, if any. It was as if the social code of masculinity prevalent in many traditional African societies operated in the academic philosophical circles as well: women were to be seen and not heard. This is not surprising, because Oruka, like many African men of his time, thrived in a social setting that strongly discriminated against women. As studies have shown, Kenya, like many African countries, has exercised its own share of domination and subjugation of women through negative cultural practices promoted by oral literature and folklores (Wa-Gachanja 2002). Even among Oruka's Luo community, the concept and practice of *Lako* or *Ter*, officially construed as "widow guardianship" (Abuya 2002), has been so controversial among wide-ranging interest groups and stakeholders that it has been demonized as a negative cultural practice (Nyarwath 2012: 103).

It is even alleged that Peris Njuhi Muthoni, the only female philosophic sage featured in Oruka's sagacity project, was allegedly unfairly treated by Oruka in his conversation with her (Presbey 2021: 2; Mosima 2018: 31). Mosima is said to have noted the difference in the questioning of Muthoni and the male sages and Oruka's unfair dismissal of Muthoni's ideas because "she engaged in cultural critique to an extent equal to or better than the other men" (Presbey 2021: 2). While it is not too clear what the allegation of unfair treatment entailed, what is obvious is that Oruka, in his authoritative book on sage philosophy, dedicated only two pages (Oruka 1991: 104–106) to Muthoni's submissions compared to the generous space given to the diversity of questions directed at the men (*ibid.*). How this could escape the scrutiny of female African philosophers for so long was suggestive of the extent of male domination in the epistemic space of philosophic sagacity.

Besides the interventions of Gail Presbey (Presbey 1997, 2012, 2018, 2021), Anke Graness (1997) and Sophie Oluwole (1997a), whose interrogation of the methodology, agency and epistemic content of Oruka's treatment of philosophical sagacity has opened up new insights into sagacious reasoning, there seem to be no other African female academic philosophers and very few non-African academic philosophers who have contributed to the sagacity discourse regarding female agents. How can epistemic justice be served when the major contributors are male?

6.2 *Suppression*

Suppression as a category of patriarchal epistemology is revealed through proverbs and narratives of dominance. Proverbs are one of the most potent ways by which perceptions of women may be ascertained from members of the community. Just as they are vehicles for the expression of a people's belief systems, transmission of values and articulation of worldviews, they are also instrumental in reflecting gender relations in a given society. Usman (2014, 2018) focuses on the Hausa society of northern Nigeria, where women have been suppressed through the use of proverbs. Proverbs such as the following express negativity and undermine women in social relations (*ibid.*).

- i. *Mata Dangin Shaidan* (Women are close relatives to the devil).
- ii. *Bin shawaran mata ita ke sa da na sani* (Taking women's advice brings much regret).

In a society or epistemic community where such toxic narratives are rife, it is very unlikely that a female sage would rank high in the eyes of the community. Conversely, in communities where women tend to be highly regarded, roles of sagacity are created for them by their societies even if such societies operate regimes of benign sexism (Mazrui 1993), recognizing gender segregation without bestowing sexual advantage or inflicting gender cost. In such societies, Okyerefo informs us, wisdom is "personified as a female virtue to endow the elders with the prowess to adjudicate in intractable cases" (Okyerefo 2019: 14), thereby predicating male decision-making on female acumen.

However, there have been arguments that such a relational mode might have been imagined, because some traditional Yoruba oral traditions accord certain epistemic privileges to women, especially mothers. One of the strongest allusions to this position has come from Oyewùmí, who, in her influential but controversial work, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (1997), argues that because biologization of the gender is not a conferrer of status, privilege and power in the Yoruba social system, Yoruba women are not perceived as "powerless, disadvantaged, and

controlled and defined by men” (Oyewùmí 1997: XII). Although this essentialism and idealization of gender equality among the Yoruba would seem to advance women’s empowerment, studies (as cited above) have shown that patriarchal domination and suppression were and are still prevalent in many African societies (Adebayo and Kolawole 2012; Familusi 2012; Balogun 2010).

6.3 *Acquiescence*

In common parlance, acquiescence refers to the act of non-objection, compliance with or giving tacit agreement to a view, policy and the like. But as a category of patriarchal epistemology, it refers to the epistemic agency of women “whose desires and values are patriarchal excrescence not attributable to [them] women as real free agents” (Narayan 2006: 418). Narayan alluded to acquiescence as compliance with cultural practices that bargain with patriarchy and an epistemic prison where choices are made within constraints.

In epistemic conditions where suppression was not observed, during our interviews there were cases of acquiescence on the part of the respondents. One observable recurrence during the interviews was the deliberate surrender to faith and religious beliefs through an appeal to banal “theologism” in articulating metaphysical issues. This “theologism” was also evident in the responses to gender relations. With the exception of one or two respondents who were adherents of some Indigenous religions, others imposed or rather took recourse in their Christian or Islamic positions on the issues raised. Even in philosophical questions that required logical articulation, there was quick surrender and tacit assent to religious beliefs. We see this infrarational appeal as an indication of the centuries of cultural and cognitive restructuring that has been systematically orchestrated by religious interlopers. It is not surprising that religion operates as an instrument of patriarchy. As Amadiume (1987) explains about her Igbo ethnic group, Christian missionaries, in an unholy fraternity with colonial rule, abhorred customary practices and outlawed them. The consequence of this epistemic violence was the eventual disempowerment, domestication and relegation of women (Amadiume 1987: 119–134). What all this tells us is that the reality of female sages is predicated on the dominance of a patriarchal knowledge production scheme, since patriarchy is the norm when it comes to gender relations (Amadiume 1987).

7 **Deviation from the Orukan Sense**

One of the fallouts of the Orukan conception of philosophic sagacity is the ascription of critical and rational investigation to sagacity. In this regard,

sagacity consists in the ability of the sage to pursue the exploration of an idea through the agency of *ratio*. *Ratio*, as the kernel of the Orukan thesis on sagacity, entails the epistemic ability to analyze, dissect and scrutinize an object of inquiry. But, is this all there is to philosophic sagacity or to being sagely philosophic? The notion of sagacity as a Western hegemonic *ratio* that can be extracted from the mind through interview has been criticized by Mosima:

Wisdom is not just theoretical or abstract thought (*sophia*) as Oruka makes us understand when he interviews his sages. Wisdom is also practical (phronesis), as in *sangoma* wisdom ... It constitutes a way of self-knowledge of our own existential and practical situation.

MOSIMA 2016: 121

In her reaction to this criticism, Presbey (2017), who suggests that Oruka intended by action and later works that sage philosophy be a future-oriented and continuous self-evaluating project, agrees that it was misleading of Mosima to review Oruka's sagacious philosophy in this light. According to her, Oruka, in a continuous evaluation of his project, engaged in interviews with "sages on a variety of topics like natural family planning", while paying careful attention to "concepts of home, family relations, burial practices, and religious beliefs and practices" (Presbey 2017: 89). The point is that Oruka himself, in expanding his idea of sagacity, did not restrict the activity of the sages to the scrutiny of abstract thought, he also accommodated postulations on existential conditions and practical mundane living as subjects for sage philosophy. Wisdom, therefore, entails not only the capacity for critical evaluation of concepts or ratiocinative inquiry but also profound articulation of living experiences. If this is the case, then it deviates from Oruka's original position that merely tends to create an *alter* Socrates out of the philosophic sages.

8 Towards "Feminine Wisdom"

In the light of this revised Orukan position, we can speak of another kind of sagacity, one that need not be entrapped by pre-established male-dominated canons. Although the responses of our sages might seem pedestrian in the original Orukan sense or to any essentialist philosophical tendency, on careful and discerning analysis they express a peculiar kind of sagaciousness about being and nature. They are open to some sense of sagacity that may be "feminine" on the basis of being different. This difference is evident in the knowledge production universe, where women are subjected to both testimonial and

hermeneutical injustice on the basis of their ontological relegation as intellectually weak and inscrutable on account of their gender (Eyo and Obioha 2022: 145; Fricker 2007: 1). These experiences of epistemic injustice tend to engender a broader outlook on existence which appears different, if not strange, to a male-dominated order, thus opening up new insights into sagacious reasoning. Indeed, women have the capacity to contemplate some mystery about their being in a way that eludes masculine rationality.

Furthermore, in a postmodernist world characterized by multiform narratives and multiperspectival existential standpoints, it is scholarly inelegant to impose non-negotiated standards and methodologies as canons of what philosophy is and how to go about African philosophy following the form of philosophic sagacity. Whereas for the older generation, sagacity is contemplated in the context of suppression, acquiescence and control of female epistemic agency, knowledge production for the educated, Westernized younger generation includes protests and counternarratives through forceful constructive dialogue and negotiated management of epistemic spaces. This is why Oluwole's submission on the extrarational nature of African philosophy is instructive in appreciating feminine wisdom. In one of her proverbial submissions, Oluwole avers: "*Bi a ba non gongo ogbon si nkan, ti ko ba to o, ki a fi were die ti ese*" (If reason is stretched to its limit, then folly becomes inevitable) (Oluwole 1997b: 39).

The "little madness" implied by the proverb is suggestive of the manifold nature of sagacious activities. Feminine wisdom, or the epistemic activity of female sages, may come in any form in so far as the agencies deployed lead to new ways of knowing or viewing African experiences. For instance, while the sages' submissions on the origin and cause of being lack the rigorous explication of concepts found in textbooks, their recourse to self-affirmation is noteworthy. By providing grounds for the existence of God based on their expression of interior experiences as mothers or child-bearers, their position complements other forms of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. Furthermore, the reality of consensual knowledge production in this age of globalization abhors any purist or totalizing conception of an African philosophical position.

9 Conclusion

By using sage philosophy as an example to highlight the dominance of patriarchal forces in female knowledge production, this paper encourages a movement towards female sagacious philosophizing. It is a call for female academic philosophers to interrogate whatever toxic masculinities hamper

female epistemic agencies. However, we are aware of, and hamstrung by, the fact that there is a gender imbalance in the discourse on philosophic sagacity. Considering Presbey's review of the work on marginalization of African women in philosophical discourse, which questions the preponderance of male contributors who decry the absence of African women in academic philosophy, it seems highly disturbing that projects like this have not been taken over by female academic philosophers. That women have not been the ones responding to the Oruka challenge is as baffling as it is discomfoting to us male researchers. Doesn't this salvaging mission also suggest the prevalence of patriarchal regimes in academics?

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Knowledges in Conflict: Conceptualizations of Age in Colonial Letters

Eric A. Anchimbe

1 Introduction

Colonialism set in motion contact between groups of people, cultural knowledge systems, patterns of sociocultural interaction and languages (among many other things), the outcome of which is visible in current postcolonial contexts. A challenge to researchers of colonialism, especially in Africa, has been the unavailability or scantiness of documents produced during this period. These could provide access to the state of minds of the parties involved, the potential challenges they faced and the contact of starkly different social systems. Some of the documents that can be found in archives around the world are travel diaries, letters, journals, newspapers and telegraphs. Unfortunately, most of these were written by colonizers and therefore predominantly record their perspective (see, for example, Von Hagen 1908; Schuchardt 1979; Gilbert 1985; Weber 2012; Włodarczyk 2013). However, a few also depict the perspective of the colonized and/or a clash of both, as in, for instance, the letters of Louisa Mvemve (Burns 2006). For a comprehensive understanding of how foreign and local patterns and structures of knowledges thrived during colonialism, we need access to both perspectives. How they interacted with or challenged each other is central to how they eventually co-existed or became hybridized.

The impact of colonial contact may be gauged from artifacts, written and visual material that was produced at that time. Through written correspondence between the different entities that were involved in colonialism, we get an insight into contemporaneous patterns of decision-making, intergroup communication and especially the contact, conflict and potential coalescence of inherently different and often conflictual knowledge systems as they happened. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the conflict of conceptualizations of the notion of age in letters written by colonial authorities and Indigenous Cameroonians during the colonization of the Southern Cameroons by Britain (1916–1960). Whereas for the British, being old signified senility and a time to retire, for the Indigenous population it was a mark of experience and wisdom, qualifying a person for further administrative authority or power. This

differing understanding of age underscored conflicting knowledge repertoires and interpretations of the natural order of growing old or ageing.

Using letters exchanged between British colonial authorities and Chief Manga Williams of Bimbia, in the British Southern Cameroons, I seek to answer the following questions: What conceptualizations of age were adopted in these colonial letters? How did these differ in letters written by colonial administrators and colonized subjects – in this case Chief Williams? What repertoires of knowledges drove their production, rejection and perhaps co-construction?

The rest of the chapter is organized thus. The next section offers a brief literature review of research on colonial correspondence, followed by an overview of the particular historical context of the British Southern Cameroons, where the correspondences that are analyzed in this chapter were written. Chief Manga Williams's life and relationship with colonial officers, and the circumstances under which the letters were written, are presented as the major source of data. The section entitled, "Conceptualizations of Age: Conflicts of Knowledge", is the core of the chapter, and illustrates perspectives on age with examples from letters written by colonial officials and Cameroonians. How these conflicting conceptualizations co-existed after Williams retired is discussed in the section that ensues. The conclusion calls for more historical data-driven investigations into the functioning of colonial encounters as a means of understanding processes of sociocultural and linguistic hybridism, coalescence and co-existence in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

2 Colonial Correspondence: a Brief Review

A number of studies have investigated colonial correspondence and communication, predominantly from an anthropological and historical perspective. They are based on documents like travel diaries, letters, journals, newspapers and telegraphs written during the colonial era. The focus of these studies has been, *inter alia*, the relationship between the colonial administrators and the colonized subjects, the achievement of colonial agendas and the colonizers' encounters with new knowledges and resistances. Burns (2006), for instance, describes the contact and clash between Indigenous knowledges of herbal treatment and colonially introduced medical treatment, as played out in the letters of Louisa Mvemve in South Africa during British colonization and white settler rule. Krüger (2009) analyzes letters written in colonial South Africa on a variety of private and personal topics. Stoler (2009: 1), for her part, describes "lettered governance and the written traces of colonial lives" in the Dutch East Indies. Using British colonial office correspondence from the Cape Colony,

Włodarczyk (2013) investigates the place of labels and metatextual clues in establishing the “importance of user attributions and conceptualizations” (Włodarczyk 2013: 399) of objects of communication in colonial letters. In the case of the Cape Colony, these conceptualizations were consistent because, as Włodarczyk (2013: 401) explains:

Clerks of the Colonial Office at that time had to be professional letter-writers therefore they must have had at their disposal a repertoire of more or less routinised forms of written communication. Moreover, these forms of communication must have been related to fairly clear conceptualizations of different discourse patterns.

It is to be expected, therefore, that writers corresponding outside the circle of colonial clerks relied on their own repertoires or employed letter-writing companies for the purpose. In the latter case, while the generic structure of the letter may have remained the same, the content and the conceptualization of issues often differed, reflecting the content dictated by the client. The Chief Manga Williams letters studied in this chapter bear traces of both. Williams himself was educated in English and German and perhaps wrote some of his letters. Some of the petition letters sent by Cameroonians to the colonial office were written by letter-writing agents – this was always indicated at the end of the letter.

In linguistics, not much research has been done on colonial correspondence, especially letters and how they reflect the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. A few studies, however, exist. The edited volumes by Stolz, Vossmann and Dewein (2011) and Engelberg and Stolberg (2012) deal with the impacts of German colonization on African and Oceanic languages and cultures at various levels. Among other things, the volumes explore contact between Indigenous languages and the German language and the place of colonial power structures. The impact of German on a dialect of the Beti language in German Kamerun (now Cameroon) is explored by Nyada (2011); Azamede (2011) demonstrates how Ewe was transformed from being an Indigenous people’s language to a religious lingua franca in German West African territories. The evolution of pidgins and creoles was also influenced, albeit minimally, during the German colonization of Cameroon (Weber 2011, 2012) and Papua New Guinea (Mühlhäusler 2012), in that German words and expressions were introduced into the lexicons of these languages. In most of these studies, the place of religious missionaries is accentuated and portrayed as central to the linguistic changes that took place (Stolberg 2011) and their spread beyond their immediate communities.

Texts and discourses produced during the colonial era testify to the modes and systems of conceptualizations in force then. As mentioned above, these often differed between the colonizers and the colonized. Riese (2012), for example, identifies six ways in which Samoans and Samoan culture were depicted in the German colonial newspaper, *Samoanische Zeitung* (1901–1914). Two of these involved reconceptualizations of the Samoans in terms appropriate to the colonizers and were intended to justify German colonization of the territory. As Riese explains (2012: 171), the discourses were unilaterally produced by German colonizers and were neither contested nor contradicted by discourses produced by the Samoans themselves – their perspective was not deemed relevant in the colonial power constellation.

On the basis of predictions derived from locating the Samoan people “racially” and culturally, agents articulating themselves in the sz [*Samoanische Zeitung*] discuss processes of cultural change and possible measures of preserving a “codified version” (Steinmetz 2004: 268) of *fa’a Samoa* (Samoan culture) ... the cultural alterity of the Samoans is dynamically constructed in order to legitimise the colonial enterprise as a whole.

The unilateral conceptualization or construction of colonized subjects and their cultures along with their knowledges is a common facet of colonial discourses. However, examining correspondence and discourses produced by these subjects themselves is salient to understanding the instantiations of colonial contact and power. This chapter tries to fill this gap. But first, I describe the historical context of the British Southern Cameroons, where the exchanges analyzed here were written.

3 A Brief History of the Southern Cameroons

The colonial history of the territory known today as Cameroon/Cameroun is complex. Between 1887 and 1961, it was colonized by three European countries: Germany (1884–1916), France (1916–1960) and Britain (1916–1961). Shortly after the Berlin Conference of 1884, aimed at regulating European trade in and the colonization of Africa, the Germans signed a treaty with the Duala kings, Bell (Mbeli) and Akwa, on July 12, 1884, establishing the Protectorate, or *Schutzgebiet*, Kamerun. However, the kings preferred the British and had written a letter to the British consul in Calabar (Nigeria) indicating their “voluntary colonial submission” to Britain for the sake of peace and security (Fonlon 1969; Wolf

and Anchimbe forthcoming). The British Consul, Hewett, who had been in initial contact with the kings, arrived to annex the territory to Great Britain five days after signature (see Ngoh 1979), but it was too late. Germany governed the territory together with its central African territories until the First World War broke out.

When Germany lost the war, its colonial territories were confiscated. *Schutzgebiet Kamerun* was taken over by France and Great Britain in March 1916, along the colonial boundaries established in 1910. France received more than four-fifths of the territory and Britain the remaining two strips of land neighbouring its colonial territory of Nigeria. At the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Germany officially relinquished ownership of its colonial territories as part of the postwar settlement. German Kamerun was mandated to France and Britain by the League of Nations, creating the current anglophone and franco-phone divide of present-day Cameroon.

In 1946, after the League of Nations was replaced by the United Nations, the Cameroon territories ceased to be mandated territories and became trusteeship territories, according to Article 77 of the UN Charter. Thus, political development was added to the mandate's aims, which previously had been predominantly geared to social and economic development. Political development further ensured the territorial integrity of the territories. The French part was governed centrally from Paris (Ndam Njoya 1976: 135) because of its size and population. However, the British part, referred to as the British Southern Cameroons and the British Northern Cameroons, which was made up of "two long, narrow, mountainous strips of land ... separated from each other by a gap of some forty to forty-five miles" (UNGA 1956: 116) with a small population, was merged with and administered from Nigeria, which Britain had colonized in 1884. The focus in this chapter is on the Southern Cameroons.

In 1960, French Cameroon obtained its independence from France, becoming La République du Cameroun. The British territories achieved independence in 1961 after a plebiscite that was intended to determine the nature of their post-independence existence. In the plebiscite, the British territories were asked to choose between joining French Cameroun or remaining with Nigeria. The British Northern Cameroons voted to remain with Nigeria and was integrated into that country. The British Southern Cameroons voted to unite with French Cameroun, a return to the German colonial entity, forming the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Today, as Map 10.1 shows, the former British Southern Cameroons constitute two administrative regions of the 10 regions of Cameroon. These are the Northwest and Southwest Regions, generally referred to as the anglophone zone.



MAP 10.1 Former Southern Cameroons (Anglophone) territory in Cameroon today
 SOURCE: ANCHIMBE (2013: XXV). COPYRIGHT: ERIC A. ANCHIMBE

4 The Data: the *Manga Williams Personal Papers*

The data used for this chapter was culled from the long letters between Chief Manga Williams of Bimbia, Southern Cameroons, and the British colonial

administrators, who included the district officer, the senior resident administrator and the governor. The *Manga Williams Personal Papers* (1947–1952), located at the National Archives Buea, cover various topics, including his request for a car allowance, police protection and various retirement benefits, and petitions by his subjects for his removal. The examples below are extracted from the letter exchanges about these topics. The correspondence travelled a journey that followed an administrative hierarchy, from Victoria to Buea (Cameroon) to Enugu and Lagos (Nigeria) and then to London. The replies to these letters followed a similar journey back. This complex travel route was not only physical but also cultural, linguistic and ideological, and was characterized by contacts and conflicting knowledge systems and power structures.

Chief Johannes Manga Williams (OBE), born in 1876, was the grandson of Chief William (also known as Bile) of Bimbia. In 1858, Alfred Saker and the Baptist Missionary Society bought a piece of land from Manga Williams's father, which they developed into a missionary settlement, later named Victoria. After the Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884, they negotiated with and acquired the Victoria settlement from the Baptist Missionary Society, and “replaced the Town Council and the Court of Justice with a Native Mixed Court” (Takougang 1994: 13). The members and president of this court were appointed directly by the German district officer (*Bezirksamtmann* or *Stationsleiter*), unlike the traditional cultural practice of hereditary chieftaincy and administration. In the post-German era, in 1937, the British district officer of Victoria wrote an intelligence report on the administrative strategies of the Germans. He detailed that “respect for the spiritual power and traditional knowledge of their elders was superseded by a sense of confidence in the younger men of ‘brain’ and ‘push’” (Allen 1937: File 8). As Takougang (1994: 14) confirms, “Manga Williams matched that profile. He was young (thirty-two years old in 1908), entrepreneurial and fluent in both the English and German languages”.

When the British took over the territory after the First World War, they kept Manga Williams in the position of Native Administrator and later appointed him the paramount chief, in part because he was educated (fluent in English and German), wealthy and intelligent. In the words of the Resident Administrator of the Cameroon Province, “there was no other suitable candidate” (Takougang 1994: 16). Both the Germans and the British granted access to power based on youth, vibrancy, education and wealth. The Indigenous perspective, however, additionally prized age and the wealth of experience gathered over time.

Chief Manga Williams therefore held two positions of power. He was the hereditary Chief of Bimbia as well as the Native Authority appointed by the British colonial office. As Native Authority he was, in line with the British colonial policy of indirect rule, the link between the Indigenous population and the British colonial administration.

5 Conceptualizations of Age: Conflicts of Knowledge

The discursive construction of age, what it entails and its consequences or benefits differs between letters written by British colonial officials and those written by Cameroonians. These conceptualizations were tied to societal notions of responsibility, relevance and active contribution to society. For the British, age was tied to the number of years one had lived. The higher this number, the lower the cognitive ability of the person. This perhaps explains why, in several of the communications, the British officers felt it necessary to state Manga Williams's age as a direct or indirect justification of their request that he retired.

In contrast, the Cameroonians did not refer directly to age in their correspondence. In none of the letters was Manga Williams's age problematized, not even by his opponents, who wrote several petitions requesting his removal as Native Authority or President of the Victoria Federated Council. For this society, age was not automatically a hindrance to a person's ability to serve their society. Possibly, this is why Manga Williams's opponents instead stressed his supposed illegitimacy as hereditary ruler and his autocratic governance strategies as reasons for their petitions for his removal.

In the next sections, I use excerpts from the colonial letters on Chief Manga Williams to illustrate the conflict in knowledges about age between colonial and Indigenous actors, and how each group conceived of the relevance of age to society. All italics in the excerpts are mine, used for emphasis.

5.1 *The Colonizers' Conceptualization of Age*

Manga Williams possessed the qualities for the type of strict native administrator that the Europeans wanted for the indirect rule of their colony. Intelligent and educated, he benefitted from the trust and power bestowed on him by the Germans, and later the British, to establish himself as an indispensable ruler. Both in the native colonial and Indigenous hereditary administrations he was unavoidably present at the highest levels of power (Takougang 1994). As he himself stated in a letter to the Senior Resident in reply to petitions against him:

Sir, the truth of the matter is jealousy and covetousness. They [his fellow Cameroonians, authors of the petitions] say I have more interest in the Europeans for the native lands and that I am pro-British. This is not to bias your mind against them, but is a fact.

MANGA WILLIAMS 1949

Williams was admired by the Europeans for his ruthless approach to collecting taxes and maintaining order in the villages. In 1949, when Williams was forced to retire, the district officer of Buea even recommended that “He must receive a substantial pension ... in recognition of his public services and his loyal support of British rule against dissident influences”. The British admiration of, and support for, Manga Williams was not trumped by the numerous petitions and calls for his removal, resignation or retirement. In their numerous petitions, the locals threatened to revolt and demonstrate on the streets, risking being shot by the police and soldiers rather than remain silent to the British government’s indifference and lack of action in line with their petitions.

The only excuse the British used to force Manga Williams to leave office, thereby clearing the way for their constitutional reform, was his age. Using age as a reason justified the offer of an honourable retirement with benefits. In examples 1–3 below, direct reference is made to his age and the colonial officials make it clear that Manga Williams is an old man. For instance, in Ex. 1, the Acting Resident writes to The Secretary in Enugu to recommend that Manga Williams’s request for a car allowance be granted. Among the several reasons Williams had advanced in his request was the expansive geographical nature of his administrative region. The Resident highlights Williams’s age, over 70 years, and hence the need “for him to travel in comfort if he is to carry out his duties” (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1. He is an old man (over 70 years of age) and it is essential for him to travel in comfort if he is to carry out his duties, therefore he had no option but to purchase a new car of proved reliance and comfort.

4.09.1947, AG. RESIDENT, CAMEROON PROVINCE TO THE SECRETARY, EASTERN PROVINCE, ENUGU

In 1947, the calls for Williams’s resignation or removal had just started. He still enjoyed the unwavering support of colonial officials, given his ardent loyalty to them. It is therefore understandable that the Acting Resident supported his request for a car allowance. In this letter, however, there is an implication that if Williams had been younger a car allowance would not have been necessary. The colonizers’ construction of age as a deciding factor in decision-making is undeniable.

Two years later, the petitions increased and the calls for constitutional reform that would introduce local governments similar to those in Nigeria signalled a progressivist turn in the colony, which favoured British policies. The District Officer for Victoria (*Ex. 2*) welcomed these calls but regretted that they

would be bad for Manga Williams because “he will never be able to resume his former position”. Although he knew Williams to be “a trusted public servant”, he still sarcastically referred to him as “The Grand Old Man”.

Ex. 2. The real difficulties are going to arise on Chief Manga Williams’ return. The people are now so awakening to ideas of constitutional reform and local government that, however regrettable it may be in the cause of efficiency and gratitude to a trusted public servant, he will never be able to resume his former position. Nor do I think the new situation has been brought about solely by his absence in England; it has only been hastened. It is to be remembered that such changes as have occurred have been brought about in a peaceful and constitutional manner, are fully in accordance with the new principles of local government and, but for the unfortunate consequences to “*The Grand Old Man*”, might almost justify us in moderate self-congratulation.

26.09.1949, DISTRICT OFFICER, VICTORIA DIVISION TO THE SENIOR
RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE, BUEA

In the eyes of the British, constitutional changes “in accordance with the new principles of local government” (*Ex. 2*) took priority over their support for “a trusted public servant” like Williams. To justify their “moderate self-congratulation” in achieving peaceful constitutional changes, they used Williams’s age as the factor that rolled the dice. The choice of words “The Grand Old Man” signalled the end of an era in which the British relied on the concentration of colonial power and Indigenous hereditary power in one person. The introduction of local governments meant an end to Native Authority administrators who had doubled as chiefs and colonial administrators – one of whom was Williams.

Whereas the end of the era of an absolute single ruler as a link between the colonized people and the colonial administration was usually triggered from bottom to top and peaceful, the British found themselves stuck with Chief Manga Williams, whose loyalty they had enjoyed. How were they to discard him? Would it not be a betrayal of this loyalty to simply tell Williams they did not need him anymore? To avoid a messier break up than it already seemed to be in the exchange of letters over a seven-year period, they decided to invoke age – the natural phenomenon of growing old, getting weaker and less active. The District Officer for Victoria therefore decided to send Williams into honourable retirement not because of the petitions against him but because he was old and “undoubtedly failing somewhat” (*Ex. 3*).

Ex. 3. I have come to the regretful conclusion that Chief Manga Williams who is 75 and undoubtedly failing somewhat, will pretty soon have to proceed into *honourable retirement*, and the Council must be told of our intention that he should do so. It is we who have sown the seed, and we cannot now preach two sets of precept, nor is the compromise of *constitutional monarchy* open to him as in the north, because *he is not properly speaking "a monarch"*. He must receive a substantial pension, a reasonable proportion of which must be paid by the Victoria Native Treasury and the balance by the Government in recognition of his public services and his loyal support of British rule against dissident influences. In view of the dearth of genuine leadership in the Cameroons, I think it is not out of place to suggest some further decoration.

26.09.1949, DISTRICT OFFICER TO SENIOR RESIDENT

In none of the letters written by the colonial officials who had contact with Williams or in the many petitions written against him by Cameroonians is it mentioned anywhere that Chief Manga Williams was failing because of his age. In *Ex. 6*, the petitioners, who were his fellow Cameroonians, do not problematize his age nor do they suggest he is weak or ailing and hence unfit to rule.

For the district officer, Williams could not be a constitutional monarch, as in the North, which would have granted him access to power for life. So, to further compensate him for the loss of his power and for his "loyal support of British rule against dissident influences", Williams was granted "a substantial pension" and "some further decoration" (*Ex. 3*) as well as possible honorary positions on council boards.

Examples 1–3 show an insistence by the British on age and the supposed corresponding decline in cognitive and physical abilities as a disqualifier for holding colonial power. In *Ex. 1*, Williams's request for a car allowance is positively supported by the Acting Resident, among other things, because "He is an old man (over 70 years of age)". In *Ex. 2*, Williams, "The Grand Old Man" must lose his previous position of power because a new wave of local government reform leaves him no space. He supposedly belongs to the past because he is old. In *Ex. 3*, the British claim that at 75 he is failing and must retire honourably. The British conceptualization of age was hypothetically tied to an imagined natural biological curve of life that is expected to fall as one grows older. Did the colonized Southern Cameroonians share this same view of age? The next section offers an answer to this question, with examples from Williams's letters and the petitions written by his compatriots.

5.3 *The Colonized's Conceptualization of Age*

Several studies have highlighted the importance of age-based hierarchy in African societies. In some societies, age difference is a non-negotiable marker of superiority and an indicator of who owes who respect, deference and politeness. Age tends to be linked to society's baggage of accumulated knowledge and is "tied to lived experience and generationally transmitted access to the society's history, knowledge and code of conduct" (Anchimbe 2021: 126). Similarly, Macia et al. (2019: 819) explain that, in Senegal, "older adults are without doubt the keepers of traditional values and the guarantors of the perpetuation of community habitus". Chiangong (2021: 6) describes "the role of the elderly as custodians of their community's history and culture ... as keen observers of the transformation of societal values". What these three quotes indicate is that, in African societies, the older one gets, the wiser and more knowledgeable one becomes. Age is therefore not linked with the natural decline of cognitive and physical abilities, as in the British conceptualization, but with the acquisition of knowledge that society needs for its success and future. This conceptualization is evident in the arguments in examples 4–6.

The petition letters written by the Southern Cameroonians do not mention age as an impeding influence in the ability to keep power. They shared the same cultural background as Williams and so identified with the same conception of age. Manga Williams, for instance, had gathered a wealth of wisdom and experience during his long life which he believed was relevant for the country. He lamented, "this country is wanting in wisdom and understanding" (*Ex. 4*), which explains why he was "desirous to exhort and teach" the self-seeking (younger) people of his society the wisdom and knowledge he had assembled as "an old administrator", with the hope that "in future a few may be found among them to be of some use towards the progress and general welfare of this country" (*Ex. 4*).

Ex. 4. As an old administrator for so many years and a native I know so many things and have experienced so many things during my time and have been very tolerant especially that I found that this country is wanting in wisdom and understanding and being desirous to exhort and teach them that in future a few may be found among them to be of some use towards the progress and general welfare of this country, for at present nothing but selfseeking is the main object and nothing else.

10.11.1949, MANGA WILLIAMS, PRESIDENT FEDERATED COUNCIL, VICTORIA TO
THE SENIOR RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE, BUEA

Williams encapsulated the duty expected of the older and experienced members of society. At 75, he considered himself to be full of wisdom and

understanding, gathered from his more than 40 years of colonial administration and his indigeneity as a native. He expressed a societal obligation to teach the people what he had learned over these years. His age was not a weakness or a signal that he had to retire but rather the indicator of the need for him to continue serving his society, especially at a time when “self-seeking is the main object” (*Ex. 4*) of the current generation. By virtue of his lived experience, he considered himself a guarantor of community habitus, to borrow from Macia et al. (2019).

In *Ex. 5*, Williams invokes the cultural value of age as being positive, that is “a man of good age”, to justify his request for a car allowance and other benefits in the event of his retirement. This positive casting of age as good incorporates other values like wisdom, maturity, ripeness and understanding.

Ex. 5. I can gather by this action that the simple reason is that a person serving in the Native Administration is an inferior to those serving under the Government and as such N.A. members are unworthy of provisions which are not only necessary for the performance of my duties but also for my health being as *a man of good age* and long service which you are not ignorant of.

05.01.1952, MANGA WILLIAMS TO THE RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE

While Williams touted his age as a positive quality for staying in power, his fellow Southern Cameroonians had other reasons for wanting him out. Their problem with Williams was not his supposedly failing abilities caused by age but with his legitimacy as chief. The petitions against Williams led by Otto Musuka and S. Itutu et al. called for his removal because “he is not of our tribe but was brought to Bimbia when he was young by his father who was a foreign-native – a sojourner, and was therefore never a village Head nor a Chief” (11.08.1949, Petition by Musuka et al. to The Governor, Lagos). They argued their position in this petition, thus:

Ex. 6. That times and again, through petitions and interviews, have we been suggesting to the Government the needs for changes and urging it to accede to our demands of reform in our Native Administration Judicial and Executive works but have often met with disappointment. Mr J.M. Williams, O.B.E. whose father as stated above *was never a village Head nor a Chief but an ordinary foreign-native who came to sojourn in Bimbia with his son* has, since many years past and through support of the Government, been allowed to rule the indigenes autocratically and as it pleases him.

11.08.1949, PETITION BY MUSUKA ET AL. TO THE GOVERNOR, LAGOS

Besides Williams's alleged illegitimacy as the hereditary and communally accepted leader of Bimbia, the petitioners also complained about his autocratic rule. A probable reason why the British were reluctant to censure Williams on this, Takougang (1994) suggests, is because his iron fist rule benefitted their colonial approach.

The framing of old age as a wealth of lived experiences embellished with wisdom and understanding (*Ex. 4*) and as good (*Ex. 5*) in Indigenous conceptualizations contradicts the British perspective, which considered old age a determinant for retirement from active public service. We see both perspectives at work and in conflict with one another in the correspondence between the colonial and Indigenous actors. This clash epitomizes the differences in social and knowledge systems that came into contact during colonial times. How this conflict was resolved and how the two systems fared thereafter is the focus of the next section.

6 Co-existence of Conceptualizations: Age and Spheres of Power

Colonialism thrived through violent and peaceful clashes, subjugations, takeovers and coalescences of sociocultural, political, educational, religious, linguistic and economic systems. Precolonial systems clashed with colonially introduced ones in various ways and domains. The outcomes generally varied, depending on the societal system or social domain involved. Whereas religion was often authoritatively imposed and consolidated, leaving little space for Indigenous religious practices, other domains gradually fused together or co-existed in delimited and independent domains. Administration was one of them. The colonially introduced, centralized, political national government flourished when nation-states were created at independence. However, these nation-states functioned, sometimes side by side, with ethnic, clan or village kingdoms and chiefdoms. Two succinct examples are the Asante Kingdom in Ghana (Obeng 1986) and the Kingdom of the Baganda in Uganda (Reid 2017). The colonial judicial system co-existed and still co-exists with the customary law systems that are a continuation of precolonial, Indigenous arbitration systems.

The *Manga Williams Papers* expose a similar clash of political systems and of conceptualizations linked to them, such as political vs hereditary power, age-based claims vs appointment-based claims to power, retirement vs lifetime right to office, among others. For Williams, and by extension Southern Cameroonians, age granted him the wisdom and experience needed to continue in

a position of power. But for the British, age disqualified him from that power. The colonial perspective won, and Williams was forced to retire, despite his interest in continuing. His retirement paved the way for constitutional reforms aligned with the colonial conceptualization of power – politically appointed rather than hereditary. In a letter to the Commissioner of the Cameroons, Buea, the Acting Resident Cameroons Province reported on a resolution (*Ex. 7*) passed at a meeting held with the Victoria Native Authority.

Ex. 7. We the Victoria Federated Native Authority resolve that in the event of his resignation from the Native Authority for any reason Chief Manga Williams will be paid during his life time a pension of £300 per year from the funds of this Native Authority.

17.01.1952, RESOLUTION OF VICTORIA FEDERATED NATIVE AUTHORITY

This resolution effectively ended Williams's tenure as Native Authority. In addition to his pension, he was accorded the gratuity he had asked for, although with a twist. In the same letter, the Acting Resident added, "Recommendations in regard to this gratuity will follow and need not, I think, *be taken too seriously*". The Acting Resident was clearly asking the Commissioner to ignore any recommendations that would be made for Williams's gratuity. Now that Williams no longer wielded political colonial power, the Acting Resident felt no obligation to fulfil his demands or to keep his own promise to Williams. This is probably because, for the colonizers, Manga Williams, in the years 1947 to 1952, had become a stubborn episode in the new status quo represented by the introduction of local governments. The Acting Resident seemed relieved to have finally got rid of Williams, and with him the precolonial vestiges that stood in the way of progressive reforms. He concluded his letter with the following statement of triumph:

Ex. 8. The way now seems to be open for Local Government reform.

18.01.1952, ACTING RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE TO THE COMMISSIONER OF THE CAMEROONS, BUEA

Aware that his opponents had castigated him as an obstacle to local government reforms in their petitions and that the colonial government might have been persuaded by this argument, Williams felt the need to set the record straight. In a letter responding to the petitions and accepting his retirement, he emphatically refuted that he was "an obstacle in the way of progress in the Local Government" (*Ex. 9*).

Ex. 9. My being born here and brought up under a religious Mission training, and by natural inclination had never misled me to act as it were autocratic in any way, but to perform all my duties according to the organizations of the Governments in charge of the country and so I wish the Government had not been entertaining any wrong notion in the belief that the well invented story of my antagonists who cleverly employed the falsehood of my being against the introduction of the Local Government was true. I have never been against any constitution as far as it is hoped to further the progress and welfare of the people. If the Authority introducing the Constitution fails to achieve the right aims and purpose for which the Constitution had been created, it is their business and not for me to oppose. I hope therefore that the retirement had not been considered as treating me as *an obstacle in the way of progress in the Local Government*, but will serve for its success.

05.01.1952, MANGA WILLIAMS TO THE RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE

Williams's letter (*Ex. 9*) is significant in that it resolved the clash between the colonial and Indigenous systems. By declaring that he was not an obstacle, he opened the way for the new system to establish itself in the political constellation. But the question is, what happened to the hereditary power of chief that he held?

Although the colonizers won by pushing Williams out of the colonial power apparatus, their victory was not significant because it was limited to only that sphere of power – the colonial political power. Williams continued ruling as the Chief of Bimbria endowed with hereditary power, which he valued as “ordained by God” and “cannot be bought with money” (*Ex. 10*). Thus, the hereditary power of a chief triumphed.

Ex. 10. Whether I be a member of the New Constitution or not I am and will *ever remain a Chief* whether I hold an office or not, for the actual meaning of a chief by *inheritance and right* cannot be bought with money and it is a fact that promotion comes from God alone. My appointment was *ordained by God* and therefore I thank God for not having abused it.

05.01.1952, MANGA WILLIAMS TO THE RESIDENT, CAMEROONS PROVINCE

The two spheres of power therefore co-existed, each occupying its own ambit of influence and applying different norms and conceptualizations of age and power. For the colonizers, age determined how long a person could wield power before qualifying for honourable retirement. For the Bimbrian or Cameroonian

norm, a “chief by inheritance and right” (*Ex. 10*) was not limited by age but could rule till death. Williams remained a chief while the local governments took over the colonial administrative duties he had performed.

These two systems co-exist even today in the two spheres of power and authority: the government with its political and electoral procedures and the Indigenous, tribal and ethnic with its hereditary rights to power. To the latter belong Fons, Chiefs, Lamidos, Quarterheads, etc. While the Indigenous system functions on a hereditary or inheritance axis, the government functions on an electoral and political appointment axis.

7 Conclusion

The chapter set out to describe the conflicting conceptualizations of age of colonial officers and Indigenous subjects, as reflected in letters written during the British colonization of the British Southern Cameroons. Using the *Manga Williams Papers*, I illustrated that the relationship between age and access to power was construed differently between the two actors. For the British, age determined when an official should retire from service. But for the Cameroonians, age was the golden period of knowledge and wisdom when a person was most resourceful and could help society from a position of power.

During the colonial era, these two perspectives often conflicted, but in Cameroon they now co-exist in delimited spheres of influence. The hybridism, syncretism and co-existence of sociocultural, linguistic, religious and economic systems in contemporary postcolonial contexts may have emerged in ways similar to those described here about age. How this happened can be understood only by studying records produced during this era, exploring how different actors interacted with one another, arrived at the decisions they made and overcame challenges from peers and opponents, and the discursive choices they used to express their positionalities. The data I used here is intended to offer this view. More studies that adopt a similar data-driven approach based on real-life data produced during colonial times will certainly provide additional in-depth understanding of cultural hybridism, social co-existence and multilingual processes triggered by colonialism.

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Haunted Numbers: the Lingering Legacies of Colonial Statistics and Measurement

Christine Hanke

In the nineteenth century, a frenzy of “measuromania” arose in the practices of imperial science, which was particularly enacted in colonized regions in Africa and beyond. Embarking on the idea of getting to know the world “scientifically”, colonial researchers used measuring and statistical data evaluation, and various measurement as well as description schemes, and extensively collected data from Indigenous people in order to determine “racial” and “sexual” differences. Besides collecting data on site, European colonizers appropriated – mostly without consent, often in clandestine ways or violently – thousands of skulls and other human body remains and transported them to European archives, museums and private collections, where most of them are still kept (Palladino and Worboys 1993; MacLeod 2000; Berner, Hoffmann and Lange 2011). These bodies have been stored in anthropological institutes, collections and museums; they have been presented at meetings and conferences of anthropological societies, in museum displays and exhibitions. Morphometric descriptions, measurements and visualizations derived from them have been discussed in scientific journals, lectures and popular science books.

Human remains and the measurement data collected from living bodies served in this way as comparative “race” collections throughout Europe. Huge amounts of data were extracted to form a comprehensive archive of dispersed analogue databases with source data for further anthropological processing. Hesitantly, European museums and scientific institutions have begun to investigate the “acquisition contexts” of their collections, to reflect their deep entanglement in colonial power and violence and to slowly engage in the restitution of human remains. A forerunner in Germany was the “Human Remains Project” at Charité – Berlin University of Medicine (Stoecker, Schnalke and Winkelmann 2013).

Some human remains from European collections have been returned since but thousands are yet waiting to be restituted. Although awareness has been rising about the ancestral remains in European archives, what I call the “metric-statistical” practices of knowing in this colonial discourse remain strangely untouched. On the contrary, legacies of colonial statistics

and measurements still linger in current scientific knowledge. Handbooks for anthropometric data practices that serve as guiding methodologies for anthropology, medicine, archaeology, forensic sciences (Slice 2006; Preedy 2012; Grupe et al. 2015), and anthropological articles (Stephan and Simpson 2008; Ousley, Jantz and Freid 2009) refer to colonial anthropology papers when it comes to, for example, measuring points and measurement instruments, standardized data recordings, craniometric systems and terminology. Data sets from colonial anthropology are fed into anthropometric databases like *FORDISC*, *CRANID* or the “macromorphoscopic” databank, to provide forensic and archaeological identifications, at least indirectly (Howells 1996; Manthey and Jantz 2020; Kallenberger and Pilbrow 2012; Hefner 2018).

Within the digitalization paradigm in museums and in sciences, many researchers – sometimes using the catchphrase “virtual anthropology” – call for an automatization of anthropometric measurement, data processing and data sharing across the Internet (Weber 2014; Errickson and Thompson 2017; Hassett 2018). Wittwer-Backofen and Schläger (2013) even propose scanning colonial human remains before their restitution in order to keep the data for further scientific use.

Ethical debates about this “digital euphoria” started only recently (Squires, Errickson and Márquez-Grant 2020; Fforde et al. 2024). And in the current “AI euphoria” it might not be surprising that machine learning, neural networks and deep learning have been proposed for the evaluation of forensic and anthropometric data (Bell and Jantz 2002; Ousley 2016; Dong 2021). In these approaches, the biological concept of “race” is mostly either avoided or replaced, or synonymously used with terms like “ethnicity” or “ancestry”. An “absent presence of race” (M’charek, Schramm and Skinner 2014) is thus enacted with regard to the concept of “race” and lingers in still-circulating colonial data methods and data sets.

Since the relational entanglements of anthropometric modes of knowledge and colonialism have not yet been recognized fully (Chakrabarty 2000), this chapter proposes a critical engagement with the genealogies and legacies of measurement and data processing as colonial modes of knowledge-making and with their epistemic violence (Spivak [1988] 2010). With respect to un-disciplining African studies this chapter grapples with the “coloniality” (Maldonado-Torres 2007) of a specific knowledge mode that is genealogically bound to European colonization of the African continent. The chapter calls for an awareness of the lingering legacies in current anthropometric knowledge that still draws on African bodies.

The aim and endeavour of “race science” has been widely criticized and denounced since the twentieth century for its inherent racism. Statements

by Ashley Montagu (1942), UNESCO (1950) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1952) mark influential efforts in the politics of knowledge to unknow “race” (in its “European” biology-based understanding). The Jena Declaration by the German Zoological Society (2019) demonstrates that such statements still need to be made – especially in the face of the rising racism and (neo)fascism in Europe and beyond: “The concept of race is the result of racism, not its prerequisite” (Fischer 2019).

With respect to a critical discussion on the history of science, Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981) was seminal, carving out the racist prejudices and bias that underlay “race science”. The genealogy and aftermaths of this specific knowledge, its functionality for colonialism and racism, and its inscribed racist prejudices have been widely discussed in history of science (Stepan 1982; Stocking 1991; Kaupen-Haas and Saller 1999; Zimmermann 2001; Evans 2010; Weindling 2010; Müller-Wille 2014a, 2014b; Bauche 2017; Zack 2017). But these critical approaches have barely touched on the epistemology of the scientific methods, as if the problem were mainly a matter of wrongly (because prejudiced, racist) applied scientific methods – “biased science”.

Taking a closer, more detailed look at the material of 1900s “race anthropology”, I was struck by the appearance of “scientificity” in this discourse. Having a feminist and queer critical view on all essentialisms, and being trained in the scholarship of Derrida and Foucault (Hanke 1999), the performance of objectivity in this discourse seemed so persistent to me that unpacking its racist presumptions or detecting biased applied methods would not be enough. It was the very mode of knowing and its evidence effects of biological difference that unsettled and worried me, in addition to the often clearly articulated racism. Using numbers as its main medium, physical anthropology acts as neutral, objective and universalized in this mode of knowing. It operates as a “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1988: 581; Marcus 2020). Through measuring and data evaluation, physical anthropology claims to comprehensively grasp the world without being positioned or situated anywhere. This characterization holds not only for this discipline but haunts the dominance of metric-statistical approaches in contemporary sciences.

In the following, I add to discussions about the racist dimensions of “race science” by locating the problem of epistemic violence in the practice of metric-statistical procedures and by unpacking the epistemic infrastructures of the field of physical anthropology, with the intention of contributing to the decolonizing of research methodologies in African studies and beyond (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019). My contribution tries to uncover the specific positionality of this scientific mode of knowledge and its aftermath by situating

it in relation to colonial history, extractivism and epistemic violence (Mignolo 2011; Mbembe [2016] 2019).

I take a closer look at the genealogies and predecessors of measurement in physical anthropology. Complementing colonial historiographies, my approach connects discourse analysis and deconstructive, epistemological and media theoretical methods with decolonizing approaches. This is to understand the epistemic violence and structural relationality to colonialism that I consider inherent in this scientific approach. I use Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) methods of discourse analysis to unpack discursive regularities of European physical anthropology in given historical settings and to understand their continuities, stabilizations and disruptions.

In order to grasp how this mode of knowing functions, what kinds of objects are constituted in this way and what knowledge and power effects are thus been generated, I look at examples of anthropological material – utterances and statements that were deemed legitimate within this discourse. Conceptually, my analytic process aims to begin deconstructing colonial anthropology from within and to understand the ways in which measurement functions as part of the production of knowledge.

In my contribution I focus on the emerging discipline of physical anthropology, the foundations of which lie in the development and application of new metric-statistical methods and practices to scientifically identify and determine “races” in the European colonies. In order to discuss the coloniality of this knowledge of the global North, regarding its genealogy and its epistemology, my approach interweaves two lines of thought. I situate the analyzed practices of knowing within the broader transformation of European knowledge production and its relationality to colonialism. And I reflect epistemologically on the specific approaches of measurement and statistics, by focusing on the nitty-gritty practices of metric-statistical knowledge production in colonial anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century, to expose the epistemic violence of this approach (and not only its faulty/biased and prejudiced application). My contribution argues from an interdisciplinary background, unpacking the power structures and knowledge effects of this colonial form(ation), to invite a reflexive critique of this hegemonic, seemingly self-evident, mode of knowing.

1 Historicity of Objectivity

The comprehensive datafication of nineteenth-century anthropology and the debates about identification were part of the search for a scientific grounding of European “race” theory. Data collection and statistical evaluation act as

“god tricks of knowing” – they appear to be guarantors of scientific objectivity and thus, to a certain extent, as neutral and non-positioned. In order to unpack this unsettling way of knowing, I situate the self-evidence of this scientific approach historically and culturally.

In their historical study, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison describe a fundamental shift in European concepts of scientific objectivity in the nineteenth century, when the principle of “truth-to-nature” (Daston and Galison 2007: 55–113) is replaced by a “moralized epistemology” of “mechanical objectivity” (Daston and Galison 2007: 39), in which self-discipline, restraint and asceticism are demanded of the scientist. Daston and Galison explore the close connection of mechanical objectivity and the increasing use of the new technical medium of photography in various scientific atlases of anatomy, botany, astronomy and other fields, where the medium appears to be an intermediary that “preserves” scientific knowledge from the subjectivity of the researcher, be it their scientific and aesthetic judgement or their dogmatic thought constructs and anthropomorphisms.

This approach seemed to guarantee that the epistemic objects were now being recorded independently of the researcher – as the title, *The Pencil of Nature*, by one of the inventors of photography, William Fox Talbot, had envisaged (Talbot 1844–1846). Thus, the apparatus of technical media (photography, the sphygmomanometer and other curve plotting tools) promised to mechanize scientific research processes through simple, mechanical, non-interventionist recordings of nature. Photography was implemented in nineteenth-century colonial anthropology hand in hand with the fundamental process of datafication through new instruments, standardized measurement procedures and statistical data analysis. The new mode of objectivity in anthropology can therefore be situated in an even broader scientific approach in which “mechanical objectivity” is only one component.

The movement towards the mechanical objectivity of a technical apparatus and away from the researcher’s subjectivity is part of a larger context, namely the comprehensive mathematization of the sciences in Europe from the middle of the nineteenth century. In *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, Theodore Porter (1986) describes a development in which measurement and metric-statistical data processing were established as the new guarantors of scientific objectivity. Therefore, I expand on Daston and Galison’s concept and propose to coin the new mode of knowing that gained traction in imperial science in the nineteenth century, “metric-statistical objectivity”.¹ Technical media approaches,

1 When Peter Galison (1998), with respect to anthropological debates about measurement vs aesthetics, uses physical anthropology, of all things, as a model for illustrating judgement

like the use of curve plotters, microscopy, photography and other visualization apparatuses, can be subsumed under this mode.

The measurement and statistical analysis of data are – as I discuss in the example of anthropology – a very specific mode of knowing. Measuring can be characterized as a complex epistemological process, in which numbers are assigned to phenomena or things and thus transform them. In perceiving things or phenomena as measurable, they are thus already subjected to a specific mode of knowledge. Statistics, in turn, is a method for analyzing large amounts of data. Its claim to validity as an objective scientific method is closely related to its mode of posteriority: “normalism” researcher Jürgen Link points out that “types” are now no longer normatively presupposed but “normalistically” produced *ex post* (Link 1996: 2004a–c). Instead of measuring only those phenomena that appear to be “characteristic”, “ideal” or “typical”, the metric-statistical approach claims to collect data from samples that are as large or random as possible. Furthermore, statistical data evaluations “aggregate” and produce new objects from the data of individuals (Desrosières [1993] 2002: 77–115) – in the case of anthropology, racialized categories.

Measurement and statistical analyses as a mode of knowledge are closely related to the emergence of the modern European nation-state, capitalism and industrialization, underpinned by new infrastructures of communication and transportation within Europe and the colonized regions (the steam engine, shipping routes, railways, telegraphy) and the standardization of scales for space and time (Desrosières [1993] 2002: 36–40). Additionally, new forms of governmentality and population control emerged at that time, together with administrative compilations of death, birth and marriage lists, accident and illness data for monitoring workers’ productivity, and a new concept of risk, calculable for the newly implemented insurance systems. The transfer of the Gaussian error curve to phenomena in society and nature, comprehensive data collections and their statistical evaluation, and methodological debates, became an integral part of new form(at)s of knowledge that arose in the course of the nineteenth century. In all areas of European societies, measurements were taken, data was collected and statistical analysis was done. In this way, the machinery of metric-statistical evidence spread around the world and fundamentally transformed scientific knowledge production.

rather than mechanical objectivity, he underestimates what I call the *metric-statistical objectivity* of 19th-century anthropology and the internal anthropological conflicts between perspectives that are valued as “objective” and those that are considered “judgemental” (Hanke 2007: 137–149).

Linking science studies to decolonial studies prompts the question of how the transformation of scientific modes of knowledge is fundamentally related to coloniality. As Mudimbe (1988), Seth (2009), Mignolo (2011), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Mbembe ([2016] 2019) and many others have argued in multiple ways, the transformation of Europe – modernization, industrialization, capitalism – is closely interwoven with colonialism, the plantation economy, racism and enslavement. As a result, the dissemination and implementation of metric-statistical objectivity as a modern scientific approach serves as a powerful although unobtrusive instrument to control knowledge and bodies in the service to industrialization, capitalism and colonialism.

Colonial anthropology is an important mediator in this process, because its approach of racialized othering not only entails knowledge and power effects that are constitutive for white supremacy and the legitimization of Europe's colonial endeavours but also generates knowledge that can be further used in colonial infrastructure and administration. Moreover, colonized spaces and people serve as distributed experimental and laboratory fields, where new modalities of knowledge are practised and tested, discussed and further developed. Therefore, historicizing scientific objectivity (Daston and Galison 2007), statistical thinking (Porter 1986) and the politics of large numbers (Desrosières [1993] 2000) has to take into account the intrinsic coloniality in these modes of knowledge.

Ramon Amaro (2023) examines the relation of data science, statistics and inherent racism in European sciences with respect to Leibniz, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and draws a line of continuity from then up to contemporary machine learning and AI. With this in mind, I focus on a specific turn of knowledge and its research methodology in physical anthropology around 1900 – the practice of metric-statistical objectivity. Since this mode of knowing is characterized by a mathematization of knowing and statistical data processing, I propose to understand its use in colonial anthropology as a genealogical precursor to datafication, data repositories (databases), Big Data, surveillance, forensics and other digital data processing (Benjamin 2019; Bender et al. 2021; Sharma and Singh 2022). Not only were methods of data collection and evaluation widely tested and enhanced in colonial “laboratories”, but the epistemology of this very mode of knowing can be characterized as epistemically violent and colonial.

2 Physical Anthropology

Form(at)s of knowledges that operate in modes of what I call “metric-statistical objectivity” are a core and intrinsic part of European colonialism, not only in

Africa. During the nineteenth century, they gained traction through expansive colonialism in the multiple efforts to provide European “race theory” with a scientific basis. This scientific endeavour presupposes and enacts the existence and hierarchical ordering and gendering of “races”, where European white men place themselves at the top of an evolutionary line of human development. The coloniality and epistemic violence of these imperialist knowledges lies in the racializing practices of metric-statistical procedures.

Colonial anthropology has multiple effects. Besides legitimizing racism and colonialism, it is a field of experimentation and profiling for the professionalization of the discipline of anthropology, in which physical anthropological, ethnographic and prehistoric approaches were closely interwoven. Moreover, colonial anthropology plays a central role in the development, testing and implementation of the new modes of European science. It operates as a distributed methodological laboratory (Tilley 2011). Strong debates revolve around data recording, standardizations of data collection and statistical evaluation procedures, which colonial anthropology tests on concrete data, only rudimentarily accompanied by mathematical theory; debate also rages around imaging processes and descriptive recordings of bodies.

In what follows, I undertake a close reading of colonial anthropometric methods (Hanke 2007), with the aim of understanding their specific knowledge and power effects and to render visible the epistemic violence that lies in this metric-statistic modality. In order to unpack the “god trick” of these new scientific modes of knowing, which are still used today, my problematization draws on one of the discipline’s most important discussion platforms in the German language, the *Archiv für Anthropologie* (Archive of Anthropology), which was the scientific journal of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) from 1890 to 1914.

This journal is replete with data and visualizations extracted from bodies subjected to measurement. It can be characterized as an archive that provides anthropology with the working objects on which this emergent scientific discipline carries out its identification procedures. In these identifications, “racial” and “sexual” differentiations are relationally bound to each other and categories of “race” are often sexed, while categories of “sex” are often racialized. Anthropology’s objective to determine “races” (and “sexes”) is pursued by scanning bodies in terms of shapes (morphology), measures and proportions (anthropometry) and colours (“complexion”). This scanning not only involves a specific gaze by the anthropologist but also positions and displays the people to be identified by the anthropologist’s eye and measurement tools in literal

ways (with respect to their posture) and epistemic ways.² Thus, bodies are transformed into scientifically measurable and describable entities which are then categorized according to specific traits.

This approach is characterized by a fundamental epistemic violence. The anthropological gaze converts bodies into “rasterized”, fragmented objects, which are located in a mediatised realm of words (standardized catchwords/categories) and numbers/numerical indexes. From this data extracted from single individuals, physical anthropology constructs collective bodies – “races” and “sexes” – that are then assigned to these metric-statistical constructions. In this way, thousands of people are transferred as data into the order of European physical anthropological discourse. Both the individual body and the “population” body appear as fragmented, taken apart and put together in the form of aggregated objects/categories (Foucault [1967] 1991).

With my close reading, the practice of rasterization, or scanning, of bodies can be understood as a specific media technology that transforms bodies into data. Recent digital 2D and 3D scanning procedures of bodies in “virtual anthropology” and beyond can be situated genealogically in these processes of colonial body scans.

By taking individual bodies as a starting point for comprehensive data extraction, physical anthropology transforms and transfers them fundamentally into the medial realm of data – their living body and individuality are dehumanized and turned into numbers. It is this erasure of context that impedes the restitution of data and ancestral remains (Stoecker et al. 2013; Förster and Fründt 2017) and hinders the memory and mourning of the societies of origin.

It is this transformation of living bodies into data that I call out as epistemic violence. The epistemic violence and coloniality of these physical anthropological procedures therefore is not only a problem of violent appropriation and missing consent within colonial power regimes. Epistemologically, it can already be situated in the approach towards world and people practised here, in this scanning and converting of living bodies into numbers.

This transformation of bodies into data is by no means self-evident – bodies do not spill out data as if it was intrinsic to them. Since the flesh of human bodies belongs to a completely different realm from the realm of numbers, the very act of measuring it becomes recognizable as practising a specific epistemological chiasm and violence. Furthermore, the anthropological approach enacts a

2 For a comparable gaze and positioning, not of humans, but of Karakul sheep, see Schaumann in chapter 12 of this volume.

strong “will to difference”³ in all its data collection and evaluation. The core aim of colonial anthropology is to generate racialized and sexed differences. In its scientific mode it may be characterized as a huge difference-generating machine, which still lingers in scientific modes of knowing.

3 Modes of Metric-Statistical Knowing: Tables, Frequency Schemes and Curves

The specific performativity of the number medium consists in its “practice of schematization, arrangement and formation [my translation]”.⁴ Numbers “number, sort, divide, create registers, lists and hierarchies, or fabricate chronologies [my translation]”, as the media philosopher, Dieter Mersch, argues⁵ (Mersch 2002: 210). The ordering structure of this medium produces discrete patterns with certain “step sizes”: 1, 2, 3, 4, or 1.0, 1.1, 1.2., etc. This organization also implies a decision logic – a logic which is only fully realized in the binary logic of the computer. Numbers, as a medium, correspond to the metric-statistic objectivity paradigm of the modern sciences because in their abstractness they act indifferent or neutral – they perform the very “god trick of science”. Their intrinsic logic opens a field of general comparability because they allow “universal interchangeability” (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 1989: 10)⁶ – thus offering infinite, arbitrary possibilities to relate to and correlate with other data. The correlation of data distributions is a highly productive statistical procedure used to generate new relationalities and new knowledge from multiple data collections. It is practised in machine learning, AI, large language models (LLM), public health and the medical sciences.

To explain the principles and the specific productivity of metric-statistic modes of knowledge, I zoom into the nitty-gritty practices of colonial anthropology and unpack its data processing. In the following it will become clear

3 In reference to the “will to knowledge” formulated by Foucault ([1976] 1988), following Nietzsche.

4 “*Praktik der Schematisierung, der Anordnung und Formierung*” (Mersch 2002: 210).

5 “*Zahlen [...] nummerieren, sortieren, teilen ein, erstellen Register, Listen und Hierarchien oder verfertigen Chronologien*” (Mersch 2002: 210).

6 In the European Enlightenment, the use of numbers was detached from numerological or mystical contexts and paradigmatically came to be the medium for the “disenchantment” of nature (Adorno and Horkheimer ([1944] 1989: 3), empowering the human mind “to hold sway over a disenchanted nature” via modern sciences (ibid.: 4).

how closely related visualizations of data and metric-statistical knowledge generation are and how data visualizations operate as epistemic images – they do not simply show but generate knowledge (Hanke 2005).

In the *Archiv für Anthropologie*, the numerical data extracted from living and dead bodies by anthropologists, ethnologists, medical doctors and missionaries, among others, is stored and presented in vast numbers of tables. Traces of the measured bodies as living (or dead) individuals are generally eliminated in these data collections, although sometimes individual names appear in the tables, before they become mere numbers in the process of data evaluation. The mediality of the table makes data extracted from bodies available for analysis, which is why I understand these anthropological tables as pre-computer databases, as data archives before the time of the computer.

The specific performativity of the table format consists in the principle that it provides an ordering system. Data is arranged according to the individuals who were measured and by measured variables. Tables arrange the collected data along two coordinates, their ordering structures of rows and columns enable horizontal and vertical reading and comparisons. Rows and columns of cells can be flexibly rearranged according to various aspects and directions. They map the measurement data on a two-dimensional surface and can be understood as a media hybrid between images or graphics and numbers or text. Tables are readable in lines and columns, the digits are countable in discrete steps, tables plot data in a coordinate system – a grid stretched between the x- and y-axis – and the (data) space of a table is structured according to repetition and difference (Deleuze 1968). Moreover, in tables, the grid structure of measuring – that is, the scanning and rasterization of bodies – comes to the fore: the rasterization of bodies is itself (co-)visualized in tables. The specific mediality of the table does not hide but enters the picture; it displays, it *shows* itself (see Figure 11.1).

A study of tables and their use in anthropology shows how tables store data and keep it at hand but also how they work by enabling structured ways of reordering. The metric-statistical identification of “race” and “sex” is undertaken using the likewise accumulated, plotted numerical data. Statistics then “aggregate” new things from the data extracted from individuals. It does this by focusing on data clusters – that is, those areas of the measurement scale in which most of the measured values are located. From such data accumulations, “typical” or “normal” values are determined. Statistical processing is described as a procedure that “[die] *Eigenschaften des [Daten-]Aggregats*

Höhe im Stehen m	Grösste Länge mm	Grösste Breite	Ohrhöhe	Kleinste Stirnbreite	Gesichtshöhe			Kleinste Stirnbreite	Entfernung der Kiefer- winkel von einander	Ent- fernung der Augen- winkel von einander	Mundbreite	Lippenhöhe	Ohrlänge	Länge zur Breite	Länge zur Ohrhöhe	Breite zur Ohrhöhe	Jochbogen- breite zur Gesichts- höhe			Kleinste Stirnbreite zur Kieferwinkel	Nasen-Index				
					V	B	C										A	B	C						
—	184,5	152	136	97	176	116	72	47	42,5	142	110	34	88	54	16,5	60	82,3	73,8	89,6	123,6	81,6	50,6	63,8	10:7,7	90,4
155	184	151	124	106	181	112,5	68	45	42	142	113	32	87	48	22	60	82,1	67,3	82,2	127,3	79,3	47,9	7,5	10:7,9	93,3
—	196	154	125	104,5	199	119	71,5	50	44	147	111	37	104	56	20,5	65	78,6	63,7	81,2	135,2	81,0	48,7	7,1	10:7,6	88,0
—	198	147	129	96	183	105	67	45	37	144	112	29	89	53	22	58	74,3	65,3	87,7	127,0	72,9	46,5	6,7	10:7,8	82,1
—	188	147	123	100	168	103	63	42	40	143	115	34,5	94	50	21	60	78,3	65,5	83,6	117,4	72,1	44,0	7	10:8	95,2
—	189	157,5	125,5	112,5	186	105	63	40	36	147	111	35,5	99	51	82	60	83,3	66,4	82,3	126,2	71,5	42,8	7,6	10:7,6	90,0
—	188,5	161	125	93	186	109	65	47,5	44	146	122	35,5	93	52	22	63	86,4	66,3	77,7	127,0	74,7	44,5	6,4	10:8,4	92,6
—	177	143	112	72	150	89	53,5	32	33	123,5	98	31	87,5	46	20,5	53	81,0	63,3	78,4	121,5	72,0	43,2	5,9	10:7,9	103,1
—	187	148	116	100	156	106	70	40	39	135	108	38	101	51	25	63	79,3	62,2	78,5	114,9	78,6	51,9	7,4	10:8	97,5
—	187	145	125	81	189	109	69	45	42	141	114	31	95	48	27	62	77,6	67,0	86,1	133,9	77,4	48,9	5,7	10:8,1	93,3
—	188	151	110	91	175	103	60	40	38	132	108	29	83	47	21	57	81,3	54,6	72,9	132,5	78,1	45,5	6,9	10:8,2	95,0
—	189	147	130,5	100	171	97	68	44	41	141	126	37,5	98	55	—	56	74,0	65,6	88,8	121,2	68,8	48,2	7,1	10:8,9	93,2
—	191	153	121	99	186	102	68	45	40	140	111	36	98	43	26	58	80,2	63,4	79,1	132,4	72,8	48,6	7	10:7,9	88,9
—	183	146	102	95	165	105	63	40	37,5	136	116	28,5	95	51	24	59	80,0	55,7	70,0	121,3	77,3	46,3	7	10:8,5	93,7
—	183,5	156	127	104	184,5	114	71,5	47	36	143	116	34	96	51	22	63	85,0	69,3	81,4	128,9	79	60,0	7,3	10:8,1	76,6
155,5	198	150	112	98	194	121	76	50	36	138	106,5	36	90	44	17	57	76,0	56,5	74,6	140,5	87,6	55,0	7,1	10:7,7	72,0
—	188	147	122	104,5	159	95	57,5	36	37,5	139	111	35,5	102,5	50	14	—	78,3	65,0	83,0	114,4	68,4	40,7	7,5	10:8	104,2
—	169	158	131	98	163	102	63	40	36,5	137	105	35	85	46	16	—	93,5	77,6	83,0	119,0	74,5	46,0	7,1	10:7,7	91,2
—	172	150	119	99	168	98	53	36	40	143	125	35	96	45	20	62,5	87,2	63,3	79,3	117,3	68,5	37,1	6,9	10:8,7	111,1
160,3	180	154	126	106,5	193	120	71	47	46	153	—	39	102	57	—	66	85,5	70,0	81,8	126,1	78,5	46,4	—	—	97,9
166,5	187	153	143	107,5	205	123	80	51	44	144	—	35	97	57	—	62	81,9	76,6	93,5	142,4	85,4	55,5	—	—	86,3
163,0	191	142	126	103,5	179	109	64	45	38	134	—	32	91	55	—	60	74,5	66,0	88,7	133,6	81,4	47,8	—	—	84,4
157,7	202	145	126	115,5	190	115	68	42	41	141	—	32	96	52	—	62	71,9	62,4	86,8	134,8	81,5	48,2	—	—	97,6
156,3	188	147	127	108,5	189	119	67	45	40	137	—	35	94	47	—	61	78,3	67,6	86,3	138,0	86,9	48,9	—	—	88,9
142,9	168	141	128	105,5	178	103	62	43	34	133	—	33	87	43	—	62	84,0	76,3	90,7	133,8	77,6	46,7	—	—	97,1
147,9	182	137	124	103,5	169	98	60	41	34	131	—	35	96	47	—	56	75,4	68,2	90,6	129,0	74,9	45,9	—	—	82,9

FIGURE II.1 The mediality of the table
SOURCE: VOLZ (1899: 723, EXTRACT)

so-called “*Craniofacialwinkel*” (craniofacial angle) are plotted. This mapping of data results in specific – anthropologically unintended – effects that can be observed throughout anthropometrics. In the course of anthropology’s metric-statistical modes of identification, “race” (and “sex”) is generated as a gradual category – differences do not appear qualitative, but quantitative and discrete. Reading this observation “against the grain” of the colonial anthropological purpose shows that these methods paradoxically blur the boundaries of “race” in physical anthropological discourse, and that the boundaries of the categories unexpectedly become spaces of transition. This unintended medial effect runs against the aim of anthropology to clearly and scientifically determine “races” and “sexes”.

Describing this table as if it were a picture enables a reflection about the epistemic power of these kind of data visualizations. Numbers (and a few letters) are distributed on a plane. Through this rather impenetrable crowd of digits, a vertical and horizontal structure can be discerned. Schematically, a shape stands out: an accumulation, a cluster of digits. Out of the indeterminate field of numbers, a bulge with a strange internal structure emerges – an accumulation of data. The anthropological gaze takes from this example a cluster of measured values in a spectrum of angles between 86° and 92° and concludes that the “normal” “craniofacial angle” of the measured skull group (which has been ascribed to a “racial variety” beforehand) lies somewhere between these values. The perception of this accumulation of measured values is an effect of the purposeful reordering of the data and occurs from the interaction of the two media – numbers (order, readability) and image (density, shape). In anthropological and other statistical data processing, distributional “landscapes” with “hills” and “valleys” become visible via specific orderings of the data.

In the history of data visualizations, this example shows the epistemic transition from tables to graphs or curves. Although it is presented as a table, it is already well on its way to becoming a curve. Visually, such tables function like curves without a curve line: an imaginary contour line along the respective lowest entries in this table results in a curve that resembles an upside-down Gaussian curve (see Figure 11.3).

This process of accumulation of data through reordering is ideally embodied – or better, visualized – by the Gaussian bell curve of normal distribution: The “belly” of the curve shows the field of the “typical”/“normal”. It is by means of such Gaussian fields that “race” and “sex types” are identified in 1900s anthropology. But the Gaussian bell curve has been productive in many

other scientific fields. Anthropological curves – and the Gaussian curve as the idealized graph of the “normal distribution” – visualize data in such a way that they graphically perform areas of clustering and accumulation. It is only after this kind of sophisticated ordering of data that anthropological groups can be identified “at first glance”.

Interestingly, where exactly the margins of these accumulations lie, where the deviations outside of the “typical”/“normal” begin, remain arbitrary in this form of data processing and visualization – as in its metric-statistical predecessors and variants. This can be characterized as one of the performative effects of such statistical data evaluations, which runs against the aim of “sorting things out” (Bowker and Star 1999). Here, a specific effect of rasterizing grids in the statistical knowledge mode becomes visible. Statistical grids do not produce clearly delineated or separable categories; rather, they fundamentally undermine category formation and a constitutive indeterminacy creeps in. My research shows that in the course of statistical data evaluations category boundaries are not determined qualitatively but quantitatively. There is no clear, qualitative and absolute demarcation between “race” and “sex types”, and thus the identification of “race” and “sex” is potentially undermined. This phenomenon can be observed throughout the discourse of physical anthropology.

These detailed analyses of anthropological procedures to determine “racial” differences show that statistics can be understood as an epistemic instrument of a specific gaze, which brings with it specific indeterminacies. In the accumulation of data, this approach spots the “normal”, the “typical”. Within the metric-mechanical objectivity of anthropology, the intermediary instrument of statistics is applied to see the “racial”. The statistically operating anthropological gaze is now directed to numbers and data arrangements, to the new imagery of statistics. Curves and accumulation schemes visualize metric data and identify fields of the “typical” in the accumulations – but at the same time they can undermine these fields from the margins and visualize their dispersions.⁷

In this discussion I have demonstrated the specific productivity and performativity of the knowledge mode that is practised in colonial anthropology. Measurement and statistics have to be characterized as complex procedures to process data and to bring forth racialized entities by ordering and reordering within a specific will to difference. The analysis above has shown that statistics

7 At the same time, however, these fuzzy edges also constitute the effectiveness of scientific knowledge production: the boundaries of the categories can be narrowed or stretched as needed. Jürgen Link describes this as the power effect of flexible normalism (Link 1996; 2004a).

produce boundary objects in a literal sense. Not only is the overall concept of “race” “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star and Griesemer 1988: 393), but within the framework of metric-statistical objectivity, the boundaries of the categories and thus the categories themselves remain fundamentally indeterminate. This becomes – as I have shown elsewhere (Hanke 2007) – one of the major internal problems in this metric-statistical mode of knowing: that the wish to identify “races” is countered by the methods themselves. This is observed and problematized within colonial anthropology and results in broad debates on measurement and evaluation practices. But instead of stopping the endeavour, the anthropological difference-generating machine is refuelled, even today.

This is precisely what drives the multiplication of approaches to determine “races”, to develop methodologies further, to secure results that dissolve at same hand. At the same time, this demonstrates the complexity and difficulties in metric-statistically objective and scientific determinations of “races” that seemed so evident to colonial researchers. The use of statistics testifies to an attempt to secure the stability and boundaries of the categories scientifically, which are flexible in their procedure. The necessity of dealing with the deconstructive side-effects of the metric-statistical mode of knowing does not result in discarding the approach but in methodological discussions and negotiations of solutions within this new mode of knowing. This shows the persistence of this mode of scientific knowledge, which is enacted in the spirit of a new form of objectivity that gained traction in the nineteenth century.

Drawing on the epistemology and mediality of metric-statistic objectivity, a ubiquitous and taken-for-granted scientific practice becomes visible as a very specific and situated approach, which, starting from Europe, became established in modern natural science and empirical social science. This mode of knowledge is characterized by a specific detachment from the things examined. Although the approach claims to capture and record neutrally and objectively – without interfering – it undertakes a radical transformation of living bodies into numbers and from there into statistically constructed objects. It is in these transformations that this scientific approach enacts systemic epistemic violence, which is well hidden in its metric-statistical objectivity.

4 Conclusion: Colonial Legacies

Colonial anthropology’s modes of knowing linger to date in anthropological, medical, forensic and archaeological knowledge as well as in approaches to

scan body surfaces digitally to produce “virtual replicas”. Modes of measurement and data processing that were developed and enacted within imperial science have been carried into contemporary statistical procedures and continue to inform emergent modes of knowing, such as Big Data analytics, biometrics, machine learning, AI and digital humanities. Even now, we associate surveying, data collection and statistical data evaluation with evidence, neutrality and objectivity; these modes of knowing still act and present themselves as universal and non-situated, as the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1988: 581).

In order to situate this mode of knowledge, I have combined science and technology studies, epistemology, media theory and decolonial studies to unpack the legacies and epistemic violence of what I call metric-statistical modes of knowledge. I have contextualized this form(at) of knowing within the broader European transformation by capitalism, industrialization and modernization and its close relationality to colonialism. Metric-statistical knowledge – as I have argued – is an intrinsic part of modernity, as its “darker side” (Mignolo 2011). While colonial anthropology contributed to legitimizing colonialism through its metric-statistical, objective, evidence of racialized differences, it also served as an experimental laboratory for the testing and development of these methodologies, which are practised – even being developed further – today.

Supplementing research that has focused on the fraudulent and biased collection or evaluation of research data, I have located coloniality in the scientific epistemologies and procedures themselves and demonstrated their intrinsic epistemic violence. These analyses contribute to critical analytical tools for discussing the measurement and datafication of the body regardless of the disciplines involved.

Considering the colonial legacies of these metric-statistical modes raises serious questions with regard to emergent form(at)s in current knowledge production and future knowledges. Although metric-statistical knowledges are immensely productive, they are haunted by epistemic violence.

As coloniality is intrinsically interwoven with the genealogy of contemporary methodologies, and since colonial anthropometric data has left traces in archaeological, forensic, anthropometric and medical knowledges, a strategy of unknowing seems quite impossible. Against the backdrop of my analysis, I would propose three tactics towards decolonial reflexivity:

1. *Unpack colonial legacies!* More research is needed, that follows anthropometric data by asking: Which data from colonial contexts has made its way into which contemporary knowledges? How has this data been transformed and incorporated? Through which papers and handbooks

has it been circulated? Which knowledge and power effects has colonial data enacted in current knowledges?

2. *Restitute colonial data!* While unknowing or deleting colonial data from contemporary knowledge archives is hardly possible, a call for the restitution of colonial data would draw attention to the problem of colonial data extraction. Discussions around the restitution of cultural heritage and appropriated ancestral remains have to be complemented by reflection on how to deal with data appropriated in colonial situations. Thus, Indigenous data sovereignty (Kukutai and Taylor 2016; Davies et al. 2019; Walter et al. 2021) is not just to be enacted with newly collected data, but communities of origin are to be included in discussions about how to deal with colonial data. How might a restitution be possible if this data still circulates decontextualized in databases?
3. *Challenge measurement!* When measurement, datafication and statistical data analysis are called upon as empiricist methods in African studies and beyond, we need to remember that we are enacting approaches that were conceived of and shaped in colonial situations. Acknowledging their situatedness in colonial genealogies might lead to a more critical and hesitant use of these seemingly neutral approaches. Taking seriously the epistemic violence inherent in the transformation of people and things into data calls also for pausing before producing digital scans of human remains and cultural objects appropriated in colonialism.

These proposals could be taken further in tracing the coloniality of data practices in other disciplinary fields. Big Data, machine learning, AI, digital humanities, LLM, chatbots and other statistically operating modes of knowing perform as current laboratories that design innovative methodologies of data processing and evaluation. How these experimental fields are genealogically interwoven with colonial laboratories of imperial science and how epistemic violence lingers in these fields are subjects for future research.

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Lamb Description – a Circulation of Knowledge Practices

Eleanor Schaumann

The description of a Swakara lamb is certainly one of the most difficult tasks that exists in farming, due to the fact that none of the traits that are described (graded) are measurable, but that everything is done by looking and feeling. [...] There is one golden requirement for this, namely *knowledge*.

SWAKARA BREEDERS' SOCIETY AND SWAKARA BOARD OF NAMIBIA, 2007, translation from Afrikaans by me, highlight in original.



1 Introduction

On Namibian Swakara sheep farms, all newborn lambs are individually examined within the first days of their birth. Farmers or farm workers pick up each lamb, inspect it and stroke it to determine whether to keep it as part of the flock or to use it for pelt or meat production. This practice is referred to as lamb description, though in fact it is as much a practice of selecting and grading as of describing. It is central to Swakara sheep farming and reverberates throughout the relations and institutions of the Swakara industry.

The agricultural knowledge of the Swakara industry is not located primarily in academic institutions. Neither is it a pristine indigenous knowledge practice. This makes it an important case that extends the projects of reconfiguring African studies and un_knowing colonial knowledge practices beyond the realm of universities. It shows that the colonial binaries of nature/culture, subject/object and reason/emotion (see Arndt, chapter 3 this volume) can be destabilized, even by a community of practice that is not committed to projects of decolonization.

Swakara is a breed of sheep unique to Namibia. It is descended from the Karakul sheep brought from 1907 onwards to what was then German South

West Africa, as a colonial experiment. In the 1960s and 70s, Swakara pelts became one of the most important export goods from South West Africa, which at that time was under South African rule. Thus, the industry is deeply entangled with histories of German settler colonialism and apartheid. These legacies are evident in the economic inequalities and knowledge practices around Swakara farming.

The practice of lamb description was imported to Namibia along with the Karakul sheep from Germany in 1907 (Declercq 2016). Its origins lie in German colonial rule in Namibia and it was institutionally and methodologically implicated with racializing scientific practices (Schramm forthcoming). The practice of “describing” is a specific way of relating to the world. Initially one might assume that description implies a clear distinction of subject and object, a subject describing an object, an author describing a world. However, unlike the “colonial measuromania” described in chapter 11 of this volume, by Hanke, those who practised lamb description were extremely aware of the fluidity of the subject-object binaries.

I argue that description is a world-making knowledge practice rather than a way of relating to an objective world “out there”. This demonstrates the complexities of how a practice can be simultaneously deeply colonial and yet destabilize the assumptions on which colonial knowledge practices are built. Knowledge is in a co-constitutive relation to the worlds it attempts to describe. The actors in the lamb description encounter do not exist independently – they are embedded within a wider context of relations, which, in turn, become meaningful through the industry’s practices.¹

The agricultural context of southern Namibia is greatly shaped by the legacies of colonial rule and apartheid. Some 70% of Namibia’s commercial² farmland continues to be owned by white farmers (Namibian Statistics Agency [NSA] 2018: 33). Karakul farming in particular was complicit in the processes of colonial land theft and the forced removals of populations from their land. It generated significant wealth for a group of white commercial farmers descended from German- and Afrikaans-speaking settlers, through a combination of subsidies from the apartheid government, the exploitation of African

1 The co-constituted nature of relations has been extensively theorized by scholars working on actor-network theory and STS (Barad 2007: 33; Law 1999: 3–4; Asdal, Brenna and Moser 2007: 27).

2 Commercial farming, according to the NSA, is defined as capital-intensive, developed and export-oriented, as opposed to communal farming which is characterized as labour-intensive, subsistence-oriented and low technology (NSA 2014: 15). The official definition of a commercial farm includes resettlement farms and Affirmative Action Loan Scheme farms (NSA 2014: 19). Most communal land is state-owned and managed by traditional authorities, with plots allocated to individual farmers.

farm labour, the appropriation of farming knowledge and land, and a booming export market for pelts (Moore 2021; Silvester 1993).

Though white commercial farmers profited most, they are not the only ones who have shaped the industry and who claim Karakul farming as their heritage. Black farmers in communal areas, Affirmative Action Loan Scheme farmers, farm workers and their descendants and, to a lesser degree, resettlement farmers are integral to the Swakara industry, present and past. The skills and knowledges in the Swakara industry are the subject of hierarchizations. In relation to lamb description, this means that the “farmer’s”³ skills and knowledge are frequently acknowledged, by themselves and other farmers and actors in the industry institutions, whereas the work of farm workers, wives and children, those who fetch the lambs, wash them, brush them and hold them, those who type up the findings and fill in the description forms, is de-emphasized.

My fieldwork included two extended periods of participant observation on Swakara farms and at the offices of Swakara institutions in Namibia in 2020 and 2021, one shorter period in 2022, and several interviews with actors in the current and historical Swakara industry. My research on the Swakara industry is shaped by my personal positionality as a white woman based in a German academic institution. It is also situated at a specific point in history. The industry is in a situation of crisis following years of drought, low pelt prices, falling numbers of producers and sheep, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The relations and practices within the industry are in flux and in the process of being rearranged. This is especially true of knowledge practices, where strategic interventions such as training courses are organized by the Swakara Board in an attempt to preserve the knowledge of the industry. At this moment, the undoing of lamb description as a knowledge practice might be imminent, not as the result of any decolonial project but due to the changing economic situation.

How do knowledge practices and relations shift when the underlying principle (in this case the promise of wealth, of generating income from pelts) is no longer applicable, when the very notion of objectivity is put in flux and context

3 The question of who counts as a Swakara farmer and who is relegated to the roles of farm workers, assistants or family members is engendered by racialized and gendered inequalities. In matters of skill and knowledge relating to the animals and the land, farm workers are farmers. However, they do not own farms, so they are not “farmers”. Within this contribution I refer to a person as “farmer” when it is clear to me from context and conversations that they consider themselves a farmer. All the commercial farmers I cite in this contribution are white. This is the case with most, but by no means not all, commercial farmers in the Swakara industry. Some Black farmers in the Swakara industry farm on resettlement farms or on farms purchased with Affirmative Action Loan Schemes. Most Black Swakara farmers farm on communal land – that is, state-owned land managed by traditional authorities.

threatens to overwhelm any analysis of specific relations? I use the concept of “thinking as moving” to address these questions and to trace the fluid genres of lamb description and the worlds that are mobilized by it.

2 Describing a Lamb – Moving from Subject to Object to Context

The opening quote from the lamb description teaching materials published by the Swakara Board, the institution that represents the industry’s interests through advisory and marketing activities, calls knowledge the “golden requirement” that makes subjective perception, “looking and feeling”, meaningful. The “subjective” nature of the skills and knowledges involved in lamb description are not in opposition to objectivity, or “scientific farming”. Instead, subjectivity is contrasted to measurability. It is the immeasurability of the relevant traits that makes lamb description a “subjective” skill. As a retired Swakara breeder explained to me, “the problem is, you cannot measure these things. The only thing you can measure is the hair length, but you cannot measure the hair [quality], the curl type, you know”.

The farmers’ ability to “look and feel” is intrinsically entwined with the standardized perception, the terminology, categories and description standards of the Swakara industry. Several farmers contrasted this to sheep farming for meat, where the most relevant trait is the animal’s growth rate, which can be easily measured. They concluded that Swakara farming requires more skills and knowledge than meat sheep farming, since anybody can put a sheep on a set of scales but not everybody knows what curl types and patterns are desirable.

Actors in the Swakara industry would frequently talk of being able to “read a lamb” or “reading a photo” at a stud auction when referring to the skills needed for lamb description. The word “description” is derived from the Latin verb *describere*, which translates as “to write down” (Oxford Dictionary of English 2009). Lamb description does not always involve literally writing something down, but it is an act of defining and fixing information. At the moment of description, the sensory information perceived by the person doing the describing is rendered in the terminology of curl types, pattern-forming characteristics and sheep physiognomy.

There is an immediate encounter between the lamb being described and the person describing it, usually the farmer. The decision of what to do with a lamb is determined not just by the traits of the lamb and the enactment of knowledge practices in the immediate encounter of description, but by wider relational entanglements that I refer to as context. This context includes factors

like the current prices of pelts and meat, the rainfall or drought conditions in the area and the local and global economic situations.

The term “context” has been criticized as a way to preempt any analysis of the specific phenomena under examination by explaining it away through reference to a higher order (Latour 2005: 171). Clarke and Star write of the importance of considering conditional elements of a situation as “constitutive of it, not merely surrounding it or framing it or contributing to it” (Clarke and Star 2008: 128). Although I agree with the problematization of context, I believe that “context” is useful in paying attention to scale while situating the knowledge relations and practices under examination within a wider world of temporal and spatial relations. Context is neither a passive substrate on which subjects act, nor a set of factors that determine action. It invokes the imagery of weaving and the co-production of description, of text and world. Context is useful to conceptualize the co-production of worlds and practices on a scale more specific than cosmology but beyond a particular encounter.

In her conceptualization of the term “worlding”, Tsing defines it as “a concept suggested to enable the flip back and forth between claiming and refusing context” (Tsing 2010: 47). By centring the relations that are enfolded in and constitutive of the practice of lamb description, I follow these back-and-forth flips, trace the particular worlds that are being enacted, and study which contexts (material and immaterial) are made relevant in what ways. Thinking as moving, along analytical scales and as modes of relating and knowing allows us to follow these relations through their entanglements across temporal and spatial axes.

Lakoff and Johnson coined the term “thinking is moving” as part of a wider metaphor system with four special cases: 1) thinking is moving, 2) thinking is perceiving, 3) thinking is object manipulation and 4) acquiring ideas is eating (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 235). In my use of the term, I go beyond Lakoff and Johnson’s linguistic analysis and use moving in a more literal, materially and relationally embodied way. In this I take inspiration from Strathern’s thoughts on interpretation as a practice of figure–ground reversal. However much a figure is enlarged by putting it into a “wider context” of understandings, it inevitably falls short of that context itself.

Figure–ground reversal involves an alternation of viewpoints. Now although ground by definition encompasses figure, what is to count as figure and what is to count as ground is not a definitive matter at all [...]. Figure and ground promote, we might say, unstable relationships.

In this understanding, “moving” is an “oscillation of view (point)-s” (Strathern 2006: 90). This allows for an analysis of complex relations across multiple temporal and spatial scales without taking the particularities of these relations – the question of what is an object of analysis and what is context – for granted (Strathern 2006: 92).

I use “thinking as moving” to follow the paths of lambs and knowledges across spatial and temporal locations in the Swakara industry. At first glance, the movement of lambs through the different processes of the Swakara industry appears to be a unidirectional production chain, moving and transforming them from living lambs on the farm to pelts sent to the pelt collection centre, to be exported to fur auctions overseas and then marketed as a high-end fashion product. However, this movement is part of a wider network of flows and relations, in which temporal and spatial dimensions are enfolded in more than linear ways. For instance, the decision to keep a lamb for the farm’s flock is both an anticipation of future offspring and an articulation of the lives of previous generations of sheep, of the labour of farm workers and of farmers and their family members.

Lamb description is concerned with the animal’s body, with specific phenotypic traits. The most important is the pelt pattern, followed by hair quality. The different patterns and curl types of Swakara lambs determine the prices their pelts achieve at fur auctions or the price that a stud animal can be sold for. Lamb description takes place on all Swakara farms, irrespective of size and scale; however, only stud breeders are required to document their descriptions. For each lamb they wish to register with the Breeders’ Society they need to fill in a description form and provide a photograph of the newborn lamb.

3 Point of Departure – Lamb Description Courses at Gellap Ost

Within the web of relations of the Swakara industry, the moment of lamb description is a convenient point to analytically “cut the network” (Strathern 1996). At that point, the lamb is the embodiment of a number of resources and relations. It is placed in relation to the person describing it and to the constantly reformed and renegotiated standards agreed upon by the Swakara norms committee. It is placed in relation to all the previous generations of sheep that came before it, in the form of pedigree or the absence thereof. It is placed in relation to the potential future generations of lambs it might be a parent to, or to the potential income to be generated from its pelt. It embodies the resources of labour, love and knowledge that have been invested in raising sheep on a particular piece of land. It is an enactment of a Swakara farmer’s

tactile and visual knowledge of Swakara lambs and pelts. To trace these knowledge practices, I begin at the research station Gellap Ost, where I participated in a beginner's lamb description course and learned my first lessons on how to describe a lamb.

Gellap Ost, the research farm, is a place where several knowledge practices within the Swakara industry are enacted. It is the site of former and potentially future agricultural research on Swakara sheep. It is where future generations of Swakara farmers are instructed in the scientific terminology of lamb description and grading standards, and in the subjective but standardized ways of perceiving and grading Swakara lambs. In the words of the manager at Gellap Ost, "the government stud flock exists to preserve the knowledge of farming with Swakara and the genetic diversity of the Swakara breed". The research farm is funded by the Namibian government; therefore, the managers' selection decisions are not informed by economic necessity in the same way that other farmers' decisions are. This allows the research farm to keep stud animals of less desirable curl types.

Each year, several training courses are taught at Gellap Ost: the beginner's course followed by the standard lamb description course and, finally, the advanced course, which needs to be passed for official recognition as a breeder. The skills taught in these courses include the slaughtering and pelting of lambs, the framing of pelts and, most importantly, the skill of lamb description. There is a long history of lamb description courses in Namibia. From the 1950s onwards, the Neudamm Agricultural College, farmers' unions, the Karakul Board and the Karakul Breeders' Society conducted lamb description courses. The aim was to promote Karakul breeding and improve the overall product quality of the Namibian Karakul industry. (Bravenboer 2007: 152–54). Since Namibian independence in 1990, more focus has been given to training communal farmers in lamb description and selection.

In June 2021, I participated in a beginners' lamb description course. The teacher was Garrick Husselmann, who runs the research farm. There were three participants: two students who were studying agriculture at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), doing their practical research projects at Gellap Ost, and myself. The students were already familiar with Swakara to different degrees. Neither intended to be a Swakara farmer but both could imagine having some Swakara sheep on their farm.

Lamb description does not take place in silence. Even during the course, in which we were taught skills individually, we were discussing among ourselves. We were in conversation. These discussions are an important aspect of the practice of lamb description. In a similar way, the discussions among its members are of great importance to the grading committee's work of evaluating

the lamb photos submitted for stud registrations. Completing the courses at Gellap Ost, learning to read a lamb – be it as a living body, a pelt or a photo – is a prerequisite to joining this conversation.

4 Pelt – Subjective Knowledge – Beauty

The newborn lambs' skin is the product that the Swakara industry revolves around. After the first days of a Swakara lamb's life the prized pattern disappears. This means that any lamb destined for pelt production must be slaughtered within the first four days of its life. Breeding, mating and other farming activities are all oriented towards producing the best possible quality of pelts. A pelt's quality is determined through a lamb's curl type, pattern and hair quality. Therefore, a significant section of the lamb description course was dedicated to teaching us about these characteristics.

In the theoretical part of the course, we received a primer from which we learned the basic lamb description terminology, the different curl types and pattern-forming characteristics, and the weight they have in grading the lamb. The most desirable curl is water silk, which was developed on the Neudamm research farm in the 1930s (Thompson 1938; Viljoen 1981: 154). The flatter curl type distinguishes Swakara from Karakul populations in other countries.⁴ Garments designed from the flatter curl types are lighter than the classical Karakul coats, which are made from pipe curl.

After the theoretical lesson, we went into the courtyard to practise our skills on real lambs. "When you are learning you need lambs, just learning with photos does not work", a farmer I met in Keetmanshoop told me. In a practice of objectification and standardisation, a lamb was placed on the table in the yard at Gellap, with its mother in the pen across the farm. This appeared to remove it from its social relations to other sheep and its relation to the land as part of a grazing flock of sheep. It was carted there in a metal cage on a trolley along with a handful of other lambs that had been born in the previous days. The trolley with the cage was pulled by two farm workers, one of whom stayed for the practical lesson, to assist with holding the lambs.

4 Karakul farming is practised in several Central Asian countries, foremost in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. The first flock of Karakul sheep imported to Namibia in 1907 by the German colonial administration was descended from Karakul sheep in Bukhara, Uzbekistan (Bravenboer 2007: 15). There are also small populations of Karakul sheep in Argentina, Germany, Romania, the United States and several other countries. All these populations are of the pipe curl type and are descended from Karakul sheep in Central Asia (Ryder 2007: 268–69).

It is worth critically examining who or what actors are thought to be entangled in a relational encounter and who or what actors are relegated to context. Farmers' accounts of lamb description always emphasized the individual encounter and the individual knowledge of the person describing the lamb, which was usually the farmer. Some stated that farm workers on their farms have the relevant skills but that the farmers prefer to make the selections personally. To them, lamb description was a crucial moment, upon which success and failure in the Swakara industry depended. Therefore, farmers were reluctant to delegate it. Nevertheless, the moment of description is only superficially a one-on-one encounter. It is the result of the previous labour of farm workers, helpers and sheep. The people transporting the cage, the hands holding the lamb and the ewes that gave birth to it are all de-emphasized when one centres the individual encounter of farmer and lamb.

In the course, we first learned how to approach the lamb. The first impression was visual – we were told to note down our opinion of the lamb's hair structure from a distance. Garrick instructed us, "Place yourself so that the sun is behind your left shoulder, so you can see the lustre". The first step of description is perception. We were each issued a notepad and preprinted description sheet and told to write down what we perceived.

"Then you move closer." The position of the lamb was standardized: all lambs were arranged facing to the left for the description and for the lamb photograph.⁵ Again, we examined the hair quality and curl type. "Does the hair appear silky or coppery, do you see S-hair or feathery hair? How does it reflect in the sunlight?" Finally, we were allowed to touch the lamb. We stroked the hair with reverence. It was, indeed, silky, velvety, incredibly soft. The lamb was also a warm, breathing, living being. Garrick reminded us to pay attention to the legs as well, not just the back section that would become a pelt. For an accurate lamb description and hair-quality assessment, these parts mattered too.

In this case, examining the lamb was quite literally an activity of thinking while moving. The examiner moved closer from a certain position in relation to the light to perceive the sheen of the lamb's hair. The lamb itself never stopped moving, and it took several hands, the hands of us students, of Garrick or of one of the farm workers, to keep it still. It is at this dynamic point of movement and cessation of movement that the examiner *thinks* about how

5 The lamb photographs for stud animals follow another specific set of standardizations. In addition to the left-facing photographs, each lamb's back is photographed, in order to have a clear view of the entire potential pelt. This pelt is the most important characteristic a stud animal's offspring would inherit.

to make sense of the lamb, how to use it, what path the lamb will proceed on: pelt, flock or meat.

Selecting a lamb for pelting narrows the gaze of which characteristics are relevant. Only the pelt, specifically the central section of the lamb's back, matters at this point. Other characteristics that might be relevant to the lamb's health, should it grow into an adult sheep, become irrelevant. The moment a Swakara lamb is born, a countdown starts. This results in interesting enactments of temporalities and potentialities. If it is to become a pelt, it must be slaughtered within the first few days of birth. If not, the characteristics relevant to lamb description soon will no longer be visible on its body. The pelt characteristics become invisible on a grown sheep and are only articulated via its offspring. For this reason, all stud animals need to be photographed at birth if they are to be registered with the Breeders' Society. Only then can they be articulated as the offspring of a grown sheep.

In the teaching material handed out at Gellap Ost, the terms "lamb description", "lamb selection" and "lamb valuation" were used almost interchangeably. To describe was to recognize the different traits, curl types and pattern-forming characteristics, to award points to the different categories and sections of the lamb, from which we deduced a final score, based on which we made our selection decision. Lamb description became a process of grading and then selection. These practices were deeply entangled; there was no description without judgement, without comparison. What we perceived, the lamb we encountered, was rendered in the terminology we had just learned. It was a practice of comparison, of relating the lamb to the potential ideal incarnation of standards, which could never exist in practice. We compared each lamb to the previous lambs we had seen. "If that one was a 2 then this one cannot possibly be 3." Whereas the very best lambs would be kept as part of the flock, those with acceptable curl types and pattern-forming characteristics would be pelted immediately. The pelt would then be dried on a frame, and the meat of the lamb's carcass would be consumed or sold locally.

Apart from the lamb's characteristics, the decision to use a lamb for pelting depends on conditions beyond the lamb's body, outside the immediate description encounter. In times of drought, farmers tend to slaughter all lambs to minimize the burden on the scarce grazing and the ewe's health. This means that the average age of a flock of Swakara sheep rises in drought years. Consequently, in years with good rainfall, farmers tend to keep more lambs in order to restock and reduce the average age of their flock. This means that lamb description in settings outside the training courses is about knowing not only the individual lamb but also the overall flock of Swakara sheep on a farm and the weather and climate conditions on the land. Thinking about

lamb description means moving with changes to the land and local and global market conditions. Knowing how to navigate the world of Swakara farming is just as important as having an eye for a pelt's beauty and quality.

Lamb description is a learned skill of standardized and routinized perception. The visual and tactile senses are the most relevant. Nevertheless, other senses like sound and smell are meaningful to farmers in other farming practices and on an affective level. There was a gendered dimension to the ways that farmers' skilled touch was described. When I asked about women attending the lamb description courses, I was told that women tended to be very good at lamb description because they had more sensitive hands than men.

"Swakara is about beauty." This was a common reply to my question on what makes Swakara different from other types of farming. It refers to the high-end fashion products made from the pelts of Swakara lambs, by designers from places like France, Greece, Italy and China. Through their entanglement with the global fur trade, farmers in the south of Namibia, a group not inherently known for their sense of haute couture, are aware of and affected by developments in the fashion industry. Though they do not design clothes themselves, farmers would describe their skills at lamb description with terms like "having an eye for it", "having good instincts" or "having a good touch". These refer directly to the sensory organs used to perceive the lambs, pelts and photos. They individualize the perception and emphasize its subjectivity. The right description is not *out there* on the lamb's body, it emerges from the farmer's relation to the lamb. This does not mean that all descriptions are equally valid. There is not one objectively true description, but some are better than others. Or, as one farmer put it, "It is mainly guesswork. But with experience you make better guesses".

Lamb description builds on visual and tactile perception. However, when what is perceived is rendered into data, visual data travels easier than haptic information. Swakara pelts are collectively marketed through agra, a former farmers' cooperative and now corporation, with an extensive infrastructure of shops and offices in most towns in Namibia. Producers can hand in their pelts at any agra office, from where they are forwarded to Windhoek, where the pelts are sorted and then transported to the fur auction in Copenhagen. At the auction house, the pelts are sorted into the auction house's category system. On a scale from purple to platinum, the pelts are sorted into lots of approximately the same price category. When the Covid-19 pandemic prevented the Swakara pelts from travelling to the April 2020 fur auction in Copenhagen, the Swakara Board uploaded photographs and videos of the pelts for sale to allow potential buyers to digitally inspect the pelts. Very few pelts were sold at that auction. While there were various reasons for this, several Swakara employees and

farmers stated that they were sure the designers' inability to touch the pelts was an important factor.

"It is subject to visualization. Feeling it. It is subjective, the whole process: grading, selection", is how a former Karakul stud breeder remembered lamb description. The immediate moment of description relies on individual perception, yet it is always implicitly or explicitly embedded within the relations and conversations, the different opinions of different actors with a stake in Swakara farming. One farmer described disagreements with his son on lamb description. "The courses are helpful, but in the end, it is a difference of opinion." Though the criteria themselves are not measurable, their effects can be. In the end, he said, the good prices he received for his pelts at the fur auction proved him right. However, due to the instability of the global fur markets and the context the pelts are sold in, the pelt price is at best a problematic criterion to measure the accuracy of a farmer's lamb description.

The introduction of this volume quotes Chinua Achebe (1964: 46): "if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Schramm, this volume). This is true of lamb description in a literal way. It is, in part, about position, about being situated in a complex network of relations, and of standing at a certain spot in the courtyard at Gellap Ost with the sun behind your left shoulder. In lamb description, positionality is not a fixed thing but a choreography of standardized approaches. You position yourself (or your camera) in a certain relation to the lamb and the light. And then you move.

5 Flock/ Stud – Breeding Knowledge – Genetics

"This one I'll keep", said a commercial farmer as I accompanied him during lambing season while he examined the lambs on his farm. The lamb was one of the first to be born that season. It was a water-silk lamb with acceptable hair quality, characteristics that would no longer be visible after its first days of life. Its mother was strong and healthy, and the farmer was keen to restock his flock in this first year of rain after eight years of drought, so this lamb was going to be kept as part of the commercial flock. Unlike other lambs selected for pelt or meat production, this lamb would grow into an adult sheep and have lambs of its own in the coming years. But this lamb was not a stud animal, which means its pedigree and its characteristics were not documented. Instead, it would become part of the commercial Swakara flock producing lambs for pelt and meat.

Describing this lamb took place informally in the field. The farmer lifted it, looked at it and touched it. After the decision to keep it was made, the lamb

received a coloured ear tag to mark it for the flock. When a stud lamb is registered, lamb description becomes more formalized. The information about the lamb is translated into a system of standardized categories. Breeders need to fill in a lamb description form and add a photograph of the lamb within the first days of its life.

The breeding criteria and description standards date back to the 1920s, when the Karakul Breeders' Society was founded and the first manual for lamb description in Namibia was published (Bravenboer 2007: 68) together with the Karakul studbook, which initially only allowed the registration of lambs that were traceable to imported Karakul sheep. From 1929 onwards, sheep had to be inspected by the studbook commission before they could be registered (Bravenboer 2007: 78). This codification and formalization of breeding standards took place in the context of an intensification of colonial land theft under South African rule in Namibia. Poor, white Afrikaans-speakers from South Africa settled in the south of Namibia within a regime of biopolitical and territorial violence against Black populations (Hayes, Wallace and Silvester 1998: 8, 18).⁶ By 2021, the Swakara Breeders' Society had shrunk to 16 members, of whom only eight were active breeders (Swakara Breeders Society and Swakara Board of Namibia 2020: 21).⁷

The breeding standards are constantly renegotiated. Once a year, the Swakara norms committee and the breeders come together to discuss and adjust the standards and make decisions on future breeding directions. This event, the Norms Day, takes place at Gellap Ost. It is an occasion for strategic discussions of the overall direction of the industry and a social occasion for the Swakara farmers.

Although all animal breeding is ultimately about promoting certain traits to optimize the overall population of the breed and increase productivity, Swakara farmers claim that their breed takes this to a different level. "I love Karakul," said a farmer I met in Keetmanshoop, "It is scientific farming, not like

6 The integration of these Afrikaans-speaking settlers into the structures of the Karakul industry was an uneasy process. German settlers feared for their privileged position as Karakul breeders. In 1929, the same year that the registration examinations for stud animals were made mandatory, the Breeders' Society adopted Afrikaans as the language of operations and began to recruit Afrikaans-speaking settlers (Bravenboer 2007: 81). Until Namibian independence, the Breeders' Society membership consisted entirely of white commercial farmers, and the occasional industry advisor and politician. By 2021 only one of the commercial breeders in the Breeders Society was a Black commercial farmer and stud breeder.

7 There used to be several Swakara breeders in South Africa, but due to outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in South Africa in recent years, they were unable to transport animals or even pelts to Namibia.

with meat sheep. Especially the breeding aspect. You need to look exactly at what ram goes with which ewe, it is a science.” Several farmers characterized Swakara breeding as more “scientific” than other kinds of farming. When I asked what made Swakara scientific, the answers would revolve around knowledge and, most commonly, standards. Though the perception and description of a lamb is subjective, it is in relation to the wider context of the industry, the opinions of others and the industry standards.

In 2020, the entire judging system for stud lamb photographs was overhauled to align it more closely with pelt production and make it more intuitive to producers who are not breeders. In the previous system, each lamb received a percentage score, the higher the better. This was replaced by the categories Type 1, 2, 3 and Elite in the new system (Swakara Breeders’ Society and Swakara Board of Namibia 2020: 9). This system was implemented by the Swakara grading committee,⁸ which reviews the descriptions and photographs submitted by breeders. This is not a rubberstamping procedure. Instead, each photo and description are carefully examined, and the score given to a lamb is adjusted if the committee disagrees with the breeder’s assessment.

The members of the grading committee are the manager of the research farm Gellap Ost, a retired breeder and former manager of the research farm, and two active commercial breeders. The committee is elected and appointed at the annual Swakara industry forum. Normally the committee meets every other month, but in October 2021 there had only been one meeting that year. The committee’s decisions are made by consensus.

At the judging meeting I attended in spring 2021, the committee members gathered around a table at the Swakara office in Keetmanshoop. Each person took a pile of photos, which they sorted into the different categories, as marked on a table. After this, they collectively discussed and adjusted each other’s assessments. Each committee member was a veteran at lamb description, but by judging the photos collectively the decisions were made more objective, though not in the sense of moving closer to an objective truth “out there” but by making individual subjective description intersubjective. As a member of the grading committee stated, “Four eyes see better than two and six see better than four”.

The different positions of people describing and grading lambs are not equal. The grading committee’s decision is final, though breeders do have the opportunity to contest a decision and the committee’s decisions are in relation to the breeder’s original assessment. Although the quality standards are not

⁸ The grading committee and the norms committee are two separate committees, though there is significant overlap in members.

negotiable, context also matters in the grading decisions of the grading committee. At a time when there is little demand for Swakara stud animals, several breeders are reluctant to pay the fees for registering lambs.⁹ In this context, it seemed unlikely that the grading committee would be overly rigorous in their grading decisions.

Following the review by the grading committee, the photos and descriptions of the lambs are sent to the Namibian Stud Breeders Association (NSBA) in Windhoek, which issues the registration certificates and manages the stud animal database. The NSBA is the umbrella institution for all stud-breeding societies in Namibia, including Swakara, and manages the record-keeping and registration for all stud breeds in Namibia.¹⁰

When I visited the NSBA office in Windhoek, an employee described his vision of scientific livestock breeding and what it could mean for Swakara. His view of scientific farming deviated from that of the Swakara farmers. In his eyes, the basic skills of lamb description were not enough to ensure a future for Swakara. “[Breeders] are too concerned with what an animal looks like.” He added that breeders do not make use of the advances in technology that would make it possible to make breeding decisions based on genetic information instead of phenotype. According to this vision, the selection decisions of which animals to keep for breeding could be made on a more “objective” basis – genetics instead of aesthetics. “The science tells us it doesn’t help to have just a nice-looking animal, it must be an efficient producer.” However, the problem of measurability remains. Although it is possible to predict an animal’s performance in terms of number of births or growth rate, the pelt quality characteristics that form the basis of lamb description remain unmeasurable, even with genetic analysis. Nevertheless, many farmers envisioned scientific innovations as something that could improve Swakara farming.

Gellap Ost was formerly the site of scientific research for the Karakul industry. In recent years, the activities at the research station have focused on teaching training courses and preserving the genetic diversity of the Swakara breed. With falling pelt prices and producer numbers, the Swakara Board has been intent on cutting costs. “We could train ten farmers or analyze one gene.” Since

9 Since it is in the interest of the overall industry to prevent stud registrations from falling even lower, there was an initiative by the Swakara Board to cover the registration costs for breeders in 2021.

10 The Namibian Stud Breeders Association was established in the 1990s, following Namibian independence, with Bernd von Kunow, long-time manager of the Karakul Breeders’ Society, as its first manager.

funds have been scarce in recent years, the research conducted at the research farm is now mostly limited to small-scale student projects.

The vision of scientific innovation is entangled with the notion of progress as a linear development, the idea that better technologies will produce better sheep with better-quality pelts and better health. However, in the current situation, this is a promise without traction. Although farmers saw scientific research as a potential hope for a struggling industry, they were quick to admit that it was far more likely that such innovations would happen in other, more profitable farming sectors.

6 Meat – Generating Income – Knowledge in Suspension

“What would you do with this one? Pelt, flock or meat?” In the current market situation, this is a theoretical decision. With pelt prices at an all-time low, all the lambs are being raised for meat. In November 2020, the auction house Copenhagen Fur announced its controlled liquidation by 2023, following the Danish government’s decision to order a cull of the country’s entire mink population in an attempt to limit the spread of new mutations of the Covid-19 virus, which had been identified at several Danish mink farms (Buttler and Wienberg 2020). The news caused great ripples in the Swakara industry. A commercial farmer I was visiting at the time stated, “Of all things, I would never have thought that it would be Copenhagen Fur, that goes. [...] It is strange that something that has been there for 100 years can be gone just like that”. Apart from exacerbating the general mood of uncertainty among Swakara farmers, this meant that the Swakara industry needed to move to the Saga Fur auction house in Helsinki in 2023.

Swakara sheep can be used for mutton production. However, their growth rate is lower than that of meat sheep breeds like the dorper or meatmaster. Most farmers I met in 2021 were mating their Swakara ewes with meat sheep breeds to generate income, regardless of what this would mean for curl type or hair quality of the lambs. “No one in their right mind is producing pelts right now.” A stud breeder described it as painful to see the resulting lambs born from his prized stud animals.

After our lamb description course at Gellap Ost, the lambs were carted off in the cage they had been brought in, to be released back into the pen, amid some excitement from the ewes, and returned to their mothers. Though we had judged several of them to be best suited for pelt production, none of these lambs were made into pelts. While this was good news for the lambs, who got to live for at least another five months, it meant that in our case the practice

of lamb description was a practice without material consequence. It remained a relational knowledge practice. However, the wider context had changed so that Swakara pelts were no longer generating meaningful wealth. In this context, lamb description was a rehearsal, a way of maintaining the relations that are engendered through lamb description, through attending the courses. We learned the ways of engaging with the lambs, of approaching, seeing, feeling and describing them. This re-enactment of lamb description served the purpose of preserving the knowledge of how this is to be done until a future time when it will once again be useful.

7 Conclusion

The knowledge practice of lamb description is both contingent on and constitutive of relations among humans as well as non-humans in the Swakara industry. It is the knowledge of an individual lamb, its pedigree and its potential as a pelt or as part of the farm's flock. Lamb description is about perception, the ability to appreciate the aesthetics of Swakara pelts, being able to imagine a living lamb as a potential product at fur auctions, knowing the terminology and desirability of the different categories of curl type and other traits, and, finally, the knowledge of how to make economically viable decisions to secure the future operation of the farm.

Lamb description is rendered "scientific" through a rigid terminology taught in the courses at the research station and through the strict standardization of perception and reporting procedures. Subjectivity is cast as both a requirement and a challenge to lamb description. In an immediate encounter with the lamb, the person describing it needs to have "an eye for it" or "the right touch". The criteria of lamb description are rigorously defined and immeasurable, at the same time. Within the Swakara industry, knowledge, as enacted in the encounter of farmer and lamb or in the discussions of the grading committee, is positioned as the resolution to this contradiction. This knowledge is gained through experience, through the practice of being a Swakara farmer, through family legacies and in conversation with other farmers. The courses at Gellap Ost are but a point of departure in this dynamic.

The practice of lamb description moves beyond dichotomies of theory and practice, academic and practical knowledge. "You need to feel it see it. [...] you just know." This subjectivity, the fact that it is always a person doing the describing and the judging, is not in opposition to the notion of Swakara as scientific; instead, it shows that there is not always a clear dichotomy between scientific and practical knowledge.

Lamb description pervades the Swakara industry in ways that go far beyond the immediate encounter of farmer and lamb, where position and movement are standardized. It links the individual farms to the studbook registry, norms committee and grading committee. Furthermore, it is positioned within a constantly shifting context. Position matters in ways that go beyond mere positionality. It shows what happens when the standpoint, the position and the worlds enacted are in dynamic flux. These movements offer us ways to destabilize the binaries of academic and practical, aesthetic and economical, scientific and intuitive knowledge, objectivity and subjectivity.

What will happen to the knowledge relations within the Swakara industry when its promise of generating wealth has become obsolete? Swakara is no longer up and coming. It no longer holds the promise of quick wealth, and it seems that the promise of capital-intensive, modern, export-oriented farming has moved on to other products. Swakara has become an endeavour of enthusiasts and nostalgic farmers. If thinking is moving, then the objects and subjects of lamb description have shifted along with their context. The aesthetic, “subjective” knowledge of those describing a Swakara lamb is, at this moment in time, mostly located in the individual description encounter. Few lambs are slaughtered for pelts, and therefore the knowledge of curl types and hair quality does not lead to the fur auction. Instead, it serves the purpose of preserving the knowledge, and the genetic characteristics of Swakara lambs, for a time when pelt prices might rise again. Consequently, the ongoing conversations among farmers, the mutual recognition of quality, have become more important, as the outside recognition through auction results has fallen away. Being able to describe a lamb, knowing how to *read a lamb*, being part of the conversation among farmers lies at the core of what it means to be a Swakara farmer in the current situation.

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Combative Decoloniality and the BlackHouse Paradigm of Knowledge, Creation and Action

Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres

A deadly disease has scotched us.
The condemned chained.
Traditions wiped out.
Native language substituted.
Scared and ill the little spirit left,
I shout combat.

MATHONSI, BLACKHOUSE COLLECTIVE 2021



BlackHouse Kollektive's Nonkosi Mathonsi started us off with a powerful spoken-word piece that introduced the main theme of the event: combative decoloniality (Mathonsi 2021). Organized by the Frantz Fanon Foundation, the event commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the passing of Frantz Fanon and the publication of his classic decolonial treatise, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 2004; Fanon Mendès France and Maldonado-Torres 2021; Fondation Frantz Fanon 2021). For organizations like the Frantz Fanon Foundation and BlackHouse Kollektive-Soweto (BHK), decolonial thought is not decolonial if it is not also combative. Combativity, however, is not easy to pursue or sustain within modern/colonial institutions such as academia, where we find increasing references to decoloniality today.

The propagation of decolonial thought in some circles and networks of the academy in the past decade represents a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it can offer more opportunities for new generations to learn about, research and contribute to the unfinished struggle for decolonization; on the other, it risks creating and normalizing a non-combative version of decoloniality that makes decoloniality collapse into a teaching and research theme within the hegemonic liberal paradigm of knowledge production within academia. Our concern is not only with the field of critical theory writ large and with

“anti-to-post-colonial” forms of critique (Tuck and Yang 2012: 19) that fail to address the entanglement between coloniality and settler colonialism in their analyses, but also with – and this is critical – academic projects that remain caught up within the liberal framework of the globalized modern Western university, despite having more robust analytical orientations.¹

We approach the globalized Western university largely as a “white academic field” (Maldonado-Torres 2020) and argue that its power and influence should not be underestimated. The dominant ethos and the multilayered set of priorities at work in the liberal space of the hegemonic academy function as goals and boundaries that shape the sensibilities and work of scholars in the global North and South, including those who might agree that decolonization is not a metaphor. There are multiple ways in which the modern/colonial and liberal paradigm of knowledge simultaneously rejects the incorporation of ideas of combative provenance into the academy while preparing the ground for the mistranslation, domestication, eradication and effective deactivation of the combative dimension of any such idea that makes it to the table of academic disquisition and debate.

At least three modes of operation – key parts of the coloniality of knowledge – are readily observable in the workings of the immune system of the liberal paradigm of knowledge that is central in the globalized, modern research, Kantian/Humboldtian university and its contemporary neoliberalized formations. The first is the rejection of decoloniality and related themes like Black consciousness or reparations, which challenge a liberal conceptualization of modern nation-states and the world order. This rejection often takes place in the name of supposedly neutral conceptions of excellence, reason, rigour and science, according to which decolonization and reparations are social and political matters, not epistemic. From this perspective, the search for

1 Consider that Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang’s important article was published a decade ago and that, since then, there has been a proliferation of writings about decoloniality in multiple areas of the humanities and social sciences. Our point here is that it has become increasingly important to continue challenging purely anticolonial forms of critique and metaphorical conceptions of decolonization, as Tuck and Yang did, but also to address the question of the limits of work that is mainly confined to the liberal academy, including writings that address settler colonialism and struggles for land. The issues are hardly new, but they are taking on new dimensions in the context of a considerable commodification of decolonial thinking and the spread of liberal projects of diversity and inclusion, civic engagement and the public humanities in universities of the global North and South today. Because of our proximity to movements that have sought to decolonize the university, such as the Third World Liberation Front in the US and #RhodesMustFall/#FeesMustFall in South Africa, and our work in related areas within institutions of higher learning, we have witnessed up close the impact of liberal frameworks of knowledge production in the modification and transformation of decolonial forms of knowledge in the academy.

decolonization is often portrayed as anachronistic and as a matter of specific interests and grievances that fail to address relevant issues of universal reach and significance.

The second mode, which arises when the first is too difficult to sustain, is the incorporation of carefully selected ideas and concepts that recognize the existence of inequality and its effects within the academy, but in such a way as to shield the liberal and neoliberal academy from challenges that exceed its limits. This includes the reduction of systematic and systemic inequality and dehumanization to matters of “diversity and inclusion” and to institutionally defined “transformation”, as well as the strategic mistranslation of terms that originate outside of the university (for example, Black Lives Matter) in the effort to further strengthen the corporate and liberal diversity and inclusion framework in the academy. There is a domestication that limits the critical power of the adopted concepts, along with the creation of liberal echo chambers that constantly reiterate the accepted terminologies and prevent serious engagement with frameworks that challenge the premises of liberalism, capitalism, settler colonialism and coloniality. In this context, it is not strange to encounter the apparently ironical situation of discourses on inclusion that serve to exclude other frameworks, such as Black Power, Black consciousness, decolonization, abolition and decoloniality, among others.

A third mode of operation becomes obvious when, as a result of the pressures of social and student movements, ideas like decoloniality start to have some presence in the academy, in spite of resistance from the established fields, disciplines and the administration of the university. In this context, the dominant attitudes and practices of modern/colonial *homo academicus* in the university function as a safety net of sorts, making it appear that combativity is exhausted or fulfilled through intellectual debates alone.² In this context, concepts like decoloniality can start to have some recognition and value within the academy but only to the extent that the vital connections and effective relations with grassroots organizations and movements that promote decoloniality are increasingly severed.

2 We are pointing to the need for incorporating a racial and decolonial perspective to the analysis of *homo academicus* (Bourdieu 1988), such as it appears in Fanon’s reflections on the “colonized intellectual” and of intellectuals in the process of decolonization (see Fanon 2004). Fanon engaged in this analysis prior to Bourdieu, who did not understand the extent to which his own work and perspective remained caught up within the orbit of modern/colonial *homo academicus*. As a result, Bourdieu was unable to acknowledge Fanon’s contributions and he described Fanon’s writings as “frightening”, “false” and “dangerous” (see Bourdieu 1990: 7; Le Sueur 2001: 282).

The liberal paradigm of knowledge also severely limits the understanding and praxis of combativity at the level of teaching; the tendency is that, in the best-case scenario, students are taught to engage in the struggle to introduce certain ideas of combative provenance to the academy while leaving aside the preparation that they need to effectively question and counter the coloniality of the dominant liberal and neoliberal frameworks, and the training to become part of living movements and collectives in the search for decolonization.

Fanon offered a different model, a combative one, according to which knowledge creation, transformation and critique are grounded on a decolonial turn. This sees subjects and communities shed the desire to assimilate to modern/colonial ideals and turn to each other in the process of creating new relations among themselves and new concepts that reflect those relations and their possibilities (Fanon Mendés France and Maldonado-Torres 2021; Maldonado-Torres 2006, 2011, 2016, 2017). For Fanon, combativity is first and foremost a matter of collective responsibility in the face of the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality, which implies the formation of collectives and the mobilization of those collectives *against* the forces of coloniality and *towards* the creation of an-other world (Fanon Mendés France and Maldonado-Torres 2021; Maldonado-Torres 2016).

The formation of collectives among Black and racialized subjects is nothing less than extraordinary. To do this, they have to overcome, or at least start to leave behind, the expected antiblackness and the desire to appear human on the basis of the established criteria of the modern/colonial world. This chapter focuses on the combative work and possibilities that characterize the collaborations between one such collective, BlackHouse Collective in Occupied Azania (aka South Africa), and academic spaces and projects, such as decolonial ethnic studies and Caribbean thought in the United States and the Caribbean, and the Frantz Fanon Foundation in France.³ Our work is also informed by the actions of other collectives and similar organizations, such as Decolonize This Place in New York City and the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción in Puerto Rico, among other movements, some of which we discuss in this chapter (Colectiva Feminista en Construcción 2018; Decolonize This Place 2021; The Laura Flanders Show 2018).

3 Building on the vision of the Pan-Africanist Congress, we take the term Occupied Azania to indicate the decolonial combative imaginary that foregrounds the continued liberation claims to the recovery of Indigenous lands stolen through unjust wars of colonial conquest in what has come to be known as South Africa. The term is a critique of the continued settler colonial project of conquest and calls into question the injustice and normalization of antiblack violence embedded within the democratization project that unfolded in 1994 (see Webster 2021).

The authors, Zandi Radebe and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, started to work together in early 2016, in the context of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMust-Fall (RMF/FMF) movements in South Africa. RMF/FMF forcefully introduced the thematic and imperative of decolonization within the South African academy. We had been educated, and dedicated ourselves, to advance the legacy of Black consciousness and decolonial struggles of previous generations in Occupied Azania and Abya Yala.⁴ RMF/FMF was a catalyst of sorts that offered the condition for an encounter and collaboration between us. Our collaborations have sought to contribute to the challenge of RMF/FMF to the liberal paradigm of knowledge and its severe coloniality in academia.

For us, RMF/FMF was not a mere object of analysis and we have not sought to join the sudden large list of “specialists” and “experts” on the movements. Rather, we see our task as a combative one and not merely academic: while South African universities desperately engaged in mistranslations of the challenges of RMF/FMF, we sought to build connections from existing decolonial spaces within and outside the academy, and from inside and outside South Africa, to develop a project of combative decoloniality, which we have tentatively termed the BlackHouse (BHK) paradigm of knowledge creation and epistemic and artistic change. This paradigm simultaneously counters the coloniality of the dominant liberal paradigm of knowledge production in the academy and advances the combative decoloniality of existing collectives and projects through South–South collaborations that include, but exceed, the limited space of the academy.

In this approach, the task of decolonizing the university is to be first and foremost rooted and expressed not in the creation of new administrative positions or the production of new modules, publications and manuals, as important (though also often ambiguous) as they could be, but in the creative work of linking pedagogical, research and artistic projects that express and advance a combative, decolonial and Black consciousness within and, particularly, outside the academy. This implies that the decolonial university (to the extent that there could be one) and combative decoloniality in academia would emerge from these collaborations that always already exceed the space of the liberal academy and its preferred modes of knowledge production, dissemination and engagement.

4 Abya Yala is an Indigenous name that has been adopted by a large number of Indigenous groups and collectives of Black and racialized peoples throughout the Americas, to refer to the entire region, including the Caribbean. The term might be most commonly used in South and Central America and in some parts of the Caribbean but it is also found in anglophone North America and other areas.

This chapter has two main parts and is written from two perspectives. The first is written by Zandi Radebe, cofounder and director of the BHK, who lives and works as a Black decolonial activist scholar, theorist, community educator and organizer in Occupied Azania. The second is by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, an Afro-Caribbean decolonial philosopher-militant and organizer in the US from the US colony of Puerto Rico, and the co-chair of the Frantz Fanon Foundation. The first part provides an account of the BHK's origin and of some of its Black-conscious, Pan-African and decolonial activities; the second provides an overview of Maldonado-Torres's experience in Occupied Azania and his relationship with the BHK. Both parts are connected by intersections with the RMF/FMF movements in Occupied Azania.

1 Genealogy of the BHK, Soweto (by Zandi Radebe)

It is perhaps fitting to start off by examining the real reasons which make it necessary for us to think collectively about a problem we never created.

BIKO 2004: 96

The BHK, within the paradigm of decolonizing knowledge, is a community-based organization, founded in Soweto in 2014 against the backdrop of dominant colonial epistemologies and political theories that do not centre Blackness. We concern ourselves with programmes that educate on racism. Decolonial scholarship that is anchored in Black consciousness and Pan Africanism is our mainstay. Our activism and advocacy for heightened awareness agitates against systemic and institutional racism where it pervades private and public institutions, community and our country in general.

Shaped by the lived experiences of its founding members at various points of their lives, the BHK was born from our collective encounters with the realities of South Africa, post 1994. In many ways, the BHK became our political home because we had collectively called into question the status quo, particularly the continued existence of antiblack violence in post-1994 South Africa, thereby making unpopular decisions about the direction of our young lives. In search of a new system of values capable of providing answers to the Black experience post 1994, we sought ways to escape coercion into occupations designed for the youth of capitalist societies. Black graduates separated from their communities become easy prey to being coerced into and swallowed by an exploitative society in which, very often, we are direct objects of exploitation (Fanon 2004: 104). This separation further reduces the possibilities of detaching ourselves from the debilitating experiences of colonized education. This, we argue, is unsustainable because capitalist societies, historically, have

destroyed communities and enslaved nations. In the following section, I provide an overview of the genesis and some of the work of the BHK through my own trajectory as cofounder and educator there.

1.1 *From UCKAR to Siyaphambili Youth Pioneers (SYP): Black Consciousness Ideas and Praxis*

Ironically, my experience as a Black student at the University currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR) in 2006–2008 was no different from what was expressed by the students behind the #RhodesMustFall movement in 2015 and the subsequent responses to racism and white supremacy in South African universities captured through various hash tags, such as #MyCurriculumSoWhite, among others. As a Black postgraduate student and tutor in a predominately white setting, I became acutely aware of Black students who, unprepared, made it to universities that not only taught a Westernized curriculum but were also racist in their culture and outlook. UCKAR left me with a deep sense of anxiety about the prospects for Black youth in institutions of higher learning. This experience inadvertently radicalized my attitude to the university and, by extension, the project of higher learning in its entirety.

Whereas most graduates are generally excited about the prospects of employment and dream jobs after completing their studies at university, I wanted something different. What I wanted had nothing to do with financial security. I had already grown deeply critical of the academic project, owing to my experience at UCKAR. As a young Black graduate who grew up in the township of Soweto, which is also the home of Black Consciousness and the Pan-Africanist culture of resistance, I equally became aware of the fact that, and as Mike Stainbank (2011: xiv) observed, “not a single national programme illuminates a cognitive understanding of the violence inherent in racism”, let alone provides conscientization programmes that seek to provide some level of political orientation to Black youth in post-1994 South Africa.

I had also come across the anti-apartheid speech that got Ongkopotse Tiro expelled from university, when I decided to convert my mother’s backyard into a school in 2008.⁵ In the same year, on the anniversary of the Soweto Uprising of 1976, a group of instructors, including myself, officially launched our organization, Siyaphambili Youth Pioneers (SYP). With Afrikan History and

5 In April 1972, the South African Students’ Organization (SASO) leader and SRC President of the University of the North (Limpopo University) was expelled for his powerful anti-apartheid speech delivered at the graduation ceremony. The speech would change the course of South African politics and later cause his brutal murder. One of the most dedicated and selfless Black consciousness leaders and practitioners, Tiro was killed by a parcel bomb sent to him by the apartheid government in Botswana in 1974 (BlackHouse Collective 2022).

Black consciousness philosophy infused into our programmes, we sought to provide a vehicle that would aid Black youth with our coming into consciousness while providing a response to the debilitating conditions of township schooling. We worked with Black learners who had been schooled entirely post 1994 and yet whose lived experience in township schools strongly resembled that of the apartheid era. As Stainbank (2011: xvi) purports, if our young Black learner should be fortunate enough to enter a decent university, and, assuming she will be able to pass her first year, she stands to be shocked by what her post-1994 education has not taught her. Thus, our efforts at SYP were directed towards encouraging school learners to acquire some sense of political awareness about the country and to reject the “born free” (Mokoena 2014) indoctrination made popular through ANC “culture”.

The combative nature of SYP was evident in its infusion of Black consciousness ideas in its programme which, undeniably, was disruptive to the neoliberal ANC Charterist framework (Sobukwe [1957] 2013). This was demonstrated in various ways among our Pioneers both within their schools and families. Within a few months we began to see a noticeable transformation in many of our students; their newly found thinking manifested itself in various ways, including challenging their peers, teachers and parents on an array of topics. By testing their knowledge on teachers, SYP students inadvertently exposed problematic aspects of township schooling that national government thought respective management at schools had been sweeping under the carpet. We encouraged the Pioneers to use their Black consciousness-oriented thinking and superior debating skills to question limits and problematize the state’s reluctance to mainstream Black consciousness in their learning experience.

During this period of working with young learners, I would become aware of the unquestionable relevance of Black consciousness as a living philosophy. There were instances when SYP, and by extension our school programmes, were met with hostility and outright rejection by the school management, who we later learned were members of the ruling party. It was therefore not surprising that they were not supportive of Black consciousness and Pan Afrikanist ideals in teaching and learning at their respective schools. Ironically, these occasions gave us the opportunity to appreciate the continued relevance and challenge of Black consciousness as a philosophy and practice thereby fortifying our resolve. We began to appreciate the urgent need to revitalize and popularize the teachings of Steve Biko and Mangaliso Sobukwe.

Not everyone was opposed to the SYP approach and lessons at the schools where we worked. A handful of schools and teachers had grown critical of the post-1994 political order and were therefore receptive to our alternative ideas and Black consciousness pedagogy. These would become our host schools. Moletsane High School stood out as a formidable example. Its teachers provided

SYP with the support we needed to recruit and rally more students behind our banner. As a result, after a year being at Molestane High school, SYP managed to produce exceptional debaters who would go on to compete in prestigious tournaments and win against experienced and affluent debaters from Model C and private schools. Our Pioneers from various schools in Soweto had, in their own way, begun to question the illusion of Black liberation that was ushered in by the 1994 project and organised around the figure Mandela as the sole liberator.

The following year, 2009, I would encounter BlaQ Aesthetics, a collective of young Black artists who, with a heightened sense of political awareness, took seriously the need to do work in our communities that amplified the ideas of Black consciousness. BlaQ Aesthetics understood that Black culture is an integral component in the search for Black liberation. Biko's declaration that "Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values" (Biko [1978] 2004: 106) helped the movement to reimagine better schools for decolonized education. BlaQ Aesthetics graciously opened its doors and welcomed SYP students to Khaya Lendaba, the historical home and shrine of Isanusi, seer, sage, healer, teacher, philosopher, historian, artist, playwright, orator, sculptor, writer and Indigenous wisdom-keeper, Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa, located in Jabavu, Soweto – a historical hub and heritage of the Soweto Revolt of 1976 (Setai 2020).

Through the works of Black Aesthetics, Black youth within the cultural and activism space in Soweto aligned their projects with Credo Mutwa's work. This alignment was significant to the quest for, among other things, epistemic justice, the promotion of the ideas of Credo Mutwa and safeguarding his lifelong vision of validating and legitimizing the various facets of indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained society through the ages. The programmes of SYP and BlaQ Aesthetics were designed to foster critical youth consciousness, drawing from the South African Student's Organization (SASO) tradition of conscientization. SASO defined Black consciousness as "essentially a slogan directing us away from the traditional political big talk to a new approach" (Biko 1971: 1).

At this time, I accepted an invitation to a talk at Wits University by Andile Mngxitama, one of the leading thinkers of a youth-based Black-conscious movement called Blackwash (BW). After the Wits talk, I was introduced to some of BW's members at a meeting held in a restaurant. Between the light conversations that sought to unpack Mngxitama's stimulating talk, over drinks and snacks, I recognized two of the sisters who were introduced as leaders and cofounders of BW. They were both former students from UCKAR. There was a plan to meet with other BW members after the Wits University talk and this was the meeting that set into motion the next three years of my involvement in the organization.

I had first heard about Blackwash in 2007 from a brother who wanted to "recruit" me to what he described as an emerging "Black think tank". Having

dedicated three years to theoretical work in a master's programme at UCKAR, I did not wish to involve myself in any intellectual project that did not locate itself in the Black community. "Think tank" immediately reminded me of elitist sentiments and discouraged my participation in Blackwash for a couple of months and until after my journey with SYP. In May 2009, a small delegation of SYP comrades attended a meeting organized by BW, which included young people from various Black organizations, such as eBukhosini Solution, a community-based company specializing in African-centred educational and knowledge production programmes for urban youth.

At this meeting I made a request for the movement to relocate to Soweto. The meeting was in favour of my suggestion and, indeed, the next Blackwash meetings and subsequent programmes were hosted at the Credo Mutwa cultural village, which was also home to Blaq Aesthetics. SYP and Blaq Aesthetics had collaborated on various youth events and had become natural allies. As a result, members of SYP and Blaq Aesthetics would become members of Blackwash and were very instrumental in developing the programmes and politics of the organization, using political education through literature, arts, debating and public speaking. While SYP brought the enthusiasm and energy of youth to Blackwash, Blaq Aesthetics provided artistic and cultural flavour. Blackwash programmes appealed to a large portion of Black youth in their high school and university studies.

1.2 *The Blackwash Dream – "Coz '94 Changed Fokol"*

In a context where coloniality perpetuates itself through multiple forms of deception and confusion, clarity can be a powerful weapon (Maldonado-Torres 2016: 2). Blackwash (BW) emerged from a context in which our Black population was seemingly hypnotized into accepting 1994 as the moment of Black triumph against apartheid racism. BW was one of the most prominent Black consciousness youth voices to offer political clarity against the colonial deception birthed by the 1994 liberation project. Thus, BW represented a generation of Black youth who refused to accept the Mandelization qua democratization project that expressed itself through the imposition of ANC "culture" and "politics" post 1994. For the Black majority, BW argued, the victory of the ANC in 1994 did not signify a moment of rupture expressed by the repossession of stolen lands and rehumanisation efforts, but rather the normalization of a system of dispossession and racism. Therefore, for BW, the post-1994 state represented a continuity of the apartheid system, through the Mandelization project, among other technologies of coloniality.

Founded by young Black women in 2008, BW was formed because there emerged an understanding from the Black consciousness sectors of the youth that there was never a "post" (as in "post apartheid") to speak of for Black

people in arrangement ushered in 1994. BW identified itself as a Blacks-only initiative that drew its influence from Black consciousness philosophy. It did not align itself with any political formation but rather presented itself as a counterculture movement, founded by many who were postgraduate students from a broad range of South African universities. All were reading Biko, Fanon and bell hooks while collectively thinking critically about the challenges of post-1994 South Africa. The Blackwash founding document offers a profound insight into its position against the colonial deception at the heart of the post-1994 democratization process:

Blackwash stands ultimately for the love of Black people and the end of our suffering. We shall walk as we talk. We shall make our own mistakes; we shall learn and improve on our practice. [author's emphasis] We hope to oppress none, but we shall not dialogue with forces that continue to perpetuate our oppression

BLACKWASH, 2009: n.p.

The Blackwash Dream articulated the vision and mission of the movement thus:

Blackwash stands for the liberation of Black people who want to be liberated, this means amongst others, self-governance, and equitable sharing of our natural resources. But it also means we need to find collective and democratic practices to define and arrive at our final destiny.

BLACKWASH, 2009: n.p.

The document was a fresh and penetrating critique of the notion of the “New South Africa” that had been orchestrated through a negotiated settlement that had failed to dislodge the structures of white power and reverse Black landlessness and dehumanisation. The Blackwash tag, “Coz '94 Changed Fokol” best captures the movement’s sustained critique and opposition to what, following Fanon, one could refer to as pseudo-freedom, flag-independence or “pseudo-independence” (More 2011: 178). The movement maintained that “1994 was the inauguration of a new phase in the ongoing racist colonial project which is settler colonial South Africa. The only thing that was new or different was that the same system of racism got new spokespersons, managers and guardians who had Black skin (Blackwash 2009).

In many ways, the BW critique of the Mandelization project of 1994 represented what decolonial scholar, Maldonado-Torres (2016: 2), termed “a battle of temporalities”, which is the rise of youth movements whose ideas question and threaten the status quo. However, BW had a short record of mobilizing

communities in Soweto and beyond. It was the movement's radical ideology rather than its organizational strength that had attracted attention from various people around the country. Thus, when the movement pursued strategies to build its presence within communities and improve its following at a national level, it seemingly lost its ideological potency, and then operated as a broad church to cater for its newly found political vehicle in the form of the September National Imbizo (SNI).

The SNI would mutate into a movement independent of Blackwash, which caused confusion among BW members who felt that the SNI had diluted the identity and radical politics of Blackwash as a movement committed to Black consciousness and Pan Africanism. Five years later, both movements would collapse, and I would seek to continue the work of BW in an outfit that we later termed BlackHouse Kollektive-Soweto (BHK). The following section deals with BlackHouse Kollektive, what it is, where it comes from and the politico social dynamics and contexts that gave birth to it as a space and movement for decolonial thinking and practice that advocates for the unfinished business of decolonization in Occupied Azania from a Black Power Pan Afrikanist lense.

1.3 *The BlackHouse Kollektive Soweto (BHK) Paradigm of Decolonizing Knowledge*

My experience and work with building, organizing and mobilizing in Black spaces, and communities in particular, provided me with a deeper appreciation of the relationship between “theory, action, and the importance of space and time in decolonial projects” (Maldonado-Torres 2016: 2) that would later inform the creation of the BlackHouse Kollektive (BHK). Further, in giving breath to the visions of BHK, I sought to be part of an activist community that was founded on the principles of Black Love and the genuine articulation of Black Rage in recognition of our collective efforts to decolonize our lives. BHK would become the space where Black people could generate and imagine new positions and decolonial horizons for their ideas, desires and fears. It arose out of a context defined by modernity and coloniality – that is, reinforced by the continuous existence of imposed settler occupation.

Born out of a desperate need to scream BLACK POWER, in disappointment at the 1994 project, BHK calls on all Black thinkers and prophets alike to gather and reconstitute the state of Blackness. We are called on to break from the dominant logic of theorizing about Blackness, from spaces that have so far served to maintain the intellectual negation, if not erasure, of Black bodies that embody philosophical thought – white-dominated spaces, such as universities and other state-owned institutions.

BHK draws strength from the trajectory of Black people's search for true liberation and the desire to quench a 365-year-old thirst for Black liberation

thought. BHK is a space for Black and decolonial thinking and organizing, and is committed to the work of reviving and promoting Black radical and combative decolonial thinking with the purpose of self-liberation from white racist epistemologies and colonial pedagogy currently disseminated by South African schools, universities and society at large. We think of our consciousness-raising and educational work in the community of Soweto as work based on Pan-Africanist Black consciousness decolonial thoughts. We concern ourselves with systemic and institutional racism where it pervades private and public institutions in what we call Occupied Azania.

The BHK project pays careful attention to the limitations of Blacks in anti-black spaces, but goes further and tries to create fresh furrows from which organic ideological trails for black thought lead to the end of the world as we know it. In problematizing the contradiction that comes with the structuring of Black thinking within white supremacist academia, BHK provides a cathartic space for Black philosophers, thinkers and activists alike that will shape their next generation. BHK thus aims to advance a Black liberation project and Black liberation thought beyond the confines of white academia and liberal universities, at least in the context of South Afrika.

In keeping true to the Black radical thought inspired by Blackwash, the BHK invites Black philosophers, thinkers and activists alike into a space that bridges the political and intellectual void, by enabling Black discussion, between Black bodies, within the white academic space. It offers Black Love founded on Black solidarity to those who are systematically precluded from this space and locked into Soweto, a zone of dehumanization. BHK has hosted and collaborated with internationally acknowledged luminaries in our arena of discourse, to share knowledge with our community through public lectures held in the township of Soweto. Some of the leading thinkers have included Charles Mills, Lewis Gordon, Janine Jones, Joy James, Magobo Ramose, Cde President Tiyani Mabasa, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, CK Raju and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. At the same time, we exposed them to currents of thought and action that can potentially enrich their work, orienting them in a community-based decolonial combative direction. The long-term objective is to build community-driven centres of knowledge production that are open to all Black people, with the purpose of employing Black thought as a tool to expose the limitations of the 1994 Mandela democratization project while advocating for the true liberation of Occupied Azania.

Lastly, the BHK initiative is a call to create a space outside white academia that responds to the needs of Black people located in zones of dehumanization. The purpose of the project, however ambitious, goes far beyond the consolidation of these spaces and hints at the need to collapse the existential

assumptions associated with Soweto and revive the culture of thinking, self-love and reliance as a major component of the Black liberation struggle. Our focus is on education towards social justice. We seek to educate and agitate for a free and egalitarian community through which the Indigenous dispossessed can heal, in all spheres of their dispossession, from the 370 years of the violent encounter with the savagery of colonial apartheid racism.

The Kollektive is home to social activists, artists, students in law, philosophy and political sciences, educators, professors, intellectuals and young professionals, and has been very instrumental in the student struggles in Occupied Azania (South Africa). Our youth-anchored programmes centre on introducing young people to critical conversations, study and reflection that are imbued with decolonial thought distilled from Black consciousness and Pan Africanism. In Sobukwe parlance, education – to us – is a tool by which we serve our people and raise our collective aspiration above the desires that are anchored in colonial cognitive frameworks that lead us to negate ourselves. Taking instruction from SASO, we embrace Black consciousness as “an attitude of mind, a way of life” in our efforts towards reimagining decolonized education in Occupied Azania (Biko 1971: 1).

2 From the Summer School to the BlackHouse: Linking Combative Decolonial Projects (by Nelson Maldonado-Torres)

I first visited South Africa in January 2014, for the first decoloniality summer school at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in Pretoria. Former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, gave the opening keynote address. There were more than a hundred participants, most of them Black South Africans avid to learn about decoloniality. I came as an instructor but also as someone who wanted to learn. Very quickly I found not only interlocutors but potential collaborators and, at least from the second year on, I started to invite some of the students to be co-lecturers. The collaborations led to the introduction of poems, storytelling and performance, and visits to a gallery guided by a curator and an artist. In this process, we were reinventing the classroom and breaking the models of traditional academic scholarship and pedagogy. The decoloniality that I wanted to teach and explore could not be reduced to a varsity topic, the theme of a lecture or the object of scholarly investigation. Decoloniality is nothing without a praxis that disrupts the modern/colonial paradigms of knowledge production. I was proud of what I was doing, but it was still just a beginning and it was still taking place at a rather surface level.

Then came 2016. I had a one-semester sabbatical coming up and I had decided that I wanted to spend it in South Africa. After concluding a period of campus leadership and organizing at my university, I thought that it would be the perfect place to conclude a book manuscript, learn more about South African and African struggles, and seek to continue and start new collaborations. Little did I suspect, when I made my plans in January 2015, that the South Africa to which I would return in early 2016 was going to be a very different one. The change was triggered by a performance by activist Chumani Maxwele at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015, when he went shirtless, wearing a pink hat, around the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, throwing human excrement at it while blowing a whistle and carrying a placard that read: "Exhibit White @ Arrogance U.C.T." The performance led to massive student protests that spread from UCT to probably most other universities in the country, and to the removal of the Rhodes statue on April 9. By then, however, it was clear that the statue was only a symbol of a much larger problem and that its removal was not going to stop the movement that had started.

Student organizing continued throughout 2015, but by late 2015 and very early 2016 some thought that #RhodesMustFall, as the movement was called, was probably now in the rear-view mirror. Others were uncertain. Nobody knew, and probably only a few imagined, that the movement would continue and become as strong or stronger than in 2015, now under the term #FeesMustFall. As 2016 started and many Black students were finding it difficult to pay their fees to continue their studies and/or find adequate university housing, the movement was reignited through protests against the cost of education and the limits of accessibility.

Larger questions emerged regarding the economic dimensions of Black dispossession, including land expropriation and land theft. More than two months of marches and different forms of direct action followed. The media covered the events regularly. The entire nation watched, and was forced to ask itself the question: what is decolonization and why are the students asking for it? I had a decision to make in this context. Should I seclude myself and work on my book manuscript while giving lectures on decoloniality at the university? Should I venture to learn about the movement from a distance, protecting my time to conclude my book manuscript? Or should I simply make myself available to those reaching out to me to engage with what was going on and allow the process and the needs of the moment and the movements to determine how my time and energies would be used?

That I had taught in ethnic studies departments in the US for the larger part of my career, and that I approach ethnic studies in line with the aspirations of

the student movement that gave birth to this field, the Third World Liberation Front – a topic I had talked about and that was of interest to RMF/FMF student activists – made the answer obvious: I opted to make myself available to the struggle. What followed was a period of profound learning and sharing that culminated in my interactions and collaborations with the BlackHouse Collective (BHK). These collaborations continue today. Through the BHK and my conversations with students involved in RMF/FMF, I learned much about the significance of the moment and the movement, including the following points.

The years 2015 and 2016 were just slightly more than two decades away from the establishment of the South African liberal republic under a new Constitution and the start of Nelson Mandela's leadership. By then, there was deep frustration and dissatisfaction with the alleged achievements and promises of the "rainbow nation", its liberal Constitution and its neoliberal economic approach. Even deeper, there was clearly a rejection of the preservation of a state of affairs that seemed founded on Black exploitation, marginalization and massive poverty along with the appropriation of Indigenous lands.

The contradictions and limits of the South African, racial, liberal and neoliberal state could not escape university students. Few other spaces provide better conditions for an acute perception of such contradictions and limits than universities, since they are meant to offer equal access to excellence in thinking and teaching while also serving as effective sites for social mobilization. Students come to universities with the expectation of finding something new and better than they have found before, something that will empower them to significantly improve themselves and their context. In the South African, antiblack, settler colony, what students found, instead, was a vastly dominant white academic field (Maldonado-Torres 2020).

The white academic field is arguably dominant in the modern/colonial and global university system, but its obscenity – in the sense of being extremely offensive to anyone who is aware of the racial dynamics at play in it – is bound to be felt particularly strongly in a setting with a majority Black and Indigenous population that remains largely impoverished and marginalized, as in South Africa. This is one reason why the South African student response to the white academic field in Occupied Azania is relevant everywhere, not only in South Africa or in Africa. South African youth witnesses and suffers the contradictions and limits of liberal and neoliberal discourses and their modes of managing the economy and organizing society to an impressive degree. The entirety of South Africa, including and perhaps particularly its universities, can be viewed as an important site for investigations into the contemporary workings of antiblackness and the coloniality of power/knowledge/being today.

Also extremely relevant in the workings of the coloniality of power in South Africa is the combination of overseas and settler colonialism with racial slavery. This context set the stage for continued forms of Black exploitation, race- and gender-based violence and minoritization in a country where most Blacks can claim an Indigenous relationship with the land and where the Black population is also a demographic majority. To their credit, RMF/FMF acknowledged most of these dimensions and sought to address them. The result was the emergence of a powerful Black and decolonial consciousness and movement that called attention to what tends to remain separate in other similar movements: a direct critique of the legacies of apartheid racial slavery and of contemporary antiblackness, and a call for the return of stolen land. It showed an acute awareness of the global impact of colonialism as a system of domination and exploitation that had been silenced by the triumph of neoliberalism in the 1994 so-called democratization project.

Through their direct critiques of structural racism and coloniality in universities, RMF/FMF challenged and exposed the normalization of settler colonialism and antiblackness by the liberal and neoliberal approaches of the dominant political party and some of its luminaries, who were also perceived by some as saviours of the nation. The exposure and critique of the coloniality of liberalism and neoliberalism created anxiety among politicians and intellectuals who continued to celebrate the formation of the South African liberal and neoliberal republic as a postapartheid and postcolonial formation. RMF/FMF strongly challenged this characterization. They were not the only ones to do so, but their challenge reverberated particularly loudly while the movement was active and they successfully connected those issues with modern/colonial higher education.

Soon after I arrived in South Africa in early 2016, I started to receive invitations from leaders of various departments at Unisa and other universities, to speak about decolonization. It was clear that a great part of the South African leadership structure, particularly in universities, felt the pressure of the national student movement and was struggling to understand and to respond to the call for “free and decolonised education”. I also met student organizers and was invited to speak with them. These invitations created opportunities for me to learn about the movement directly from some of the most prominent voices among the students and supporters in the faculty, as well as from those in the faculty, including heads of departments and more senior figures in university administrations, who had reacted negatively to the movement, in various degrees (Chinguno et al. 2017).

While travelling around the country, speaking about decoloniality and learning about the student movement, I was also leading a weekly seminar

on decoloniality at Unisa. Regular participants included local faculty and students, such as the anthropologist Zodwa Radebe, the Nigerian feminist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, and the political theorist Tendayi Sithole, who helped to organize the seminar. Zandi Radebe, an instructor at Unisa, was also a regular participant, and she invited Oyewumi and me to the BHK. By then, the BHK was well known among a number of prominent voices within RMF/FMF as a Black consciousness Pan-Africanist organization that challenged the status quo. The BHK would also become a site of refuge and support to the student movement. The meetings with RMF/FMF students at BHK, more than the seminar itself, became the cornerstone of our ongoing collaboration.

I felt that I had lived a long time in South Africa during those three intense months of 2016. At the university, I felt like an ethnographer in an occupied space: occupied by overwhelming antiblack and anti-Indigenous thinking and attitudes. The atmosphere at the university was heavy. Observing primarily white academics grapple with RMF/FMF was like watching repeated performances of reason fleeing the room as soon as a Black body entered the scene.⁶ The experience made it particularly clear and palpable that the academy was and remains an occupied space, that the university is an institution dedicated to the modern/colonial occupation of knowledge. In that sense, as movements such as Decolonize This Place (New York City) have put it, decolonization needs to involve a de-occupation. This also explains the relevance of the BHK, which can be conceived as a space for de-occupation and as a site from where to think, feel and be with a community of others outside the occupied space that is the academy.

For me, and those whom I came to meet in the struggle, the BlackHouse was a place of togetherness and combativity that served as solid ground for the preparation of decolonization and de-occupation projects. BHK promotes a Black and Pan-African consciousness and a decolonial attitude that re-orientes and brings subjects together in the effort to counter coloniality and create “the world of *you*” (Fanon 2008: 206). In this process, languages and knowledges – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – are reconstituted and re-oriented

6 This refers to the dynamics of reason and unreason in an antiblack world as Fanon describes it in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008). Fanon describes a Black person's engagement with reason in an antiblack world as a “cat and mouse” game: when embracing irrationality, they are countered with reason, and when adopting reason, they are found as limited because they fail to engage with “true rationality” (Fanon 2008: 99, 111). Lewis Gordon often describes this as follows: “When Blacks walk in the door, Reason walks out” (Gordon 1997: 29). For related critical explorations in the phenomenology of whiteness, see Gordon (2000) and Ahmed (2007).

decolonially; that is to say, they become part of a movement for and towards decolonization.

The BlackHouse is at once a site of epistemic, social and political insurgency where art, philosophy, politics and ethics enrich each other and become intertwined in the process of self-discovery, self-criticism, mobilization and community formation. In short, the BHK anticipates what a decolonized university in a profoundly antiblack context should aim to be: an engine of knowledge creation and of self- and collective transformation in the exercise of decolonization.

Projects for decolonizing the university should take their lead from spaces like the BlackHouse, which defy the university's liberal and neoliberal modes of production. Echoing Fanon, in spaces like the BlackHouse "the intellectual sheds all that calculating, all those strange silences, those ulterior motives, that devious thinking and secrecy as he gradually plunges deeper among the people" (Fanon 2004: 12). In this process, intellectuals can potentially abandon their traditional, heightened individualism and the role of "sentinel on duty guarding the Greco-Roman [or African] pedestal" (Fanon 2004: 11) and discover the productive dimension of collective efforts. The BlackHouse offers the possibility of decolonizing the position of the intellectual, the scholar and the student, which is far more difficult than taking decoloniality as a theme.

I maintained a conversation and relationship with the BlackHouse after 2016, and in 2019, when I returned for six weeks as distinguished visiting scholar invited by the Academy of Sciences of South Africa (ASSAF), BHK became a space of comradeship, thinking and my true north as I visited and spoke to multiple audiences in a variety of major universities in the country. I spoke about the BHK paradigm then, an idea that emerged in the context of thinking about the various roles of the BlackHouse – serving as a hub for thinking among student organizers, facilitating the visit of scholars in Soweto, engaging in political education and anticipating the goals of a decolonized university – while preparing a Black-conscious and decolonial curriculum for youth in Soweto.

For the BHK, youth education is part of an encompassing view of decolonization in which knowledge is reconstituted as part of the process of communicating, teaching and learning from Black youth who are well acquainted with the harsh realities of antiblackness. It reflects the idea that collectivity is transversal – in the sense that it creates an environment for the encounter between and enrichment among subjects who are positioned in different spaces of the social sphere – and intergenerational. Today's youth often perceive the contradiction and limits of a system and understand the possibilities of combative action in a fresh light. They are also the university students, the scholars and

the professionals of tomorrow. Organizing a curriculum for and teaching Black youth in a profoundly antiblack context is far more than “service”: it is one of the activities that simultaneously serves to re-educate teachers and researchers while mobilizing knowledge in a combative direction.

The preparation of a curriculum for youth education was part of the organization of a summer camp on Black consciousness and decoloniality for young students in Soweto of no more than 16 years of age. In preparing the curriculum, BHK continued a view that it had already introduced in its engagement with the “fallists” in 2015 and 2016: it sought to connect the Black youth of today with the combative Black youth of previous generations, particularly the Black-conscious youth who had participated in student-led movements and uprisings in the 1970s. The BHK also built on its inter- and transnational scope: Africa, the larger world of the African diaspora and the colonized world were part of its spatial horizon. This inter- and transnational approach was fundamental for the summer camp project, which involved the collaboration of the Rutgers Advanced Institute for Critical Caribbean Studies (RAICCS) in the United States.

By the time the idea of a summer school camp for youth emerged, the BHK and RAICCS had already developed important connections. I was a cofounding member and a faculty affiliate of RAICCS at the university where I taught in the United States. After my return from South Africa in 2016, I saw my role at my university and at RAICCS differently. The BHK had shown me possibilities of combative activity at the intersection of grassroots knowledge formation and higher education combined with attention to local, regional and global concerns and respect for the ancestors. All of this was reflected in the organization of a multilayered set of activities in 2018 that culminated with the third *Rencontres* of the Frantz Fanon Foundation, hosted by RAICCS, the main theme of which was: Frantz Fanon, Decoloniality and the Spirit of Bandung (Maldonado-Torres 2019; Maldonado-Torres et al. 2019).

The BHK was one of the principal organizations whose work was featured in the *Rencontres*. It involved the collaboration between an academic space (RAICCS), a non-academic international space (the Frantz Fanon Foundation) and a community organization (Lazos América Unida). Since Lazos América Unida focuses on areas such as health and youth education, the third *Rencontres* prioritized the themes of healing and education in its programme. In this effort to combine the questions and interests that were emerging in decolonial and antiracist community organizations with scholarly work and research in related areas, I was following the lead of the BlackHouse.

If my experience at the BHK in 2016 was fundamental to my work in the events of 2018, the activities of 2018, including the participation of the

BlackHouse in the third *Rencontres*, proved important for the organization of the summer camp for youth and my visit to South African universities as distinguished visiting scholar in 2019. All these crossings and collaborations informed the idea of a BHK paradigm that offers crucial considerations to any project that seeks to decolonize the university. At the BHK, Black consciousness, Pan Africanism and decoloniality combine in a combative transdisciplinarity, grounded in place and transnational form. It pays attention to the specificities of coloniality and antiblackness in South Africa and the African continent while acknowledging and building on the contributions of the African diaspora and the global South for the conceptualization, imagination and practice of decoloniality in our present and future. The paradigm is one of permanent linking and organizing across multiple sites and moments of Black-conscious and Pan-African, community-based, institutional and action-oriented, epistemic and artistic projects. The BHK paradigm counters the dominant liberal and neoliberal modes of producing knowledge at the university and offers a possibility for keeping alive the spirit and practice of combative decoloniality in projects for decolonizing the university.

3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter offers a glimpse into a postarea studies framework that challenges, not only the discrete conceptualization of knowledge in nationalistic or continental shapes, but also the hegemonic model of intellectual engagement in the academy, which is liberal in kind and continues to define most work even in “decolonial studies”—a formulation that we contest. We take decoloniality to be a verb and a struggle rather than a new area of expertise. Operating beyond the horizon of modern/colonial “studies,” we do not aim to create a new form of African Studies, and our goal is not to correct or reform either Caribbean or US American Studies. Our proposal is that the decolonization of knowledge, including the decolonization of the university, requires a different approach and orientation. The BHK paradigm is one among other such insurgent projects that intervene in and that challenge the university while having their centers of gravitation in collectives that are engaged in combative decolonial struggles. Ours is simultaneously a struggle-based, inter-institutional, transatlantic, transnational, and transcontinental combative decolonial project with nodes in Africa via South Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. We cross borders and connect struggles from the ground up, thereby also strengthening, making visible and linking local and regional projects, initiatives and movements for liberation and decolonization.

The BHK paradigm is a form of thinking as multifaceted movement that seeks to extend and contribute to the legacy and contemporary expression of Black consciousness, Pan Africanism and decoloniality. Our collaboration pays particular attention to Blackness in its multiple manifestations and expressions, and from there we link with other struggles globally. Our work offers an example of the generative and creative possibilities that emerge when decolonization is approached as an unfinished project grounded in the work of movements and collectives, even as academic works and resources are used. Indeed, our work shows that the decolonization of knowledges, including academic knowledges, best takes place not through the introduction of new topics or methods of study in the halls of academia but through the learning and unlearning that occurs in organizing direct action, creative activities and intergenerational pedagogical projects that seek to advance the unfinished project of decolonization.

Through its various activities, the BlackHouse Kollektive simultaneously addresses problems of primary and secondary education in the townships and in universities. Its work directly challenges the traditional linear (and racist) approach to education, according to which township youth cannot but fail at university because they are ill prepared. Rather, in BlackHouse's work, thinking, planning, breaking bread and plotting with elders, parents and the youth in the township become the condition of possibility for decolonizing education at school and university. We are far from a conception of decolonizing the university in terms of dismantling the master's house. Rather, the BHK itself becomes a home, generated from the ground, that can lead to reimagining and redesigning basic and higher education. From here, BHK's activities go from teaching African history and the history of Black liberation to children, to, not only welcoming internationally renowned philosophers to the township and introducing them to our approach to knowledge creation, but also engaging the local community in the cultivation of philosophy in African languages.

At the BlackHouse, one can arguably find a clearer demonstration of the decolonization of knowledge than is found in the historically white universities and other universities where #RhodesMustFall led to some changes. We have discussed how the BHK became a place of encounter for fallists and for Black-conscious, Pan-African and decolonial thinkers. But the connections between these groups did not finish with the end of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in 2016. The encounters and collaborations have continued into the present, and they include activities at the decoloniality summer and winter schools at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and UCT. It is also notable that the BlackHouse Kollektive organized its own "Black Power, Pan Afrikanism and Decoloniality"

winter school at the Funda Community College in Diepkloof, Soweto, between July 27 and 30, 2023. In short, BlackHouse Collective remains a major contributor to the ongoing work and legacy of the fallists, even as its contributions are hardly detectable through the lenses of traditional scholarship and the liberal translations and modifications of decoloniality that BHK's work and its paradigm challenge.

By virtue of its multiple interrelated activities, the BHK paradigm counters academic tendencies to keep decoloniality, Black consciousness and Pan Africanism separate and to reduce them to teaching and research themes. From this perspective, teaching, research, artistic creation and theorizing are all vital parts of decoloniality as a concrete living struggle. At and through the BlackHouse, knowledges from previous movements, from youth, from the streets and from communities in struggle combine with scholarly and artistic works through activities that seek to decolonize consciousness, knowledge and social relations. The BlackHouse is more than just a site; it is a node and a project where decoloniality keeps its combative dimension as well as a paradigm that indicates some of the ways in which the idea of decoloniality can avoid capture.

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Index

- Abuya, Pamela 208
academic authority 55
accessibility 173, 187, 188, 223, 295
acquiescence 207, 210
activism 50, 56, 80, 150, 286, 289, 295
Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 1
African Genius 94, 102
African Studies Association (ASA) 114
African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) 114
age 218, 223, 224
agency 50, 85, 168, 177, 209, 211
epistemic agency 196, 210, 212
Ahmed, Sara 163, 167
Amadiume, Ifi 195, 210
anthropology 55, 184, 238, 239, 243
anthropometry 238, 244, 250, 253
Apartheid 56, 59, 158, 160, 262, 290
Anti-Apartheid 56, 287
Post-Apartheid 290
archaeology 124, 238
archive 106, 172, 180, 187, 189
Archiv für Anthropologie (journal) 244
art 62, 185
Azania 284, 292, 293, 296

Bâ, Amadou Hampaté 37
Beier, Georgina 171
Beier, Ulli 171
Biko, Steve 289, 294
Black Consciousness 282, 283, 285, 287
BlackHouse Collective-Soweto (BHK) 281, 299
blackness 50, 70, 76, 83, 85, 286, 302
Blackwash 289
body 47, 59, 61, 70, 237, 245, 252, 266, 270
black body 50, 292, 293, 298
social body 159, 161, 167
Burns, Catherine 217, 218

Cameroon 219, 220
British Southern Cameroonians 217, 221
canon 34, 46, 51, 55, 61, 67, 211
undoing the canon 15, 34, 47, 48, 67
Cartesian dualism 48

Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU) 173
Centre of Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU) 178, 185, 186
Chakrabarty, Dipesh 6, 72
Chiangong, Pepetual Mforbe 228
Chief Manga Williams 233
Christianity 36, 54, 69, 75, 76, 77
collaboration 187, 190, 285, 294, 298, 300, 302
collection 185, 189, 237
colonialism 31, 36, 43, 56, 60, 69, 82, 85, 135, 136, 158, 167, 217, 230, 239, 253, 261, 262, 273, 297
contact zone 177
contradiction 55, 277, 293, 296, 299
control 208
cooperation 173, 186
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) 113
Critical race theory 59
critique 34, 38, 51, 81, 282, 291

Daston, Lorraine 241
database 237, 238, 247
datafication 240, 241, 243, 254
decoloniality 36, 38, 46, 281, 283, 285, 294, 303
combative decoloniality 281, 285, 301
decolonial epistemology 48
decolonial theory 58
decolonization 47, 55, 84, 85, 94, 128, 160, 189, 197, 261, 285, 289, 292, 295, 297, 299, 301, 302
Decolonize This Place 284, 298
dehumanization 50, 55, 71, 73, 83, 245, 283, 293
Délio Jasse 182
Descartes, René 48, 54
development 72, 111
digitization 171, 173, 178, 179, 183, 186, 238
disciplines 56, 86, 94, 111, 150, 184, 253, 283
un-disciplining 14, 238

- documentation 99, 171, 173, 178, 185, 189, 195, 196, 266, 272
- epicoloniality 59
- epistemology 52, 87, 183, 209, 239, 240, 243, 252, 286
- epistemic communities 51, 209
- epistemic justice 209, 289
- epistemic oppression 49
- epistemic pluralism 49
- epistemologies of the Global South 70, 82, 86
- eurocentric epistemology 40, 48, 52, 85, 113
- ethics 82, 84, 299
- eugenics 54, 85
- Eyo, Evaristus Matthias and Precious Uwaezeoke Obioha 212
- Fanon, Frantz 50, 71, 82
- FeesMustFall 50, 285, 296
- feminism 51, 52, 83, 137, 145–147, 197
- Foucault, Michel 39, 53, 163, 166, 240, 245
- Frantz Fanon Foundation* 281, 284, 300
- Fricke, Miranda 212
- Galison, Peter 241
- gender 52, 110, 131, 135, 137, 159, 160, 164, 199, 209, 212, 213, 271
- Gender Studies 12, 148, 195, 197
- Ghana 93, 114, 123, 129, 143
- Ghana Notes and Queries (journal) 129
- Gould, Stephen Jay 239
- Haraway, Donna 1, 13, 239, 253
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm 72
- higher education 61, 100, 135, 144, 167
- historical societies 127
- Historical Society of Ghana* 122, 123
- historiography 132, 240
- Hopkins, Sam 180, 182
- human remains 237
- Hume, David 72, 73
- Icon Lab* 184
- imagination 60, 102, 148, 301
- indigeneity 57, 229
- injustice 46, 56, 87, 212
- racial injustice 49
- Institute of African Studies 93, 110
- institutions 101, 113, 136, 137, 141, 146, 149, 158, 173, 190
- institutional culture 138, 140, 144, 149, 158, 161, 165
- institutional transformation 16, 19
- interdisciplinarity 47, 58, 59, 94, 177
- intervention 11, 12, 19, 145, 159, 161, 173, 180, 209, 263
- Iwalewahaus* 171, 180
- Kant, Immanuel 15, 33, 87
- Kenya 143, 144, 208
- Klemperer, Victor 68
- knowledge(s) 48, 54, 67, 70, 74, 85, 177, 185, 197, 228, 254, 261, 274, 277, 278, 282, 302
- knowledge production 34, 42, 46, 52, 55, 59, 60, 84, 85, 87, 131, 135, 144, 145, 147, 150, 181, 183, 190, 195, 199, 207, 240, 242, 247, 281, 284, 285, 290, 293, 294
- knowledge systems 189, 196, 217, 223, 230, 289
- politics of knowledge 135, 239
- traditional knowledge 57
- language 36, 47, 60, 61, 67, 68, 73, 83, 98, 99, 164, 219
- Latour, Bruno 2, 6, 265
- Legon School of History* 123, 128, 131
- Link, Jürgen 242
- Mama, Amina 110, 112, 136, 140, 146, 149
- Mamdani, Mahmoud 136
- Mandelarization 290, 291
- marginalization 42, 51, 136, 137, 145, 149, 195, 197, 213, 296
- masculinity 140, 141, 148, 196, 208
- MashUp the Archive* 180, 184
- Maxwele, Chumani 295
- Mbari 176
- measuring 237, 242, 251, 254, 264, 275
- media 245, 250
- media theory 253
- technical media 241
- memory 85, 123, 171, 245
- remembering 85
- remembrance 130, 131
- Mersch, Dieter 246, 249
- methodologies 85, 209, 212, 239, 252, 253

- Mignolo, Walter 36, 70, 82, 240
 Miss Eve 182
 modernism(s) 184, 189
 More, Magobo Percy 291
 Mosima, Pius 201, 208, 211
 Mudimbe, Valentin-Yves 44, 71, 73, 243
 multiplicity 198
 museum 107, 108, 175–177, 185, 237
 Mutwa, Credo 289
- Namibia 263, 271, 273
 nature-culture 71, 75, 261
 Nigeria 86, 94, 171, 182, 198, 201, 209, 221
 Nita 182
 Nketia, Joseph Hanson Kwabena 93, 106, 135, 137
 Nkrumahism 130
 Nkrumah, Kwame 3, 17, 103, 112, 128, 130
 Nnaemeka, Obioma 147
- objectivity 239, 241, 243, 246, 252, 253, 263, 278
 Oluwole, Sophie 209, 212
 orientalism 70
 Oruka, Henry Odera 20, 195, 196, 201, 208
 othering 69, 74, 76, 82, 243
 ownership 183
 Oyewùmí, Oyèrónké 135, 195, 209, 293, 298
- Pan-Africanism 94, 102, 113, 286, 287, 292, 298, 302
 Papua New Guinea 171, 173
 partnership 173, 188
 patriarchy 178, 196, 207, 212
 cis-heteronormative patriarchy 51
 philosophy 36, 38, 70, 195, 197, 200, 212, 288
 sage philosophy 195, 211
 Porter, Theodore M. 241, 243
 positionality 39, 56, 199, 233, 239, 263, 272, 278
 power 51, 54, 55, 60, 67, 69, 81, 84, 96, 101, 135, 138, 150, 159, 161, 172, 190, 209, 217, 223, 227, 230, 240, 250, 254, 282, 283, 291, 292, 296
 colonial power 70, 73, 97, 167, 219, 220, 226, 227, 231, 232, 237, 245
 Presbey, Gail 195, 196, 208
 preservation 105, 131, 185, 296
 privileges 50, 51, 67, 71, 84, 87, 138, 150, 160, 161, 172, 173, 187, 189, 196, 208, 209
 race 59, 69, 70, 77, 78, 83, 131, 150, 159, 160, 164, 166, 237, 244, 250, 251, 297
 racialization 19, 46, 56, 73, 159, 162, 165, 243, 244, 262, 284
 racism 49, 59, 68, 72, 85, 87, 162, 238, 239, 243, 244, 286, 287, 290
 anti-black racism 49, 51, 85
 colour racism 54
 religious racism 54
 Radin, Paul 195
 reflexivity 177, 253
 relationality 198, 207, 240
 responsibility 47, 84, 103, 138, 172, 188, 224, 284
 restitution 237, 245, 254
 Revolution 3.0 184
 RhodesMustFall 49, 50, 160, 285, 295
 Rittmeier, Simon 182
- sagacity 195, 196, 200, 201, 209, 211
 female sages 195, 198, 201, 209, 212
 feminine wisdom 195, 212
 Sankofa 85, 129
 Santos, Boaventura de Sousa 11, 36, 138
 Science and Technology Studies (STS) 6, 253
 silencing 50, 67, 70, 84, 85, 86
 single story 1
 Siyaphambili Youth Pioneers (SYP) 290
 Sobukwe, Robert 288, 294
 South Africa 55, 158, 159, 163, 167, 273, 285, 286, 294, 297
 Spivak, Gayatri 32, 42, 146, 238
 Stainbank, Mike 287, 288
 Star, Susan Leigh 251, 252, 265
 statistics 237, 241–243, 250, 251
 Strathern, Marylin 265, 266
 subjectivity 42, 241, 264, 271, 277
- Takougang, Joseph 223, 224, 230
 Tamale, Sylvia 10, 112, 131, 147, 150
 Tiro, Ongkopotse 287
 transdisciplinarity 47, 58, 301
 Twins Seven Seven 187, 188

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 239
- University 93, 137, 139, 141, 159, 163, 167, 176, 287, 292, 296, 298, 302
- African University 128, 136, 142, 144, 148, 285, 291
- Decolonial University 285
- Western University 46, 282
- Usman, Asabe Kabir 209
- violence 79, 162, 166, 237, 273, 287
- epistemic violence 70, 84, 210, 238–240, 244, 245, 252–254
- gender-based violence 140, 147, 297
- visualization 242, 244, 247, 249, 251, 272
- Von Hagen, Gunther 217
- Wenger, Susanne 175
- whiteness 50, 59, 70, 76, 85, 163, 183
- Wiredu, Kwasi 36, 37
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 36, 37
- Włodarczyk, Matylda 217, 219
- Wolf, Hans-Georg 220
- Žižek, Slavoj 162

This book emerges at a time when critical race studies, postcolonial thought, and decolonial theory are under enormous pressure as part of a global conservative backlash. However, this is also an exciting moment, where new horizons of knowledge appear and new epistemic practices (e.g. symmetry, collaboration, undisciplining) gain traction. Through our critical engagements with structural, relational, and personal aspects of knowing and unknowing we work towards a greater multiplicity of knowledges and practices. Calling into question the asymmetrical global economy of knowledge and its uneven division of intellectual labour, our interdisciplinary volume explores what a decolonial horizon could entail for African Studies at the crossroads.

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9

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