Ethics, the University, and Society: Toward a Decolonial Approach to Research Ethics

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ARTICLE

Ethics, the University, and Society

Toward a Decolonial Approach to Research Ethics

Natalie Tegama and Alison Fox

Abstract

Research ethics should sit at the very core of knowledge production in universities and other research institutions. It is the critical facet that foreshadows decisions as to whether research proposals have ethical merits, how researchers engage with and apply ethical principles to their work, and in shaping the output. As a result of its role in knowledge production, the university, as an institution, has since the 19th century played a key role as a site of scientific and social innovation. Governments and other institutions routinely cite university publications as policy justification. This article charts the current and potential role of ethical review committees in Global North universities in supporting ethical research relevant to Global South contexts. This calls for attention to be paid to how research ethics is defined and whose work is included in its definition. This article examines societal inequity resulting from histories of colonial thinking in the Global North and how this has affected its universities, for example, in terms of whose voices are heard and whose values are valued. It looks toward how decolonial approaches can be taken to recalibrate research ethics for epistemic justice. It particularly draws on examples of research in African contexts, drawing on the first author's particular experience and perspectives, and draws from the second author's commitment to contributing to practical responses by ethical committees and those producing ethical guidance in the Global North.

Introduction

Research ethics committees (RECs) or institutional review boards (IRBs) have long been established in research-active higher education institutions in countries that can be (arguably) categorized as in the Global North (Dados & Connell, 2012). In Global South contexts ethical review of research projects has been built into national and regional processes of

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granting permission for research to take place. Governance structures emerged as a response to unethical practice that violated the rights of vulnerable groups within the biomedical sciences (Nortje et al., 2019) and continue to evolve as part of the governing structure of contemporary research ethics. The establishment of these governance structures moved ethical guidance from a system of self-governance where the responsibility of ethical practice rested solely on the researcher based on their judgement, toward regulations that now apply to most research projects, including nonmedical research, and hold researchers accountable.

In the Global North, the research ethics model in the social sciences is based on this biomedical model and has been subject to an ongoing debate of suitability. Social scientists such as Dingwall et al. (2017) and Dube et al. (2013) have been critical of the current model of governance. In this article, we as authors set our line of argument within the ongoing debate on suitability, extending it to decoloniality. The first author brings their perspective as a researcher of Zimbabwean heritage funded by and situated in a University in England carrying out research in Ghana and Kenya. The second author is of European heritage working as part of an REC and as a research supervisor in universities in England. As part of calls to action in the Global North, such as advocated publicly in Canada (Johnson, 2016) and Australia (Wright, 2020), this article responds to a need to highlight responses to the framing of research ethics as dominated by "Western world views and the inherent knowledge, methods, morals and beliefs" (Dube et al., 2013, p. 13). Following that line of thinking, we argue that the RECs and IRBs in Global North contexts have a role in research projects from their onset, meaning that research ethics sits at very core of knowledge production in universities and other research institutions. The evaluation of research projects is in this way a critical facet that in part determines how researchers engage with, reflect on, and apply ethical principles to their work, and shape research outputs. It is therefore pertinent that attention is paid to the dominance of Western worldviews in the framing of ethical practice with reference to RECs and IRBs in the Global North. This intersects with the subsequent impact of colonialism and internationalization of research ethics that governs research on populations in non-Western societies with different philosophies and knowledge systems.

In order to achieve epistemic justice, attention is needed not only to whose knowledge is heard and counted, but also to recognizing and respecting the values guiding what is considered virtuous behavior in societies other than our own (Fricker, 2003). Given the association between virtues and researcher behaviors and the structural silencing of other value systems, this gives rise to dangers of inequality being rife in ethical appraisals and in the conduct of research studies (Fox & Busher, 2022), including in research outputs. Universities, and the researchers operating within their walls, need to be conscious of and apply what Fricker refers to as *testimonial sensibility* (Fricker, 2003, p. 154), "a variety of intellectual skills and virtues that govern how much credibility the responsible hearer will attribute to different sorts of speakers in different sorts of circumstances" governed by the virtue of *reflexive critical openness*, which protects against prejudice. If there is structural and socialized silencing of voices in Global North societies and their universities, this needs to be more than hearing those who we come across responsibly to include actively seeking out the values underpinning

the lives of the others with whom we interact in research settings.

Framing Ethical Practice

Behind the process of how ethical practice is determined in research ethics reviews and the criteria against which ethicality is measured for ethical approval are the critical questions. Nortje and colleagues (2019) frame these questions to include questions such as: Whose ethics is included in defining ethical practice? How are ethical appraisal and approval applied? Does the ethical approval process accord room to revisit and refine understandings of ethical practice, based on emergent and established scholarly work that is contextually relevant? There is work by many scholars from the Global South that concerns itself with decolonial approaches in academic fields that affect ethical consideration of research; ethical frames, epistemology, ontology, methodology, research goals, and conflicts in moral and political obligations. However, this is often not included in questioning ethicality within RECs and IRBs for ethical review of applications that concern research with populations from the global South. This is not limited to RECs and IRBs, as elsewhere in the university, the work of the same Global South scholars can often be elusive in institutional libraries. While work by Global North scholars, such as Seehawer (2018), advocating for a research ethic that is congruent with ubuntu philosophy in Africa, can be found, it is harder to find African scholars like Chilisa (2020). In Global North curricula, texts authored by scholars such as Chilisa (2020), Eze (1997), Hountondji (1996), Wiredu (1980), Ndlovu-Gathsheni (2018), and, more broadly, the global majority are in the minority on the curricula and on education's pulpits in lecture halls in a Global North location such as England, where the authors of this article are based and work within a university. The argument also stands in the Global South, similarly afflicted by domination and silencing within its bookshelves. This is evidenced by the mushrooming of student-led movements that have transcended borders and the provincialization of the Global North and South, such as #Decolonisetheuniversity and #RhodesMustFall. There has also been an increased visibility of scholars who seek to decenter Eurocentricism in various ways. For example, Filkschuh (2015) advocates for the philosophy curriculum at the London School of Economics to include prominent African thinkers such as Wiredu and Hountondji . Elsewhere, Black/Africana studies have been growing since the 1960s, for example, in the Global North starting in San Francisco State Experimental College and spreading across the United Staes, to include the establishment of the National Council for Black Studies and the *International Journal of Africana Studies* in 1975, published biannually with Alabama State University (Rogers, 2012; Rojas, 2010; Stewart, 2015); such programs have been further fueled toward prominence. Scholars (e.g., Dei, 2010; Le Grange, 2016; Mugwini, 2019; Ndlovu-Gathsheni, 2018) are contributing by decentering the Western model of academic organization and contributing to pluriversality (Mignolo, 2018), which respects other ways of knowing and seeks epistemic justice (Leblanc & Kinsella, 2016). The first author has found there is a high price tag often attached to these works that are published in small numbers and is aware that this can place these works out of economic reach for many. In this way, thinking originating from the Global South is being kept on the periphery of the discipline. This is even in a field such as research ethics that is concerned with the question of morality and how it should be applied to knowledge generation, and in disciplines

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such as philosophy that constitute the basis for research ethics where Western philosophy is often centralized, excluding indigenous thinking such as African philosophy. Effectively asserting that the West has settled any debate and opting for a Eurocentric philosophy that exists only in the singular, rather than the plural. Scholars such as Gordon (2019) are troubling the notion of the singularity in philosophy by adopting a lens to deconstruct the ways in which this singular cultural group, the Europeans, "self-avowed [as] the sole progenitor of philosophical practice," imposes philosophical colonization (Gordon, 2019, p. 17).

Of Student Movements and Media

Movements such as the "Decolonise Our Minds" campaign at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London evidence nodes of resistance to philosophical colonization (SOAS, 2018). The campaign emerged from the student body's resistance to the dominance of European thought on the curriculum and marked a call for diversity to include non-European philosophers, including recognizing those who had influence on the European thinkers who featured on the curriculum (Malik, 2017). The campaign was met with defiance from society, beyond the lecture halls and university corridors, extending to television and media publications in the United Kingdom. For example, the *Mail on Sunday* article for which the garish headline read "They Kant be serious! PC students demand white philosophers including Plato and Descartes be dropped from university syllabus" (Petre, 2017, n.p.) branded students as politically correct (PC), in a tone that was imbued with subtext that would avow itself in the body of the article, wrongly describing the field of philosophy as "inconceivable" without white European thinkers (Malik, 2017; Petre, 2017). This demonstrates an interplay between the university and society, showing how it is framed within the context of cultural hegemony. The dominance of European thinkers on the curriculum extends to the universities across Africa, despite rich philosophies and "evolved ethical systems" (Ogunyemi, 2020, p. 2) abounding in oral literature, in proverbs and folklore, and in taboos and customs that are often slighted in favor of Western philosophy. The trouble is, "the world can only ever be as equal as the knowledge it is built upon" (Andrews, 2017, n.p.). The university is not only a site of knowledge production but it also plays a role in social and scientific innovation and hence in shaping our societies. The standpoint adopted by Petre's *Mail on Sunday* article has its origins in the university but with students (specifically vocalized by the student union) challenging the manner in which the University of London is framing the field of philosophy. Yet the lack of response from the university purports a worrying resistance to change. Dr. Erica Hunter, the head of SOAS's Religions and Philosophies department at the time, said the union's viewpoint was "rather ridiculous" (Petre, 2017). This implies that when indigenous knowledge is presented that does not neatly fit into the confines of Eurocentric schema, it will be rebuked.

Our aim in this article is to trouble the normalization of disenfranchizing more than half the world by unjustly ignoring the values that underpin knowledge production within the context of the modern university. We pay particular attention to research ethics governance that concerns knowledge production about Africa and Africans, in Africa and the diaspora. This requires attention to be accorded to both the African context and the Western university, with specific reference to higher education in the United Kingdom. We put forward the case

for decolonizing ethics using a paradigmatic view of ethics, the university, and its role in society and the interplay that exists among the three. This recognizes the need for a differential decolonization in African and Western institutions, given the different positionalities and responsibilities of the previously colonized and the colonizers. We expand on both concepts in subsequent sections and do so against the backdrop of the social movements that have concerned themselves with race and decolonization over the last few years.

On Society

The death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 laid bare the mechanics of a racially unjust system in the United States and the worst of the brutality that is bound to the North American Black experience. It was met with a global outcry from Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean, to Africa and rest of the world, where racism abounds in its banality, in pop culture and polite society. In spaces such as the United Kingdom and France, state-sanctioned and multilaterally sanctioned racism manifests in racial profiling in public spaces: on buses, in airports, and in underground stations, as in the case of Jean Charles de Menezes. Menezes was mistaken for a terrorist, shot dead in London, and valorized as a solider in the global context of the "war on terror" (Vaughan-Williams, 2007). Intolerance of other value systems is evidenced in the unveiling of Muslim girls and women in streets and schools, for example, in France (Killian, 2003). It is seen in extravagant deportation measures that intend to send to Rwanda asylum seekers from cultures other than our own who dock on British shores (Nair, 2022). It is evidenced in the erection of wires with the potential to electrocute and walls to keep out "hordes of migrants in whose faces our doors must be slammed shut" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 61). In these spaces where racism is mobilized within and sanctioned by the state, Mbembe (2019) argues that this desensitizes the public to the abhorrent nature of racism and creates differential politics where even racist policies and practices can be normalized, such that the death of George Floyd was in some corners of the world met with the demand to unmask *some* and in others *all* of the structural injustices experienced by Black people across the globe, depending on one's vantage point. In South Africa, opposition leader Julius Malema called for the latter (Africa Web TV, 2020). In the United Kingdom, the government engaged in the politicking of poorly framed rhetoric, as equalities minister Badenoch would skew questions of structural injustice, dismissing historically and economically valid questions of white privilege in the buildup to denouncing critical race theory in Parliament (UK Government, 2020; Shand-Baptiste, 2020). George Floyd's death and the events that ensued in the aftermath served as a reminder that the world moves both rapidly and slowly in the direction of progress. It moves rapidly, in the direction of modernity's dream that is built on a racialized capitalism (Mishra, 2017). This is with technological advances, expanding our capacity to communicate, our access to news and social media feeds, and, by extension, our capacity to be collectively outraged, to sympathize, and to build movements online that can readily bleed into our worlds offline and spill onto the streets. It moves slowly, in our collective dissonance that would have us building online movements to support Black lives using technologies that are often powered by the Congo's cobalt mining industry without questioning who marches for them, and for those who exist at the raw end of a supply chain that is inundated with reports of Black children working as laborers

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(Pattison, 2021). These come in tandem with studies of the region that report a lack of protective personal equipment alongside the highest metal concentrations in pregnant women and fetal abnormalities associated with "paternal occupational mining exposure" (Brusselen et al., 2020, p. 158). The ironies that speak to the speed of progress, or lack thereof, in the direction of racial equity on a global scale are not lost. Instead, they speak to the indifference to decentering the pervasiveness of Eurocentric thought across all of society and by extension the way it materializes in our world and subjugates the Black body. The indifference to relinquishing a vintage brand of apathy in the name of normal, abetted by a hare-brained sense of progress, remains visible even in the academy: in the approval of research projects that center the West at the cost of the rest, made visible in outputs that weaponize language to frame the West as the center and Black communities as the other; in many instances attaching negative connotations to the Black body even when this is not warranted; and exemplified by publications such as Bom et al. (2013), titled "The Role of Surinamese Migrants in the Transmission of Chlamydia trachomatis between Paramaribo, Suriname and Amsterdam, The Netherlands," where the title implies that Surinamese migrants have a role in the transmission of disease, yet the findings showed otherwise. However, the framing of the title implicitly places blame in transmission, and even where it is not found, neither research ethics boards nor editors nor publishers problematize the title. We believe it is in these nuanced framings that the faultline lies and makes visible underpinning value systems that go on to shape our societies.

The Question of Epistemic Violence

The summer of 2020 inspired the same brand of urgency and impatience with which an exasperated Baldwin, then in his 60s, asked, "How much time do you want for your progress?" (Thorsen, 1989, n.p.). The slow pace of progress in racial equity on a global scale makes for an uncomfortable reckoning. In the face of the horrors of Western crimes against humanity, including but not limited to the slave trade, colonialism, fascism, and the Holocaust, Western nations continue to mobilize racism in national and international policy (Mbembe, 2019) and in ill-judged curricula that whitewash global histories and negate histories of the systematic dismemberment of indigenous knowledge that, for example, targeted knowers in African societies, attacking, capturing, and decapitating kings who sat as heads of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The violence resulting in this intellectual silencing was not academic or abstract but visceral. So widely spread was the practice of collecting skulls that after the battle of Kambula during the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879, having lost, the survivors visited a Dutch trader Cornelius Vijin at his homestead to ask, "Why did the Whites cut off the heads of those who had fallen, and put them in their wagons? What did they do with these heads?" (Vijin, 1988 [1880], 3, p. 38, cited in Harrison, 2008, p. 297). The decapitated heads were transported to the homes of lieutenants and generals to sit on mantelpieces, to European museums to be exhibited or to be "studied," with some of them yet to be returned (Harrison, 2008; Ndlovu-Gathsheni, 2018). The silencing and injustice continue, in the teaching of these histories and the relegation of works of Global south scholars to the peripheries of disciplines, whether in universities in the Global North or South. This is why we

support the indictment of universities as having an untenable position in propping up coloniality and creating a color line in what counts as knowledge (Bell et al., 2020).

Du Bois was prescient in his 1900 speech "to the nations" on the problem of the 20th century that has cascaded into the 21st century to mark the modern university's faultline. He described this as that "of the color line"—the question as to "how far differences of race—which show themselves chiefly in the colour of the skin and the texture of the hair—will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization" (Du Bois, 1900). Du Bois understood that at the nexus of an exploitative global system were schisms, invisible lines, drawn and redrawn to espouse a racialized capitalism dependent on the violence of slavery, imperialism, and genocide (Robinson, 2000). The modern university today dissociates itself from these schisms and invisible lines, effectively distancing itself from important questions of theft and variations of violence including slavery, genocide, and epistimicides that are the historical underbelly on which the current unequal global order and societal inequity are based. This is the same underbelly that is the root of the continent of Africa experiencing the most "negative effects of free-market capitalism" (Mama, 2007, p. 3) and "globalisation's deepest discontents" (Mama, 2007, p. 3). The problem here is twofold: The university's role in shaping society is visible in mass culture, media publications, televized documentaries, and crucially, governments, where the university is routinely referenced as policy justification. All the while, the continual charge of Western epistemology at the helm of the ship reproduces more of the same in terms of inequality, and this gives rise to the question of the color line as the university's faultline. Despite having RECs and IRBs, designed to appraise and approve ethical research carried out under their auspices, universities in the Global North continue to harbor revisionists and apologists of the colonial enterprise, prolonging the negative consequences for the Global South. Returning to the questions inspired by Nortje et al (2019) presented earlier, these RECs and IRBs should be part of the decolonial turn (Maldonado-Torres & Cavooris, 2017), where researchers disengage from the practice of presupposing value systems of Global South research settings and from imposing Eurocentric ethical frameworks in the Global South.

The Faultline

Lines drawn can be made visible in the regulation of research practices. Within research ethics, such regulation is masterfully contrived and fashioned in language that appears to be progressive but is flawed by the West assuming itself to be the center of the universe (Thiong'o, 1993). Rhetoric that claims to be progressively leading the human pack toward emancipation and rectifying injustices is, in actuality, subsumed in modernity's promises of "better still" (Mishra, 2017). While the policies and practices reinvent themselves through changes to language and regulation, it is argued that all they achieve is to draw and redraw the color line. Ethical approval processes sound like they should be progressive, yet there is an underlying sentiment that allows us to track how they too are affected by the lines drawn over in recent history. This can be illustrated with reference to their evolution. The primitive—line drawn. The barbarian—line drawn. The colonized—line drawn. The Third World—line drawn. The developing world—line drawn. Or perhaps even in the inclusive language of the Global South, or global majority that we, along with many

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other scholars, have adopted, simply put, it reads: The others—line drawn.

The challenge for RECs and IRBs arises in ensuring that researchers are engaged in ethical practice that on a continuum moves away from coloniality and toward decoloniality. The question of where on the continuum proposed research projects lie and the direction in which they move on a coloniality/decoloniality continuum is not merely a measure of the researcher's use of progressive language but should extend to the engagement with ethics and knowledge systems of the sites of research in question.

Toward Institutional Change

If the moment of racial reckoning that began in the summer of 2020 is to materialize beyond rhetoric across universities, then there is need for the university to undergo a period of deep institutional change, whether in the Global South or North. The history of the university and its relationship with change is parallaxic—appearing different based one's vantage point. Taking on a narrow view at any point throughout its history, the university as an institution in society appears heavily rigid and unyielding to change. This can serve as a convenient excuse against moving toward a decolonized model in the name of tradition clothed as rigor and colonial unreason clothed as preserving history (e.g., Kelly & Kaplan, 2001). Yet a shift in perspective, to adopt a paradigmatic view of the university-as-institution's history, importantly, tells a story of reform and transformation: from the oldest institutions such as the University of Timbuktu, founded in 982 CE, in Mali, West Africa, to its metamorphized modern-day Western-centric model (De Sousa Santos, 2019). There are very few similarities between the university today and its older forms, yet despite a change in function it has stood the test of time. It cemented its role as a site for scientific and social innovation after the French revolution by adopting the revolution's ideals of liberté, égalité, and fraternité. However, this was set against the backdrop of a division that divorced the West from the rest, normalizing the acceptance of dividing lines while also making them invisible to scrutiny. Therefore, though innovations were formulated in universal terms, the benefactor was by and large the West. This dynamic is visible in the history of ethical violations and still materializes in, for example, research that is conducted in the Global South to primarily benefit the Global North, extending beyond the university (Nortje et al., 2019; Chaun & Schaefer 2015).

The university's role as a social and scientific innovator since the mid 19th century, with its role in shaping society, gives rise to the question of ethicality and research integrity that sits at the core of a higher education institution. By extension, there is the relationship between research, pedagogy, and coloniality to critically review (Bhambra et al., 2018). As many states gained independence and the colonial project was seemingly drawing to a close across the colonies, Nizan (1971) asked philosophers to self-scrutinize and state their stance on "the things that occupy the minds of the planet's inhabitants" (Nizan, 1971, p. 38). This included "war, colonialism, the speed-up in industry . . . the varieties of death, unemployment [and] politics" (Nizan, 1971, p. 38). If the university has placed itself at the center of society, as the self-appointed producer of knowledge, and in doing so has created and maintained epistemological hegemony, now is the time for it to take a stand.

Differential Decolonization

However, to take a stance on the problems of the 21st century and their synonymity

with enduring colonial structures requires an active move away from the colonial matrix of power. De Sousa Santos (2019, p. xiii) argues that "if we continue to formulate our problems in the modern Western way, we are bound to conclude that we face modern problems for which there are no modern solutions." The panacea is in the decolonizing of research's foundational block: research ethics. We suggest that this may necessarily look different across institutions because while the university is analogous in its provision of higher learning across the globe, its facilitation of teaching and research is underpinned by different research ethics governance depending on its national setting—with significant differences between the Global South and the Global North. We suggest that research ethics and more broadly the teaching of disciplines that are intricately linked to ethics need to reflect different heritages and experiences as well as represent histories, and, as we have argued in this article, of recipients of violence and/or as violators. It is expected that the content and outcomes of universities offering African studies, for example, which now span Global South as well as North contexts (see African Studies Programs, Research Centers, & Universities, Columbia University Libraries), will need to differ, depending on the heritages not only of their student populations but also of their host university. The actuality of how that materializes will need to be varied to be situated. Thus there is a need to overcome generalizations and assumptions in the questions we ask, the assertions we make, and our prescriptions for change, depending on our vantage point. This is evidenced by the variation in the eventual outputs of the movements that have called for change and have questioned the role of the university in coloniality and the reproduction of Eurocentric thought through the mobilization of movements such as the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, directed against ties to staunch imperialist Cecil Rhodes and more broadly for the fall of white supremacy. This movement extended to Oxford University, where Rhodes did not fall. It is from the variations in the impact of varying movements that we suggest differential decolonization. In this way we borrow Mazrui's (2003) analysis of the colonial challenge in the African university, where he deemed the university in its origins an "uncompromisingly foreign [entity that] was transplanted with few concessions to African cultures" (Mazrui, 2003, p. 142), dichotomizing the African experience to that of, for example, Japan and the scientific selection that was emblematic of Japan's development that centered on "Western technique, Japanese spirit" (Mazrui, 2003, p. 143). This was designed to safeguard against the dangers of cultural dependency and by extension other forms of dependency, and that safeguarding has, for example, made possible the discussion of the sciences (e.g., physics) in Japanese where at present it is a "socio-linguistic impossibility in Africa" (Mazrui, 2003, p. 143). The challenge for Africa has in part been the generations of African graduates who in being trained in subjects such as philosophy that speak to how we should shape research ethics were trained to imitate the West, such that as teachers in the university, some have remained "intellectual imitators" (Mazrui, 2003, p. 143). Elsewhere, African researchers including historians and philosophers have made significant methodological and philosophical strides, grappling with oral traditions and the collective folk thinking (Mazrui, 2003, p. 143). Philosophers such as Wiredu (1980) have used Western techniques to dispute universality of philosophical conceptions such as truth,

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proving the Western conception to be fallible in the tradition of the Akan people of Ghana. Thus, the experience of the African researcher and decolonial praxis has not been a monolith across scholars or the institutions that house them. We anticipate that engaging with decolonization will continue to necessarily vary and will require different approaches across institutions. As such, in exploring decolonial approaches to research ethics, we acknowledge that there are many universities across the globe that have engaged in the adoption of decolonial approaches to research ethics (De Sousa Santos, 2019), with many opening their doors to vibrant decolonial intellectual communities that are engaged in rich discourse where hegemonic approaches and paradigms across disciplines are being taken to task (Mama, 2007). This community building should not be seen as synonymous with creating room for epistemic freedom—“the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrcism” (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2018, p. 3). The adoption of decolonial approaches is both in the minority and emergent, in Africa and further afield.

The move toward a decolonial approach to research ethics necessitates the adoption of a paradigmatic view across different aspects of the university, including the curriculum. This is in keeping with Mazrui (2003), who argues for major strategies for framing modernity in relation to the African university and broader African society, proposing three strategies across the university framed in relation to the West. We focus on one, pertaining to the domestication of African education. In this way we centralize the relationship between the university and society framed within the argument we have made for research ethics as a central component in knowledge production and produce strategies for mapping coloniality and charting a way toward decoloniality. For ease, we conceptualize these as three spectrums existing on three nonhierarchical levels where the center of each spectrum situates the now and to the sides are the past and the future, respectively.

One level concerns the university and its relationship with coloniality: the university’s present and historical contributions to colonization and coloniality and the inverse, how that relationship may evolve in the future.

A second level concerns itself with questions specific to research ethics against its historical background and looks toward a pluriversal future. The pluriverse refers to a shift from Western-propagated universalism toward a world where many worlds fit (Schöneberg, 2020). This is in line with the idea of the freedom to think and theorize unencumbered by Eurocentric thought (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

A third level looks at the role of context in research ethics, situating the debate on cultural sensitivity and elucidating on what is required within research ethics to move toward normative frameworks for culturally appropriate research ethics.

The compartmentalization of these levels is not to be taken as indicator of a lack of interaction across spectrums because they maintain synergy both in theory and praxis. Posing the questions that are contained within these three levels to institutions in Africa versus, for example, Europe would yield a myriad of answers, hence the notion of differential decolonization. The decolonial work that must be done in African institutions and Western institutions is different. Research ethics governance in African institutions has been heavily influenced by Africa’s colonial history, with the West playing a significant role in the development of ethical standards. Ethical

norms and requirements follow international guidelines; for example, the first author's PhD research was subject to the several ethics boards including one in England, at the home institution. Notably, the requirements of RECs in African countries such as Kenya were similar to those in the United Kingdom. Where researchers were required to undertake ethics courses such as Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE) and obtain certification prior to being granted approval the content of courses referenced failures and abuses in research in the Global South, however, there were no reference to context specific ethical codes (TRREE, 2021). TRREE is led by a consortium of parties from both the Global North and South. It exists with the aim to provide basic training and build capacity of research ethics and provides an example of how research ethics have evolved in Africa, in the way they are often developed to comply with requirements of funding partners. Thus, historically there has been little input from Africans. Therefore, despite having ethics boards in Africa and studies being vetted, clearance is still granted to socioculturally inappropriate studies that fail to address the needs of communities and, more broadly, national priorities (Kruger et al., 2014; Nortje et al., 2019). There has, however, been development in the field of ethical regulation beyond the university, where indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, and Southern Africa have contributed to ethical codes. We argue these to be examples differential decolonization, because they are steeped in contextually relevant ethics of the people who belong in those spaces. These are examples from which the university can learn; we expand on these developments in ethical regulation in the next section (Fox & Busher, 2022).

The Road to Transformation

Transformative approaches to decolonization place the impetus to lead on African institutions where African ethics is concerned. The need therefore in African institutions is to prioritize the creation of greater freedom for scholars to think unencumbered by Eurocentric thought and for that to extend to the pedagogy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). There is a need to empower scholars to trouble exclusionary lines that have been erected within African institutions. Du Bois (1900), De Sousa Santos (2019), and Ndlovu-Gathsheni (2018) use the idea of invisible lines drawn as points of distinction that have historically excluded and, among other violations, continue to exclude the global majority from being recognized as producers of knowledge. To trouble that notion in terms of ethics is to prioritize and nurture African ways of knowing in African institutions, that is, epistemologically, ontologically, and methodologically, the by-product of which is the transformation of research ethics. It is to invest in the development of ethical frameworks that embody the humanistic morality, normative social rules, and principles that guide an African way of life (Nortje et al., 2019), including oral traditions, collective folk thinking that is reflective of an inherited philosophy or the unwritten, original contribution to knowledge of the sages of tribes without seeking epistemological justification based on Western tradition (Murove, 2013). Ethical regulation need not reside solely with universities. Indigenous populations in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have been included in drawing up ethical codes and guidance (Fox & Busher, 2022). More radically, in terms of claiming rights to self-determination, the San people in Southern Africa took on the mantle of ethical regulation entirely themselves

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by setting their own code and approval process for studies seeking to involve their people. This code, although aligned with and available through the Horizon2020 funded Global Code of Conduct (2022) involving many funders, institutions, and industrial partners, has itself eschewed the university, to center the San people in the establishment of their own South African San Institute (2017).

Within research ethics in the West, a proactive decolonial approach is needed to avoid exploitative research practices by researchers from the Global North in the Global South. This needs to counter the current norm that research ethics governance by design is Eurocentric and broadly reactionary; "it is a retrospective response to unethical practices" (Schoeman, in Nortje et al., 2019, p. 1). The requirements of RECs and IRBs across universities and research institutions currently should serve not as an end but as a step toward ethical, decolonial practice among researchers. The call to decolonization is a call to decentering Western thought (Wa Thing'o, 1993), to change the order of the world. Global North RECs and IRBs need no longer to see themselves as experts in what should count as ethics in Global South contexts but instead should establish processes of dialogue with those who are embedded in any of the settings for research represented in applicants for approval (Fox & Busher, 2022). Those in the settings are seen as the experts in their own lives, and an ethical way forward would be to recognize this and turn the processes on their heads. Rather than starting with ethical review, the starting point would be discussions in the setting of what and how research might best be conducted and ethically appraised. This could then be taken to the REC or IRB to inform, enlighten, and guide any decisions made as a response from the Global North institution. This could be seen more as an invitation to research once trust is built, to be earned by RECs displaying Fricker's (2003) testimonial sensibility and critical reflexive openness. Fanon (2001) asserts that it is quintessentially a call to a program of disorder. On a macro level, this therefore calls for universities and research institutions concerned with research ethics to create room for greater epistemological plurality, and yet to do so there is a need to embrace disorder—other ways of knowing—and to disqualify the idea of Westerners as final arbiters of philosophical discourse, and then to negotiate the way to a new order.

Regardless of whether researchers are situated in the Global North or South, on a micro level, a decolonial approach necessitates that universities require proactivity in the adoption of deeper levels of self-scrutiny among researchers through an intersectional lens that places the researcher and the researcher's work within the frames of historical and present-day contexts, enabling the researcher to contend with the complexities of the aftermath of a "colonial turn which produced global coloniality and affiliated itself with racism, imperialism, capitalism and modernity to create an unholy alliance" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 71) that reconfigured conceptions of power and knowledge. Thus, the researcher can consider the direct impact of the colonial turn on the self as the researcher, the study, the sites, participants, and the evolution of the discipline, and reflect on one's agency to make micro societal changes. The job of the researcher is therefore to understand the philosophies that are held by potential participants, to understand the reality that has shaped their philosophies and hold them in as much regard as those personal to the researcher, and yet to allow them a higher regard still when conducting research as a guest in another society (Dei, 2010).

That is the beginning of an earnest pursuit of decoloniality.

Conclusion

While there are movements in the Global North and South calling for decolonization and actively trying to disrupt and challenge universities, there is a need to expand calls to change, which mainly focus on the curriculum of the university, to challenge the very process of knowledge generation, and to include decolonization of the ethical frames used to evaluate which studies are carried out (or not). This first requires challenging the biomedical origins for ethical regulation of social science research that drive research evaluation in the Global North and South, though considered unsuitable and problematic in both contexts. Decolonial research ethical frames can be used to ensure that the values of societies other than those in the Global North are recognized, respected, and drawn on to guide the knowledge generated. This will involve RECs and IRBs actively engaging with pluriversality, throwing off their view as experts in research ethics suitable for all settings, and opening themselves to challenging their Global North assumptions and givens via "responsible hearing" through "testimonial sensibility" (Fricker, 2003) to voices other than their own. This humbling should invite experts in their own settings' heritage and valued ways of being to educate the committees and boards in how research might be most appropriately carried out—or even whether it should be carried out (Mama, 2007). Decolonized research ethics should affect the shaping, the conduct, and the dissemination of knowledge generation such that knowledge from around the world can drive Global South–North and Global South–South dialogue, countering what has become the accepted, but indefensible, domination of Global North–South flow of knowledge and values. In the Global North, societies will be challenged to change and innovate, as has always been the role of the university, by hearing philosophy from the Global South, to include the oral traditions of the South and the the values that underpin societies that hitherto have been silenced and marginalized. In this recognition of differential decolonization, Africa must continue to lead in dismantling coloniality and its structures in our institutions, as well as driving the much-needed change in universities in the North. We (that is, Africans) paved the way for Rhodes falling, for erecting new statues, and we must lead the way in decolonizing research ethics. Rhodes (that is, coloniality) will eventually fall elsewhere.

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