

# African Decolonial Theory: A Conversation

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## Stefan Ouma

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**Abstract:** *Antipode* has become a key platform for engaging with decolonial and anticolonial scholarship, as well as adjacent fields such as Black geographies, Indigenous studies, Latin American feminism, and work on settler-colonialism. African reference points in this literature, however, have been far less common, both in the journal and more broadly in radical geography. Recognizing that there are several loci of enunciation for decolonial and anticolonial work, we committed to curating a series of conversations with and interventions by leading scholars from Africa and its diaspora associated with these epistemic and political projects. This long-read article, a first for the journal, brings these conversations and interventions together, highlighting the power of each as well as the common threads that connect them.

**Kiswahili Abstract:** Antipode imekuwa jukwa muhimu la mijadala “decolonial” na “anticolonial”, na masomo za karibu kama jiografia za weusi, Indigenous studies, ufeministi wa America Kusini na “settler colonialism”. Hata hivyo, kwa masomo ya jiografia kwa jumla, hata ndani ya jukwa letu Antipode, maarifa “decolonial” kutoka Africa haijatangulika vile inafaa. Tunatambua kwamba kuna maoni na misimamo tofauti kuhusu swala la ukoloni kwa bara la Africa, na tumejitolea kuzindua mfululizo wa mazungumzo na makala kutoka wasomi wakuu kutoka Afrika na ughaibuni wake wenye wamejihusisha na mradi huu. Kwa mara ya kwanza, makala huu katika jukwa letu inaleta pamoja haya mazungumzo na makala, ikinyesha nguvu za kila moja na ikionyesha maarifa yenye inawaunganisha.

**Keywords:** decoloniality, Africa, commons, decolonial Marxism, Afro-feminism, defiant scholarship

**Kiswahili Keywords:** kupinga ukoloni/“decoloniality”, Afrika, Umaksi “decolonial”, Ufeministi wa Kiafrica, masomo za upinzani

## Introduction

*Antipode* has become a key platform for engaging with decolonial and anticolonial scholarship, as well as scholarship that breathes that spirit, such as Black geographies, Indigenous studies, Latin American feminism, and work on settler-colonialism. African reference points in this literature, however, have been far less common, both in the journal and in the broader field of radical geography. Recognizing that there are several loci of enunciation for decolonial and anticolonial work, we committed to curating a series of conversations and interventions on our website, AntipodeOnline.org, with scholars from Africa associated with these epistemic and political projects. This series proved to be a tremendous success, with wide circulation online, proving the need for more African reference points in radical geography. We therefore decided to combine the five independent interventions from our website into a single long-read article to be published here in the journal itself. This is a first for the journal, but we are convinced that this is the best way to highlight the power of each of these interventions, as well as the common threads that connect them.

The scholars we selected—Franklin Obeng-Odoom, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sylvia Tamale, Patricia Daley, and Wangui Kimari (who in the meantime has

joined the *Antipode* Editorial Collective from Nairobi, Kenya)—are radical writers and activists whose work should be engaged in greater depth by radical geographers. By compiling this collective introduction to their work here, we hope to foster new intellectual alliances and to address self-reflexive power/knowledge questions that even decolonial scholarship cannot evade. We also hope that the interventions assembled here will lead to more submissions to *Antipode* from scholars from Africa and the African diaspora.

We start our conversation with the Ghanaian political economist Franklin Obeng-Odoom. Obeng-Odoom works on questions of urban and rural land, the commons, resources and extractivism, and uneven development in Africa. He has made key contributions to the political economy of Africa over the last years, including *Reconstructing Urban Economics: Towards a Political Economy of the Built Environment* (2016), *Property, Institutions, and Social Stratification in Africa* (2020a), *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty: Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society* (2021b), and *Global Migration Beyond Limits: Ecology, Economics, and Political Economy* (2022). He currently works at the University of Helsinki.

The conversation below was led by geographers Sybille Bauriedl and Inken Carstensen-Egwuom in mid-2021 for an edited German-language book, *Geographien der Kolonialität (Geographies of Coloniality)*, which in the meantime has been published (Bauriedl and Carstensen-Egwuom 2023).

The next conversation is with Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, whom one of our now Editorial Collective members, Yousuf Al-Bulushi, interviewed on the broader political and intellectual context in Africa that informed his coedited volume with Morgan Ndlovu, *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2021). Ndlovu-Gatsheni has been one of the key voices of decolonial theory from Africa and has been an extremely prolific scholar with over 100 publications including more than 20 books to his name. Besides the edited volume scrutinized here, his other important publications include *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018); *Decolonization, Development and Knowledge in Africa: Turning Over a New Leaf* (2020); and *Beyond the Coloniality of Internationalism: Reworking the World from the Global South* (2023).

In the interview, which took place in 2022, Ndlovu-Gatsheni reflects on the relationship between the two overarching themes explored in the book—Marxism and decolonization—and the new position he had assumed back then in Bayreuth, Germany, where at the time he occupied a professorship in “Epistemologies of the Global South”. He describes the institutions and movements in South Africa where contributors to the volume may have developed their Marxist and decolonial analyses. In the first part, the interview touches on some of the key African and African diasporic theoretical reference points for the volume, including Pan-African, Black radical, Afrocentric, nationalist, and Black consciousness traditions of thought. Finally, we discuss the relevance of land reform, mining, and feminism to the theoretical and empirical frameworks deployed in the book.

In the second part of the interview, Al-Bulushi and Ndlovu-Gatsheni discuss the influence that the student movement in South Africa had upon the development of key themes in the book. Ndlovu-Gatsheni elaborates on his dual role as a

theoretician of radical forms of Marxism and decolonization in the African context, and his promotion to the role of university administrator responsible for institutionalizing movement demands in the wake of the student uprisings. They discuss how this dual role highlights a central theme of the book—the inextricable relationship between theory and radical forms of praxis—something that too often eludes adherents of radical traditions of thought who nonetheless confine their interventions to the academic sphere.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasizes the necessity of rupturing the bounds of compartmentalized academic disciplines in order to engage in radical forms of praxis. Against the Eurocentric narratives of the white-dominated institutions of African Studies, he offers us a brilliant genealogy of transdisciplinary *African* traditions of African Studies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni then links the frameworks developed in the volume *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* to the work of radical geography. The interview closes with a call to simultaneously reinvent and link Marxist and democratic traditions of theorization and struggle.

As the next conversation between Sylvia Tamale, Sylvia Bawa, and Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin illustrates, African feminists have offered a sustained critique of colonialism, coloniality, and retrogressive thought for many years. Yet, in certain parts of the globe, African feminist thinkers are oftentimes forgotten in feminist curricula and reference lists that focus on decolonial and socially just futures. Sylvia Tamale's recent book, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020), is a sharp reminder of the importance of centering African feminist thinkers in scholarly conversations about decolonization.

Tamale is a leading African feminist and multidisciplinary scholar. She recently retired from teaching at and coordinating the Law, Gender and Sexuality Research Centre based at the School of Law at Makerere University in Uganda. Tamale was the first female Dean of Law in Uganda and has been a visiting professor at several universities including Oxford, Pretoria, and Zimbabwe. Tamale combines her academic scholarship with activism and adopts a critical approach to the law that aims at enhancing students' transformative personal growth and agency. She has served on several national and international boards, including the Global Commission on HIV and the Law. She is the author of numerous publications. Her recent book under focus here won the 2022 FTGS Book Prize of the International Studies Association.

Bawa, Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, and Tamale delve into various themes in the latter's book that revolve around an audacious decolonization agenda that not only unshackles Africa from its Euro-colonial tethers, but also showcases the continent's hopeful futures. In short, the book strongly opposes the pessimism surrounding decolonization in Africa; in particular, she rejects the narrative that the decolonization project is an exercise in science fiction. Accordingly, Tamale calls for African liberation, a prerequisite for decolonial African futures. She emphasizes that liberation is only possible if it is informed by a Pan-African feminist and Ubuntu philosophy/ethic because they effectively challenge modern liberalism—the life-giving spirit of capitalism—and dehumanization. Our discussions on decolonization focus on re-storying Africa, African spirituality, Afro-ecofeminism, restorative justice, legal pluralism, and Wakanda.

The three preceding conversations are then engaged further by two scholars writing from overlapping but distinct positionalities, Patricia Daley and Wangui Kimari. As a Caribbean scholar who has spent much of her research time in Central and East Africa, Daley is in an ideal position to re-read the conversations through a rich transatlantic archive on Black “defiant scholarship”.

Patricia Daley is Professor of the Human Geography of Africa at the University of Oxford. She is also the Helen Morag Fellow in Geography at Jesus College, Oxford, where she served as Vice-Principal from 2018 to 2021. She was the University Assessor (2015–2016) and cofounder of the Oxford University Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Network. She was elected to the University Council in 2021. In addition to academic fora, she frequently speaks at community events such as the African Liberation Day commemorations. Patricia was a coeditor of the journal *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* and currently serves as the “Place and Environment” unit editor for Oxford University Press’s digital project “Racism by Context”. Patricia’s research interests include forced migration and belonging, militarism and gender-based violence, and the political ecology of conservation in East and Central Africa. Her latest book, *Learning Disobedience: Decolonizing Development Studies* (coauthored with Amber Murrey), was published by Pluto Press in 2023.

In the last intervention, Wangui Kimari, who in the meantime has joined the *Antipode* project as its first African (and Africa-based) editor, reflects each of the other four pieces, including Daley’s intervention. Kimari’s reflexive and embodied reflections on decoloniality offer us a window into the precise meaning of praxis, a commitment that is central to radical geography but too often ignored. In so doing, she parallels Vanessa Agard-Jones (2013), who insists that we always think across scales by placing bodies at the center of our systemic analyses.

Wangui is a lecturer at American University—Nairobi, and an honorary research associate at the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town. Her interdisciplinary research work draws on many local histories and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches to try and think through urban spatial management in Nairobi from the vantage point of its most marginalized residents. Wangui is also editor of the online publication *Africa Is a Country* (AIAC), a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, and a co-organizer of the UTA-Do African Cities Workshop.

## **[1] Decolonize the Commons—Debate! A Conversation between Franklin Obeng-Odoom, Sybille Bauriedl, and Inken Carstensen-Egwuom**

### *Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society*

Inken Carstensen-  
Egwuom

Looking at “Geographies of Coloniality”, as we called it in our book, we are interested in colonial continuities around spatial structures of inequality, dispossession, and accumulation in general and we believe that looking into the colonial legacies of today’s property regimes is one of the most pertinent issues

when we aim at understanding those deeply ingrained structures of inequality.

In your research, you look at social-ecological crises in the Global South and also highlight issues of social stratification and social justice—both in urban and rural areas—and so we are very pleased that you agreed to take time for this interview.

With this background in mind, we really believe that your most recent book, *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty: Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society* (Obeng-Odoom 2021b) offers a compelling and rich perspective on intellectual debates and political practices around the critique of private, exclusionary and unequal property regimes, and that research around the commons addressing questions of organizing collective ownership and cooperative ways of regulating access to resources is very important here. From our perspective, we are especially interested in your own decolonial approach to this field of knowledge. As a first question, we would like to ask you if you could elaborate on your specific understanding of what you call the commons and your decolonial perspective on it?

Franklin Obeng-Odoom

I intend this book to be one of a three-part analysis which I consider to be a contribution to the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson 1983). So, I have to answer your question from this perspective. I started this three-part analysis with my book *Property, Institutions, and Social Stratification in Africa* (Obeng-Odoom 2020a), which seeks to reexamine inequality and stratification in Africa and between Africa and the rest of the world. In the book on the commons to which you refer, I have tried to develop this Black Radical Tradition in socio-ecological terms. Then in the last part of my three-part analysis, I hope to demonstrate the power of this tradition in terms of rethinking global migration (Obeng-Odoom 2022).

Within this tradition, it is not only the “mainstream” body of research that is the focus of critique, as in some decolonial approaches, but also the so-called progressive scholarship. In the book to which you refer (Obeng-Odoom 2021b), I identify two key colonial approaches: the Conventional Wisdom and the Western Left Consensus. Both are centered on growth. Both are centered on capital. Both are based on prioritizing Global North interests and universalizing Global North approaches. My decolonial approach stresses global inequalities and stratification, global unequal land relations, and Global South concerns about the socio-ecological crises in the world. In the process of writing *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty*, whenever I distinguished my work from existing theorizing about the commons in these ways, I was referred to what, for example, Marx said somewhere in a footnote or in his main texts, but on which he did not dwell. Well, I didn't say Marx didn't do anything about land. But *how* I think about land, the weight I have been giving to land, and the limitation I am placing on a

workerist framework of analysis – these are all quite different. My formulations are, indeed, more Georgist, drawing far more on Georgist Political Economy (GPE) than on Marxian political economy, which is more strongly focused on capital. Yet, Georgists are not the best on postcolonial analysis, but neither is the Conventional Wisdom nor the Western Left Consensus. My decolonial approach to socio-ecological crises engages, but ultimately tries to transcend, insights from all these approaches. For example, I try to learn from Southern scholars, not only their empirical insights, but also their theorizing. I work both into my questioning of the capital-, growth-, and Global North-centered approach to the commons. My central point is that I develop a decolonial approach, which is quite distinct from the Conventional Wisdom on the commons and I consider that my approach is also quite distinct from what I call the Western Left Consensus.

Carstensen-  
Egwuom

Thank you so much for that! Maybe my next question would kind of approach that in a bit more detail. You do extensively refer to what Elinor Ostrom's research did and she focused on the potentials of cooperation and the complexity of decision making when it comes to managing common-pool resources. She also argued against Hardin's (1968) position, what might be the Conventional Wisdom that any common-pool resource would eventually be overused and destroyed, and against his advocacy for top-down government intervention or privatization as a solution. And her case studies that she did with colleagues showed that humans do have this ability to cooperatively manage and take care of resources without massive state intervention—if they have long-term interest, if they invest in monitoring the resource and also if they are able to make their own rules and develop trust (Ostrom 1990). For us, this framing of the commons seems to be a rather optimistic approach for sustainable development and has also been important for social justice movements. And maybe if you could tell us what your view on this approach is?

Obeng-Odoom

Ostrom might come across as offering a fundamental critique of the Conventional Wisdom, but one has to go beyond what people write and look at how they intend to achieve what they write or say. I doubt very much that Ostrom has a theory of justice. As I discuss in Chapter 3 of *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty* (Obeng-Odoom 2021b), Ostrom's approach to sustainability is centered on something about polycentricity, something she called, in this context, "green from the grassroots" (Ostrom 2012). It is something like this: "Oh, we should all make a contribution", as if we all contributed equally in creating and reproducing the crises! So, in the book I classify Ostrom as part of the Conventional Wisdom. I cannot see any structural difference between Ostrom's and Hardin's approaches. They are similar, as suggested by Hardin

(1998) himself. If you look at Ostrom's work carefully, in fact, what she is saying is not entirely that Hardin's work is fundamentally flawed; but that Hardin's approach is not the only way. It is one way; Ostrom proposed another. To really understand Ostrom's alternative, we need to leave, for a moment, Ostrom's work as a famous political scientist, later Nobel Prize winner in economics, and look at her PhD work. Academics tend to be quite incremental in what they do and, therefore, the history of what they did is important in understanding what they do today. Ostrom is a public choice theorist. Like all public choice theorists, she was skeptical about the state. Public choice theorists seek to develop alternatives to the state because of assumptions that politicians are rational individuals seeking to maximize their own utility. So, Ostrom, too, started her work in this tradition. Unfortunately, she never really left this tradition. The cloak of global fame and global respectability appears to have diverted attention from her cynicism about the state, which she appeared to consider in static terms, allowing for little or no room for evolution or transformation—much like the Conventional Wisdom about the state (Klimina 2018). This stasis or static view of the state hides Ostrom's own ideological views in plain sight. In *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty* (Obeng-Odoom 2021b: Chapters 3 and 4), I review much of Ostrom's work, often concluding, based on the evidence, that she is usually trying to say something about the power of the market, something about how inefficient the state is, and how great self-organization can be. So the virtues of both gated communities and informal communities are extolled. Regardless of their contrasting, albeit interlinked realities, for Ostrom, such spatial inequalities mark the wonders of collective organizing to reject the failures of the state.

As I show in the book, experiences of people in informal economies do not bear out these claims. The point that I'm making is that I consider Ostrom's work to be within the Conventional Wisdom, conventional analysis of socio-ecological crises, conventional solutions, and conventional theorizing. It is not even near the Western Left Consensus, but as I said, as soon as Ostrom became famous, progressive thinkers also tried bringing her closer to their own schools of thought. I think there might be two reasons for this. Number 1: They don't systematically study Ostrom's work. And number 2: It sounds, from the reading of her work, like she's saying "Oh, you know, the commons are not destined to crises" and, hence, others consider her arguments to be germane to theirs. As I argue in the book, there is a distinction between the Conventional Wisdom on the commons and the Western Left Consensus. That said, there is an increasing convergence between the Conventional Wisdom and the Western Left Consensus. To give one example, the *Economist* magazine recently published an issue with the lead story "Making Coal

History” (The Economist 2020). Well, I think that many who advocate the Western Left Consensus would welcome this position but, as I argue in the book (Obeng-Odoom 2021b: Chapter 6), I think from the radical alternative, that I try to develop, this is inadequate, as is the capital-, worker-centered Western Left Consensus on “just transition” (for further elaboration, see Obeng-Odoom 2021a). But many colleagues will be satisfied, because it says that coal should be left in the ground and that is the end of the story. Even though, this approach does not address what Julian Agyeman, the Black socio-ecological theorist, calls “just sustainabilities” (Agyeman 2008, 2013). In my view, questions about global ecological reparations need to be addressed as urgent (Obeng-Odoom 2021a). But, for the Western Left Consensus, once fossil-based capitalism seems to be buried and fossil fuel is left in the ground, that should be enough and that, I think, represents the kind of consensus, you know, not consensus just within the Western left, but now increasing consensus and convergence between the Conventional Wisdom and I think the Western Left Consensus. The radical alternative is of course different; it’s based on global just sustainabilities, demanding redistribution, and commoning land. If the two, the Conventional Wisdom, including Ostrom’s work, and the Western Left Consensus, seem to be in a tug of war about growth, whether it should be “no growth”, whether it should be “more (green) growth”, or whether there should be “degrowth”, the radical alternative is centered on inequalities and global stratification centered around land. So we have quite a different way of thinking about the problem and therefore, what might address the political-economic and socio-ecological crises of our time.

## *Shift to Landed Property*

Carstensen-  
Egwuom

Thank you so much. That clarified a lot for me. And then I would love to shift our discussion to what you mentioned previously, that your focus is on land. I have the impression that your focus on land is very much in tune with the seminal text by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” (Tuck and Yang 2012), where they argue that much of the academic discussions on decolonization are fraught if they do not seriously attend to problems of land distribution and the restitution and reparations of lands that were forcibly taken from Indigenous peoples through colonization in the Americas. It focuses on the American context, but in your research, you use examples from many different regional contexts, especially in Africa. Maybe if you could explain more on how you see the connections between colonial processes and the regulation and distribution of landed property, for example, in an African context?

Obeng-Odoom      What you describe is intriguing. Decolonization is, indeed, a concrete vision, not mere rhetoric. Vague notions of progress ring hollow and are often based on hazy analytical formulations. I consider my own approach to land to be quite specific and quite concrete. It is neither neoclassical nor Marxian, as I have said, even if we can find writers in both traditions who work on land. It is Georgist, but with features that cannot usually be found among other Georgist political economists. It is precisely for this reason that when I say that I am interested in land, in the book, I spend some time trying to explain, what it is that I am interested in, what concept of land, what politics of land, and what sort of theoretical currents percolate my thinking about land (see, e.g. Obeng-Odoom 2021b:10–15). Some people talk about land restitution, but as the example of Zimbabwe shows, it can be quite limited as a remedy for inequalities and social stratification. Setting aside problems of implementation which could be addressed, as I argue in *Property, Institutions, and Social Stratification in Africa* (Obeng-Odoom 2020a), there are fundamental problems with the physical redistribution of land or plots of land. Problems of absentee landownership can easily arise, as can the problem of the private appropriation of socially created rents. So my emphasis on land is closest to the theorist Henry George (Obeng-Odoom 2020b). In *The Commons in An Age of Uncertainty* (Obeng-Odoom 2021b: Chapter 3), when I write about rethinking the commons, I actually set Ostrom's and George's conceptions of the commons side-by-side. So the emphasis in my interest in land, is landed property, property rights, and economic rent. I'm not thinking really about physically redistributing land in the Marxian sense. But I am talking about the socialization of land rent,<sup>1</sup> the institution of just wages, and establishing social protection schemes funded by land value tax and others, notably, reparations.

This takes me in a rather different direction from what is quite common in the Western Left Consensus. Again, the way I am thinking about rent in the book is not to totally remove rent from society (as per some Marxian Western Left Consensus theorizing), but to socialize it—the two are not the same. In other words, they seek socialism or communism when they try to nationalize land, although, for me, the emphasis could helpfully be on socializing and sharing rent. Spreading value, progress, and prosperity is more certain and more ecological this way.

Carstensen-  
Egwuom

Okay, yeah, thank you so much.

Sybille Bauriedl

I think this leads us perfectly to our next question. You made clear your critique of the Western Left Consensus perspective on the commons. And there is a second debate, that is really important, we think, in the Left Consensus or in critical development research. We find numerous studies that have been conducted in West and

East Africa on the phenomenon of land grabbing in the last decade. What is new about recent dynamics, according, for example, to Peluso and Lund (2011:668), is the tilling of land for “new crops with new labor processes and objectives for the growers, new actors and subjects, and new legal and practical instruments for possessing, expropriating, or challenging previous land controls”. And we are interested in your observation, what do you think are the central aspects of these dynamics of land use change?

Obeng-Odoom

Yes, interesting that you mentioned this work. Christian Lund's work is fascinating. I reviewed one of his many books for *Geography Research Forum* (Obeng-Odoom 2017). From what you describe, there is much which I share about the literature on land grabbing. That said, most of the work on land grabbing claimed that it was “new” without taking into account the history of land appropriations, specific historical contexts, changing property rights and relations across space and time, and rent analysis, as I argued in my contribution to the *Review of Black Political Economy* (Obeng-Odoom 2015). For example, I thought the Marxist work on land grabbing was not undertaking Marxist rent analysis carefully. Even more fundamentally, Georgist political economy, the most comprehensive framework for the analysis of land, had been overlooked. That is why I focused my analysis on clarifying Marxian rent theory and Georgist political economy. The two lead to quite different lines, or lanes, of analysis and quite distinct possible policy options. So the studies on land grabbing generated a rich body of work, no doubt about that, but I thought such research could be developed further, analytically. Some of this deeper analytical work has been done now within the Marxian tradition by colleagues such as Stefan Ouma (see Ouma 2020), whose work is outstanding, as I have previously said (Obeng-Odoom 2020b). I work in the Georgist school of thought that is distinct from the Marxian school of thought or even from the Polanyian school of thought.

Land is central to all aspects of my analysis. So, if someone says that “Oh, but Marx also talked about land” then I say, well but if you look at the circuit of capital, land and capital are the same; there is no special place given to land in the circuit of capital, even if the most creative Marxists find a way around the problem. If there is a talk of rent, they say, “Oh, rent is one of the elements in surplus value”. In my own approach, the reverse is the case: land is pivotal and special. The rest are secondary. These emphases shine through all three projects I have talked about: social stratification in Africa (Obeng-Odoom 2020a), the commons (Obeng-Odoom 2021b), and global migration (Obeng-Odoom 2022).

- Bauriedl I think this is a very great point, because we have a lot of geography students and also postgraduates who want to start a dissertation and I think for them it's easier to get access to inequality, when they focus on people who were displaced. So, this is mostly a focus not on land but on the people, who were displaced. And we are very interested in your understanding of land and when you speak about land, you address various elements of nature as we understand it: the environment below the surface of the earth (such as minerals) and the nature that existed on the surface of the earth (including soil, vegetation, and water). Do you think "land grabbing" is not the right term to address all these elements? And how do you think we can consider the exploitation and property rights of these different elements of land together?
- Obeng-Odoom Yes, let's talk about rights and rents from these socio-ecological relations. But first one small clarification about whether land grabbing is the right term. I think it's the right term, it could be used; it's the approach that I was talking about. On the one hand, if the approach leads to an analysis of land that excludes property rights, then much insight is lost. If the approach to land grabbing overlooks rent analysis, again, much analytical power is lost. On the other hand, an approach to land that emphasizes the centrality of land for nature, economy, and society clearly leads to a much more comprehensive framework for analysis. So, if graduate students are interested in the exploitation of labor and the expropriation of land, they can, indeed, work within the Black Radical Tradition, drawing on Georgist political economy, institutional political economy, and stratification economics all at once. That way, to say that the question of land is central to our understanding of the world is not to diminish the importance of capital and labor, or the stratification by race, color, class, caste, and gender, indeed by many other identities underpinning stratification. We can engage, but transcend, the historical focus on individuals, capital, and class this way. Graduate students can—indeed should—be critical of the approach I have been describing, too. Consider Georgist political economy. It can be quiet on the question of stratification and minimalist on the issue of reparations, but I consider myself a reparationist. Henry George had just a few things to say about reparations and some Georgist political economists sometimes cringe at the mention of reparations, because they think, to address socio-ecological crises, it's sufficient to pay labor what it is due without taxing away wages, socialize rent, and use the resulting revenue for social and ecological purposes. "Economic insanity" could be addressed this way (for a more systematic review, see Obeng-Odoom 2021d). But I suggest that if you look at the historical wrongs, the weight of the historical problems that Black people and others across the world have endured and which continue to shape their realities to this

day, well, there needs to be a place for, you know, for reparations in the story. That could still be incorporated in the analysis. For African-Americans, it is usually done by reference to “forty acres and a mule” (see Darity and Mullen 2020). For Africans, socio-ecological reparations could be worked into the analysis of social change by considering, as an example, oil cities, as I try to do in the case of Port Harcourt in Nigeria (Obeng-Odoom 2021a).

## Urban Political Economy

- Bauriedl                      So, as you mentioned, you think, not the size, but the value of land is crucial to bear in mind and in our opinion. Is this true for rural areas as well as for cities? So far, postcolonial development studies on dispossession and displacement have focused almost entirely on rural areas and the countryside. What do you think, how do these land conflicts (in Africa) differ conceptually from land issues in urban areas? For instance, in cities and suburban areas, land rights and land demarcation lines are more clearly defined and land ownership is more personalized. So, is there in your opinion a conceptual differentiation needed for urban and rural areas?
- Obeng-Odoom                This is precisely the reason why rent is so crucial in urban settings. Perhaps this is the most important distinction between the urban and the rural: urban land rent. Even though the “urban” and the “rural”, indeed the “region”, and the world are interconnected all the time because urban land undergoes certain processes that are not typically the experience of rural areas, cities can be special. Along with the economies of agglomeration that urban economists and economic geographers like to analyze, and the growing urban poverty, inequalities, and socio-spatial stratification, cities need to be taken very seriously. How urban land accumulates rent, how such rent is appropriated, and in what ways the resulting rent-related and other inequalities produce and reproduce urban problems are central axes of conflict and contradictions for urban political-economic analysis. Not only are landlords even more powerful but absentee landlords build cities from afar. With little interest, attachment, or care to the local, the neocolonial landlord class who are neither resident nor attached to particular cities own and control such cities, often marginalizing the voice of those who actually work and produce in those cities. That is also the reason why in the analysis of the commons, as a potential way to resolve these conflicts, it is crucially important to take urban land seriously. But as I said, a sharp distinction between the city and the country is unhelpful. Often, urban landlords also control land in the country, which, in turn, supplies food and finance to the city. In examining oil cities in Africa, for instance, all the scales of analysis

are needed to understand oil, transnational corporations, labor, cities, regions, Africa, and the world (Obeng-Odoom 2014). Land matters in all contexts. The size matters, but perhaps the rent, rights, and value matter even more. They can all be interlinked, of course, in shaping the ownership and control of cities.

- Bauriedl When we speak about land, we always have to add water, too.
- Obeng-Odoom Absolutely, absolutely! And minerals—in general the earth—along with the rights that come with nature, as I argue in my book (Obeng-Odoom 2021b:10–15). In other words, land is something—indeed the intersection of rights therein—that, in simplistic terms, is not created by labor or capital. Similarly, the right to land and the rights in land are fortuitous, even though these rights and interests in land have been so much shaped by other socio-ecological and political-economic relations. That conception is very powerful because as soon as we conceptualize land that way, then the fundamental problems of all traditions which suggest that the enslaver, by providing some kind of capital, becomes automatically entitled to land ownership and control become evident. From this perspective, the Lockean theory, that “if slavers are able to provide some capital and put the land to more profitable uses they have won the right to land” becomes questionable. Similarly, from the way that I conceptualize land in the book, land is not capital as in the conventional sense and land is not one thing, but rights and interests. It is, for many people, identity, another name for nature or spirit. Land is power.

## *Development and Its Alternatives*

- Bauriedl I would like to refer to a debate that is really strong in Germany, at government level. The idea, that Africa is a continent of “chances”, of “opportunities”. In summer 2017, during the presidency of the G20 Summit, the German government published the so-called “Cornerstones of a Marshall Plan with Africa” (BMZ 2017). They don’t call it a plan “for” but “with” Africa, and imagine a very positive future of collaboration with Africa as a rich continent with vast agricultural and land resources. The goal of this plan is a new partnership for development, peace and a better future and a relationship between Europe and Africa “at eye level”. The plan refers to the growth-oriented development strategy of the African Union. This is very obviously a plan to establish the whole continent as a free trade area without barriers for European investments. Do you see any opportunities for a radical transformation of this kind of neoliberal idea of modernization? With reference to the debate on decolonial development studies (Escobar 2015; Ziai 2012), do you think we need an alternative

- idea of development or do we need development as a strategy at all?
- Obeng-Odoom      Going back to the taxonomy I use in the book, the Conventional Wisdom, the Western Left Consensus, the radical alternative, I think even though I have not read nor referenced this plan, from how you describe it, it seems to me that it falls directly within the Conventional Wisdom.
- Bauriedl              Of course.
- Obeng-Odoom      In this Conventional Wisdom, Africa is also conceptualized as open pasture. And in order to transform Africa or to develop Africa, we go back to Hardin's framework (Hardin 1968). From this conventional standpoint, it is necessary to have transnational corporations or state corporations, acting as transnational corporations, to parcel out Africa, an open pasture. In the Hardin frame, analysts typically consider the city, or the nation. But in my book (Obeng-Odoom 2021b), I think about the "tragedy of the commons" in global terms, too. Therein lies the contradictions in the German plan you are talking about. From what you say, the logic seems to be that the future is this frontier, this new land with opportunities and it is the business and the responsibility of maybe more enlightened Europeans, European interests to get into a kind of partnership. And here, we not only need to remember our earlier conversation about Ostrom and Hardin, but also remember the notion of "good" governance. In practice, when systematically studied (Obeng-Odoom 2013), this view really means neoliberalism or libertarianism on the right and anything in between. Previous attempts at colonizing the commons have been similarly framed. "Protectorates", "collaborators", and "co-producers" are some of the jarring jargon that are used as a veil for these processes. It's just surprising, how this keeps coming back. For me as an author that shows me that the taxonomy I develop in *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty* (Obeng-Odoom 2021b) is quite useful, quite a helpful framework. This plan—"Cornerstones of a Marshall Plan with Africa" (BMZ 2017)—which you describe is not even within the Western Left Consensus, which seeks to challenge these forms of organizations and these processes and initiatives to transform Africa.
- In short, as with the Conventional Wisdom that I discuss in the book, I don't see any prospects for serious transformation. This way of thinking could, indeed, worsen in my opinion the socio-ecological crises, which in *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty*, are centered on global inequalities and global stratification. So, to the extent that this kind of free trade regime increases or reproduces these forms of inequalities, we are back to where we began, perhaps even in a worse situation.

That does not mean that the alternative African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is in any sense a panacea. As I recently argued (Obeng-Odoom 2020c), although clearly an improvement over classical, neoclassical, and Marxist models of trade in the sense that it advocates Pan Africanism as an antidote to the problems of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism, it is still quite limited. AfCFTA does not stretch to the Black world outside Africa. AfCFTA does not have any serious mechanisms for demanding, producing, and institutionalizing redistribution, and AfCFTA actually encourages the private appropriation of socially created rents. Only when trade commonizes nature, economy, and society, by commoning rents, liberating labor, and demanding reparations, can we truly decolonize global trade.

## Teaching Decoloniality

- Bauriedl Thank you for this clarification. In the beginning of our conversation you said that you would like to refer to the topic of teaching, so maybe you want to add something to this point?
- Obeng-Odoom Indeed. The aim of my three-part analysis on social stratification in Africa, on socio-ecological crises, and on global migration was to demonstrate the power and alternatives offered by the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson 1983). I would also like to reflect on the underlying pedagogical questions, how I have approached and addressed them, in the future. So, you know, as a teacher I have to think through these three positions in my own pedagogy. Doing so could be helpful in further elaborating the limits of both the Conventional Wisdom and the Western Left Consensus, and further strengthen radical alternatives of just sustainabilities developed by the Black intellectual Julian Agyeman (2008, 2013). Clearly, the Western Left Consensus position of degrowth does not systematically take into account all these other layers that I have raised: the tension, or the intersection maybe, between gender, race, and class. A just transition is needed, no doubt, but as colleagues from South Africa have shown (Marais et al. 2021), just transition, for Africa and for the Global South generally, is not just about compensating workers or greening work. In any case, you see, that the “worker” in “just transition” discourses is the exception in many cities and regions in the world. Many people are not workers, classically defined via wage relations. Informal laboring is not I think fully appreciated; neither is color, race, caste, nor gender, sexual orientation, abilities or disabilities (or other identities and their “intersections”) are appreciated fully, not in research, and certainly not in teaching. There has been some progress, or at least awareness since Black scholars raised these matters (Carbado et al. 2013; Crenshaw 1989), but the realization of the vision is far from complete. On the one hand, these matters

are not taught nor learned (Conventional Wisdom). On the other hand, they're being presented as proselytizing, not teaching, or presented as teaching but only as marginal (because "capital" or "capitalism" or "resistance" or "revolution" is more important) and, even then, as the say so of some Western texts, Western writers, or male Western writers only (= Western Left Consensus). In my view (Obeng-Odoom 2020d), critical teaching is not about preaching, nor is active learning about accepting sermons, whether of the Conventional Wisdom or of the Western Left Consensus. As a teacher, even when justice, whether social or spatial, economic or ecological, is central to my pedagogy, I actively encourage critical thinking and questioning of every position raised and discussed in the classroom. We must go beyond pedagogical monism and beyond pedagogical pluralism as well. To decolonize the classroom and the university, we need to take global pedagogical citizenship more seriously. We need a just transition, but that change cannot be just that: we need a just change, both in research and in teaching.

Bauriedl

Franklin, thank you so much for your thoughts to the debate on, how we call it, "Geographies of Coloniality".

## **[2] Marxism and Decolonization: The View from Africa —A Conversation between Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Yousuf Al-Bulushi**

Yousuf Al-Bulushi

Your chair position at Bayreuth University in Germany is in Epistemologies of the Global South. Can you describe how this particular position came about? What does the title mean, in your mind? And how does it relate to the project of the book we're discussing today, *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*?

Sabelo Ndlovu-  
Gatsheni

My position here is professor in Epistemologies of the Global South, with an emphasis on Africa. It emerged within a context in which the University of Bayreuth, which is well known for its African Studies program, was leveraging its positionality at a time of resurgence and insurgence of decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2019, they won funding for what is called the "Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence".<sup>2</sup> And that funding really emerges within a context in which there is a resurgence of decolonization, in which the question of decolonizing knowledge becomes a prominent feature. This chair was meant to bring in epistemologies of the South to catalyze the thinking, the epistemologies, the methodologies, as well as the reflections on doing "African Studies" differently. One issue that was very clear in this is that we need to do African Studies with Africans, rather than making them objects of study. The second issue is that doing African Studies

without considering the epistemologies from Africa, from the global South, will still be problematic. Now, how this relates to the issues with which we're dealing in the book: one of the trends cutting across the book is the Black Radical Tradition, which has always embraced the Marxist tradition. At the center of epistemologies of the global South is also the Black Radical Tradition allied with what Cedric Robinson termed Black Marxism. But the book was conceived while I was still in South Africa, not when I was here, at the University of Bayreuth.

Al-Bulushi

In North America, despite our long history of red baiting and anti-communism, there are a few places where scholars and activists can still go to learn about Marxism and decoloniality from more than just one or two anomalous thinkers. This is perhaps a product of what Michael Watts refers to in his essay on the successes and failures of 1968 as the long march through the institutions (2001). In the case of your volume, many—although not all—of the contributors, are at South African institutions. I wonder if you can speak to the specific context of Marxism in South Africa—where are the contributors to the volume learning their Marxism? Are they members or past members of organizations like the South African Communist Party (SACP) or the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)? Are they learning Marxism in SACP or NUMSA political education sessions? Are they learning Marxism in their formal education at specific universities where Marxism has somewhat of a foothold? Or are they principally autodidacts, forced to learn Marxism on their own for lack of access to an institutionalized presence of Marxism? After answering that I'd like you to answer the same question for decoloniality—where are your contributors first learning about decoloniality? What kind of institutional presence does it have in South Africa? Have they participated in organizations like the Economic Freedom Fighters or the Rhodes Must Fall movement that may have generated an interest in theories of decolonization? I think I read somewhere that there was an important decolonial theory working group that may have also influenced the development of this volume.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Yes, as I mentioned, the book was conceived while I was working in South Africa; even the co-editor Professor Morgan Ndlovu is still in South Africa. So, the location determined the number of South African contributors, and also, with a project like this, you always rely on networks. The networks which I had were mainly in South Africa. The very idea of theorizing both Marxism and decolonization simultaneously emerged within the context in which there was a feeling among others that this push for decoloniality is displacing, so to speak, Marxism, or with others, of course, doing a quick critique of Marxism, putting forward such views (of Marxism) as a Eurocentric idea. So, I thought, instead of

falling into those quick dismissals, it would be important for us to have a project in which we really bring people to think deeply about *the two movements*. From where I was standing, the key concern of the book was that I never saw an antagonism between Marxism and decolonization. If anything, I saw complementarity between the two. But coming back to your question directly, the uniqueness of South Africa: I think the first uniqueness of South Africa, is really the colonial uniqueness in the sense that, it was supposed to be a little Europe existing at the southern tip of the African continent. It really emerged perhaps concurrently with the movement to colonize Latin America. If you think about the so-called “voyages” of Vasco da Gama or Bartholomeu Dias, who were contemporaries, they were actually happening simultaneously with Columbus going to the Americas. So, it’s a unique space from which to think about the depth of colonialism in the South African region, with South Africa really becoming a staging post, into Zimbabwe, into Malawi, into others from 1652 onward. So, that’s one thing, that I thought would be important as a starting point to understand the question of coloniality. Second, it also has the deepest, if I can say racial capitalist realities, including links with the issues of enslavement. So, all the dirty aspects of coloniality, modernity, you’ll see them in South Africa. Of course, maybe they did not fully succeed in the project of extermination. But there were massive killings of the indigenous people, and it is also about their displacement. The second aspect is that South Africa becomes a convergence zone of intellectual traditions. Garveyism, Ghandiism, you’ll see them in South Africa. You’re able to see Black Power and Black Consciousness as strong traditions in South Africa. You will also see liberalism, white liberalism as well as liberal African nationalist traditions. But you can also see the radical Pan-Africanist tradition in the mold of the Pan-African Congress under Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (Shoki 2021), which really brings in the notion of “Africa for Africans”, the Garveyist idea. And then you also have very deep and rich traditions of Marxist thinking, embodied, of course, by the South African Communist Party and the New Unity Movement, among others. You can then see in this deep Marxist tradition, people like Moses Kotane going to the Soviet Union long ago. You will see people like Joe Slovo, emerging as key Marxist thinkers. People like Chris Hani. You’ll find that there is a Chris Hani Institute in South Africa. You’ll also find a place called Mzala Nxumalo Centre in Durban, which tries to revive Mzala’s tradition which was also a deeply Marxist tradition. These are recent centers that were built. The other aspect in South Africa which is very interesting, related to the Marxist tradition is the emergence of the labor unions. When we think about institutions, we also think about the University of the Western Cape for instance, which was also a leftist-dominated institution that produced a lot of leftist thinkers. The University of Durban–Westville was another one. So

there is really a very rich tradition. It's a very complex intellectual space to operate in. And that tradition is not dead. But those leftist traditions were always in contact with strong Africanist traditions. When Mbeki came to power after Mandela, he came with the idea of an African Renaissance, which goes back to the time of Kwame Nkrumah and others. This tradition also has its own institutions. When I joined UNISA, I found there was an Institute for African Renaissance Studies at the University of South Africa. So, in South Africa, you find almost every tradition in the same space.

And of course, the long anticolonial and anti-apartheid struggles themselves became schools in which many people were educated and radicalized. But as you were saying, they were also auto-didacts. As a result of the disappointment of the transition from apartheid to democracy, the youth were in search of answers to the question: "Why is the situation like that?", why certain changes never took place, and a lot of them then decided to force themselves to look for revolutionary thought, which can help them to explain the situation in South Africa. So, indeed, there are people who are learning on their own by going back to these traditions. But you will also find that the other important aspect of the South African situation is the strong civil society movements, which are also grounded in leftist, and also Africanist traditions, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (Al-Bulushi 2024), the shack dwellers movement, the anti-privatization movements (Bakker 2007), which are also schools in their own right. They make sure their constituencies are equipped ideologically to think differently. It won't be surprising in such a situation to find such movements as the Economic Freedom Fighters, who are combining both the nationalist, the Marxist, and Fanonian type of thinking, while also bringing Biko into the mix. I must say also, the youth and students in South Africa are also influenced by particular thinkers, such as Bernard Magubane, who was also a leftist thinker, and pan-Africanist intellectuals like Archie Mafeje, who also belonged to the New Unity Movement, and Steve Biko is alive today more than he was during his time I think.

So in that context, it was easy to see decoloniality in such a rich space. But more specifically, I have been in South Africa for over a decade or so, and when I joined the University of South Africa, I also then entered into a space which was not very familiar to me: it was still white at the top, Black at the bottom. And I quickly also said: "But how do I contribute to changing the situation which I found?" And then, I formed the Africa Decolonial Research Network in 2011. And that Africa Decolonial Research Network became really the site for decoloniality. And the University of South Africa became also a site for nurturing the decolonial spirit. I was also reading the literatures of the Latin American modernity/coloniality group. And one of our members, Morgan Ndlovu (coeditor of this book), in 2011, attended the Cultural Studies

Association of Australasia annual conference where Ramón Grosfoguel was the keynote speaker. It was in that encounter that when they began to speak, Morgan informed Ramón that “In South Africa we formed the Africa Decolonial Research Network”, Ramón just jumped in and said: “This is exciting news. Yaa! This is exactly what we wanted. There is decoloniality in Africa!” And that member came with a message to me from Ramón to say they have an international Summer School on Decolonizing Knowledge and Power in Barcelona and our network was invited. And in 2012, seven of us went there, and that’s how we then combined our forces. And in 2014, we began a version of the Barcelona School at the University of South Africa. It attracted a lot of young people from across the institutions in South Africa, including those who were from the social movements. So when Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall then broke out in 2015–2016, we were just hiding the fact that perhaps the decolonial school might actually be the one who influenced this, because now the government was worried. But indeed, it [the decolonial school] contributed a lot to making people rethink their condition and it gives them the vocabulary to name some of the issues which they didn’t have a name for. But I think this story won’t be complete without emphasizing that South Africa is in Africa. Let me put it that way. So, because of that, the existence of strong Pan-Africanist and decolonization traditions on the continent must also be taken into account. Nkrumah is a hero in South Africa. Lumumba is a hero in South Africa. Amílcar Cabral is a hero in South Africa. Frantz Fanon is a hero in South Africa. So, there is also a tapping into the long existing, strong Pan-Africanist traditions in the decoloniality movement. Of course, with the contradictions, such as xenophobia. And also, we cannot ignore the fact that there are also institutions on the continent, such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), which has continuously produced Africa-centered and political economic thinking.

Al-Bulushi      The book certainly draws extensively on African and Caribbean anticolonial traditions of thought, particularly on the work of Césaire, Nkrumah, Senghor, Cabral, as you just mentioned, and others. How has the reception of these thinkers changed over time? And what new light do the contributors to this volume shed on their work for radical theory today?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni      I think one of the issues when we were doing the decolonial work, one of the agenda items was to try to expose ourselves, the youth, and the students to the literatures which we were deprived of. You know, these literatures which are not in the curricula. So, we began a project of recovery, of Black radical thinking. And immediately, as we exposed ourselves, the youth, and the students to some of the literature, we began to understand the world

differently, and the politics of knowledge became clear to us. Some of the leading scholars like Molefi Asante, for instance, and the Afrocentricity School, have a very strong following in South Africa. So, a lot of the members of ADERN (the Africa Decolonial Research Network) see value in both decoloniality, Afrocentricity and Black Marxism. Then there are others who, when they discovered Cheikh Anta Diop, also thought, here is an answer to our problem. The works of these scholars, thinkers, and activists have always been available but not in the curriculum and formal education.

The same can be said about Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* (Al-Bulushi 2022; Robinson 1983). A lot of the scholars actually began to read that book now rather than when it was first published in 1983. And they think: "Oh, wow, we didn't know there was somebody who explained racial capitalism in this way!" So, it is an interesting time, in which the reading is "going back" to the Black Radical Tradition. And if you view this from the Latin American decoloniality, these figures are from the border; they're not the central figures in academia. And now, all the young academics and next-generation scholars who are training for Masters and PhDs, and those who have teaching responsibilities, they are now rewriting the curriculum and bringing in these thinkers. Your question was about whether there is a changing meaning to all this. There is indeed a changing meaning of it. The way the younger scholars are taking it up and applying it to current challenges and problems. This is like new old literature to many of us who were not exposed to it before. And therefore, this is a literature which can propel us into understanding the present and into the future. So, we use it not only for academic, intellectual enrichment, but also for activist purposes. And this also comes within a context in which we are tired of the neoliberal traditions and the issues of democracy and human rights as a solution to African problems of social and economic as well as cognitive justice, and many are really disillusioned with that type of thinking. So, they think there must be other thinking which can actually liberate them, other than the issues of democracy and human rights preached from the global North. Not that they are saying democracy is wrong or human rights is wrong—but they want it to be radicalized.

So what they were lacking was the language to name the challenges which they are facing. So, concepts like neocolonialism, coined by Kwame Nkrumah in 1965, are important concepts. A concept like racial capitalism—which you can see throughout the chapters in this book—they find really has explanatory power when applied to the situation in South Africa. Concepts like decolonization of the mind, from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ibekwe Chinweizu. There was a time when Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was not very popular. But he has recently come to South Africa three times if I am not mistaken. Really, the walls and lecture theatres were full.

Because it's also like a discovery: "Oh, Ngugi is alive!" And his works have come back as new literature. This is what is interesting to me. And even including myself, I reread all these literatures after I had the PhD. And I found that they taught me a lot of things, which I could not have known if I had not done that. So, I think what happens is that it radicalizes and propels us into action. If you see the Rhodes Must Fall and the Fees Must Fall movement, Biko's idea of Black Consciousness was very central. Fanon's ideas on violence and decolonization were also very central. Intersectionality thought featured too. There was a debate—how do we handle the issue of violence in activist politics, and others were justifying violence by saying "Fanon said, decolonisation is always a violent movement".

Al-Bulushi

Another unique aspect of this volume is its combination of theoretical and empirical studies. With regard to the latter, issues of land reform, mining, and feminist policy are some of the topics that come to the foreground. Can you tell us why these topics are especially important when it comes to thinking about where Marxists and decolonial thinkers might turn today to apply their ideas in radical forms of praxis?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

This again takes me back to my first point about the place of South Africa in modernity and more specifically in colonial modernity. Perhaps let me make reference to the uniqueness of the Southern African region as a whole, in the sense that it was dominated by what is called settler colonialism (Odukoya 2018). I think that's an important point to begin with because if we don't understand that, we won't understand why the issue of land, for instance, becomes a central issue, or the issue of minerals and mines. You will not understand why there is a formation like Economic Freedom Fighters, if you don't take that background into account, in the sense that even after the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, you find that perhaps what was gained was political independence, without economic independence, without cognitive justice and epistemic freedom. The question of minerals and nationalization is also very central in their discourses. Southern Africa is rich in minerals like gold, diamonds, and many others. There is a feeling mainly among youth that what was gained in 1994 in South Africa was bourgeois liberal democracy, and that social justice and economic justice were never delivered. So, in that sense, immediately you speak about both Marxism *and* decolonization, they seem to take them to the necessary existential issues of life in an antiblack world, continuations of racial capitalist exploitation, as well as heteronormative patriarchal sexism.

On the question of land also, you will find that Zimbabwe also stands at the center of debates in the sense that the attempt to do compulsory land reclamation provoked so many problems on the one hand, and on the other hand, it was necessary (Moyo and

Chambati 2013). And the feeling is that global capital and the powerful regimes of the global North wanted to make an example of Zimbabwe, that if you take this radical position, this is the disciplining which you will receive. So that others must never attempt what Zimbabwe attempted to do. So that's what everyone cautions now: "Don't do it the way Zimbabwe did it, because you will see the consequences." So, Namibia is not moving as fast as it's supposed to move in terms of land reform. South Africa is also very cautionary in the way they want to do it. So, on that Zimbabwe question, we were happy to receive that chapter which actually speaks about the land reform in Zimbabwe from a Marxist and decolonial perspective as an important aspect of Black economic liberation.

And then, if you come to South Africa, the issue of mines and minerals and you link it with the Marikana massacre of 2012, whereby Lonmin—which is actually a multinational company in cahoots with the South African neo-apartheid state—gained against labor and killed 34 miners who were striking for a living wage. What is perhaps emerging poignantly in the book is that Marxism continues to be seen as a very good science of understanding capitalism. And perhaps, decolonization is another very good science for understanding colonialism. But also revealing that capitalism and colonialism are self-co-constituting each other. So, if you combine them, you will understand the modern world-system better. And in understanding the modern world-system better, the issue of feminism, the issue of gender, the issue of sexism, then arises not as an addition, but as an intrinsic part of the constitution and the cartography of power of coloniality. To the extent that the argument is you'll never have a genuine decolonization without de-patriarchization, this is where that chapter that brings in the issue of feminist policy becomes very important, in the sense that this is not another terrain of struggle which is on the side. It is really a central part of the decolonization struggles, because the major problem with decolonization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that it then became dominated by men, it became androcentric, and the issue of de-patriarchization fell by the wayside. So now, when we're reorganizing and rearticulating decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the issue of gender must not be a peripheral issue, it must be an interesting part of the decolonization, because there can never be decolonization without de-patriarchization. And secondly, there can never be a good social science, that ignores more than 50% of the population which is of the female gender. And there was always this critique when I went to the university in the 90s, that Marxism was gender and race blind because of its concentration on class analysis. And I think the position is now changed as research on Marxism has progressed in that it depends on which version of Marxism one is referring to. Friedrich Engels engaged the gender question and there are many

Marxist feminists. Decolonization was also suffering from the same limit of sometimes sidelining gender but now the question of heteronormative patriarchal sexism is central to it. Yes, in the 1960s, the dominance of big men, whenever you talk about decolonization, big names like Nkrumah, Nyerere, and others, and very few women, was common. But there were many women in the struggles. So, that's why we are trying to say that theory and praxis need to go together to reflect on the actually existing social, political, cultural, economic, and epistemic challenges, and the gender question as well as the sexuality question cannot be ignored.

Al-Bulushi

Along that line of thought, I would like to ask you about the importance of feminist analysis in the volume. In radical geography, it has often been social reproduction, broadly conceived, that has been an extremely important field of analysis for us. And this is thanks in large part to interventions by scholars like Altha Cravey, Cindi Katz, Melissa Wright, and many others. In the African context, we can think of the work of Pumla Gqola, Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí, and Sylvia Tamale, among many others, as having advanced the study of gender, decolonial feminism, and racial capitalism. So, I'm wondering how the other contributors—beyond that important chapter you referenced by Fuzani Mtembu on feminist policy—engage with questions of social reproduction, on the one hand, from the Marxist tradition, and what Maria Lugones called the coloniality of gender, on the other hand, from the decolonial tradition?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

That's an important question in the sense that even among the contributors there was a skewing toward men. And that's always a challenge even in the wake of decolonizing, which we're trying to do, in the sense that most of the time, the responses are mainly from men because they dominate the academies. So, we need a targeted and deliberate invitation of women into these spaces so that we don't reproduce the same problems of the domain of knowledge being dominated by men, even if they are Black. This is one aspect. So, as I was saying, what we are trying to do is to make sure that the issue of gender is not an addition and certainly we are not yet there. Gender questions should be cutting across decolonizing work. We must not be found saying: "Oh, there is gender, that we did not take into consideration!" What we were trying to do is to make it part of the broader decolonization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to the extent that we're saying the problem is the modern world-system and the global orders. And if the problem is the modern world-system, and its global orders, then at the center is the heteronormative patriarchal sexist order of things that has to fall. And if it is a central part of that, how do you change the modern world-system, therefore, without engaging the question of gender? We might not be succeeding the way we wish to succeed.

But we were very aware of that important aspect of it. And we were really very happy that Funzani and the other colleague from India, Debadrita Chakraborty, who also dealt with the question of the Dalits, actually dealt with it from Maria Lugones' concept of coloniality of gender. It actually was very interesting for us, because we needed more of that type of thinking. But at the moment, we are very aware that consciously, we need to address the question of gender as an intrinsic part of decolonizing. So, it might not be cutting across all the other chapters of our book at the moment. Just like race, which continues to privilege white supremacy and bourgeois lifestyles, gender inequalities continue to privilege men, and hence, there is slowness in moving away from it by the beneficiaries of patriarchy (Willoughby-Herard 2014). They need to be pushed to take a deliberate position to reflect on and embrace feminism and womanism.

Al-Bulushi

I wanted to ask you a little bit about the broader movement context (Pithouse 2016) that may have informed this volume. You have already touched on it by talking about how your decolonial theory working group that began in 2011 may have influenced the "Fallist" movement in important ways. But I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about how the movement may have also influenced your theorizing. I'm thinking of some of the problems and tensions that emerged, either in the "Fallist" movement itself, or in what we could call the broader globalization of the Movement for Black Lives, which is now definitely decentered from the United States exclusively. Did those of you involved in this volume have specific conversations around the problems that emerged in these movements, when these struggles began to have ripple effects on college campuses throughout the world, and might we view the volume as also responding to and thinking further about these problems that emerged in the movements?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Yeah. In fact, even within the intellectual decolonial movement, we always had these tensions about what we have just discussed. The tensions about how seriously we are taking the gender question into account, and how committed are we? How different are we from other patriarchy who have been parroting this concept of decolonization but practicing patriarchy at the same time? That tension has always been there. The other issue was that of doing decolonization as an intellectual project versus doing decolonization as a liberation project. So, there were also tensions between those who are using decoloniality for careerist purposes mainly and then abandon the mud and brick aspect of it, which is the activist part.

You're talking here to somebody who led in the formation of ADERN (the Africa Decolonial Research Network) in 2011 as an epistemic movement in the first instance that was concerned with issues inside universities where the politics of knowledge was a

glaring issue. The outbreak of Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall in 2015 and 2016, respectively, read to us like a translation of theory into praxis. It was mainly because of the Rhodes Must Fall and the Fees Must Fall movements that even conservative academics and the universities were put under pressure to implement changes in institutional cultures, curriculum, scholarship, funding models, pedagogies, demographics, and iconography. On one end was the urgent need on the part of the university leaders to placate the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall activists because the university feared further eruptions, and, on the other, there were committed progressive academics and students who thought that this was an opportunity to bring about real and genuine change within the universities, and even outside the universities, informed by decolonization thinking and praxis. At the University of South Africa in 2016, they built what is called the "Change Management" unit within the vice chancellor's office. I was invited into that space. And again, I consulted with the network and comrades because it can be dangerous to move into these spaces of administration where managerialism rules. But at the same time, it can also be dangerous to leave that space for reactionary forces and their hypocritical politics. So, we felt that there was a need to push some of our forces into those spaces, while others remained on the ground to make sure that all the flanks were covered, and to monitor any tendencies that undermined the struggles for decolonization. So, I did move from being head of the Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Applied Social Policy Research (AMRI) and became a director of that Change Management unit responsible for the scholarship and curriculum transformation. Administrators of the university were comfortable with the concept "transformation" rather than "decolonization". Activists were saying "we are beyond transformation and we are for decolonization". At the management level, they were not very comfortable with the term decolonization. I maintained the concept of decolonization and critiqued "transformation" as not radical enough and as having failed. Rhodes Must Fall never cried for "transformation". They were clear that they wanted decolonization. So if the university's new initiatives were really developed in response to those movement demands, I asked, why weren't we using the language which the movement was using? And then the question came: "But there are so many grammars of change. Transformation is one of them. Social Inclusion is one of them. Africanisation is one of them. Decolonisation is one of them". So, then it meant that we were exhausting ourselves in these grammars. Which one? Then I said: "No, no, no". I don't want to be trapped in nomenclatures while the realities on the ground were dire for students, young academics, and women academics who were on the receiving end

of what Ramón Grosfoguel correctly termed “racist/sexist” cultures of domination.

If we’re using Africanization, what I demanded was a *practical* explanation of what was being done under this grammar of change. If we are using social inclusion, again I demanded that it be explained practically, so as to see whether it was really adequate to the task at hand. And that’s how I will measure whether you are moving forward or not. So, that’s the way we broke the deadlock, while they were trying to trap us into spending a lot of time debating: “Is it decolonisation? Is this transformation? Is it social inclusion? Is it Africanisation? Is it indigenisation?” So, I said: “No, no, no”, use whatever concept you want to use. Whatever grammar you want to use. But for me, from the office which I occupy, I want to see changes *concretely on the ground*. Whether we are changing using indigenisation, Africanisation, I have no problem with the name. But I will come to assess, what are you *doing* within a department? What are you *doing* within a faculty? What are you *doing* within a college? And if there is actually concrete change, I have no worry about what term we are using. So, I spent the last five years before I came to Bayreuth in that office, where I ended up being the Acting Executive Director, and we were not comfortable with the concept of “Change Management”. We thought it smelled neoliberal. So we renamed the office into a Department of Leadership and Transformation (DLT). And it had very clear areas of change. We wanted to change scholarship, curriculum, and the language of learning, teaching, and research. That was one area. Then there was a second strand, which concerned a change of institutional cultures, including racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other aspects. Then third, there was the leadership, management, and governance domain that also needed to be decolonized. It had embraced neoliberal corporatist cultures in which knowledge, education, and research were commodified and commercialized. Then the systems and the policies of the university had to be subjected to change so as to make them supportive of the agenda of decolonization. And that’s the way it was structured.

It was not the easiest part of the job because you needed to mobilize the entire constituency of the university behind the agenda of decolonization. Academics in Westernized universities work through dissensus rather than consensus [laughter]. So, really, you need to spend a lot of time to make sure that what we are bringing is a superior thinking to what they are used to. The university council and vice chancellor seemed genuine in wanting to decolonize the university. So I spent most of the time really mobilizing. From an administrative point of view, DLT was also even given the task of documenting where there was resistance. But because I was also an academic, I was not very comfortable quickly saying “these people are resisting”. Perhaps they don’t

understand what we are talking about. So, that's basically the tension which I saw.

But in the movements themselves, there were also tensions related to other identities that were not accommodated, like LGBT+. There were a lot of reactions within the movement. And I think they were inevitable, if I can put it that way. This Rhodes Must Fall/Fees Must Fall movement—just like the liberation struggles—they were schools in revolutionary thinking and revolutionary praxis. You learn while you're doing. So, throughout there is learning and unlearning of a lot of things.

And then the other aspect which I learned is the issue that if you create an office like the one which I'm talking about, which is located in the vice chancellor's office, people take whatever you say in terms of "compliance". And that's a very problematic way of thinking, that "now the office has said X, and we need to comply". But in their hearts and minds, they have not changed. So, that's another reality, which I realized. If you make it a matter of compliance, people will give you a good report, but without having changed their consciousness of knowledge or their politics of knowledge.

The other challenge which we faced as a challenge, which is continuing now, is the issue of sexual harassment within the institutions. It divided a lot of comrades who were supposed to be on one side. So, there were really many factions within the movement. And the good part, we always say, is that it was never meant to be an event. It is a *process*, and it is a process which is not about *other* people, but about *ourselves*. And that issue of being about ourselves I've tried to emphasize many times. Because a person like myself, I was never produced by a decolonial university or something like that. I'm also produced by these very problematic institutions. So, on a daily basis, I must also interrogate myself, learn to unlearn in order to relearn some of the things, so that we become better and perhaps we will create the institutions of relationality which are better than the previous ones. So, it's really a learning curve which I came through, and I'm thankful for being at the center because it made me a better person and helped me to express my ideas writing books better.

But you'll realize that, while I was in office, I also wrote a book called *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018). And that book, I wrote it because I always told the vice chancellor: "Those who are in this office of yours, who are supposed to lead in this decolonisation, they need to be on top of the scholarship of revolutionary change to be effective. And being on top of the revolutionary discourses requires that they must research widely on all these other topics. They must also be research-led in thinking and action". And that book, I wrote it while I was in office, because I was reacting to critical questions which were posed to the office and to me. So, it's another way of

learning how to write a book while you are still doing the work of activism and administration.

Now you mentioned Black Lives Matter and I was saying, in South Africa, it was more of Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall as the rupturing point. Of course, it converges with the Black Lives Matter movement. And analytically, we need to read them as events of the same moment, or some conjuncture. And if we read them that way, we will then see that, despite the fact that they emerge in different geospatial regions of the world—the US and South Africa—there are a lot of commonalities. They all quickly traveled out of their areas of origin, into the planetary, if I can use that word. That's where you will see Rhodes Must Fall starting in Cape Town, and then Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford. You will see the Black Lives Matter and the killing of George Floyd in the USA, sparking the movements against statues all over the world targeting monuments and iconography of racists, enslavers, imperialists, and colonialists. And I think I always think about these as planetary decolonial movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of course, there are specific locations with regard to where they come from, but they quickly become planetary in terms of their resonance.

Al-Bulushi

What you've just conveyed about the back and forth between the work of movements and the work of scholarship, even when working within the institution, is such a rich example of praxis. So I want to ask you a little bit more about the centrality of praxis to this volume. In conversation with the work of Hamid Dabashi, you explain in the volume that philosophers of liberation write across and against disciplines. And that this is because they write with "blood and tears". This means that praxis arguably lies at the heart of your conception of Marxism and decolonization. And this is certainly a challenge to many purely academic theorizations of radical critique, although it's obviously most loyal to the original formulations of actually existing Marxism and decolonization. As the US-based ethnic studies scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have argued about the overly loose use of the term decolonization, "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang 2012). So, I'm wondering if you can expand upon the priority of praxis to your theorization and what it might look like for scholars to take the necessity of engaging in praxis more seriously. As we train the next generation of Marxist and decolonial scholars, should we be insisting that their scholarship always involve radical forms of praxis as well?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

It's an important question that also preoccupied a lot of us: how adequate is it to think from disciplines? How adequate is thinking from the disciplines for practical changes? And going back to the work of Lewis Gordon about *Disciplinary Decadence* (2006), whereby the discipline becomes a spectacle, which makes you see some things and not see others. We always have an issue because

all of us were trained in disciplines. But the issue is how do you get out of the discipline into the existential problems facing humanity? And Marxism and decolonization became handy to me in the sense that I always said, “but Marx never wrote for a promotion to professorship”. He was not sitting down writing a book so that he could become a lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, etc. Behind all the writing, there was an agenda of liberation and exposure of the dangers of capitalism as well as bourgeois leadership of the world. And I then thought about Frantz Fanon, who, when he was writing, was also involved in a very violent struggle for liberation in Algeria. And the issue was how to make sense of what was taking place, and also to equip the comrades with a better way of understanding the complexities of the struggles they’re involved in. Then I thought about the work of Amílcar Cabral. All the theorization that he was doing was not from a lecture room, or a lecture theatre, or an office. But it was from the bush and it was meant for the consumption of the comrades who were involved practically on the ground (deGrassi 2023). So, that’s why I was really happy about the idea of knowledge from the battlefields of history. And if we link it with the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, to the epistemologies of the South, that is, those knowledges which emerged from struggles against colonialism, against capitalism, and against patriarchy. Was it not Karl Marx who said capitalism emerged dripping with blood from every pore? So, the “blood and tears” is not a metaphor if the world is read from Marxism and decolonization, because the colonizer’s model of the world emerged through violence, warfare, genocides, enslavement, dispossession, displacement, and racial and gender exploitations.

And I think if we think from this “underside of modernity” (to use a concept from Enrique Dussel) and build from that, the question of thought, knowledge, and action as always intertwined becomes clear and urgent. And in the Southern African region during the armed liberation struggles against white settler regimes, there was a clear thinking that the guns and revolutionary thought belonged together. One had to always think about the revolution, but with your gun under your arm [laughter] so that you could do both simultaneously. So, it’s not like bourgeois intellectualism, or bourgeois pontification. The Tanzanian intellectual Issa Shivji once said that bourgeois pontification is 99% irrelevant [laughter]. Only perhaps 1% relevant. So, I thought, when we bring together the issue of Marxism and decolonization, we’re bringing something which is 99% relevant, and practical. And I saw it, in the sense that Rhodes Must Fall was full of action. So it’s really important to me that we don’t fall into bourgeois intellectualism, which is always just pontificating, while you are sitting in air-conditioned offices and hotels. We need to combine the two. But our training was not meant to be like that. And I think what we need to do is to do

scholarship differently. We need to know that scholarship has to have a liberatory purpose.

But I must hasten to say, there are spaces whereby we are divided as academics and intellectuals into those who push for a purposeful scholarship, a liberatory purpose, and those who think that, no, no, if you do that, you are bringing ideology to scholarship and undermining scientific thinking. You are actually bringing identity to scholarship. You are bringing subjectivity to scholarship. You are really moving away from objectivity and impartiality and all that. But to me it's important that knowledge has to be relevant and useful. Scholarship *has* to have an agenda. It can't be an agenda-less game. To me, I'm not shy to say my research and scholarship is informed by the struggles for liberation of the oppressed and this does not mean I compromise on scientific quality. I do both. And secondly, that does not therefore mean that it is not rigorous. I do both, but I think it is important that there must be a higher purpose. Why are we doing it? And I think even the Western philosophers, whatever they were doing in philosophizing, had a purpose. There was philosophical support for racism, enslavement, and colonialism! So we need to do scholarship which has a purpose for *decolonization*. It was never just philosophy for the sake of philosophy. There were Western thinkers who were *in support* of imperialism and the colonial project. And if you then say we must do scholarship which is not in support of anything, then it's a useless scholarship. We need to be on fire for justice, if I can be allowed to draw from Cornel West's concept of "Black prophetic fire"! We need to be on fire for gender equality. We need to be on fire for equal redistribution of material resources. We need to be on fire in defense of Black lives. The scholarship needs to be animated by realities which actually decimate human lives. And fundamentally, to even save the Earth from capitalist exploitative logics.

Al-Bulushi

Studies of Africa within Africa—as opposed to the Western formations, institutionalized in bodies, such as the African Studies Associations in the UK and the US—have arguably oscillated between two competing poles over the past half-century. On the one hand, at the height of the anticolonial struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, political economy and the question of development came to dominate many studies as an exclusive lens through which one was supposed to pursue all forms of intellectual inquiry. On the other hand, especially since the 1990s, scholars like Mahmood Mamdani and Achille Mbembe have been somewhat critical of what they viewed as an overemphasis upon political economy. And instead, they've examined other questions such as the relative autonomy of the political, postcoloniality, and questions of subjectivity. The critique of Marxism is a question that this volume takes up, but via other reference points, such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Stokely Carmichael, and Onkgopotse Tiro. Can you share some of

these critiques with us and explain what they might offer to ongoing conversations across sometimes competing liberatory traditions of struggle?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

The starting point is very good: what are the key questions which animate African Studies and African thought? I think you have raised the question of development. Decolonization starts with existential questions. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois posed the question as follows: "How does it feel to be a problem?" And that's an existential question. And this is then picked up by Aimé Césaire, putting it in terms of the tormenting question: "Who am I? Who are we? What are we in the antiblack world?" I think these existential questions form an ideal background for what is called the Black Radical Tradition. There are questions of life. And then, of course, the next question which also animates African Studies is the question of history and being human (McKittrick 2015). And that question of history arose from a context where there were attempts to deny that those designated as Black are human beings and therefore have history. There is a lot of work in the volume trying to answer that question, and to say: "No, we're human beings with a history". Then, of course, the developmental question, which is also linked to that.

Thinking about it from the continent, it has taken me back to the 1960s. It takes me back to what was happening in Ghana when it gained independence in 1957. Kwame Nkrumah was the head of state, but he was also actively involved in the struggles for epistemic freedom to the extent that he was a leading figure in the establishment of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. This was a catalyst for change within a university that was linked to the University of London tradition. There was no African Studies; it was very peripheral. If you look at his speech at the formal opening of African Studies, it talks about the African genius: how do we regain the African genius? And then at the Congress of the Pan-Africanists he talks about the African renaissance. And Professor Kenneth Dike from Ibadan, who was also there, talks about regaining our epistemic sovereignty. So that is an attempt to say, "but political independence without epistemic freedom would be empty". So, it would be important to move in that direction, to the extent of Nkrumah inviting W.E.B. Du Bois to Ghana to continue with his *Africana* encyclopedia. And if Nkrumah was not removed from power in 1966, we don't really know what would have been the outcome of all these efforts. But I found that to be a very important aspect of this issue of African Studies. Because at the moment, a lot of the way people are thinking about African Studies is to think from the US and also to think from England. What I'm trying to do is ask, how do we think about the movement for African Studies in Africa itself? And you already mentioned the issue of associations. 1957—Ghana gains independence. 1957—US Association of African Studies is

established. It begins to overwhelmingly push the issue of African Studies as Area Studies, while Nkrumah is pushing African Studies as part of the advancement of Pan-Africanism and the African national revolution. Whether it was a coincidence or not I don't know, but it happened in the same year—when Nkrumah is talking about epistemic autonomy (African genius and African renaissance), then in the US they are establishing an association to read Africa from the outside, funded from the US which was involved in a Cold War. But during that time, it looked like the continent was very confident of where it wanted to go. If we move from Ghana to Nigeria (Ibadan), you will also find that there was a clear argument: “In order for us to move forward, we need to rewrite African history”. And if we went to Dakar, with Cheikh Anta Diop, “we need to dispel the Eurocentric conception of African history”. And if you moved to Dar es Salaam, again, you will find a very interesting leftist tradition with Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Issa Shivji, Mahmood Mamdani, and others, of course, also critiquing the Ibadan School, arguing that the Ibadan School is all about kings and queens. It's not about the people. History is not made by queens and kings. It is made by the people and then the Dar es Salaam School begins to do what might be called a People's History From Below.

In 1967, there was the establishment of the Association of African Universities. And in that association there is a clear definition of what an African university is. It is born in Africa, not transplanted from outside. Then you move up to 1973 with the establishment of CODESRIA and others. You'll begin to see that there is a shift. First, the economies were no longer performing well enough to finance the universities. Second, on the political front, you had military dictators and the rise of Idi Amin and the others. And then third, at a global scale, you have the beginnings of the Washington Consensus and the Structural Adjustment Programs. And then the whole African national decolonial project collapses. And when it collapses, a lot of academics engage in what we call survivalist politics. Either you adopt a comprador position in the intellectual sphere in which you just become a conduit so that you get paid, or you degenerate into sycophancy, again singing for your supper.

And this takes us to the emergence of what you were talking about—postcolonial discourses. And again, I always try to be very careful when I'm talking about this. Because some people want to dismiss it and say “the posts” were a problem—that postcolonialism was actually born out of postmodernism and poststructuralism. But I think we need to nuance this as well, in the sense that there is a version of postcolonialism which is informed by postmodernism and poststructuralism, but there is also another version that is informed by *anticolonialism*. If you look at the significant work of scholars like V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of*

*Africa* (1994), *The Invention of Africa* (1988), you can't dismiss this literature and say: "It contributes nothing to African Studies!" Even Mbembe's (2001) *On the Postcolony* has generated so much for us in African Studies. And then you go to the work of Pal Ahluwalia, who wrote this book *Out of Africa* (2010), in which he was saying: "Let's not quickly say that the postcolonialism is coming from Europe". And his idea is that you will find that thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and others are Maghrebian thinkers, rather than French thinkers, if their history and linkages with Tunisia and Algeria are considered. And if you think that way then you will understand them differently. So, it's a complex terrain in which African Studies finds itself, but you cannot then dismiss the contribution of post-colonial thought easily.

What I've always tried to say is that there is a long decolonial intellectual movement, with its own sub-movements. So, if you think in that way, then you spend all your time trying to consider nuances and contexts of particular moments and intellectual traditions that emerged. Julian Go's work (2016) on how anticolonial thought is social theory helps us also to understand this better by using the idea that there are waves. He uses postcolonial for everything—rather than the decolonial—in his waves perspective. Importantly, he identifies the significance of 1973 as a turning point in postcolonial thought. And he says that in 1973, first of all there is the assassination of Amílcar Cabral, who was a leading light in the anticolonial phase of postcolonial thought. It becomes a turning point. And he also says that in 1973, we have the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war, which was being watched by Edward Said. And he begins to write that canonical text, *Orientalism*, based on the observations he made during the Arab-Israeli War, whereby Western media was Orientalizing the Arabs as cowards destined to be defeated by Israel. And I always add that, if we were thinking from the continent, 1973 was also the formation of CODESRIA.

So, it's a very complex terrain, which, as I said, forces you to end up presenting another lecture. But it also takes us to the other dimension, which is always falling between the cracks: the gendering of African Studies and the contribution of feminist scholarship to African Studies. What changes does it bring? How is it cutting across? Where did it intervene? I then see the recent resurgence of decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as perhaps a "fourth wave" within this context in which we return to reopening the basic epistemological questions, if I can use that argument from Immanuel Wallerstein. To me the basic epistemological questions include: What is the relationship between knowledge and identity, for instance? What is the relationship between knowledge and ideology, for instance? What is the relationship between knowledge and geography, for instance? And all these questions, you cannot just dismiss them as they are doing in France (Mbembe 2011) and say:

“This is Critical Race Studies which is something from America, which is an imposition on us”. I think that’s a lazy way of dealing with it. These are difficult questions which have come back to haunt us. And we need to confront them directly.

Al-Bulushi

You’ve just mentioned the question of geography. And I think you’ve already given us a rich sense of how you were thinking about, and how the volume is thinking about, how we might radicalize and decolonize our geographic imaginations. So I’m hoping you can say a little bit more about that, with regard to the geographic imagination that is at work in this volume. And relatedly, I wonder what you make of the burgeoning field of Black Geographies and the interventions by people like Katherine McKittrick, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Clyde Woods? Might we see your volume as helping to further globalize some of the themes in their work, even if more implicitly than explicitly?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Yeah, in fact, when I saw that question, I thought that the departure link perhaps in decolonial thinking is the work of James Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World* (1993). And he was a geographer, I think. The issue which we are trying to engage is this notion of “worlding from Europe”. And what Marxism and the decolonial in combination are trying to do is to pose a counter-reworlding from the global South. If we think that way then you will center certain events which might otherwise be peripheral, like the Haitian Revolution. This becomes a very central example of reworlding from the global South. You will find the people who were enslaved, who were kept in chains but who never lost the drive to reproduce space on their own terms.

And the second aspect takes us to the concept of the geographies of opulence versus the geographies of poverty. And our approach is to study this, not from a conventional geographic way where it can be naturalized, but by denaturalizing what has been naturalized by the colonizer’s model. And if you bring Fanon into this issue of the geographies, his concept of the zone of being and the zone of non-being has links with urban space and the Manichaeon structure. The town of the Black, and town of the whites. I supervised a Master’s thesis which was using Fanon to study the geography of Sandton, which is the richest suburb in South Africa, and the poor township of Alexandria, which is just across the M1 highway. And they were using the M1 as really a dividing line between the two. And it really brought out very clearly the Manichaeon structure. They are just neighbors; on one side, the houses are very small matchboxes, and on the other side are gigantic houses. And if the police see you [a resident from Alexandria] on the other side in Sandton at one o’clock, they will always ask you where you are going. And you need to say “well I’m going to George’s house” or something like that, or “I’m working” if you are Black. And if you have no answer for the

police, they just take you across the M1 and drop you back in Alexandria. You belong in that geographic field—don't come to this other side.

So, I found this concept of Black Geographies to be very important, but I also found that it is breaking out of the disciplinary. Geography was not always known that way. It's really an interesting way to bring in race, to bring in gender into issues of space. And this type of thinking makes people rethink their fields of study. If it wasn't for your question, I wasn't following Black Geographies that much. So, I really had to go back to check, because I'm reading Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science* (2021) here. So, I knew a bit about it. But I hadn't delved deeply into thinking about Black Geographies yet. It actually links very well within the whole concept of the coloniality of being. Because if you don't understand the coloniality of being, you won't understand why some people were subjected to genocide, while others were subjected to enslavement, while others were subjected to dispossession. You won't understand. Because the issue is the coloniality of being. If we pose it properly, it actually says: "This is a device". They were looking for a device: "Who are we going to colonise? Who are we going to enslave? Who are we going to dispossess?" And then they brought a criterion that the ontologies of human beings will be graduated. So there will be some with the higher ontology who are white, and then there are others who are lighter, and some who are darker. And then there are others who are pushed out of the human family altogether. And those are the ones who were subjected to genocide. Those are the ones who are pushed into a subhuman category. Those are the ones who were subjected to slavery. Colonialism was not a random process. You needed to have clear targets and a structure which allowed you to say: "No, I will colonise these". You fight them, then you target them differently, and you subject them to modern colonial power differently. So I found that we can link those things in a very interesting way.

Al-Bulushi Finally, the book really underscores the importance of Marxism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as being democratic. And this term may mean different things to different people. Can you expand upon the specificity of the *democratic* in your democratic Marxism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and why it is so important for your project?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni And when you raised the question I thought it's not only "democratic Marxism", but it must also be "democratic decolonisation". And I think we were supposed to put it in quotation marks, the "democratic". Because it doesn't mean the liberal democracy which we're all familiar with. It must mean something deeper than that. And with reference to Marxism, we're thinking about how to shift from the orthodox version of Marxism, which was very prescriptive, very rigid, very dogmatic, highly

curated, if I can use such a word, and perhaps even intolerant of diversity. This tradition suffered the high price of Stalinism. It was also state-led. This gave Marxism a bad name. People then decided to associate the failure of the Soviet Union with the failure of Marxism. But, to me, Marxism is a science. And it is still relevant even after the fall of the Soviet Union. Because as a science of understanding capitalism, there is nothing which rivals it. It continues to be a very useful science. Then its democratization concerns rerouting it through people's struggles, rather than the way it has been hijacked by elites. I think that's what we mean by "democratic". If we reroute it through people's concrete struggles, which are anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, then it regains its popular aspect, whereby it is not an imposition from above. And if we think that way, even for decolonization, then we need to think how to re-route it through the people's struggles. Rather than the way it has been hijacked by the petite bourgeoisie and nationalist elites, which, if we use Fanon's terminology, are associated with the "pitfalls of national consciousness", and all its corresponding problems. This then means that the Marxism and decolonization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are open to other movements, like radical ecological movements, feminist movements, and Indigenous peoples' movements. In that way, it is really not rigidly proletarian, so to speak. It adapts to the challenges of the present times. And if Stalin is used as an example of a spoiler in Marxism, then we can say there were also many spoilers in decolonization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. People like Mobutu Sese Seko and many others gave it a bad name. So, the democratic is really to say: we take into account the distortions and the abuses of these liberatory theories, as the book is trying to say, but you don't then throw away the bathwater together with the baby. As a science of understanding capitalism, in all its mutations, I think Marxism is still very useful. And decolonization and decoloniality are very useful in understanding the afterlives of colonialism. So that's what we meant by "democratic". But we don't mean the liberal definition of democracy.

But at the same time, I think, if we take them together, Marxism and decolonization, it also enables us to speak today about the sovereignty of the people rather than the sovereignty of the state. And I think that emerged clearly in the Arab Spring, where people were really trying to gain their sovereignty against the sovereignty of the state. But there was a time in the decolonization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereby the sovereignty of the state was confused with the sovereignty of the people. But I think now we've learned that the sovereignty of the state is never the sovereignty of the people. It also makes us reconsider the horizon of decolonization. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the horizon or the heaven of decolonization was the attainment of state status, or national status. But I think we've realized that the state is actually a coup within the modern world-

system, saving capital more than the people. Approaching it that way enables us to rethink many things which went wrong in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **[3] Decolonization and Afro-Feminism—A Conversation between Sylvia Tamale, Sylvia Bawa, and Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin**

- Sylvia Bawa      Prof. Tamale, it is good to meet your heroes! In this case, it's particularly fantastic for us, Grace and I, that we get to talk to you about your work, because it has been really inspirational for us. It's made things a lot easier for us in Canada, in the diaspora, and just as African feminists in general, in terms of talking about some very difficult things. Our people say that the palm wine tapper has a view that those who are on the ground are not privy to. Therefore, we are grateful that we get to tap into your wisdom today in terms of discussing these important questions of the future with you. Both Grace and I read this—your book—mostly as something that gives us a roadmap for the future. Therefore, I think the conversations that we've been having and those that we are going to be having today with you are primarily about the future. Indeed, you say that in the book that you are writing this with the future in mind.
- Sylvia Tamale      Thank you for the kind words. It's my pleasure to be here.
- Bawa      Thank you so much for making the time. We are going to start with the brief anecdote you gave about the American academic who jokingly called this book project about decolonization, "African science fiction". We both had a good chuckle when we read that. You clearly do not believe this and boldly declared in the book that African decolonization is not science fiction, but that it is indeed realizable. Could you tell us how you came to this conclusion, especially given the circumstances we find ourselves in today, with multiple crises? As you even said, it looks like we always take one step forward and sometimes multiple steps back on the continent. Could you tell us where your hope comes from and how you came to this conclusion?
- Tamale      Well, that American academic was speaking from a place of ignorance and prejudice, in my view, like most people around the world, including Africans, by the way; as Africans we should know better that we are included in this ignorance and prejudice about who we are and what our continent is. Like most people around the world, the construction and ideas that this academic has about Africa are probably informed by the consistent diet of primitivist myths that are fed to the world by their very efficient propagandist machinery. That is, the imperialists' propagandist machinery.

Coloniality uses broad brush strokes to freely paint Africa as an impoverished backwater, this hot land of disease, war, corruption, and poverty. Very few people have the capacity to identify all the mechanisms in domination, production, knowledge acquisition, and knowledge dissemination. The firm grip that the “new empire”—the G7 countries, the big multinational corporations, China, multilateral institutions like the World Bank and IMF—has on the management of information systems and knowledge is unprecedented and almost uncheckable.

Despite the debilitating legacies of slavery and colonialism that continue to hold our continent and perpetuate global geopolitical and economic imbalances, I think Africa will inevitably rise like those many heads of the hydra whereby you strike one and another one that is twice as strong emerges. The anticolonial movement is catching on more in the Global South, including in Africa, particularly among the youth. This is where I find hope. The colonial blinders are beginning to slip off our eyes, and we are waking up to reclaim our dignity and our position in the world.

I find that these ripples are being felt around the continent. You can see it in small pockets such as the Fallist Movements, the emergence of Pan-Africanist institutes around the continent, decolonial research networks, and popular street and civic resistance in countries like Sudan and Burkina Faso. The world is definitely changing, and Africa is no exception. Young people are now including decolonial and anti-oppression literature on their book club reading lists, bell hooks, Fanon, Freire, Rodney, and so on. Things are changing. You asked, how did I come to this conclusion? It’s because of these things that I can witness. I know it won’t happen in my lifetime, but things are beginning to change. People are beginning to understand what decolonizing the mind is about and what it means for our decolonization project.

Bawa I think decolonizing the mind is probably the last hurdle we have. You have outlined that well in your book. I’ll pass it over to Grace now.

Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin

Thank you, Professor. In listening to you, and obviously from reading your book, we can definitely tell that you do have this sense of hope. I like what you pointed out about how people are waking up to reclaim our dignity and our position in the world. In relation to that, I would say in terms of a segue, you write this book with the objective of reaching and opening up dialogue and spaces of possibilities with young Africans, grappling with Afro-feminism and decolonization. You called for us to “re-story” ourselves. Recent Afro-futuristic projects, such as art, literature, and cinema, project a viable, decolonial and futuristic Africa. We think these projects are, like your book, about power and resistance and

are similar to your previous response. So, power to reclaim and proclaim, and resistance to the coloniality of being in various ways. Do you think these kinds of projects open up spaces for hope and dreams about the future we deserve?

Tamale

Definitely. I think African futurism and the interdisciplinary genre and movement hold a lot of promise for the imaginaries of our people. I think it was Eleanor Roosevelt who said that the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. Last year, I was lucky enough to be part of the editorial team that published an issue of *Feminist Africa* on "Gender and Sexuality in African Futurism".<sup>3</sup> That's when I really got to understand the power of imagination. Imagination grounded in African indigeneity, histories, cultures, technologies, and experiences.

Nelson Mandela also told us that dreams are the roads that lead to our goals. Actually, many Africans believe that dreams are voices of our ancestors. There's an African proverb, I think, that says something like dreams are related to the past, but connected to the future. African futurism can help us reimagine gender roles and relations. Reimagine and map out the possibilities of a continent that utilizes the abundance of its resources. And by resources, I think about human, physical, technological, and so forth. So, building an awesome continent from which its people don't flee, but return to in droves, including you two [laughs]. Now, never underestimate the power of the mind. What African futurism does is harness that power into action. It empowers us to craft the future that we want.

Adeniyi-  
Ogunyankin

Thank you, Professor. I love that. Never underestimate the power of the mind. I like what you said about dreams as well. Yes, we will return to the continent, Sylvia, right?

Bawa

Definitely. We return in various ways. Sometimes, I like to believe that although we are physically living in the West, we are present in Africa through various ways. When you talk about return ... and I'm not going to go on this tangent, but I always talk about time travel that I think Africans have been doing, if we think about it, in the kinds of spiritual journeys that our people undertake. But like I said, I will not go off on that tangent, not today.

Prof. Tamale, as African women who did grad school in North America, we often did not see ourselves reflected in our readings, especially concerning feminist projects. It's always exciting for us when we read scholarship that centers on African feminisms, Afrofeminism. In particular, you make a very compelling argument that African liberation is only possible through a decolonial Pan-African feminist lens with Ubuntu at its core. Could you please elaborate more on the important relationship between Ubuntu and Afrofeminism and the ways it offers a roadmap toward decolonization?

Tamale

Sadly, even here on the continent, the education system promotes Eurocentric orthodoxies and hierarchies. It's not just there. This is how our minds and imaginations are captured by coloniality. Of course, there are other institutions that complement education like religion, the media, the law, and so on. But for me, it is simple logic that whatever it is that we are doing now is not working. I've been part of the African feminist movement for over three decades, and I just feel like a hamster on a wheel. All the work and sacrifices that we poured into this movement have very little to show for it. The situation for the ordinary people on the ground, particularly women, has not shifted much. This should signal to all of us that there is something fundamentally wrong with the frameworks and paradigms that we are using.

Being under the grip of coloniality, we keep returning to its logic; we keep returning to its processes to solve our problems. We are fooled into thinking that it's where it will lead us to modernity and development. So, our ways of thinking, our ways of being and doing, have been captured by Eurocentric worldviews, which actually denigrate African traditional worldviews. The Ubuntu worldview reflects Africans' understanding of the essence of humanity. It understands very well that you cannot live well if others do not.

Solidarity and interconnectedness are key to the health of the community. It's about belonging to a community and being protected by it, as well as being one with nature. Most non-Western countries share this worldview. Ubuntu values unity in diversity and it holds a lot of promise for human dignity and compassion. I am because we are. How would such a philosophy lead us to decolonization? When you look at its core values—solidarity, interconnectedness, humaneness, respect, dignity, egalitarianism—and then you juxtapose them with the neoliberal philosophy that valorizes individualism, competition, the market, privatization, commodifying humans and social relations, this alone tells you that it can act as our moral compass toward decolonization.

There's a lot of promise in Ubuntu as a source of inspiration for our future in Africa. In whatever we plan, we should aim at inclusivity, not exclusivity. We must promote sharing and the interest of the collective, as well as individuals within the collective. In addition to all that, the fact that Ubuntu views humanity as part and parcel of physical nature means that it celebrates the values that connect us to nature. This is very different from the neocolonial capitalist view of nature, which is very exploitative and extractivist. In my view, Ubuntu practices can stem the destructive processes of global warming and decolonize the climate crisis and all its vulnerabilities.

Bawa

You have rehashed the importance of Ubuntu in centering liberatory projects and practices. I'm really glad you touched on the fact that, because the situation on the ground hasn't shifted

much for the ordinary African woman, actually Black women in the world, we do need to shift our focus and our framework. I think when you talk about Ubuntu in this way, you also point to a way in which we can actually do more ethical interplanetary politics.

Adeniyi-Ogunyankin How can we overcome the reality on the ground that doesn't always point us toward Afro-communitarianism, particularly given the assault of Ubuntu by capitalism?

Tamale It is indeed a monumental challenge that we face as Africans to reorient and to reconfigure our ways of thinking and being. After over a century of imbibing coloniality, it is extremely difficult for us to adopt alternative ways of perceiving, of understanding, and of interpreting the world. We have to be very proactive and very intentional in adopting processes and policies that will reorient our thinking and reconnect us to our indigenous values of Ubuntu. I'm talking about a complete overhaul of all colonial structures, institutions, and policies that will transform our continent for the better.

Take the education system, where students continue to uncritically consume Eurocentric material that only helps to infringe the continent deeper into global capitalist hierarchical structures, capitalist spaces and even ideologies. I've always wondered why, when we are learning, the alphabet tells us A is for apple when we don't have apples in the tropics. They don't grow here. It becomes very difficult for a child to visualize and understand something that they do not know. I think the first time I saw an apple was in the 1980s. Africa and its people can't create the futures that we seek if we continue with business as usual. And it has to be a continental, Pan-African effort.

Bawa I got excited about the example of the apple. Because I still remember so many things that I read about and only seeing here for the first time, and realizing that, if only somebody could have made that local connection for me when I was still growing up to understand what was happening. One of the things that we like about the book is that the decolonial project is not just about deconstruction, but also about reconstruction. In other words, you just don't provide a critique, as it were, but you provide a roadmap for achieving decolonization. Two of the things you highlight as being critical to reconstruction are the restoration of our spirituality and Afro-ecofeminism. Could you please elaborate a bit more on these two pillars and tell us why they are integral to reconstructing Africa?

Tamale I think Africa needs a decolonial break from the tether that ties its economies to the global capitalist market. Now, reconstructing Africa would entail excavating the values that were buried by the empire. It requires radical structural changes such as adopting an alternative economic system and making a series of

transformational processes to replace global development, discourses of development and modernization. Some center socialism, where it is not the market that drives it, but the optimum utilization and distribution of resources. This can only be done after we restore our indigenous spirituality or cosmological interconnectedness between humans, animals, and nature. Details of how such an economy would operate would have to be worked out, but it's inevitable.

**Bawa** That connection with nature is really crucial in thinking about the future.

**Adeniyi-Ogunyankin** Part of what you also emphasized in your book is community justice. Particularly in Chapter Five, you mentioned that community justice challenges the colonially imposed systems of justice of policing. While reading this, it reminded us a little of the prison abolition movement, particularly Mariame Kaba's book *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (2021) where she emphasizes "Building community-based interventions that address harms without relying on police" and "Thinking through the end of the police and imagining alternatives". Would you say that abolition is a possible decolonial project in the African context?

**Tamale** Of course, it is. The prison system as we know it today reflects the Eurocentric liberal moral system and not the values and moral system of, say, Ubuntu. The former glorifies individual moralism and autonomy, while the latter, that is Ubuntu, emphasizes collective moral responsibility of individuals. Can we honestly say that the current prison system in our countries is working? It is designed to control and regulate and does not solve the problem of reoffending and rehabilitation or reintegrating the offending people in society. Statistics clearly show that the prison system is a disaster. You must know, Sylvia, the Sankofa symbol from West Africa.

**Bawa** Yes, I do.

**Tamale** I love it. I have adopted it as my logo now that I've retired and it's on my personal letterhead. It depicts a bird moving forward with its head turned backward. It's associated with the Ashanti proverb that says, it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten. The Sankofa theory reminds us that we have so many gems in our indigenous traditions that we have lost and need to retrieve. Most African traditional ecosystems aimed at restorative justice and based themselves on participatory communal reconciliation. To provide examples of such community-based conflict resolution mechanisms: the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, for example, the Mato Oput among the Acholi in East Africa; both these models are based on the philosophy of reconciliation and reparation, not the incarceration and retribution prison regimes. I think it is possible to return to these processes that, instead of

dehumanizing and breaking offenders, work to make them accountable while preserving their integrity and dignity.

Bawa

Thank you for talking about restorative justice. I'm grateful that you are very hopeful about things. But then there are all these other entanglements that we have to deal with before then. Sometimes I think about them, in the meantime, before we arrive. As Grace asks in her work (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin 2019), have we arrived or what's the process of arrival at that place? The question that we have next relates to the last one that you just answered about abolition. Because one of the contributions that we found useful that has also heavily influenced our work and feminisms is the argument that culture and rights are not antagonistic to each other as we've been made to believe for a very long time. And in fact, as you've said, using Sankofa, to go back to look at the nuggets in our histories that we could reclaim and use very critically toward our liberation.

You argue in Chapter Five that "Our decolonial efforts must therefore shift the focus to the practice of living customary law and its amenability to change". How do you imagine this project of restoring the dignity of our people will unfold in this time of multiple crises? How do we, as you ask in the book, "navigate Eurocentric 'modernity' without losing our 'Africanness'", especially with regard to the rights discourse and the ways in which they're pitched against each other? Do you think third-generation human rights, that is, the right to development and the right to solidarity, which is still in drafting state, provide some hope? Can you elaborate, especially, on this legal pluralism that you talk about in the book?

Tamale

Well, I think in the previous responses, I've touched on the issue of how I imagine the project of restoring the dignity of Africans will unfold. But on the issue of this so-called third-generation human rights development and solidarity, as you must have read in Chapter Six of the book, I don't have much faith in the human rights system, mainly because of its discourses and practices that are informed by the ideology of liberalism. Liberalism—that life-giving spirit of capitalism. There are too many complexities and contradictions between the current system of human rights and decolonization. I don't think that adjusting and tinkering with the current human rights framework will work. I think for me, it's a clear case of using a master's tools to dismantle a master's house.

On the face of it, these beautifully crafted rights to development and international solidarity, seem to rhyme with decolonization under Ubuntu philosophy. But on closer scrutiny, you will find that the development model that the international human rights framework has in mind is the neoliberal universalistic essentialist one, steeped in modernity and conceptualized in the capitalist global political economy. The right to solidarity, as you know,

already exists in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It was Africa's attempt to incorporate the Ubuntu philosophy of interconnectedness, reciprocity, and compassion into the human rights framework at the regional level. However, it's always faced steep resistance from the West, mainly because its spirit does not sit comfortably with neoliberal capitalist values of individualism, competition, and sovereignty.

The other problem is that, as legal constructs, these two rights are incapable of protecting vulnerable people. Why do I say this? Because the neoliberal Western paradigm that informs the treaty-based human rights framework simply cannot stand up to the abuses of neoliberal economic policies and practices. For example, neoliberal states that privatized basic services such as water, healthcare, transport, education, electricity, sanitation, and so on, result in serious tensions with human rights. I think Africa needs to be wary of international human rights law.

In the book, I talk about the contextual cultural approach to rights, espoused by some African feminists, as one that offers a more nuanced approach and depth of understanding to people's lived reality. One that is rooted in communitarianism and the ethos of Ubuntu. In short, I think we are talking here about an Africanized notion of human rights. But I really don't think that this so-called third-generation ... even just prioritizing rights in that way, first-generation, second-generation, and third-generation, is very problematic.

Adeniyi-Ogunyankin Thank you, Professor, for that insight. It seems like all your responses so far keep pushing us back to the bird that you like—to fly forward, but with our heads looking back. We need to, without romanticizing, go back to how things used to be, be more nuanced about things, be rooted in communitarianism. The one thing that I find challenging is the overhauling of the system because, where do we start? But let's say that we do successfully follow all the blueprints, that you highlighted in the book, and that you've also discussed today, for liberation and decolonization—what do you think Africa will be like, say, 100 years from now?

Tamale It will be like Wakanda. No, but seriously, I think futuristic cinema, such as *Wakanda* and *The Woman King*, more recently, may have their flaws, but they offer a glimpse of the futuristic African space. I particularly like them for their decolonial frame, their critical agendas, and their feminist representations of women as people of power, people of wisdom, strength. I like that glimpse into the future of Africa. So, yeah, Wakanda.

Adeniyi-Ogunyankin Wakanda Forever! I really like what you mentioned in terms of the feminist representations of women as people of power, wisdom, and strength. You're right. Both of those films have their own flaws. But I do remember when I was watching *The Woman King* ... I don't always get emotional when I watch movies, but there was

just this little bit of emotion that came out, even though I think it was a really difficult subject and topic. But these women, it was just so nice to see them; especially when you're here in the West, for us, there are all these problematic representations of African women, but it was just so wonderful to see that power, wisdom, and strength.

And like you argue in your book, we need to have an Afrofeminist approach to decolonization and to thinking through the future of Africa. If we can do that with this wisdom and strength that comes along with feminism, maybe we definitely might achieve that future that you just mentioned, that you've imagined and that we've seen others imagine in various forms of work, whether it's literature, art, etc., etc. Sylvia, do you have something to add?

Bawa

One of the things that excites us is this idea of intrusion; this taking over of space, as it were, by artists on the continent and in the diaspora. All these Afro-futuristic works that we see in art, in design, in film. Particularly in film, I remember going to watch *Black Panther*. It was a whole project, especially in the diaspora, perhaps not as much on the continent. Because again, on the continent, I don't think that we necessarily see the assault on our humanity in the same way. People in the diaspora really responded well to this very positive and futuristic depiction of Africa in *Black Panther*.

We're talking about all these things that are coming out; Afro-futuristic work, novels that we've started to read in our graduate courses. We tend to assign these things to our students so that people can make certain other connections about Africa. You discuss the challenges of shaking off this coloniality of being and trying to do decolonial work. In trying to reclaim our humanity, we spend way too much time fighting and fighting these things. Subsequently, we sometimes actually forget to dream about the future. To think about what it would look like in another 100 years if we weren't so focused on the master's house. But we should focus on dreaming and looking ahead, something you do exceptionally well in your book.

#### **[4] "Defiant Scholarship: Learning from African Intellectuals"—A Reflection by Patricia Daley**

*Antipode's* engagement with three African scholars (Franklin Obeng-Odoom, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and Sylvia Tamale) aims to challenge the limited presence of African scholarship in debates on global societal transformation, especially in new wave 21<sup>st</sup> century interventions on decolonization and decoloniality within the discipline of geography. Except for the work of Achille Mbembe, which has also been repeatedly featured in the pages of *Antipode* (see e.g. Davies et al. 2017; Death 2022; Hutta 2022; Ortega 2020), African critical thought is rarely engaged with in and beyond radical geography (for exceptions, see Al-

Bulushi 2023; deGrassi 2023), despite its long history of defiant scholarship<sup>4</sup> challenging imperialism, colonialism, racial capitalism, and Eurocentric knowledge systems; its extensive research on the “premodern” and precapitalist world; and its emancipatory visions for human futures. In this commentary, I would like to explore some of the explanations for the continued marginalization of African intellectual contributions by discussing how coloniality affects the production of scholarship in and on Africa and its external reception, despite moves to decolonize knowledge by African and African diaspora scholars.

Elsewhere, I have argued, with colleagues, that geography’s “epistemic ignorance” (Grosfoguel 2021) can be attributed to the marginalization of Area Studies within the Western academy and of Africa in geography (Daley and Kamata 2017), and colonial logics that persist in the discipline in Africa (Daley and Murrey 2022). This peripheralization is deeply rooted in white supremacist colonial epistemologies that devalue and subjugate African knowledge systems, and promote African exceptionalism. These practices of dismissal are not just common among Western liberal scholars but are equally evident in the Eurocentricity and latent racism that inform the worldview of many on the Western left. This commentary builds on Obeng-Odoom’s (2019) substantive discussion on the marginalization of African intellectual thought. His critique of the “Western Left Consensus” (Obeng-Odoom 2021b) follows a tradition of African and African diaspora intellectuals’ refusal to adopt Eurocentric left perspectives uncritically (e.g. as espoused by Hubert Harrison and Walter Rodney).

Africa’s role in the geopolitics of knowledge production is maintained by the long-held prejudice that African scholarship is characterized by empiricism—only addressing realities peculiar to the continent. Lessons from research conducted in Africa, even those using Western-derived theories, are considered to lack universal applicability. White supremacy within the modern academy maintains the intellectual hegemony that Western Africanist scholars have over the production of knowledge about Africa. Such academic propriety is unparalleled anywhere else in the Global South (Mafeje 1996). Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake (1982:124) described the “mainstream Western social science in Africa ... as imperialism”: “it is a crucial tool in controlling Third World perceptions of their world”.

African intellectuals, including those in the diaspora, have been producing defiant scholarship on decolonization since the imposition of colonial rule, and especially since the beginning of print journalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Daley and Murrey 2022; Grosfoguel 2021; Younis 2022). In Africa, what Mignolo (2009) terms “epistemic disobedience” was partly constrained by the influence of Christian missionary education, which introduced European ontologies and epistemologies as superior, while denigrating African thought to the realm of the primitive and uncivilized, thus denying the possibility of dynamism and critical insights (Mafeje 1992). Some of the mission-educated elites and their descendants have remained Francophiles, Anglophiles, and Lusophiles, adopting Western modernity as the endpoint of human progress, and embracing former colonizers as benevolent aid donors. It is this coloniality that explains why, as Sylvia Tamale notes,

children in postcolonial Africa start their learning with “A is for apple”. This disjuncture between the language of modern education and that of the children’s social worlds limits the depth of experience that can be brought into their classroom and later academic scholarship. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who wrote his sixth novel *Matigari* (first published 1986) in his native language Gikũyũ, states that colonialism’s “most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world” (wa Thiong’o 1986:16).

Ake (1982) refers to the dominance of “European teleologism” in Western social science that positions actually existing European society as the “ideal society”. Consequently, the discourse of European modernity as a counter to African primitivity limited the capacity of the “educated” to value indigenous experiences and to learn from their histories and cultures. Looking back or internally was stigmatized as romantic introspection and relegated to the realm of ethnic nationalism or, much worse, “tribalism”. This has had implications for the transferal of revolutionary critique into decolonial praxis. Despite the extensive literature denouncing colonial formulations and their saliency in popular consciousness (e.g. Mafeje 1971), ethnicity still provides effective political tools for violence and oppression.

Critical African scholars have challenged the Western academy’s dehumanizing views of their peoples and sought to produce alternative scholarship that drew from their lived experiences and those of their ancestors (Archie Mafeje, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ben Magubane, V.Y. Mudimbe, Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí). For example, in 1963, Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop introduced the matriarchal principle as the foundation of African societies and the basis for a pan-African cultural unity, thereby showing how patriarchy and matriarchy differ between and within the Global North and the South (Diop 1989).

While Western universities experienced a form of creeping neoliberalization, in many African universities its impact was immediate and blunt (Mamdani 2007; Wuyts and Shivji 2008). The 1970s debt crisis precipitated a trend in state disinvestment in African universities. The decades that followed saw a concerted attack on radical scholarship. Debates about disciplinary relevance focused on whether they were advancing the neoliberal policy agenda. Governments sought to silence critics, ban protests, and shut down forms of activism that addressed injustices. Student activists were expelled, harassed, and progressive newspapers banned (Omanga and Buigutt 2017). With the liberalization of the university sector, coupled with increasing authoritarian practices, African academics were faced with three choices: succumbing to neoliberal orthodoxy and donor-approved and sponsored policy research; marginalization and impoverishment; or joining in the brain drain and fleeing the continent. Many took multiple jobs on the new university campuses springing up and found nonacademic side hustles in consultancy or business. With that university-based liberatory research declined, and critical thinking was left largely to research centers funded by progressive institutions from the Global North (the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, founded by Egyptian economist Samir Amin, being the main

example). Protecting academic freedom and gender/feminist studies became priorities for radical scholars, as well as transforming Africa's inherited universities to generate scholarship reflective of the continent's diagnosis of its own needs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 1997). Mafeje (1992) advocated "non-disciplinarity" as the way forward to Africanize political and intellectual discourse. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the more sustained African challenge to the Western academy in Africa has emanated from South Africa, where academic institutions still have some resources and independence from state and donor institutions, amidst the glaring failure of the modernity project to foster racial inclusivity and the universities to transcend their apartheid education legacies.

### ***Decolonial Marxism***

The experience of imperialism in the periphery and the global structural inequalities that it enforced meant that Marxism provided a suitable explanatory framework in Africa. Anticolonial scholarship drew on orthodox Marxism to understand how the productive forces in Africa could "develop", and neo-Marxists explained the limits of capitalist accumulation as a development strategy. Such was the revolutionary power of Marxism that anticolonial leaders, such as Patrice Lumumba, Amílcar Cabral, Samora Machel, and Thomas Sankara, who espoused socialism, were assassinated by an alliance of conservative African and imperial forces.

Unlike in the Western academy where Marxism and political economy analytical frameworks lost traction due to the emergence of poststructuralist critiques, in Africa, their demise can be attributed to the epistemic violence of neoliberalism. To impose structural adjustment in the 1980s, Marxism had to be discredited by governments and academic institutions eager to gain acceptance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Wuyts and Shivji 2008). The collapse of the Soviet Union was used to reinforce the view that there was no alternative to capitalism. Therefore, the intellectual space for sustained Marxist thought in the African academy deteriorated in almost all countries, except for South Africa and to some extent Zimbabwe. Here, post-apartheid, proponents of Black consciousness, the progressive wing of the African National Congress, and the Pan-African Congress drew on Marxism to articulate more just post-racial futures.

In the face of neocolonial realities, a political economy approach remains central to radical scholarship in Africa. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Morgan Ndlovu, in their edited volume *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Living Theories and True Ideas* (2021), point out the "planetary vision of liberation" that Marxism presented, and its common ground with decoloniality. Linking epistemic liberation to a reconfiguration of the relationship that African societies have with capital opens the imagination to the possibilities of radical Afrocentric futures.

Modern endemic poverty in Africa might have multiple dimensions but it is racialized, structural, and has deep colonial roots. Franklin Obeng-Odoom's (2021b) critique of Western liberals as well as the "Western Left Consensus" continues the tradition of Black and African decolonization scholars who refuse to be straight-jacketed by Marxist epistemology. In *Marxism and Decolonization*, Ndlovu-

Gatsheni and Ndlovu (2021:2) describe Black and African Marxists as intellectuals whose “lives of struggle and ideological orientations reflect how they deployed, critiqued, and stretched Marxism practically in the context of concrete forcefields and battlefields of national liberation histories and anti-colonial struggles”. For them, Marxism and decolonization “exist as living theories of life”.

Class formation in Africa is still of interest to foreign investors looking for markets in 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa. Structural adjustment virtually wiped out the middle class in the 1980s and 1990s; however, two decades later, Deloitte, the consultancy firm, produced a report proclaiming a rising middle class with Westernized consumptive patterns as a positive consequence of population growth. They write, “[n]umbers move product ... we will focus only on the opportunity on the premise that profit is underpinned by volume” (Deloitte 2013:1). Deloitte’s proclamation led to a flurry of interest in the spending power of the new middle classes—only for radical critique to expose its fallacy (Melber 2016). This new middle class is not to be confused with Africa’s established elites whose excessive consumption patterns and global mobility make them part of the new cosmopolitan Africans or *Afropolitans*.

Obeng-Odoom’s focus on the significance of land in the debates about planetary futures echoes Tuck and Yang’s (2012) thesis on the fundamentals of land to the decolonial project in North America. In many parts of settler-colonial Africa, the land question remains unresolved. For the continent as a whole 21<sup>st</sup> century land grabbing by corporations, wealthy individuals, private equity companies, conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and external states, mirrors the 19<sup>th</sup> century scramble for Africa in its dehumanized practices of dispossession, forced displacement, and impoverishment. Land restitution is often dismissed by both liberals and the Western left as a retrogressive and affective step that is out of line with modern systems of land use and productivity. Obeng-Odoom foregrounds the importance of land as he makes a case for learning from Africa’s experience of the commons as the basis of a new global ecological political economy.

### ***Global Connections***

In his interview, Ndlovu-Gatsheni demonstrates the solidarities that African intellectuals continue to sustain with radical scholars worldwide, particularly in the Global South. Black and African radical intellectual thought has always maintained a global perspective to understanding and overcoming capitalist oppression (Younis 2022). Pan-Africanism and Third Worldism are geographic imaginaries that challenge the bounded spatialities within which Africans are confined in Western intellectual thought. Thinking beyond the colonial-capitalist social groupings of “tribes”, “races”, and “nation-states” allows for the imagining of social formations with the potential for true liberation.

As with African Marxists, African feminists recognized the importance of forming transnational alliances within the continent and with the diaspora as part of the Pan-African movement. Sylvia Tamale represents the cohort of African

feminists in the academy who have challenged all forms of oppression, militarism, patriarchy, and homophobia. From the early 1980s, African feminists theorizing gender were engaging in decolonial praxis, questioning the European experience of gender as the global norm. In her seminal text, *Male Daughters Female Husbands*, Ifi Amadiume (1987) drew on Cheikh Anta Diop's understanding of patriarchy and matriarchy in the Global South to explore gender identities in Eastern Nigeria. In the same way European Marxists dismissed Diop's matriarchal principle as Afrocentric mythmaking, Western feminists rejected Amadiume's findings as romanticized accounts of precolonial relations emanating from a Nigerian diaspora-based scholar. Africans seeking to understand their societies outside of European frameworks suffer, and may fear, accusations of romanticizing the past, or of being preoccupied with ethnicity. But decolonial methods require accessing those ways of knowing that were labeled evil, backward, barbaric, and bush, and were stigmatized and forbidden within colonial education systems. As Tamale explains, these traditional ways are important, especially in warzones where liberal peace negotiations have failed to stop direct violence and people yearn for peaceful co-existence.

In contemporary Africa, elite capture of public goods, external domination, and patriarchal power is crudely enacted and opposition brutally squashed. As Tamale states in her interview, for women, progress has been slow. The reasons are complex and include the de-politicization that has accompanied gender mainstreaming in development policy, and the channeling of women's voices into donor-funded NGOs that became vulnerable to state regulation. NGOization allowed African First Ladies to establish nonprofits to counter movements from below. Mainstreaming resulted in the adoption of limits to women's empowerment. For example, the 30% quota as the level of women's political participation has enabled authoritarian regimes to plant compliant women into positions of power and declare progress to Western donors. In *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020), Tamale's optimism for liberated futures is grounded in the coming together of pan-Africanism and decolonial African feminism, which makes sense, since pan-Africanism transcended the bounded loyalties and imaginations of nation-states, and decoloniality forces a rethink of gender relations that is non-European in its ontology. But class needs to be part of the equation, as not enough attention has been paid to differences between African women and the disempowering effects of class politics on poor and rural women in African feminist studies.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The voices of African intellectuals should be more prominent in radical scholarship globally, not as interlocutors of African knowledge systems to the Global North, but as purveyors of insights on how to live and struggle in spaces subjected to ongoing practices of accumulation by dispossession. Spaces in which social and medical experiments are tested and refined, matriarchy has been superseded by modern patriarchy, and progress is dictated by external institutions bent on

reproducing colonial relations of domination. Finally, there can be no successful addressing of the socioecological crises of capitalism without the centering of race and extractivism in the Global South. Decoloniality has been at the heart of African peoples' liberatory projects and anticipated futures. 21<sup>st</sup> century rearticulations of decoloniality allow for consideration of African relational ways of knowing and living on the planet.

Even when academia and the populace were under neoliberal onslaught, public intellectuals remained defiant. Writers, visual artists, and musicians have popularized epistemic disobedience. For decades, the emancipatory lyrics of reggae musicians Bob Marley and Peter Tosh resonated across and between continents. The Nigerian artist Fela Aníkúlápó Kuti translated democracy as "democracy" in his Afrobeat song *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* to reflect the lived realities of electoral politics, and Edson "Azagaia" da Luz attacked the corrupt Mozambican elites in his rap song *Cães de Raça* ("Pedigree Dogs"). These critiques draw on traditions of communal storytelling in palavers, insakas, and barazas—the social worlds of decolonial epistemologies.

## **[5] Decolonial Crossroads—A Reflection by Wangui Kimari**

### *In the "High Night of Nameless Paths"*

Coloniality is everywhere. In all of our bodies, in the multiple times we live, in the many spaces we try and cultivate lives of dignity.

In my own family, in my own body and the collective bodies that I live within, it rears its ugly head through many diverse articulations. My grandmother died in the early 1960s on the operating table of a White South African doctor who, it is said, was conducting experimental tubal ligations on African women in Kenya. One great-grandfather, on my mother's side, never made it back from fighting in the First World War in Burma—if he ever made it there at all, we will never know. But I also have an ancestor, one of society's rascals as our last name implies, who used to intentionally urinate on the bonfires of authoritarian chiefs, and the heritage of this disobedience is registered in this name formalized in the identity documents that tie us to a neocolonial state. Through many corporealized sojourns across generations, it is because of these kinsfolk trajectories that we have pain and privilege; it is through these embodied experiences that we have relational insights into the ways in which my family and others are shaped by what, using Walter Rodney's (1972:205) phrase for colonialism, is a "one armed bandit".

I mention these experiences here in a bid not to forget the multiple ways through which colonialism moulds us: from the privileges that allow me to write this, to the death of my grandmother that is not often vocalized; it is offered, when it is actually shared, through the pain and resignation of an older aunt who can remember the difficulties in reconciling her mother's death with the memory of her leaving the house one morning full of vitality. These reflections on our own experiences are necessary to keep "fidelity to humanity" (Depelchin 2017);

against, in the words of Tamale (2020:2), “the imperial machinery [that] never eases its stranglehold over the world”.

Thus, while, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni mentions in his earlier interview within this series, decolonial reflections are increasingly demanded and popularized in institutions of higher learning across the globe, and unfortunately sometimes prescriptive and instrumental to the violent whims of academic careers, we must not forget the many crushing ways colonialism is lived in bodies. And, importantly, we who are called upon from time to time, due to our privilege, to elaborate on what this can mean, must not evade the need to put our bodies, too, at the center of the decolonial question.

The bodies that have been dealt the blows that are the forceful (and often fatal) reactions to calls for decolonization—the bodies that are not protected by our books, our essays, our online discussions, and who continue to live within the worst enduring outcomes of coloniality; they require that we belong to the collective body that tries to make its way through, borrowing from the poem *Rumo Novo* by Agostinho Neto (1950), the “high night of nameless paths”.<sup>5</sup>

In these routes without names, where we take uncertain steps to construct a new “rhythm” while looking for the “[hu]man we lost”, nothing is easy. There are no road maps. Step after step is crossroads. Yet, in the bloodied border fields of Melilla, in the teargassed streets of Dakar, in the actions of those on the frontline in Sudan trying to make sure that their loved ones stay safe, there are bodies that have known an “inheritance of lashes”, but somehow, still, “remain believers” (Neto 1950).

Certainly, “decoloniality’s point of departure is existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination, and exclusion”, writes Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:492). But, incredibly, many of those who have been claimed by and continue to strain against the enduring sharp teeth of what Ferdinand (2022) terms an “unsurpassable pathological irresponsibility”; those who are continuously made as “Negroes” and reside at the very bottom of “hold politics”, they show us that while treacherous, this road to remake power, knowledge, and being is not, as Tamale charges in her conversation with Adeniyi-Ogunyankin and Bawa, “science fiction”.

“Defiant scholarship” (Daley and Murrey 2022) can support these steps, and is, in fact, inspired by it. However, it, too, as Ouma (2022:184) argues, has its “dangers, limits and contradictions”. A paradox that I highlight here (and from which I am not exempt)—albeit with important exceptions documented by Daley and Murrey (2022), Ouma (2022), and Al-Bulushi (2023)—is this failure to recognize our various colonial heritages, implications, vulnerabilities, and entitlements as scholars who are working to think through decolonial pathways.

By committing to join and see in our body this collective body, of the struggling masses, whose “inheritance is lashes” but “still believes”, we can take up epistemic journeys that steer us away from the enduring colonial research that entrenches what Depelchin (2005) terms the “syndromes of abolition and discovery”. And, instead, implicate ourselves in what Thomas (2019:3), reflecting on the afterlives of the plantation in Jamaica, refers to as “Witnessing 2.0”: an “embodied practice” toward recognizing and responding to “the psychic and

sociopolitical dynamics in which we are complicit, and therefore to generate the ability to be response-able, to ourselves and others”.

At the decolonial crossroads that our people face and navigate every day, this is the least we can do.

### ***Thinking Nairobi, Detroit, Brazil***

Shimoni. On the southeastern coast of Kenya, there is the village of Shimoni named after a set of caves that were used as a “holding pen” for enslaved Africans before they were violently transported to Zanzibar and elsewhere. This unfortunate human cargo was captured from near and far, and then forced to travel between five and seven kilometers underground—a dark subterranean railway—from the village of Fikirini, so as to get to this terrestrial enclosure before they were transported to its maritime version.

In Shimoni’s absence from our local school curricula, the public invisibility of this former slave site, I am reminded of the inadequacy of African states, scholarship, and institutions to really grapple with the need to heal and historicize with the African diaspora.

Instead, like the treatment of Shimoni, which remains, for the most part, confined to a subterranean presence, particularly at the state level, we recognize our diasporic kin usually through unsustainable political or commercial gestures. Ultimately, our national investments to reflect and honor the memory of those who were “the ebony wood of Africa” stolen to “sustain colonial inhabitation[s]” (Ferdinand 2022:59) are mediocre, if there are any at all.

In her poem *Eulogy*, Grace Nichols (1983), the Guyanese-British poet, asks the “souls caught in the Middle Passage”:

How can I eulogise your names.

What dance of mourning can I make?

Despite the enduring horrors, the many “afterlives of slavery” (Hartman 2008) in Shimoni and across many parts of the continent, there is no substantive eulogy that is being cocreated in the region by those who have power. Instead, the memory of the millions of lives felled and stolen is pushed further down, made more materially and metaphysically underground. As but one example of this, the National Museum of Slavery in Luanda, Angola—the country that is estimated to have exported the bulk of enslaved Africans to the Americas—was, in 2019 when I lived briefly in the city, perpetually closed or under renovation. When I was finally able to enter one day by asking a caretaker to open it, the displays in the three small rooms were explained by what could not have been more than a few generic sentences; a curation that for me expressed a “sympathy-without-connection” (Ferdinand 2022) that is gravely disturbing for a country that had lost so much from a centuries-long sinister harvesting of its kin. But, at the same time, don’t we need more than a museum in Shimoni, Luanda, and beyond?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:493) states that “within the broader Global South context, the decoloniality movement has produced such South–South formations as

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa that is geared at shifting economic power from the West". Nevertheless, despite their purchase with states and scholarship on the continent, these bids for "de-imperialization" and "de-westernization", as we can see from many events, are not a decolonial "eulogy". Rather, in the persistent anti-Blackness seen within the articulations of these formations, and particularly in the countries that comprise these blocs, we fall far short of ensuring healing and justice. The coloniality of economic power and knowledge may be challenged, but not the coloniality of being.

This would require, as conveyed by Fanon (1967:186–187), an interrogation of the universals—South–South, for example—and a restoration from the "drowning" they imply. As he shared:

I have barely opened eyes that had been blindfolded, and someone already wants to drown me in the universal? What about the others? Those who "have no voice", those who "have no spokesman"...I need to lose myself in my negritude, to see the fires, the segregations, the repressions, the rapes, the discriminations, the boycotts. We need to put our fingers on every sore that mottles the black uniform.

Surely, we do need to touch wounds, and we need eulogies (and peoples museums) that come to terms with "the segregations, the repressions, the rapes, the discriminations, the boycotts". These are definitely not the empty statements emerging from presidential stages, such as those offered by, for example, Uhuru Kenyatta who denounces imperialism while his family remains the biggest landowner in Kenya. Or the "flag" pan-Africanisms of Presidents Museveni, Ramaphosa and, more recently, Ruto, while they massacre struggling people on the streets. It is certainly not the performative solidarity of institutions such as the African Union.

In contrast, Shilliam (2015:3) advocates for a peopled "infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity", one embedded in a "decolonial science of 'deep relation'", which cultivates "knowledge 'sideways'" away from the cartographic violence of imperial maps and visions. Such a science allows us to read, think, feel, act, historicize Nairobi, Detroit, Brazil together, without looking at their geographic locations; it prompts us to bring the Black Pacific and Soweto into one African story, and simultaneously eulogize Comoros and the Virgin Islands. This is a practice that, in the words of Kamau Brathwaite (1992), would be attuned to a "note that has been held for 500 years", and which bears witness to the reality that, as Tamale (2020:11) argues, "when the empire strikes the African 'other' it completely disregards the[ir] nuanced diversities".

It would allow us to see the similarities between the colonial inhabitations that deny Black residents in Flint, Michigan water and those that let Kenyans die of thirst. We would be able, then, to grasp why there are similarities in the life expectancies of Congo and Haiti.

And, too, amidst the violence and suffering, we will recognize, as Ferdinand (2022) asserts, that "the Negro does not die".

These kinds of recognitions, many would argue, are rare in the contemporary educational institutions on the continent, where scholarship is less independent, and is molded by the caprices of governments, foreign consultancies, and the

neoliberal condition. On this, Daley (2023; Daley and Murrey 2022) speaks of the intimate and public challenges faced by “defiant scholarship”, ultimately allowing for a situation where, in the words of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:489), “[w]e so far don’t have African universities. We have universities in Africa”.

To build this science that “exists underneath the wounds of coloniality” (Shilliam 2015:13), that centers the “underneath” of Shimoni and Luanda—the “psychic life of [their] geology” (Yusoff 2021:666), would require, as Daley (2023) writes, “accessing those ways of knowing that were labelled evil, backward, barbaric, and bush, and were stigmatised and forbidden within colonial education systems”. It would necessitate that we travel through the subterranean cave systems we have created, individually and collectively, to connect Nairobi, Detroit, Brazil, so that we can hear that decolonial “note that has lasted 500 years”.

### ***A Road Called Mau Mau***

In 1892, a few miles from the center of what would become Nairobi, the infamous Captain Lugard, of divide and rule fame, observed that “at one time ... four rhino were standing in different directions within view of the plain, and one which I severely wounded, in making off, stumbled over a couple of magnificent lions” (quoted in Nairobi City Council 1950:8). These kinds of narratives, of a land teeming with game, an open terra nullius, contributed to the settler-colonial enterprise that would seek to make, what would later be known as Kenya, a “White man’s country” (Jackson 2011).

Over a century later, in the railway museum adjacent to Nairobi station (site of the initial encampment from which emerged colonial Nairobi), one can still buy a poster that advertises:

THE HIGHLANDS OF  
BRITISH EAST AFRICA  
AS A  
WINTER HOME FOR ARISTOCRATS  
HAS BECOME A FASHION  
SPORTSMEN in search of BIG GAME make it a hobby  
STUDENTS of NATURAL HISTORY revel in this FIELD of  
NATURE’S own making

This information is followed by a graphic (see Figure 1) of the Kenya–Uganda railway line, with animals literally spewing from the sides of this machine. Here, there is a hippo and a crocodile half-submerged in a pool beside the train; a lion appearing to consider climbing up a palm tree; snakes slithering, in long coils, out of the railway windows; an African child launching themselves off the roof of the locomotive; and what seems to be a misplaced bear leaning on the railway



**Figure 1:** Poster from Nairobi Railway Museum (photo by Wangui Kimari, June 2023)

fence looking at an unperturbed White man. There is also a sign, by the lion and the palm tree, declaring: "EAST AFRICAN PROTECTORATE NOTICE: THE big GAME ARE TO BE CAREFULLY PRESERVED BY ORDER". And other human and nonhuman figures—elephant, bush and bird, for instance—are necessary features of this colonial mise en scène. Towering over them all, planted firmly within the raised section of the train station roof and clock, is the Union Jack.

When I first came across this poster during a visit to the railway museum in June 2023, I thought it was a relic of history: an object that had survived nature's way of interacting with archives—dust, termites, tears, greasy fingers, and the incendiary guilty purge of departing colonists—to pierce through our moment as a mnemonic device. However, I was soon to learn that this imperial poster had been *intentionally* reprinted for sale by Kenya Railways since, at least, 2005, and even featured the affirming stamp of the Kenya Tourism Board.

There was no irony in the faces of those who sold it, and the freshly printed copy I bought could be evidence for not only the popularity of this poster, but also the purchase of this national frame; the enduring need to make and represent Kenya as a “winter home for aristocrats”.

Critical conservation practitioners like Mordecai Ogada have consistently demonstrated the enduring seduction, with grave material effects, of this account; the positioning of Kenya as a land of endless savannah where Theodore Roosevelt and his entourage shot (as could you) 5,000 animals—over 160 species—and that Prince William seeks to “protect” with his continuous attacks on African “overpopulation” patterns (see Al Jazeera 2021). Almost 20 years after Binyavanga Wainaina's (2005) satirical essay *How to Write About Africa*, an enduring “Out of Africa” tale, replete with the language he flags, is still being reproduced by the state, giving insights into the logics and aspirations of a country that has been “independent” for over 60 years.

My research work over the last decade has sought to understand how Nairobi's marginalized dwellers continue to navigate the very violent articulations of this coloniality; their everyday struggles against the materialization of post-independence chronicles that maintain Africa as what Obeng-Odoom, in his conversation with Bauriedl and Carstensen-Egwuom, calls an “open pasture”. Those discourses that have somber bearing in the city and its lives in many intimate and public ways include “World Class City” policies and practices, whose impress, really, evidence imperial rationales.

Close to 70 years ago, a publication to mark the jubilee anniversary celebrations of Nairobi, 1900–1950 (Nairobi City Council 1950), noted the following:

The people of Nairobi are engaged in building here more than a city of stone, steel and wood, they are building a new city of human beings, working out a new way of life in this old continent, and a new means of bringing harmony between men and women of many kinds, drawn from many corners of the earth, with vastly different standards and ideas. The inspiration and experience are drawn from the glory of Britain.

Without a doubt, the majority of Nairobi's residents will tell you that Britain is still legible in the landscape. While Africans can now live in the city, it is, still, nonetheless visible in the design of buildings past and present, and in the bylaws and zoning inheritances that shape access to basic services and, even, life chances. Efforts to keep it so were more explicit in the years preceding independence, where the declarations of “harmony between men and women of many kinds” seen above and reproduced in the 1948 Master Plan for a Colonial Capital, were

as believable as the notions about the “glory of Britain”. This was done via a multifaceted process—for example, legislation, force, church, school—that many scholars have examined, and which led to an incremental coloniality of the mind, alienation of the self from the body and nature, a “cultural bomb” (wa Thiong’o 1986).

But, like the native child who was drawn jumping off the Kenya–Uganda railway in our earlier poster, marginalized Nairobians, then as now, “had vastly different standards and ideas” for the city. The archive is full of administrative laments about Africans driving hand carts down the “wrong side” of the road, brewing alcohol without a permit, organizing illegal ngomas (parties), creating proscribed “squatter situations” seen as “scattered in a nondescript fashion along meandering footpaths” (Njoh 2009:307), and much more “diseased, detribalized, and degenerate” behaviors (White 1990:121). Despite the fines, the removals, the raids, systematized dehydration, the lack of basic services, and confinement to minimal space, the Black urban majority, whose descendants still live on only 6% of Nairobi’s land, held on and continue to stake claims to a city that was not meant for them; it was intended, instead, to be a metropolitan base where White hunters could shoot rhinos that would then, in their escape, trip over lions.

Their struggles in a colonial city, and across decades, are many; for adequate housing, to prevent evictions, for quality schools and healthcare, and to put a stop to state-sanctioned police bullets. These demands for life also include vernacular tactics to assert that visible from the margins, and principally from the shack, is the “durability” (Stoler 2016) of empire, despite the denials from a more privileged society, and state discourses claiming otherwise.

Two inspiring examples of people’s efforts that recognize and respond to this widespread coloniality are Mau Mau Road in Mathare, and the Dedan Kimathi monument in the center of the town. The former is in one of the oldest settlements in Nairobi, which has long been considered a site of “outcasts”—criminals, “prostitutes”, illegal alcohol brewers and vendors; ultimately ungovernables who don’t belong in the vision the city has for itself. While the statue of Dedan Kimathi is the earliest of two Mau Mau monuments in Nairobi, and the only one, to my knowledge, paid for by the Kenyan government. Interestingly, this statue is erected a few meters away from the Stanley, the oldest hotel in the city, where pictures of “big game hunters” and their victims still proudly hang on walls.

Mathare is “one of the most difficult urban environments in East Africa” (Muungano Support Trust et al. 2011:4). But, as Gathanga Ndung’u (2022) writes, notwithstanding this enduring legacy, it remains “an urban bastion of anti-oppression struggle”. For example, Anderson (2005) describes how, during Operation Anvil—a militarized colonial incursion into the settlement in 1954—women would spit on their captors’ faces in defiance when they were detained in mass raids. Furthermore, local oral narratives convey the importance of Mathare to the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), also known as the Mau Mau, as a court, an urban nerve center, and a location where they had widespread support.

It is surely this history that led to the local designation of the only path that cuts through the settlement as Mau Mau Road. The Kenya Land and Freedom



**Figure 2:** Picture of the Dedan Kimathi statue in downtown Nairobi (photo by Wangui Kimari, September 2023)

Army was only unbanned as an organization in 2003, following the ostensive end of a dictatorial postcolonial situation lasting from 1963 to 2002. In such a context, it remains remarkable that a settlement always under threat—where four generations have somehow fought off total state erasure—would memorialize the Mau Mau in this way. Undoubtedly, this toponym, not yet witnessed anywhere else in the country, is a statement about the persistence of the colonial, and, certainly, a poor people's register that, despite their everyday encounters with its pervasive and suffocating violence, they recognize it for what it is, and will enact multiple movements—tangible and symbolic—to signpost its treacherous reach, while working to halt its progress.

Across the other side of town, in the central business district, Dedan Kimathi Waciuri's statue (see Figure 2) stands tall. In military regalia and dreadlocks, this figure clutches both a rifle and a dagger; his anticolonial war implements. A legendary Mau Mau field marshal, Kimathi was executed in 1957, and where he was buried has not been formally disclosed by the British. Yet, here is his bronze body. And it is the powerful agitations of landless young people, their persistent vocalizations of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army and, especially, its betrayal by postcolonial governments, which provoked the recognition of Kimathi in this way in 2007.

Elsewhere in Kenya, museums have archaic exhibitions that uphold essentialized views of culture and politics. But, surprisingly, in a street in the central business



**Figure 3:** Picture of Mau Mau Road sign in Mathare, Nairobi (photo by Wangui Kimari, September 2023)

district, there is a statue of a Mau Mau leader that, in its function as a symbol of resistance, draws in and from the presence of those the city seeks to exclude. Undoubtedly, in a Nairobi that has long prized skyscrapers over public housing, colonial memory over local histories, this monument, as Mau Mau Road, pierces through the coloniality that still reproduces beings, knowledges, and power in

the country. Both the organic impetus that prompted these two commemorations of Kenya's freedom fighters, as well as these artifacts themselves, produce and sustain struggles, however small, toward what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:492) calls a "democratization of knowledge, de-hegemonization of knowledge, de-westernization of knowledge, and de-Europeanization of knowledge".

For me, as I seek to argue in my work, these memorials index the reality that—in spite of the colonial poster reproduced by the Kenya Tourism Board and the railway museum, despite the imperial city logics that perpetuate "Out of Africa" tales, against the formal production of the relationship between Nairobi, Detroit and Brazil as inconsequential and subterranean, the crossroads and contradictions, the lashes—the people will fight, across decades, for even just one road to be named Mau Mau (see Figure 3).

## About the Interviewers

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## Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of rent and Georgist political economy, see Obeng-Odoom (2015, 2021c), Haila (2016), and Harrison (2021).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html> (last accessed 12 November 2025).

<sup>3</sup> <https://feministafrica.net/feminist-africa-volume-2-issue-2-2021-gender-and-sexuality-in-african-futurism/> (last accessed 12 November 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Daley and Murrey (2022:160) define defiant scholarship as scholarship that "cultivates those ways of thinking and those practices of thinking that are external to, in opposition to, and/or unconventional to the coloniality of knowledge".

<sup>5</sup> Agostinho Neto was a poet, and also Angola's first president.

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