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Defiant scholarship: Dismantling coloniality in contemporary African geographies†

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Colonial epistemes persist in studies of African geographies. We argue that colonial continuities are revealed in (a) the status of human geography within African higher education; (b) the marginalization of Africa (particularly beyond Southern Africa) within the discipline of human geography; and (c) erasures of the functions of racialization in African societies. These are compounded by the relative marginalization of African knowledge within decolonial thought, including decolonial geographies and the disunities between the subfields of black geographies *and* African geographies. To challenge some of these dynamics, we introduce the concept of defiant scholarship in Africa, a form of scholarship that seeks to work against and outside of dominant grammars and prevailing registers and which draws from a powerful and extensive intellectual tradition across the African continent. Working from Walter Rodney's 'guerrilla intellectuals' and drawing on Walter Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience', defiant scholarship cultivates those *ways of thinking* and those *practices* that are external to, in opposition to, and/or unconventional to the coloniality of knowledge. We ask what it means for our scholarship to be disobedient to colonial and capitalist epistemes, and, in so doing, we sketch the contours of an African geographies subdiscipline that is anti-racist, decolonial, and in active conversation with black geographies. The result of our engagement is a call for a reinvigoration of African geographies as we currently know and practice them.

Keywords: African geographies, anti-racist, decolonial, black geographies, epistemic disobedience, decolonize geography

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Introduction

We are inheritors and students of a long radical tradition of African diasporic scholarship produced by 'guerrilla intellectuals'. This is a term used by the Guyanese political historian Walter Rodney (1990) to describe the politicization of knowledge within empire and the need, therefore, for people to mobilize knowledge against imperialism, in ways that empower, and in solidarity with communities of struggle. For Rodney (1990: 112), intellectuals need to work to transform the academy within their own 'orbit'—not to gain legitimacy but 'to occupy the terrain' in order to 'free the whole structure'. The intellectuals who have inspired this paper have long worked to unsettle and displace the hegemony of European epistemological traditions and produce what we term 'defiant scholarship': active scholarly practice that seeks to work against and outside of colonial grammars and prevailing registers. Drawing from Argentinian decolonial philosopher Walter Mignolo's (2009; 2011) 'epistemic disobedience', defiant

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scholarship 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. Our argument is that defiance can be a tool to dismantle coloniality in African geographies, as well as to contribute to ruptures of and within the colonial 'uni-versity', a term used to critique Westernized institutions of higher education as being based upon European canons, foundations, and modes of being in which 'Euro-American *men*…are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality' (Boidin *et al*., 2012: 2).

Our scholarship is situated within decolonial struggles and the prospects of transformative academic futures, including that of the 'pluriversity' (Boidin *et al*., 2012), e.g. the active rupture of Eurocentric canons through excluded, dangerous and marginalized epistemes. We are academics based at the University of Oxford, an institution central in the production of British colonial and neo-colonial epistemologies and which has long benefited from colonial extractions and capitalist exploitations. We begin with a recognition of the advantages that come from operating from such a site of knowledge production and the qualitative differences in practicing defiance from the centre of power, in contrast with spaces of colonial subjection. We also emphasize the importance of thoughtful, careful, and continuous multi-sited coalitions of struggle in the project to 'occupy the terrain' so as to 'free the whole structure' (Rodney, 1990: 112).

Outline of arguments

In articulating our notion of defiant scholarship, we first critique some of the colonial logics that persist in contemporary studies of African geographies. Colonial persistence is revealed in: the historical foundations of the university in African countries, including the political pressures for positivist study within neo-imperialist contexts, in which socio-economic domination often occurs through the deliberate weakening of sovereignty. This means that the continent continues to be interpreted by Western institutions, as South African masculinities studies scholar Kopano Ratele (2021) and others argue, places for data extraction or 'mere' empiricism, 'problem-solving research grants' (Branch, 2018: 87), and artificial 'collaborations' driven by external priorities and funders. Colonial persistence is further revealed in how Africa is situated in other bodies of thought, including in the erasures of the functions of racialization (including whiteness) in scholarship on African societies within and beyond human geography. Colonial persistence is revealed in the marginalization of Africa within human geography, particularly beyond Southern Africa (Myers, 2014; Daley & Kamata, 2017) and Anglophone regions in Africa.

We think through and refine what we take 'defiant scholarship' to suggest and how it is situated within a larger constellation of inclinations and practices. Among them are work in decolonial thought on convivial futures (Nyamnjoh, 2015b), 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009; 2011) and 'disobedient pedagogies' (Murrey, 2019) for holistic praxis working in solidarity to dismantle coloniality in African geographies. We highlight some of the disunities in distinctions between black geographies and African geographies, as discrete and interrelated intellectual projects, as critical areas for the development of the kind of defiant scholarship that we seek. The relative marginalization of Africa within popular decolonial timelines and anti-racist projects are crucial areas for fruitful intellectual solidarities. Ours is an explicit orientation to contemporary and foundational texts by African intellectuals, as well as a decolonial and convivial ethic for anti-racist scholarship on black (and) African decolonial geographies. Throughout, we engage with the work of Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake

(1939–96) and key African thinkers to draw attention to the history of defiant scholarship in Africa.

The persistence of colonial logics in the study of Africa

Coloniality in geographies of Africa

Important work has critiqued the 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988) of imposing Eurocentric systems of knowledge in Africa (wa Thiong'o, 1986; Mudimbe, 1988; Oyěwùmí, 1997), including the 'thing-ification' of Africans (Césaire, 1955; Beti, 1972) in dominant scholarship and the racism embedded within colonial cartographic dissections of the continent. Scholars have critiqued the dominance of the Western academy in the production of knowledge about Africa (Ake, 1979; Watts, 1997; West & Martin, 1999; Zeleza, 2006; Branch, 2018); some addressing their disciplines directly (Mafege, 1996 Magubane, 2006; Mama, 2007), including geography (Myers, 2014; Daley & Kamata, 2017). Indeed, beyond Africa, much has been written on the colonial roots of geography (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000).

As geographers we are conscious of the imperial and colonial-inspired foundations of our discipline and are interested in critiquing their legacies in defining the parameters and priorities of geographical research in post-colonial Africa, so that we might work beyond them. As scholars operating in and from the global North (within the belly of the colonial beast that is Oxford), we seek to follow in the tradition of pan-Africanists and Afro-diasporic scholars who refused to accept the cartographic violence that divided the continent into racialized groups and regions (Anta Diop, 1963; Chinweizu, 1987; Mudimbe, 1988), extricating some groups from the space and corpus of knowledge labelled African (for example, the geographical imaginary marking the people of North Africa and black South Africans during apartheid as distinct from 'Sub-Saharan Africa'; Mafege, 1996), and that seeks to break the collective memory and alliances that the historic African diaspora population have with the continent (Campbell, 1996).

Neocolonial legacies and the discipline of geography on the continent

In some of the countries where we have worked and taught—for example, Burundi, Cameroon, and Tanzania—colonial powers established the first modern universities modelled on those in the metropoles. The Islamic tradition of universities that predated those in Europe (Zeleza, 2006), for example the first university in the world, founded in 859, was al-Qarawiyyin in what is now Fez, Morocco and the influential Al-Azhar University in Cairo was founded in 960. European scholars borrowed and appropriated central insights and tools from Islamic, African, Chinese and Indian traditions in mathematics, law, library science, medicine, architecture and more (for one geographical history of the university see Heffernan *et al.*, 2018).

Most modern African universities have therefore evolved from their Eurocentric origins and, indeed were always 'amalgam[s] of the specific sociocultural conditions into which [Western education models were] transplanted' (Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 1997: 15). Zeleza (2006) argues that nonetheless, remnants of the 'colonial library' remain—their influence reinforced by the persistence of European ontologies and epistemologies in defining the transition from colonial to developing societies. The Ugandan political scientist Mahmood Mamdani, and the Cameroonian anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh and others have long excavated the university's instrumental neocolonial role in Africa. The result is that research in and on Africa remains mired in what

the Zimbabwean political philosopher Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), working from Anibal Quijano's (2000) 'colonial matrix of power', calls the 'coloniality of knowledge'.

Within the 'coloniality of knowledge', Eurocentric canons, methodologies and epistemologies function to border, enforce, police and contain knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Ways of thinking and being are prioritized, ordered and catalogued; perspectives are privileged while others are suppressed or eliminated, what is known as 'epistemicide' or the killing of ideas (Nyamnjoh, 2001). Authority is accumulated and guarded by 'experts' (Smith, 1999) and, in the case of African scholarships, 'foreign researchers [continue to] benefit from enshrined and ongoing practices that dominate research scenes' (Mawere & van Stam, 2019; see also Mwambari, 2019). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), the university in Africa has not sufficiently cultivated (or sometimes even acknowledged) indigenous knowledge (see also Nyamnjoh, 2001). Walter Rodney experienced the colonial education system in multiple locations. His academic journey took him a from an elite school in Guyana, to the University of the West Indies (Jamaica) in the late 1950s and on to the School of Oriental Studies in London, where he completed his doctorate in African History, after which he joined the University of Dar es Salaam. On colonial and neocolonial education, Rodney (1972: xvii) was scathing in his critique, writing, 'in the final analysis, perhaps the most important principle of colonial education was that of capitalist individualism. In Africa, both the formal school system and the informal value system of colonialism destroyed social solidarity and promoted the worst form of alienated individualism without social responsibility'. The struggle for defiant scholarship and a break with existing paradigms and systems of authoritative control would be at the centre of Rodney's work.

There is a well-developed interdisciplinary body of scholarship on higher education on the African continent and we do not seek to reproduce nor summarize that here, rather we trace some of the major developments as a means of framing this examination of defiant scholarship and human geography in Africa. Anti-colonial scholarship in many African university departments was shaped by a myriad of actors—pan-Africanists, nationalist and anti-apartheid movements, and the influx of progressive scholars from Europe and the Americas and from the African diaspora. However, Marxism—with its ontological roots in European society—was the dominant alternative to neoimperialism and capitalism, even with its African variants. It is not clear how many African geographers participated in the epistemic debates concerning the politicization of knowledge in empire that was ongoing in other disciplines on the continent in the early post-independence years, including those which occurred at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania. These conversations were influential in ushering more people centred scholarship in the discipline of history, political science and law (for example, what we now know as socio-legal studies, a subdiscipline developed first at UDSM).

The political and scholarly advocate for British imperialism, Halford Mackinder, extended his geographical credibility through his 1899 expedition to Mount Kenya, in the same year that he played an instrumental role in founding our current institution, the School of Geography at Oxford. It is not clear that geography departments, including ours and those in Africa, have sufficiently interrogated the discipline's historical roots. This may explain why our discussion on the discipline's origins with an interdisciplinary group of postgraduate students and young academics across the continent was greeted with some surprise (a course offered in May 2021 titled, *Oxford-UNISA Decolonizing Research Methodologies*[1]). In that same course, a common refrain from the

students was that they had not been previously aware 'that this stuff [coloniality, inequality, arts-based methodologies, etc.] was the work of geographers'.

Colonialism produced new geographies, development necessitated them. The relatively prominent subfield of development geography explained urbanization, new sites of production and new networks of transportation. The field generated knowledge about African populations, natural resources, and environmental conditions that could be repurposed for development within reified colonial borders and modernist political communities in the form of nation states. In the 1960s and 1970s, geographical inequalities were commonly explained as a consequence of inappropriate development within the framework of modernization theory: 'weak', mostly corrupt, political systems or because of what Claude Ake described as, 'societal characteristics that are *said* to be ridden with conflict and distrust and lacking in dynamism because of other low level of cultural secularization' (italics added, Ake, 1979: 147). Dependency theorists were at the forefront of the critique of these mainstream approaches to uneven development (Rodney, 1972; for a history of these ideas in geography, see Power & Sidaway, 2004).

Following more progressive and politically active post-independence university campuses, the Cold War saw African universities turn increasingly to positivism. Positivism rather than critique was considered neutral terrain. This was partially a reflection of donor funding and external priorities, in which the humanities and social sciences were seen as optional rather than essential subjects. In the political climate that fostered economic austerity, geography could survive in African universities as spaces of positivistic/scientific knowledge generation about the physical environment that is unproblematic and apolitical. The historical geographers Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate trace the links between geographers from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and North American universities in the 1960s and 1970s, which promoted a scholarly focus on quantification (Craggs & Neate, 2020). They did not connect this shift to efforts by US state agencies to penetrate the space of the university (Chomsky *et al*., 1998; Campbell & Murrey, 2014), dislodging the influence of the British, and, in turn, depoliticizing scholarship on and from Africa. This was an issue that Ake (1979) was well aware of, when he criticized the ways in which quantification was used to limit analysis to specific factors that delivered desired results. Technicism, he argued, serves imperialism by obscuring the fact that imperialism is the cause of underdevelopment (Ake, 1979).

The rise of neoliberalism saw economic decision-making shift from states (and the UN General Assembly) to International Financial Institutions (IFI). Through their funding and policy-directives, IFIs promoted depoliticized, externalized and individualized forms of scholarship, a set of priorities that funneled money to the disciplines of economics (neoclassical), administration, business and law (*Pambazuka News*, 2011). Whilst at UDSM in the 1980s, one of us (Patricia) found inspiration and intellectual solidarity outside of the geography department. This was at a time when critical scholarship was being undermined by the impact of neoliberal ideas and policies in the university. Academics were being compelled to work as consultants for private companies and foreign institutions in order to survive in the midst of increasing austerity (*Pambazuka News*, 2011). Women academics working on the continent faced 'increased total burden of work as they attempt to make ends meet in a context of decreased access to social services' (Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 1997: 21). In a context in which academics critical of state policies were persecuted and UDSM was being actively defunded, a number of African scholars took up posts in North America and Europe.

In a survey of research topics in modern geography in Africa after the 1990s, Kalipeni *et al*. (2006) revealed a broad emphasis on policy oriented and impact analysis studies that advocated spatial perspectives in resolving development problems. Geographical Information Systems, natural resource management and geographies of health gained pre-eminence. Critical developments in the discipline, such as postcolonial, feminist and post-structuralist thought, did not considerably influence the work being carried out in African geography departments.

Some of the African universities influenced by the American liberal arts model did not have human geography programmes at all. Indeed, critical geographical studies have been conducted in disciplines other than geography. This was the case for one of us (Amber) who taught political geography first in the School of Law and Governance at the University of Jimma, Ethiopia (2015–16) and later in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the American University in Cairo, Egypt (2017–18). The Kenyan anthropologist Mwenda Ntarangwi (*Anthropology News*, 2005: 5) similarly remarks that in many African institutions—Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and more—'anthropology is taught within sociology departments'. Ntarangwi considers issues of 'survival and legitimacy' for anthropology in these contexts, suggesting that survival is to be found in collaborative work. But these questions of legitimacy need not be tied to or constrained by colonial disciplining logics. There is nothing inherently awry with this kind of disciplinary inter-stepping. Indeed, 'some of the normative concepts and categories that guarantee coherence in our disciplines and analytical procedures do not travel well when they move outside their European provenance' (Garuba & Okot, 2017, quoted in Musila, 2019: 289). The cross-disciplinarity within the social sciences in many African universities can be understood as generative, fruitful and necessary.

Following the donor turn away from funding of higher education in the 1980s and 1990s (*Pambazuka News*, 2011), we are now seeing the return of donor interest, expressed through projects like the World Bank's African Higher Education Centres of Excellence and Global Partnership for Education, alongside a continued donor push for STEM subjects. But there is a need for optimism. Globalized youth- and student-movements to decolonize the university have given more attention to the scholars who have been working on issues of epistemic defiance and disobedience in and from Africa for decades. The Cameroonian political theorist Achille Mbembe (2016) writes that a two-pronged approach is necessary for the decolonization of African universities: one which both critiques the features of epistemic coloniality and begins to reimagine an alternative model (see also de Sousa Santos, 2018). We have seen geographers engaging critically with these topics. The South African physical geographer Jasper Knight (2018: 273) has written on the imperative to decolonize undergraduate geography curriculum at University of Witwatersrand, South Africa as responding to the 'twin and parallel themes of *decolonisation* and *Africanization'* (italics original). The South African cultural geographer Shari Daya (2021), working from the University of Cape Town, writes that 'Geography could productively engage more directly, in both its theory and its praxis, with Southern and decolonial scholarship, as well as postcolonial and feminist thought'. This section has summarized some of the shifting dynamics of the social sciences within African universities, focusing in particular on the various political pressures and contexts shaping human geographies on the continent.

Decolonial legacies in and from Africa

Defiance has been a persistent feature of intellectual traditions in and from Africa. Although such work has not been unified within a shared ideological, linguistic or

conceptual framework; hence, perhaps, the hesitation to recognize this powerful tradition as such. Decolonial thought offers new ways of understanding ways of thinking about the relations between the rich constellations of radical, Pan-African, and feminist thought outside and beyond colonial logics on the African continent—these are 'pluriversals', or world-making in which 'many worlds are possible' (Boidin *et al.*, 2012). Working within African geographies, decoloniality offers paths for pluriversal futures. Pluriversality is 'not a new paradigm or mode of critical thought. It is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis' (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018: 5). Many of the iterative imaginaries of decolonial thought echo earlier works of African intellectuals. Some of which was already aligned with the prerogatives that we now frame as 'decolonial pluriversals', such as the need for an epistemic 'break' to decolonizing knowledge (for example, the work of the Cameroonian historian and novelist Mongo Beti, 1972; Nigerian feminist anthropologist Ifi Amadiume, 1987; Egyptian-Senegalese political economist Samir Amin, 1988).

Yet, even within decolonial thought, Africa has tended to remain on the peripheries of historical timelines, with decolonial scholars typically dating the emergence of coloniality to 1492 and the beginning of the conquest of the Americas and Caribbean. Yet, the *longue durée* of coloniality might be marked as beginning earlier, on 6 August 1444, when six ships, chartered by the Portuguese Lagos Company, captured 240 West and Central Africans and forcibly transported them to Lagos, Portugal under the patronage of Prince Henry. In the fifty years prior to Columbus' mistaken voyage, Portugal was already importing 1000 to 3000 enslaved African people a year (Kendi, 2016: 24; Sweet, 1997). The American historian James H. Sweet (1997: 165) argues:

> The conquest of the Americas and the classification of the indigenous peoples according to race may be understood as part of a process …. by the time of the Colombian encounter, race had evolved into an independent and deeply etched element of the Iberian consciousness… Iberian racism was a necessary precondition for the system of human bondage that would develop in the Americas during the sixteenth century and beyond.

We have an opportunity to redress the notion that coloniality (or impacts of racialized colonial logics) have been somehow 'shorter' on the African continent or less central in shaping current geopolitical and epistemic configurations (commentaries that we have faced, anecdotally, in peer review and audience commentaries elsewhere). The impetus for defiant scholarship is, then, a project that rejects the 'systematic disappearance of Africa-based scholarship' (Musila, 2019: 288). These are generative provocations as we work towards ways of thinking, living, sensing and being otherwise, rather than points of refusal or rebuttal to decolonial options.

Defiant scholarship in Africa

We now turn to our concept of 'defiant scholarship', which seeks to redress some of the pervasive harms and traumas of the coloniality of knowledge within African geographies, to recover and celebrate the long intellectual traditions, and break from colonialities of knowledge.

To work towards the agile and flexible praxis of identifying, critiquing and responding to subtle and overt forms of racism on the continent, we needed an articulated determination that simultaneously captures the complexities of working within a colonial institution while moving beyond critique towards decolonial present(s) and futures—and,

indeed, seeking to move in collaborative and convivial ways with fellows and friends engaged in efforts to dismantle colonial matrices of power (Nyamnjoh, 2015b).

Our impetus for the concept: epistemic disobedience and the need to attend to practice

Defiant scholarship emerges from the epistemic disobedience outlined within Mignolo's (2011: 45) articulation of the project of 'epistemic disobedience', which calls for a delinking (*desprendimiento*) or 'spatial paradigmatic breaks of epistemic disobedience' from colonial logics and epistemes. Epistemic disobedience, in this way, includes those forms of thinking that are not legitimized (and which do not seek legitimization) by or through the logics of dominant epistemic lenses like coloniality, modernity, capital. Epistemic disobedience entails breaking from, delinking and active defiance. The Kenyan literary scholar Grace A. Musila (2019: 288) asks us to imagine beyond the university's 'mono-literacy':

> What would emerge… if, rather than being encouraged to adopt the registers and theories legitimised by the Northern academic machinery, [African scholars] were encouraged to pursue the questions they deem relevant, on their own terms and in their own registers? How would the texture of the academy change if it was hospitable to these registers and textures, rather than panel-beating them into adopting the monochromatic registers and accents of thought legitimised by the North?

Epistemic disobedience entails working against the canon in our writing, teaching, knowing and learning, as we actively engage with ideas deemed dangerous by modernity/coloniality (Murrey, 2018; 2019). Collectively, the practices of dwelling/working within border spaces and border thinking (Icaza, 2017), or practicing epistemic disobedience and defiant scholarship, can 'shift the geopolitics of critical knowledge (Walsh, 2007). This radical shift of the geopolitics of knowledge demands that we 'interrupt the idea of dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged abstraction… to disobey the universal signifier that is the rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the West's global model' (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018: 3). This is what Busani Mpofu and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni call the need to *rethink thinking* (Mpofu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 15) and what elsewhere has been termed the need for ways of 'learning to un-learn in order to re-learn' (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012).

Defiant scholarship, then, is the pursuit of scholarly activity in the name of epistemic disobedience and epistemic justice. Defiant scholarship is grounded by the active pursuit of epistemic disobedience; it centres practices and actions. In this, defiance is an effort to 'attend to the *decolonial* repertoires of practice, so that these humanizing skills are not opaque' (Dominguez, 2021: 554). At once an orientation, a counter-methodology and a pedagogical praxis, defiant scholarship responds to the call to *do* research, to *do* science, differently: what does it mean for our scholarship to be 'disobedient' to capital? To think, to read, to listen, to unlearn and relearn as a form of defiance. Defiance, we suggest, is a valuable prerogative within African political geographies. Knowingly provocative, it is also a project knowingly situated within the colonial university—all the while attuned and committed to decolonial futures and aspirations. We understand defiance to be a grounding orientation, a resource and a reminder, rooted in solidarities. Rodney helps us along by demonstrating that the scholar does not work alone, but it is only through collective relations—what he calls groundings—that transformation can occur. Defiance, as a decolonial practice, is relational and place-based.

Defiant scholarship works by centring the political and ethical stakes embedded within our scholarly practices. And by scholarly practices, we are opening the

discussion up beyond our written or spoken words, to denote also our wider practices that mantle colonial institutions. Defiant scholarship captures the need for active transgression, beyond content or subject matter, to the core of our practices in and out of the university. Lewis Gordon reminds that it is often the 'mundane, often boring features of instrumental activity' in which political change or stability reside. This mundane includes our pedagogical and curricular praxis, our citation politics, our editorial and reviewing practices, our care for students and one another, our research practices and relations with people in the communities where we work, the relations between principal investigators (PIs) and research assistants, our corridor conversations, our hiring and interviewing practices and more—this is the kind of holistic decolonizing and anti-racist practice alluded to elsewhere by Farhana Sultana (2019) and Caroline Faria *et al.* (2019). Teaching is an important aspect of defiant scholarship (Murrey, 2019).

Defiance denotes an enduring and flexible obstinance and a noncompliance to colonial and capitalist logics. Much like there is no clear rubric for dismantling the colonial 'uni-versity' (Boidin *et al.*, 2012) or for decolonization (Fanon, 1961), defiance is not an essentialist set of qualities or practices. Defiant scholarship is an orientation and a guiding ethos and not a fixed rubric or traveling model. Hustling and adapting new strategies and manoeuvres in real-time to the ever flexible but also sedimented forms of coloniality. This is because colonial logics are multiple and dexterous, frequently reassembling, fatiguing, misappropriating and re-bordering in the face of emergent challenges and resistances.

Defiance is evident in a heritage of African intellectuals in and outside of the university—an intellectual tradition of defiance that works to interpret the world according to parameters that humanize themselves and black people and seek live-able futures. Defiant scholarship challenges the precepts of white racism that seek to exclude, marginalize, make invisible and wipe out black lives beyond their subjection as alienated labour.

The defiant scholarship of Claude Ake

The work of Ake stands as a strong example of the sort of defiant scholarship we seek to work towards (see also Arowosegbe, 2016), especially his text *Social Science as Imperialism*, which was first published in 1979. Ake's (1979: xiii) thesis is that 'with the exception of the Marxist tradition, Western Social Science scholarship on developing countries is imperialism'. He gives three reasons.

First, because 'it foists, or at any rate attempts to foist on developing countries, capitalist values, capitalist institutions, and capitalist development' (Ake, 1979: xiii). Second, it 'focuses social science analysis on how to make the developing countries more like the West' and thirdly, 'it propagates mystification, and modes of thought and action which serve the interests of capitalism and imperialism' (Ake, 1979: xiii). Ake then substantiated his thesis using his discipline of political science, especially the theory of political development, but he also engages with sociology. He outlines the methodological and ideological bias of western social science: its Eurocentric teleologicalism, which, he argues, 'impregnated' all scholarship on the global South, and the 'equation of the ideal society to reality—"that is contemporary western society ..[as]… the best possible historical society"—thus equating what ought to be with what is' (Ake, 1979: 128). Thus, Western social science perpetuates imperial domination. Exposing the ways in which the dominant education model in Africa is informed by desires to have an elite that subscribes to ideologies of capitalism, Ake (1979: 186) contends that African social scientists risk 'internalis[ing] the values of the imperialists…[such] that they can

no longer see the contradictions between the type of education and scholarly activity they engage in and the needs of their own society'. Rather than being 'mesmerized by the scientific paraphernalia' and its universalism, African social science, as Ake asserts, should seek to shed light on the particular historical experience of its societies. This, for Ake, entails a fundamental rethink of 'development'. For Ake this is not about 'formal indigenization or the domestication of the social sciences. … *The question is not who produces the work or the science, but its character-value, assumptions, logical implications etc.*' (italics original, Ake, 1979: 195).

Pan-Africanists and anti-colonial nationalists like Ake imagined new approaches and new geographies, but their visions were too often frustrated by conservative Africans schooled in European ideation systems of nationalism and departing European powers' attempts to retain neo-colonial relations, amidst the development of the Cold War (Arowosegbe, 2016; see also Rodney, 1972). The Ethiopian-American political scientist Adom Getachew (2019) documents the visions of new globality and international and economic justice proposed by global South states up to the 1970s and their decline with the rise of neoliberalism. Getachew argues that the anti-colonial nationalists in Africa were aware of how colonial racial domination reverberated in the international sphere and that the problem of empire was not just about the transformation of domestic politics but also international politics. Working from Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, defiant scholarship questions the ontological bases of the actions of the neo-colonial international financial institutions, whose dehumanizing policies of structural adjustment reinforced extraction, dispossession and subjection. Rodney emphasized the urgency of developing 'new concepts… [for] a new humanity' in a book that the Pan-African political theorists Michael O. West and William Martin remind us, 'greatly displeased the oppressors of Africa and their academic handmaidens' (West & Martin, 1999).

Defiance against coloniality: transgression and the uneven geographies risk

Defiant scholarship is an orientation that attends to the ways in which coloniality effects forms of distortion, denial, negation, rejection and assassination of decolonial world senses and anti-imperial and anti-racist knowledges and projects for epistemic justice (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). This is what the South African anthropologist Nokuthula Hlabangane (2016: n.p.) calls the 'studied ignorance' and '*polittricking* of imperial designs' (italics added). Defiant scholarship attends to the ways in which coloniality effects forms of distortion, denial, negation, rejection and assassination of decolonial world senses and anti-imperial and anti-racist knowledges amidst 'explicit racial violence' (Joseph-Salisbury *et al*., 2018: 261). The Jamaican-American Pan-African Peace Scholar Horace Campbell (1996: 128) reminds us that 'Insofar as wars are fought over popular conceptions and ideologies, the university's role in reproducing the ideas of militarism is an important component of warfare' (see also Campbell & Murrey, 2014). Defiant scholarship reminds us of the volume, pervasiveness and tenacity of colonial logics and the colonial matrix of power within and beyond the university. To us, then, the notion of defiant scholarship allows us political and logistical footing as we seek out ways of being and knowing beyond coloniality, while simultaneously being attentive and responsive to the real and frequently contradictory forces within global racial imperial designs. Defiant scholarship is, in the Pan-African tradition of Guinean pan-Africanist Amílcar Cabral (1966), non-deterministic, experimental and creatively applied.

We cannot underestimate the difficulties and challenges of engaging persistently or even temporarily in defiant scholarship, nor the multi-scalar pressures upon scholars to remain disciplined by their disciplines and to conform to institutional norms. Such work might operate as passivity, withdrawal, subversion. We heed AbdouMaliq Simone's reminder—(following the verbal presentation of this paper at the 2021 RGS-IBG conference)—to do this work *carefully*. In no way do we want our call to remember and honour the defiant scholarships of Africa to endanger any scholars. Neither do we pretend innocence or naiveté. Critical scholars and intellectuals in Africa have long faced persecution, malignment, exclusion, threats and sexual harassment (Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 1997), targeted assassination and, more recently, toxic 'collaborations' with Northern-based scholars (Musila, 2019: 287). We begin this discussion of African geographies 'without illusion' of the 'the black pits that hide [capitalist and colonial] rhetoric' (Mignolo, 2011: 46; see also Fanon, 1961) and refuse colonial 'moves to innocence' (Tuck & Yang, 2012; see also Esson & Last, 2020). We are aware, simultaneously, that '[e]ven our best intentions can, unwittingly, be *obedient* to a logic of *coloniality*' (italics original, Dominguez, 2021: 3; see also Adebisi, 2020).

For anti-racist African geographies

In the pursuit of decolonial African geographies today, we argue for the need to work from these earlier defiant traditions, while also drawing upon anti-racist geographies. One critical space of theoretical intervention is for an anti-racist African geography. This is partially because, beyond the African Diaspora and Southern Africa, anti-blackness and the roles of racial difference long remained understudied (Pierre, 2012), perhaps particularly in political geography (Daley & Kamata, 2017; Murrey, 2018). The African American anthropologist Jemima Pierre (2012) argues that global anti-black racism has structured knowledge about Africa, including by erasing the ways in which race impacts scholarly understandings of Africa both epistemologically and politically. Even though racism persisted in and shaped the politics and economies of other African states, the predominant view of 'Africanist scholars' was that black Africans ran the state and race was therefore an irrelevant factor, and that the imperative of reconciliation and national unity demanded a non-racial political community. The space to be progressive within the neoliberal academy has long been limited, especially to think through alternatives to neoliberalism and theorizing racialization in black dominated post-colonial states (cf. the works of Achille Mbembe, Patricia McFadden, Archie Mafeje, AbdouMaliq Simone). This scholarly position silenced the role of global raciality in shaping internal and external dynamics and relations across the continent, and eschewed conversations on the functions of the racialization of the author in shaping knowledge about African societies (Pierre, 2012).

The marginalization, deprivation and police violence experienced by African diaspora communities in the West was depicted in Africa, by imperialist powers as the consequence of 'criminality' and 'laziness'–a term widely applied in colonial Africa when Africans objected to/run away from forced labour conditions and other forms of exploitation (Whitehead, 2000; Rönnbäck, 2014). Such stereotypes/representations have persisted in the Western media and policy-making circles, as black people lack the power to change the narrative, and deepening neoliberal orthodoxy presents social mobility as an individual responsibility—devoid of racial complications.

In 2016, following the Black Lives Matter protests in the USA, I (Patricia) gave a talk at the University of Ghana, in the Institute of African Studies, entitled 'All African

Lives Matter'. The goal of the presentation was to provoke a conversation as to why support for the movement was relatively thin amongst middle class Africans. It was the first time that I experienced a no-platforming campaign, orchestrated by a British-based Ghanaian and executed by a group of progressives based in Accra. They argued that I was 'colluding' with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which was described as a component of Western counterinsurgency strategy to dispossess Africans. The movement, some claimed, was 'funded by George Soros' and I would return to my 'Oxbridge comfort bubble' when 'the impoverished masses of Africa start to catch hell'. This is one example of the complexities of conversations around racism and racialization; it demonstrates both the apprehensions around transnational solidarity as potential forms of counterinsurgency as well as the ways in which anti-Western sentiments can be mobilized to foreclose anti-racist conversations. The auditorium was full and the audience's response to my talk was extremely positive, especially from those coming from outside the University. Artists reflected during the Q&A on the struggles of BLM in their work and drew comparisons to police brutality in African states (see also Nyamnjoh, 2015a).

Anti-racist African geographies

In the pursuit of anti-racist African geographies today, we argue for the need to work from the traditions of defiant scholarship while also drawing upon the work within anti-racist geographies (e.g. Esson & Last, 2020; Johnson, 2020). Anti-racist geographies is a 'praxis-driven scholarship attentive to and critical of the changing and particular functions of racialization (including whiteness and white supremacy) in informing space, place, geographies, economies and societies—as well as the structural inequalities within and between them (Puttick & Murrey, 2021). Anti-racist geographies have much to offer us by way of attending to the roles and functions of racism, racialization, whiteness and anti-blackness on the African continent—as work from the feminist political ecologists Sharlene Mollett and Caroline Faria demonstrate in their transnational conversation on the functions of whiteness in geographical fieldwork in South Sudan and Honduras, for example (Mollett & Faria, 2016). Elsewhere they assert that, '"[a]n other geography" only moves forward with a material imperative to decentre whiteness and reject white supremacy' (Faria & Mollett, 2020: 24).

From celebrity campaigns in Sudan premised on racial hierarchies that position 'Americans as "powerful saviours" located at the top of the hierarchy of humanity' (Daley, 2013), to the production of masculine tropes 'of blackness within a system of racial capitalism' (Malton, 2016: 1015), to the deployment of scientific racism to legitimize black economic marginalization in South Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 18), to multinational resource extraction in contemporary Ghana (Pierre, 2012), to 'the role of whiteness and anti-blackness in ordering contemporary political economies of extraction and dispossession' (Murrey & Jackson, 2020), racial hierarchies and racism are central to present-day corporate dominations and dispossessions across contemporary Africa. Yousuf Al-Bulushi (2020) pushes the boundaries of African geographies by cultivating precisely these crucial links between race (and whiteness), nationalism and xenophobia in South African political geographies and excavating the particularities of racial capitalism from and within Africa. Indeed, an important part of the project of defiant geographies in Africa is fostering conversations across and between black geographies *and* African geographies—a subject to which we now turn.

For black (and) African geographies

The relative lack of an anti-racist analysis to scholarships of Africa extended to work in human geography. Here we want to highlight the potential for cross-fertilizations between black geographies and African geographies, while also bringing attention to the ways in which these schools of thought and practice have tended to exist side-by-side rather than in-dialogue. Black geographies draw upon the distinctive knowledge emergent from the multiple subjective experiences and orientations of global blackness. Black geographies centre the polyphonic epistemes of people racialized as black and expand geographical understandings of nature, place, social change and more. We draw inspiration from Azeezat Johnson's use of in parenthesis in her work on 'Black (and) Muslim geographies' to situate them within conversation (e.g. Johnson, 2019). We use this motif of combining strands of thought through (and) in our work to bring attention to the ways in which black (and) African geographies are both distinct and thoroughly entangled.

Against the separation of two subdisciplines: black (and) African geographies

During the American Association of Geographers' annual meeting in Washington DC in April 2019, for example, a number of scholars—ourselves included—critiqued apparent fissures between black geographies and African geographies. These gaps were noted by Jordanna Malton[2] in panel sponsorship: with few papers and panels sponsored by the black geographies specialty group pertaining to issues on the African continent as well as few African geographies-sponsored sessions addressing racism, anti-racism and other issues central to black geographies. Similarly, in 'an audit of the papers presented at the bi-annual African Studies Association of the UK conventions… the word "diaspora" appears in the titles of only three of the more than six hundred panels at a recent convention; the word "race" appears in the titles of six papers; and except for the Maghreb and two papers, North Africa is absent' (Branch, 2018: 84).

This unevenness or sometimes lack of direct cross-fertilization in panels is significant beyond conferencing. It signals wider problematics in the study of African geographies, including (a) the marginalization of Africa within critical geography, particularly outside of Southern and English-speaking regions (Daley & Kamata, 2017); (b) exacerbates the avoidance of race, racial politics and anti-racism in the study of African geographies that we have previously outlined and it (c) silences the under-realized knowledges of shared experiences, pluralities of place-making/being-in-place/embodiment/and more that are distinctive, and dis/congruous forms of intellectual fodder and repair.

There is a need for cross-fertilization between and across black (and) African geographies. Zeleza (2006), in documenting the presence in Western institutions of a contemporary African diaspora calls for greater collaboration aimed at reigniting the perspectives of those early to mid-twentieth century pan-African scholars who conceptualized a global view of African identity and the struggles of African peoples. Whilst acknowledging the significant contributions of scholars working within the Black Atlantic tradition, Zeleza (2006: 97) argues that Gilroy's influential work on the *Black Atlantic* is 'a form of pan-Africanism that is largely confined to celebrating the creativity and construction of new cultures among the diaspora communities in the Anglophone world of the United States and Britain, excluding Africa'. We heed and extend Zeleza's intellectual argument by emphasizing the potentials for important conversations

between black and African geographies and geographers. Our argument here is also that the scholarship on African geographies continues to be structured by colonial epistemic and cartographic violence that is entrenched in the continent's position in the global geopolitics of knowledge production and that even postcolonial epistemologies fail to diminish its power.

Final thoughts

Decolonizing the discipline—towards transdisciplinarity

In the course of speaking about these ideas with friends and colleagues, we have been asked about the significance of looking so far beyond the traditional remit of human geography scholarship to decolonize the discipline. Within a holistic remit of scholarly action and praxis for defiant scholarship, our methodological and disciplinary orientations are crucial areas for critique and transformation. The widely deployed notions of the need to 'maintain methodological rigor' and institutional pressures to 'make contributions to *the* discipline' are some of the first main features learned by students in their respective disciplines. These structuring logics maintain colonial knowledge regimes by segmenting scholarship and enforcing certain ('whitestream') academic conventions. Linda Tuhiwa Smith (1999: 50–52) argues that we have colonized the discipline and disciplined the colonized. Recent moves to decolonize geography or embrace pluriversal epistemes within geographical scholarship, nonetheless, have sometimes been structured in ways that further entrench something distinctive called 'geographical thought'. Even as decolonial thought opens up new ways of thinking about space, place and politics, breaking from our discipline and collectively un-disciplining ourselves—and engaging in acts of disciplinary disobedience—remains dangerous for many of us, including ourselves. Within the context of the university, decolonization is a permanent process of radical potential-making, one that cannot be claimed or closed (Adebisi, 2020), and which requires 'relentless immanent critique of the [very] discourses [of] decolonization' (*Convivial Thinking*, 2021) to refuse the *colonization of projects to decolonize*.

Aspiring towards defiant practice within the colonial 'uni-versity' is a knowingly transgressive undertaking that has an intellectual tradition. Musila prompts us to think about the 'possible research directions, questions, interpretations and perspectives on human experience…. we [are] losing along the way as Africa-based researchers' work continues to be deemed dated or poor, because it "fails" to engage with the latest theories on the subjects or frame it in the legitimized registers as prescribed by the Northern academy' (Musila, 2019: 288). Defiant scholarly practice builds upon decolonial epistemes and a powerful body of African scholarship that portends to be universal and local; that eschews the epistemic violence of colonial categorizations, theorizations and methodologies. Through active unlearning and rethinking, we can root our project in the lands and communities where we work. The struggle for defiant scholarship and a break with existing paradigms and systems of authoritative control continues beyond the colonial wound. To do so, we have drawn upon a long history of defiant scholarship in Africa. While some of those earlier radical projects were temporarily subdued by neoliberal thinking and overlooked within the corporate academy, we are witnessing a resurgence of defiant intellectual traditions across the continent. We hope to work within these historical and emergent traditions to attend to the global nature of racialization and racial capitalism and the struggles of black people.

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Endnotes

1 A video following the experiences of Dr. Amber Murrey, Dr. Nokuthula Hlabangane (Anthropology, UNISA) and Dr. Steve Puttick (Education, Oxford) collaboratively teaching the experimental digital course is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK3r6e7GJsA.

2 These comments were made orally during a panel discussion.

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