

Response by authors

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We are most grateful to Christine Noe, AbdouMaliq Simone, Maano Ramutsindela and Stefan Ouma for their deliberate, richly historical and geographically astute insights on defiant scholarship in Africa. AbdouMaliq Simone re-emphasized the complexities within the varied tapestries of university education in Africa, saturated as it is within mosaic political traditions and contestations. Christine Noe addressed the intimate impasses of defiance, urging us to reconsider the micro-practices of quieter forms of intellectual defiance in African universities. Maano Ramutsindela provoked us to more fully articulate the unique relevance of African geographical thinking within defiant scholarship in African universities. Stefan Ouma raised the potential pertinency of our intervention, given that we teach and work at one of the world's most colonial institutions, and recognizes the important and historical research networks and institutions long operating on the continent. We cannot respond fully to each point raised. But we hope that these interactions, graciously published in the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, might be taken holistically to ignite a generative conversation for the fostering of anti-racist and decolonial political geographies of Africa.

In this response, we will address four uncertainties and contestations within the long, collective struggle to rupture the colonial uni-versity: 1) differentiated risk and danger, 2) the relevance of Africa within decolonial imaginaries, 3) anti-racism and global anti-blackness in the understanding of Africa, and 4) transdisciplinarity within defiant geographical thought.

We wish to first address risks in defiant scholarship—in particular, differentiated risks. We draw from intellectual traditions fostered by people and communities who have real stakes in intergenerational anti-colonial and liberation struggles. We do not encourage scholars to endanger themselves. Rather, we seek to acknowledge and celebrate the innumerable forms of defiant scholarship on the continent over the years. For scholars working in ways that pit them against political and economic elite within authoritarian states, exile, imprisonment, refuge have been persistent pressures (e.g. *Scholars at Risk Network*). For militant African scholars, the consequences of political defiance in many parts of the continent – amongst them Egypt, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Sudan - are arbitrary imprisonment, public humiliation, forced disappearing, torture, exile, rape and sexual abuse, and death. Non-national or ex-pat researchers and academics are sometimes detained, intimidated, deported, and forced out of their communities of work in African countries. Conducting defiant scholarship is frequently a dangerous act, one that is compounded by other forms of precarity.

We are also aware of instances where ex-pat researchers leverage their seemingly radical scholarship internationally for their own career advancement, frequently endangering and

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exploiting the labour and intellect of African nationals who are their research assistants (on the latter, see Mwambari 2019). Indeed, the risks to African nationals working in their countries of origins are more pervasive, excessive, direct, and permanent. Grassroots intellectuals and activists are particularly exposed to violent and direct backlash from racists and hetero-nationalists as a result of their work.

Our lecture was knowingly and necessarily provocative and involved a fair amount of auto-critique in our collaborative discussions and writing sessions (we have written about our struggles and uncertainties elsewhere; see Murrey 2017, 2019a, 2019b). In collaboratively preparing the lecture and article, we spoke at length of uncertainties of our contribution to the project of forging paths for decolonial African geographies. We returned again and again to Archie Mafeje's practice of thinking about the people where we work and returning always to the people and communities to whom we are accountable. Through our own transnational solidarities, we have worked to cultivate relations of support within and against the colonial matrix of power. These long-term relationships are self-critical, as we collaboratively interrogate uneven power and economic relations between scholars as well as the generative potentials for radical ruptures through acts of solidarity (Murrey and Tesfahun 2019).

Yet, the questions of risk and danger for critical scholars is a perennial question, and we are mindful of our placement at Oxford, where we are exposed to heightened right-wing media scrutiny (often racialised and gendered), but where we have been protected from the most violent and pernicious forms of harassment and targeting. Even so, we have not always managed to escape repressive responses and attacks for our work and activism. We noted Patricia's experience of a no-platform campaign for her talk in Accra; we did not address the disparaging and racist coverage of her scholarship and personhood in conservative British newspapers like the *Daily Mail*. We did not write about Amber's experience of being placed on the travel watch list in her own country (the United States), nor her being stopped upon re-entry each time that she travelled internationally for five years. US border agents were not forthcoming about why she was on the list, but they questioned the purposes of her travel to 'Africa' each time. When a complaint channel was created in 2016, she contested her status on the watch list and now travels with a redress control number to avoid additional Homeland Security checks. The risks of and backlash against defiant scholarship are not somehow uniquely 'African' problems. We hope that our provocations trigger reflection about why so many of our institutions actively do *not* support this kind of work, and that this reflection will be worthwhile, even as it triggers some discomfort.

We now turn to the relevance of Africa within decolonial imaginaries. The global dominance of the Westernized university and ongoing the realities of academic imperialism in the publication and circulation of intellectual knowledge have propagated the notion that current movements for epistemic decolonization and decolonial thought are phenomena developed 'elsewhere' and subsequently imposed on academic research in African societies. This is articulated in the premise that 'intellectual decolonization is a Northern paradigm'. We hinted to some of these knowledge politics in our RGS-IBG Lecture when we called for recognition of an earlier genesis of the emergence of global coloniality. Rather than the oft-dated 1492, the logics

of global coloniality are reflected in earlier European enslavements of West African peoples. On the other hand, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Edith Phaswana, Ama Biney, and many other defiant scholars² work to reveal both the pluriversals within decolonial African knowledge (often which predate the emergence of decolonial thought as an academic field) and the simultaneous omission and marginalization of such knowledge within the grammars of coloniality. In our paper we did not dwell on the counter-insurgency strategies of Western governments and their academic agents who sought to de-politicize African scholarship at the height of the Cold War as they pushed through damaging neo-liberal policies – strategies that succeeded to some degree at the University of Dar es Salaam. In the face of the most brutal forms of violence and repression, African intellectuals have permanently questioned and interrogated imperial roots of the social sciences, deconstructed European categories and concepts, and built the scaffolding for social science and social history from African perspectives. We want to argue that these are the intellectual roots for decolonial African geographies today.

We would like to address the questions that we received regarding the relevance of racial difference and blackness for scholars working in post-colonial African universities, particularly outside of South Africa, in countries where there is a black majority. For example, Stefan noted that race is given little attention in scholarly literature and popular discourse in Kenya and, even in Tanzania, where recent work on race has been carried out by global North scholars. Given this, are we perpetuating an imposition of Northern frames of thinking and knowing in our push for anti-racist African geographies? Again, we are thankful to Stefan (and all of our respondents) for raising valid, thought-provoking and sincere questions, which push us to reconsider and revisit our ideas. We have chosen to give most space to this question given its central significance, we think, in the commitment to dismantle the colonial uni-versity in and beyond Africa. In so doing, we take inspiration from Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020: 72) clarification of the dual heritage of the 'idea of Africa' as both 'an idea imposed by external forces of imperialism and colonialism...[and] an idea born out of resistance'—similar thinking can be taken in our understanding of blackness (see also Andrews 2018).

Blackness and anti-blackness carry different meanings in different contexts; this much is illustrated by the example Stefan has raised in his response. Racialisation is experienced and articulated differently across the African continent with respect to Blackness (Simone 2022). There is no denying that 'Blackness' or 'Africanness', as Simone argues, has been used as a political and accumulative tool in some contexts, especially in communities with long histories of colonial marginalization and complex racial hierarchies. In Africa and the Caribbean, colourism pervades despite what might appear to be Black political leadership. People racialized as Brown or considered 'lightskinned' are rarely deemed Black and are often accorded the

² As our respondents demonstrated (particularly Stefan), it is not difficult to think of defiant African scholars. Indeed, there are too many, spread across too many disciplines and countries to list comprehensively. Not only was the creation of a 'list' *not* our intention, crafting one would be counterintuitive to the political project here. We do not seek to foreclose nor fence in the conversation; nor do we presume the capacity to author an encyclopedia of such rich and wonderful scholarship.

privilege of being White. The British Rapper and writer, Akala, talks of the positive treatment he received in encounters with the Jamaican police as a light-skinned/mixed-black dreadlock-wearing man compared to the UK police, where he just Black. In North America, many light-skinned Jamaicans, and even ‘Black’ Africans resent their classification as Black or African American. Here, the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adiche, embracing Blackness in America, states: ‘I went full-circle and started identifying as black. I think it was a political decision; I decided that having understood African-American history, I was a part of it. African-American history doesn’t actually start on the slave ship. It starts in Africa. So in a way, we’re related. But America will label you black anyway’.

Since independence, public discussions of racial difference have been silenced largely for political reasons, particularly after the expulsion and flight of Asians from East African countries, and in the interest of stability & inclusivity. Certainly, political sensitivity - the fear of stoking racial/ethnic tensions - might explain why some academics have shied away from addressing race explicitly. Such a position is undoubtedly ethical. Nevertheless, it has served to stifle debate on dual nationality in Tanzania (Chachage 2009). Mahmood Mamdani’s exploration of race circumvented such limitations, as it began in South Africa and found validation in Rwanda, where it provided a legitimate interpretative frame for the genocide of 1994. Racial ideology and racialisation remain part of an uncomfortable silence in many African societies and universities. Avoidance of race as an analytical tool means that attempts to explain enduring colonial legacies of economic inequalities, land distribution, entitlements, and standards of beauty are only partially addressed. These are not our original arguments—we are building upon a tradition of defiant anti-racist scholarship to bring attention to the academic disregard of the functions of racial difference and the political work that this omission does in the service to coloniality.

While race may not be explicitly addressed, scholarship exists on particular racialized minority and cultural groups, such as Indians, European settlers, and Lebanese, and, in doing so, has increasingly recognized the persistence of racial hierarchies and associated privileges in contemporary Africa. Richa Nagar’s (2000) pioneering work on identity politics among South Asians in Dar es Salaam was amongst the first to address the question of race in Tanzania. Recently, global North scholars encouraged by the development of critical race theory and the racial critique of international legal systems, as well as everyday practices, have started to engage more deeply with race in Africa. The geographer Richard Schroeder (2012), in his book *Africa After Apartheid: South Africa, Race and Nation in Tanzania*, provides a candid and nuanced exploration of whiteness as performed and experienced by white South Africans in Tanzania post-Apartheid. In West Africa, the Haitian-American socio-cultural anthropologist, Jemima Pierre (2012:1) offers, in *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race*, an excellent analysis of how race remains salient in a postcolonial state with a black majority and with a history of Pan-African leadership and consciousness, largely because, she sees ‘postcolonial African societies as structured through and by global White supremacy’. Race has been instrumentalized by the Ghanaian state as an ideological tool to foster its legitimacy.

To transcend the silences around race in African intellectual output, might mean unpacking how the ever-present idea of race underlies North-South relations whether between states, humanitarian interventions, and international development operations (Kothari 2006). In academic collaborations, it is about addressing the epistemic and financial bases through which academics based in the North exercise power. While some scholars working in African universities might choose to ignore race or dismiss the study of racial difference in Africa as a Western preoccupation, it remains and functions as an ugly shibboleth in development thought and praxis, economic policymaking, the organizational structures of international organizations, migration policies, and so on. ‘Blackness’ stigmatized as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘Other’ was mobilised to define the racist continental boundary known as ‘sub-Saharan Africa’. Colonialists ignored the histories of mobilities, and circulation of rich cultural practices in the fostering of this divide. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 73) writes, ‘Blackism on a world scale captures the ontological split creative by the imperial racist paradigm of difference’. Divide-and-rule remains an imperialist and white supremacy strategy; collective commitments to anti-racist decolonial African geographies work to demystify global anti-blackness.

The instrumentality of racial ideology is likely to be more clearly attenuated, as we witness, in the 21st century, the rise of ultra-nationalism and public articulations of white supremacy being mobilized at a time when people of colour in global North countries are perceived to be gaining political and economic advantages, and white-dominated states see their economic power waned as they are outcompeted by China and East Asian states. Black and African diaspora scholars, whose everyday experiences of race, and who have been at the forefront of developing analytical frameworks to interpret racial hierarchies, provide powerful resources for the study of racism on a transnational scale (Rodriguez et al 2015). Elsewhere, we have argued for geographers to adopt a ‘transnational perspective on black women’s lifeways’, rather than applying assumptions and theories based on the experience of White women precisely because ‘[a]nti-blackness pervades black women’s lives globally.’ (Daley 2020: 798). They have been ‘subjected to a range of de-humanizing and exclusionary practices that deny their femininity, beauty, cognitive abilities, familial attachments and the importance of their labour both in the public and private spheres, even when attempts are being made to control their reproductive capabilities’ (ibid). Mobilizing theories developed in the North by Black women is not a panacea to addressing fundamental problems of coloniality in African societies. Kagal and Latchford (2020) discusses attempts by international development agencies to draw on the intersectional approach used by Black women activists in London, UK, in their work on violence against women in the global South. Kagal and Latchford conclude that these agencies need ‘to begin by acknowledging the geo-political and historical roots of the underdevelopment of the global South, examining the continuation of discourses of economic, social, cultural, and moral ‘inferiority’ versus ‘superiority’, and the centrality of the global North to both these processes’ (Kagal & Latchford 2020: 29). The radical transnational perspective that defiant scholarship embodies is multi-scalar and temporally integrative as well as multi-directional in its learning,

We want to return to one of the core tenets of decolonial thought: transdisciplinarity. In our experience teaching and working within British higher education, actualizing substantive trans-disciplinarity has been one of the most challenging invitations for intellectuals working

within geography departments. This has not been equally so within other institutions where we have worked, in the US, Egypt, and Ethiopia. As such, we would like to clarify that British geography in particular remains characterized by the colonial hangover of disciplinary thinking, and this is reflected in the ways in which African geography and decolonial geography are taught and researched in Britain and, subsequently, the outsized influence that British geography has on the rest of the world through the dominance of Anglophone work in the discipline. Working in the UK as we do, we have a particular responsibility to think and know beyond the confines of strict disciplinarity. It is for these reasons that we opted for a broad engagement across the social sciences in Africa in our consideration and appreciation for defiant scholarship. We intentionally sought to be expansive, looking at work in media studies, anthropology, history, politics, development studies, and sociology. We seek to move against mono-disciplinarity, in the manner of scholars like Thandika Mkandawire—and we do so as a move against the Eurocentric roots and scaffolding of our discipline. We are keen to see the discipline of geography thrive on the continent by opening the space to rethink its epistemologies and methodologies, as there is much to learn from African and African-diasporic ways of knowing and being that can contribute to the global debates within the discipline.

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