

Why Decolonising Research Ethics in African studies Reconfiguration

Ademola Kazeem FAYEMI PhD



Talk Overview

1 A conceptual overview of African studies, reconfiguration, and its impetus

2 Decolonising Research Ethics in Africa

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4 Conclusion

Introduction

- Reconfiguring African studies as a top agenda in the field.
- Shift in the classical model of doing African studies to the reconfiguration model
 - Presumption of coloniality of knowledge and research ethics
- Gap in the literature and the research question – Is decolonisation of research ethics in Africa needed in light of the reconfiguration turn in African studies?
- Thesis:
 - **Decolonisation of African studies is an incomplete epistemic project if the moral compass is left un-decolonised, and that moral compass is research ethics.**

Introduction... Contd.

- Arguments supporting thesis
 - If the reconfiguration of African studies is to achieve its aim of transforming the culture of extraversion in research and knowledge production in African studies, decolonising research ethics is necessary
 - Decolonised research ethics, when operationalised, can help reduce historical structural power asymmetry in the field
 - It can help in reducing the problem of ethics dumping and the risk of perpetuating epistemic injustice in knowledge practices within the field.

Conceptual Overview



⇒ “African studies refers to transdisciplinary knowledge production concerning Africa or Africans. This includes scholarship in, by, with, for, of, on, and from Africa and Africans” (Kessi, Marks & Ramugondo, 2020: 272).

⇒ Reconfiguring African studies is a rethinking, rejigging, and restructuring of the culture of knowledge production in African studies where the issues of positionalities of authors, reflexivity in research practices, genuine collaborations, sharing of power, data, and resources, inclusive representation of knowledge authorities are taken seriously both at the theoretical and structural levels (Oluma *et al* 2023).

⇒ Decolonization, broadly construed, is a sustained reflection on identifying, disentangling, and rectifying the acrimonious power imbalances unduly reinforced by historical legacies of colonialism in various domains of existence and intellectualism, including African studies.

Conceptual overview – contd.

- Research ethics is defined here to be the ethics of the planning, conduct, and reporting of research. Research ethics is a term most typically applied to rules for “proper” behaviour during the thinking and action processes of research and particularly to the protection of human subjects” (Depoy & Gitlin 2019: 24).
 - Decolonizing research ethics involves centering indigenous norms in the process of what counts as good research; challenging ethical imperialism in what counts research with integrity, and respecting indigenous values and protocols in ethical consideration of research. It doesn't mean rejecting all Western research ethics value but adapting them where appropriate.
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Decolonizing Research Ethics in African Studies



What Does it Mean to Decolonize Research Ethics in Africa

While decolonization does not mean a wholesale return to the past without a critical gaze, it attaches some importance to the discovery and re-enactment of productive and useful modes of being, knowing and behaving before colonial interruptions.

Decolonization emphasises conscious inclusivity and respect between different knowledge and ethics systems, centering indigenous values in knowledge production, and making knowledge creation more diverse and representative of different cultures, languages, identities and histories

Two fundamental sources can be identified in determining what a decolonized research ethics in Africa might look like: ethical environment and logic. The ethical environment is largely a product of a careful hybridization of the cultural heritages in Africa and the logic underpins the dynamism and contradictions involved in such heritages.

Decolonizing Research Ethics in Africa studies ... contd.

The imperativeness of a decolonised research ethics is grounded on a logic of complementarity rather than a logic of binary opposition that operates on an 'either ... or ... basis' in classical African studies.


The knowledge base of the western world has often operated on the principle of binary opposition, which is the system of language and/or thought by which two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another (Baldick, 2004).

In a way, the reawakening of research ethics in African studies emanates from the critique of research ethics in literature reviews, which often paints research ethics as a procedural, codified, regulatory, and bureaucratic mechanism.



Research Journey in Reconfigured African studies and Decolonised Research Ethics

The reconfiguration of African studies through specially designed research partnerships that are mutually beneficial to scholars in African studies working across locations around the world involves a number of phases.




The culture of collaboration and research relationships.



Generation of research questions.



Setting up of interdisciplinary research team to develop the proposal and research concept note.




Articulating the proposal, applying for ethics approval,

Contd.



Applying for funding, and setting up strategies for data collection.



Determining variables for data analysis and interpretation.



Writing up the research findings, and publication and dissemination of knowledge discovered or constructed



Translation of knowledge into workable solutions

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The reconfiguration of African studies through decolonized research ethics further advocates for:

⇒ A research journey that is collaborative in nature.

⇒ A reduction of historical structural power, and conceptual disparities within African studies.

⇒ A reduction in the problem of ethics dumping, and shifting control of African studies research ecosystem away from the historical extraversive sources.

⇒ Extraversion is simply having an unconscious orientation towards external sources of authority and audience

conclusion

- Decolonizing research ethics in the reconfiguration of African studies calls for a form of normative rethinking and critical consciousness in the development of the culture of research collaborations between the global North and South in ways that avoids moral imperialism.
 - Such normative thinking in research is premised on an inclusive logic, and reflects the ethical environment in African cultures.
 - A decolonised research ethics for reconfiguring African studies must be built on mutual respect, communalism, cooperativeness, collaboration, and a relationally informed precepts that are serviceable along the research journey.
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Conclusion

Decolonizing research ethics in the reconfiguration of African studies calls for a form of normative rethinking and critical consciousness in the development of the culture of research collaborations between the global North and South in ways that avoids moral imperialism. Such normative thinking in research is premised on an inclusive logic, and reflects the ethical environment in African cultures. Thus, research ethics must be built on mutual respect, communalism, cooperativeness, collaboration, and a relationally informed precepts of research ethics.

Thank You!!!