RESEARCH & ACTIVISM:
Ruth First
& Activist Research

EDITED BY
SALEEM BADAT & VASU REDDY

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Foreword

Rob Davies

Ruth First was murdered by the apartheid regime on 17 August 1982, immediately after hosting a conference on the role of research in supporting liberation struggles and regional integration in Southern Africa. In addition to the transformative challenges faced by governments formed by former liberation movements and those of organisations still contesting racist minority regimes, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) had recently been established with its main stated objective being to 'reduce the dependence' of its members 'particularly, but not only, on apartheid South Africa' (Southern African Development Community n.d.).

A major theme of discussion in what tragically became the final intellectual endeavour of Ruth First's life was the meaning and significance of the concept of "critical support" as a *leitmotif* for research seeking to contribute to the advance of the liberation project in Southern Africa. This concept had been developed to guide the work of the *Centro de Estudos Africanos (*CEA – Centre for African Studies) founded by Ruth First, who became the centre's Director of Research, and Aquino de Braganca, who was Director until he died in the plane crash that also killed President Samora Machel on 19 October 1986. The CEA underpinned both the Development Studies course offered to senior officials in state institutions and the conduct of research projects, particularly those undertaken during the tenure of Ruth First.

Key to the concept of "critical support" was a view that research should support the overriding goals and objectives defined by liberation movements that were not in doubt. This then spoke to a rejection of notions that research could, or should, be *value free*. However, the dialectic of support also being critical, spoke to the idea that the best contribution serious research could make to advancing the cause of liberation was to offer rigorous and critical insight into policies and practices, with the objective of improving their impact.

A related element was to see Marxism (then the official ideology of Mozambique's Frelimo Party as well as the unifying theoretical paradigm of CEA teaching and research) as a tool of analysis of concrete reality rather than a dogma cited to validate existing policy positions and practices. Fighting for the space to pursue critically supportive research had not been easy. Several Frelimo leaders as well as *cooperantes* from the then "actually existing" socialist countries of Eastern Europe were wary. Ruth and Aquino,

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however, had the political gravitas and respect to be able to carve out space for this endeavour.

Ruth First regarded Frelimo's attempted socialist transition as a fragile project embarked upon in one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world, located in a highly contested and conflictual region. Ruth was convinced that advancing this project, as well as that articulated by SADCC, would contribute even to the advance of the struggle for national liberation in South Africa. She saw the struggles for socialism in Mozambique, developmental integration in the region and liberation in South Africa as inextricably interlinked. This derived from her understanding of Southern Africa as a region, meaning much more than a geographically contiguous group of countries. Apartheid and colonialism had forged powerful economic ties that had shaped key dimensions of the existing politico-economic reality and thus, needed to be an arena of struggle for transformative change. First was strongly focused on her intellectual work regarding these issues during her time in Mozambique, something many an ANC cadre passing through Maputo found hard to understand.

The two chapters in this volume authored by Saleem Badat convincingly argue that the totality of Ruth First's intellectual endeavour, including that during her time at the CEA, can be subsumed under the broad concept of "activist research". Badat and Vasu Reddy offer a "loose" definition of this— 'research connected with political and social movements and projects' (See Chapter 1 and 2).

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More than four decades have passed since the reflections on "critically supportive" research at the Maputo conference hosted by Ruth First, and much has changed since then. While foundational documents of liberation movements, such as the Freedom Charter continue to offer, in my view, a high-level vision of in what direction a liberation project must go, much of contemporary policy making by now "long in government" former liberation movements are a much less certain anchor of progressive transformation and are also much more contested. Battered by a combination of neo-liberalism and kleptocracy, the heirs to the liberation stalwarts now govern societies with widening inequality, growing distance between "elites" and ordinary people and a diminishing influence of the working class and the poor. Other organisations, including trade unions and community-based and research organisations have emerged offering alternative, and frequently more progressive positions on a range of policy choices. Besides issues, whose importance was not as evident forty years ago, are now widely recognised as vital and even existential. These include the threat of catastrophic climate change, and the associated challenges of defending communities and infrastructure against an inevitable cascade of increasingly severe and extreme weather events through ambitious "adaptation" programmes, while promoting equity and inclusive development as economies necessarily and inevitably transition to lower carbon products and technologies. Beyond this, are the impact of a myriad of "external shocks" emanating

from an increasingly contested global order enmeshed in a myriad of deepening interlocking crises, increasingly widely dubbed a polycrisis.

Several chapters in this volume begin the important task of problematising the concept of "activist research" in the spirit of "critical support". Dale McKinley points out quite correctly that '...activist research can certainly be carried out by those in the centre and on the right side of the political spectrum' (See Chapter 7). He also makes a distinction between "activist academics" and "activist intellectuals" rooted in organisations. This raises the critical question: under the circumstances of today where there is much less evident and much more contested anchor of the values and principles of progressive transformation that qualifies as "activist research"—or at least, "activist research" seeking to locate itself in the spirit of the legacy of Ruth First?

The Chapter by Nancy Cartwright et al. on OBFAR (Objectivity for Activist Research) raises another important set of questions. Research capable of supporting progressive change must be rigorous and I would add, rooted in scientific method. We live in an age of highly contested notions of evidence and proof, and this requires not only a pursuit of rigour in "activist research" itself, but an ability to critically unpack and assess statistical and other methodologies used to establish points and conclusions in a broad swathe of competing advice.

Beyond this are several more practical questions. There is an evident distinction between "activist research" and policy research, advocacy or consultancy reports. Ultimate agendas of organisations purporting to carry out "progressive" research are not always transparent. Not every NGO is a Community Based Organisation (CBO). Not every NGO or CBO is organically rooted and home grown. Funding shapes agendas. How do all these factors affect and shape the quest for progressive "activist research"?

This volume is certainly not the last word on this subject; however, it is a very important contribution. It convincingly argues the case for forging a practice of "activist research" that both speaks to the challenges of the present and build on the rich legacy of Ruth First.

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Foreword

Bridget O'Laughlin

The contributors to this collection draw on Ruth First's legacy to address the ways scholars bring their research to the support of progressive political action. In reading through their reflections, I tried to think about how Ruth brought scholarship, teaching and politics together in the research carried out at the Centre of African Studies (CEA) at Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM). Of course, the context in Southern Africa is very different today. The demise of the socialist revolutionary project was declared in the definition of Mozambique as a market economy in the 1990 constitution. The Third World no longer exists; BRICS do not have an anti-capitalist or even anti-imperialist focus. The hegemony of the modernist-post-modernist dichotomy has relegated Marxism to the realms of outmoded developmentalism. Yet to understand Ruth First's legacy means thinking about what both revolutionary research and progressive change have been and can be.

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Research in a revolutionary moment

In Lusaka, 1974, after years of armed struggle, Frelimo was able to negotiate a transitional government followed by independence in 1975. Frelimo planned to transform the small colonial university of Lourenço Marques into an important African university named for the Mozambican revolutionary scholar Eduardo Mondlane (UEM). The old privileged colonial research institute would include a Centre of African Studies (CEA), headed by Aquino de Bragança, Goan by birth, Mozambican by choice, a respected journalist and participant in anti-colonial struggles. Aquino de Bragança was one of the founding members of the *Conference of Nationalist Organisations of the Portuguese Colonies* (CONCP) and had provided strategic in-depth information to Frelimo, including information for the negotiation of the Lusaka independence accord. Aquino was to continue that work as director of the CEA, a place where students and teachers could learn together through research, discussion and debate. One of its first collective projects was to involve students from the history department and teachers from various university faculties in a study of "the Rhodesia question", the problem of when and how to impose sanctions on Rhodesia that would both support the struggle for Zimbabwe's independence and minimise the damage to the Mozambican economy.

A second strategic issue Aquino was asked to confront was the sudden rapid fall in the migration of Mozambican miners to South Africa (and resultant decline in remittances and gold reserves). Aquino persuaded Ruth First to take leave from Durham University to organise a collective research project at the CEA to address the mine-labour crisis. Aquino had known Ruth for a very long time. They met as young communists at an anti-imperialist conference in Italy. In political exile, both became progressive internationalist investigative journalists, known for the persistent uncovering of imperialist complicity, building dense international networks of sources of information and political support. Both were also known for discrete resistance to orthodox dogmatism. The collective project Ruth organised included a field-study focused on rural areas in Southern Mozambique and integrated students and faculty from across UEM as researchers. The initial collective report, edited by Ruth and published by the CEA, *The Mozambican Miner,* was insightful, troubling and influential. Ruth was once again persuaded to take leave from Durham University to become the research director of the CEA.

By 1977 some of the euphoria of the first two years of Mozambican independence was fading. Frelimo faced two related questions. One was economic: how would the revolution be financed? The other was political: How would the revolution be defended? The answers, adopted in the Resolution of the Third Party Congress were dramatic, but simplistic: the Liberation Front would become a more disciplined Marxist-Leninist Party and the socialist development strategy would focus investment in state-owned industry and large-scale agriculture while drawing more surplus from small-scale agriculture through cooperativisation of family agriculture.

Making these decisions did not suddenly transform the ways people in and outside the party lived and thought. There was confusion as well as resistance and opposition. It did, however, deepen the presence and influence of the Soviet bloc in the institutions of state and in many aspects of everyday life. Eastern European socialist countries provided much of the new faculty required for a rapid expansion of the university. All students took an introductory course in historical materialism that relied heavily on memorising a fixed set of questions and fixed universal answers with minimal reference to the particularities of Mozambican experience. There was some student resistance to dogmatic Marxist-Leninist thought and within Frelimo itself some sympathy for the more critical versions of "Western Marxism" as well as to greater attention to African political history, including the ongoing liberation struggles in Southern Africa. South Africans of course know from experience, that universities can themselves be a terrain of activist struggle.

Aquino and Ruth resisted dogmatism at the CEA by constructing a course that did not fit an institutional space, but focussed on training researchers to confront development issues arising from the political economy of Mozambique. Ruth became the organiser and director of the "Development Course", a

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diploma centred around a research project that involved all the students and staff. The diploma had no clear pre-requisites other than an interview, no exams and no official equivalent academic status was required at the university. All students were also full-time workers: journalists; people on research desks in ministries; in Frelimo party apparatus; in the political commissariat of the army and university lecturers. All were given time off to attend classes and to participate in the university's "July activities", a month of fieldwork outside Maputo done by all UEM students. Most CEA lecturers were western and South African *cooperantes* (cooperatives), with research experience in Africa. All were socialists, were politically vetted and their applications were assessed by the rector of UEM.

The contributors to this collection address the dynamics of research in progressive activist organisations from states to diverse forms of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). During Ruth's time at the CEA, this political diversity did not exist in Mozambique. There were no authorised independent secular civil society organisations outside the party: production councils were formed in companies but there were no functioning independent trade unions or peasant union; women's, youth and teachers' leagues functioned as wings of the party. Frelimo had formed a classic socialist developmentalist one-party state. The research in the Development Course was commissioned principally by agencies of the state and focused on issues of Mozambican political economy. This does not mean that researchers/lecturers were not engaged in political struggles, but that these struggles ultimately confronted the authority of the party and were mediated by Ruth and Aquino; this practice could endanger the political survival of the CEA.

After the Development Course was up and running, two other research groups were organised: The Southern Africa section that focused on long-term strategic issues in the region; and the History Workshop that focused on the history of the liberation struggle in Mozambique. A documentation centre was established to systematise the reports, information and critical documentation from the research on Mozambique to build a collection of classic books on political economy, contemporary politics and history, particularly covering Africa and the Third World. The collection was intensively consulted by CEA and UEM researchers, keeping them theoretically abreast of key debates; it was, however, also open to other researchers. Ruth also established a new journal *Estudos Moçambicanos* (Mozambican Studies) that published scholarly articles on Mozambique and was aimed at a Mozambican readership, but also circulated internationally.

Towards revolution

In retrospect, I would say that five general principles guided Ruth's vision of progressive research at the

CEA. My illustrations are taken from research framed by the Development Course where my work was focused.

First, research is not necessarily a specialised scholarly activity: a capacity for clear, consistent, well-informed judgments is a right and a responsibility for everyone in a democracy, but particularly for political activists.

Students came from different educational levels and work-places. The tutorial groups that followed lectures began with questions intended to facilitate discussion amongst students of different backgrounds. The CEA always asked that a provincial cadre be included as a working member of one of the field-research groups. At the end of each day all researchers met to discuss the results, signal new question and decide what field-notes each one would write. An exploratory round of household surveys concluded with respondents posing questions to the researchers. The CEA research emphasised talking with people, not at them: observation with conversation, visiting fields and other work-places for interviews, attending meetings to listen.

Second, for activist researchers the core problem is finding the right question.   7

Ruth and Aquino both told CEA researchers many times that finding the right question is more important than finding the right answer. They recognised that research questions are embedded not only in different epistemological and theoretical positions, but also in relations of power. Political organisations often have assumptions that are not easily open to public discussion. The Development Course focused its research on agrarian political economy because Ruth felt that Frelimo's agrarian policy needed contestation and that this demanded observation and confrontation with the conditions of everyday life in rural areas. She thought that the priority the Frelimo policy gave to investment in state farms was dangerously wrong, economically and politically. The Ministry of Agriculture agreed to research on peasant farming and cooperatives, but was averse to the CEA research raising questions that looked critically at the planning and everyday operation of the state-farms. The question the Ministry of Agriculture wanted the CEA to answer was usually applied research: 'how should we implement what we have already decided'.

On state-farms, for example, Frelimo officials and company directors asked the CEA to find out why, if there was unemployment in rural areas, they were unable to hire casual labour when they needed it. They wanted the CEA research to discover how casual rural labour could solve the weaknesses of accumulation in state enterprises. The CEA had to negotiate hard to include the functioning of state-

enterprises themselves in the research questions: to see what the patterns of labour demand and recruitment were and to gain access to administrative records, pay-slips as well as to observe the organisation of work in fields, on docks and in ship-holds to establish why the patterns of labour demand were so irregular.

There were many good questions that were not asked, some precluded by the research capacity and some by Frelimo distrust. Questions on rural politics, for example, were sensitive. Trust would have required longer-term, probing field-studies using local languages that did not fit with the short-term field-research format of the Development Course. The colonial system of traditional chiefdoms had been abolished by Frelimo at Independence. Rural fieldwork showed that parallel, sometimes overlapping political authorities were at work in most districts, however, the CEA did not try to understand their basis of legitimacy.

Ruth thought that in Southern Africa most good questions of political economy have regional dimensions. Despite its lusophone bent, this point may be obvious in Mozambique; it is a long, narrow country bordering on many Southern African countries, however, Ruth also considered South African exceptionalism to be analytically indefensible. Hers was not an argument about similarity, but about interconnection. South Africa's long-term patterns of labour recruitment, racialised conditions of work, use of water, sourcing of raw materials and organisation of transport, affected the development of countries of the region, however, they have created a dualism that hobbles innovation and growth in South Africa itself.

In establishing good questions, staff researchers brought with them their own theoretical baggage, but also consulted the CEA's growing documentation centre/library to find relevant studies of, for example, cooperatives in Tanzania, rural politics in Botswana or land reform in Latin America. Short texts were translated into Portuguese and mimeos distributed to students as course reading. Later, these copies came to be copied and recopied by students from many faculties. Ruth and Aquino invited researchers visiting Mozambique to join seminars at the CEA that raised new questions. A Cuban economist consulting the Planning Ministry, for example, explained how the urban food-rationing, then being introduced in Mozambique, set a political block on the flexibility of Cuban planning. Robert Linhart, A French researcher who had studied plantation labour in Brazil, drew The CEA's attention to the similarity between Lenin's interest in "Socialist Emulation" in the Soviet Union and Taylorist methods of increasing efficiency through labour intensification.

The right questions often emerged only during the course of research itself, when reality challenges assumptions and demands reflection. A good question is one that has more than one plausible answer,

and those we often only came to understand during fieldwork. Some good questions were missed and others just did not ask.

Third, a collective approach to research allows trained researchers and activists to discover together the right questions and to learn how to find and analyse the information needed to answer them.

In the Development Course, a collective approach was used for both carrying out research and writing up results. Research topics were worked out in seminars at the CEA. One or two people would do background research, collect relevant information and literature and then present a proposal in a discussion seminar. The researchers' debate sharpened the central research questions; methods were worked out and time horizons settled. The proposal team would then do a scoping visit, obtain official permission(s) and prepare research documents and instruments to be discussed in seminar groups and tutorials for all the researchers. Groups of five or six researchers, including students from the Development Course, some interested knowledgeable UEM staff, with guidance from one of the CEA staff, were placed in different localities for a month. The researchers met mid-month to share observations, information and problems with Ruth who was also the "mobile brigade" driving between groups with Salomāo Zandamela, the CEA driver (and with Alpheus Manghezi, a collector of work songs). This division of labour meant that the scale of research could be wide allowing researchers to generalise results while registering variation. By doing so, it also meant that practical research skills could be taught.

Ruth and Aquino insisted that research at the CEA was interdisciplinary, not multi-disciplinary. CEA researchers included sociologists, anthropologists, economists, historians, political scientists, a veterinarian and at least one engineer. Researchers had different research skills, however, all worked together on defining common questions and finding the methods needed to collect the information that would answer them. Statistical analysis cannot be learned in a short interdisciplinary course, however, how to organise statistical information and read it critically, can be. Engineers trained in observing labour processes can teach others how to see what is going on in a particular work-place. Sociologists, anthropologists and oral historians are trained to look for, hear and record divergent views, and to teach others how to do so.

The drafting of the research reports was based on the field-notes and was usually done by the CEA researchers guiding each group (then called a brigade). The melding together of these reports and documentation into a single coherent report was usually done by Ruth and those who drafted the

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research proposal. Ruth taught me how to cut and paste, how to make sense out of variation, how to keep length under control and how to construct arguments that would be accessible to an informed, but busy reader. These reports came out under the name of the CEA. The names of all the participants were mentioned in the preface of the report, however, some individual writing got lost or its interpretation altered. A good journalist checked over the language for coherence and style in Portuguese. Aquino read the final versions for both content and style.

One of the advantages of this collective inter-disciplinary approach was its efficiency, particularly the speed with which results could be presented. Ruth thought it was important to get research reports out quickly. After all, she said, you cannot ask people to attend to that which they have never had the opportunity to read. And, she thought, progressive movements, including socialists in power, have limited time to correct poor practice.

There were some limitations to the collective approach. Students did not engage in the experience of writing a report from beginning to end, though they learned how to organise information, write field-notes and bring insights and arguments into the group discussions. There were, however, also tensions. Some thought the loss of individual authorship was not democratic and flattened important divergent opinions. Others noted that future academic job promotion depended on named publications in CVs. Speed, unanimity and brevity could lead to superficiality. Yet writing collectively was also liberating; one knew that someone else would read and challenge interpretation and conclusions drawn in different drafts of the reports. Ruth hoped the CEA's research reports would quickly influence Frelimo policies and expected that their impact would be transient. Yet copies of these reports were circulating decades later among university students and in the informal street-corner second-hand book market in Maputo.

Ruth also recognised that social activism and activist scholarship demand reflective, longer-term comparative and historical research. She herself took on the revision of the initial version of *The Mozambican Miner*. Ruth rewrote and reorganised much of the text. Other CEA researchers added more careful analysis of the recruitment data and collected new material including the rural women's work-songs that helped to make *Black Gold* a special book. Researchers in the Southern Africa section maintained a detailed chronological data base on political and economic events in the region, wrote memoranda on regional issues and detailed studies on the contemporary history of both South African politics and South African impact in the region. The History Workshop produced both an historical bulletin, *Nāo vamos esquecer* (we shall not forget) and drafted individual academic theses. During her first year at the CEA, along with Ann Scott, Ruth finished the biography of Olive Schreiner, a nineteenth century South African white feminist writer. Olive Schreiner's politics had focused on the intersections of race and class in South Africa, however, the awakening of feminist academia in the 1970s made her

realise, as do contributors to this collection, that long-term intersections between contradictions of race, class and gender cripple progressive projects in South Africa.

Fourth, the framing and interpretation of research findings should consciously reflect both the political judgements of the researcher and political differences within the movements that activist researchers are attempting to influence.

In this collection, the Durham collective discusses the complexity of what objectivity means in progressive research; they explain why impartiality is not a sustainable stance for a social researcher. What the CEA experience showed is that silence is an important part of the field of struggle over objectivity in research.

Frelimo, like many other decolonising socialist countries, declared itself to be a Marxist-Leninist party with a state based in a worker-peasant alliance. The flexible political meaning assigned to the worker-peasant alliance came up constantly in the CEA's research. In one of the 'Development Courses', Ruth gave a special class on class and class alliance. She outlined the difference between defining class as a social relation and class as an identity. She discussed class alliance as the outcome of a negotiated and possibly transient agreement between different classes aligned by common interest in a common struggle. In a small tutorial group after the class, one of the participants asked Ruth what class they belonged to. Ruth looked carefully around the room and answered 'As far as I can see, we are all part of the '*pequena burguesia*' (petty bourgeoisie). The group, that normally disagreed among themselves on almost any topic, was outraged. All agreed that Ruth and I might well be petty bourgeois, but Frelimo's socialist revolution made them all workers. The group rejected our counter argument that Frelimo was based on a class-alliance supported by common interest in the liberation struggle, but vulnerable to class struggles over issues such as the priority given to investment in industry and large-scale agriculture after independence. This was an issue discussed within Frelimo, but not aired in public debate.

This unsettled question over the durability of the peasant-worker alliance came up in CEA discussions of the centre's rural fieldwork. One of the CEA external researchers said he felt that CEA reports did not give enough attention to the importance of the differentiation among peasants that he encountered in his research in the countryside in Southern Mozambique. Ruth did not challenge his data, but opted for silence; in the research report she omitted his findings on the importance of rural differentiation. She thought that the group within Frelimo that saw large-scale production as inherently more efficient than small-scale production, would avoid seeing the extent to which rural differentiation was being fuelled by goods starvation resulting from planning preferences for state farms. This group, she said, appropriated even more irrigable peasant land for mechanised agriculture in the state sector.

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Ruth did not claim infallibility or expect that political decisions are always clear. She agreed to remove a photograph of children picking cotton on a state-farm from a report intended for public consumption. The minister of agriculture argued that the photo would bring down the wrath of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and compromise untied Nordic financial support to Mozambique. The written description of child-labour remains clear in the report, but yes, a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Ruth saw revolution not as a single cathartic moment—a spontaneous uprising, victory in an armed struggle or a massive electoral victory. Rather it is a contradictory process, not unilinear, not inevitable, not irrevocable, but vulnerable not just to external assault, but to its own contradictions. Was our (the CEA) silence, in relation to both the questions asked and the results observed, too cautious?

Fifth, since socialist revolutions are non-linear processes not moments, all activists including researchers must be concerned with endurance, with reproduction of self as well as with propelling revolution.

Ruth worked harder than anyone I have ever known, however, she knew how to take breaks and to organise them for others—conversation, a trip to the beach, a party, reading a novel, listening to music or seeing a film. She also delighted in sensual pleasures—good food, a fine wine, an aromatic coffee, well-tailored clothes, having beautiful objects around her. On the day she was murdered she came to the CEA for a going-away drink for John Saul, who had spent a hard year trying to collaborate with the faculty of Marxism-Leninism at UEM. I met her at the entrance, carrying a box of sparkling wine-glasses she had borrowed somewhere and a bright red blazer lent by a friend that she had worn to keep up her spirits all through the thorny international conference she had organised the preceding week.

There were tensions and failures in this care for self. Ruth felt guilty about being so far from her daughters when they needed her counsel—available only through a telephone that made strange noises, never knowing if it was infested by cockroaches or otherwise bugged. When Ruth opened the parcel the apartheid security services used to assassinate her, she was still wearing that beloved bright red blazer. Yet, this collection documenting Ruth's legacy amongst activist researchers today and the description of the struggles with which they have been involved in South Africa clearly says one important thing: the struggle does continue, *a luta continua*, we can change history, though not always as we wish.

Preface

Silence in the face of injustice is complicity
The power of the people is greater than the power of any government
The separation of powers is one of the most fundamental principles of democracy
Apartheid is a crime against humanity
The will to fight is born out of the desire for freedom
There is no justice in a system that denies basic human rights
Ignorance is the enemy of progress and justice
Education is the key to empowering individuals and challenging oppressive systems
– Ruth First

Drawn from an archive of Ruth First, by no means exhaustive, the above appropriately captures in part the ideas, thinking and activism demonstrated by Ruth First, who held multiple roles as communist militant, journalist, scholar and intellectual. Written and or spoken before her untimely assassination over four decades ago, these projective ideas could be seen as prophetic and timely. Legal apartheid may have ended in South Africa; however, her words have bearing and resonance in a current global context as we write. The volume we present attempts to make sense of Ruth First (either directly or circuitously) by revisiting her work, ideas and life and share this with new audiences. In several ways, recuperating Ruth First's work reminds us in similar (yet different) ways of Hannah Arendt's deep humanist thinking that boldly, provocatively and unapologetically alerted us to find ways to create a shared political and ethical world.

Research and Activism: Ruth First and Activist Research assembles contributions that describe, analyse, interrogate, celebrate, perform and open up a projective scholarship on First's extraordinary body of knowledge. The volume explores the making of First, her writing as a journalist, her role in movement building as an activist and her practice in some of these domains to consider the material and intellectual weight of her life and work and its nuanced textures. The text recuperates, recovers and perhaps rediscovers Ruth First, over four decades since her murder by South African security forces in 1982. By mobilising original contributions on the creative tension of her assigned identities, we seek to offer new thinking about First the person, the subject and indeed, as an object of knowledge, to expand and complicate our understanding of her various legacies (whether intellectual, journalism or activism)

and to stimulate a renewed critical reflection about her life and work.

The text seeks to advance thinking on research and activism and activist research, and to stimulate greater research on and an analysis of the issue. We loosely define "activist research" as research intimately connected with political and social movements and projects. Some scholars, and intellectuals more broadly, consider their theorising, analysis and empirical research as "activist research". There is, however, little scholarly or public engagement on "activist research" in South Africa—its meanings, character, history, institutional locations, role in society, place in universities, what distinguishes it from other kinds of research and the complications and the challenges that can arise for activist scholars and intellectuals. Of course, the questions of research and activism and activist research, when undertaken by university scholars, also raise the issues of the purposes, functions and roles of universities in general and in South Africa in particular.

Neo-liberalism and its pernicious impact on knowledge and universities has resulted in universities and their core activities being increasingly incorporated into the reproduction of capitalism and class rule. The trend is commodified, corporatised universities that are notionally sites of education and research and increasingly, businesses in their logics and operations. This has implications for the idea of serving the common public good and for Neville Alexander's invocation that the accountability of academics must extend beyond peers to diverse constituencies beyond universities. Those external constituencies cannot be reduced to the state and business and the prioritisation of their needs because of their funding and 'purchasing power' but must include the needs of subaltern social classes and the institutions, movements and organisations that articulate and represent their interests.

Today, critical and activist scholarship appear to remain marginal activities, with a dearth of strong and sustained connection with South Africa's marginalised and excluded social groups and their movements and formations. The lack of collaborative knowledge partnerships with social movements and their intellectuals that can enhance the understanding of social conditions, power and struggles compromises the rigour and quality of humanities and social science scholarship. It also compromises the production of knowledge that can meaningfully inform strategies and policies for substantive social transformation.

The making of this volume has been a two-year journey with our authors, who rose to the challenge with their dedicated work and revisions. During that time, it has been our pleasure to work with a scholar collective at Durham University and a diverse group of senior and young local scholars at seven universities to finalise this volume. We are immensely grateful to an anonymous critical reader for his thorough, rigorous and incisive commentary on each of the chapters, which has resulted in an immeasurably strengthened volume. We are also indebted to peer reviewers who provided critical

and wise feedback before revision. It has also been a pleasure to work with Heather Thuynsma and our publisher ESI, who have provided effective support all along the way. We invite readers to engage the ideas that follow critically, and to help to advance thought that can inform the practices necessary for creating the egalitarian future that First lived and died for.

Saleem Badat and Vasu Reddy
Bloemfontein

Part One

Ruth First and Activist Research

Chapter 1: Understanding Activist Research

Saleem Badat and Vasu Reddy

Beginnings and a rationale

Ruth Heloise First (1925-1982) might be considered a luminary in various ways as will become evident in the pages of this volume. Her persona looms large in both near and distant memories of the history of political struggle in South Africa. Ruth First, perhaps as a name and identification, conjures up evolving ideas around assigned nomenclature: for example, the investigate journalist; the non-orthodox activist; the subject of apartheid brutality; the complexities of power; the meaning of truth and democracy and perhaps more importantly, the relevance of her body of writing and thought as part of further interpretation in the contemporary context. How do we make sense of First, the inspiring thinker, journalist, scholar and activist? More specifically, what has been the influence, effect and impact of her thought and activism?

In *Research and Activism: Ruth First and Activist Research,* we gather a suite of contributions to mobilise a range of interpretations that describe, analyse, interrogate, celebrate, perform and open up, what we believe to be a projective scholarship on her extraordinary body of knowledge. We explore her original making, her writing as a journalist, her role in movement building as an activist, and her practice in some of these domains to consider the material and intellectual weight of her life and work and its nuanced textures.

"Activist research", loosely defined as research connected with political and social movements and projects, has a long history in South Africa (Broodryk 2021; Choudry 2009, 2014; Gutierrez and Lipman 2016; Lewis 2012; Tendi 2008). Some scholars, and intellectuals more broadly, consider their theorising, analysis and empirical research as "activist research". There is, however, little scholarly or public engagement on "activist research" in South Africa—its meanings, character, history, institutional locations, role in society, place in universities, what distinguishes it from other kinds of research and the complications and the challenges that arise for activist scholars and intellectuals (Cantwell 2022;

Fisher 2005; Walker 2012; Wright 2019).[1] This edited collection contributes to thinking on research and activism and activist research and seeks to stimulate greater research on, and the analysis of the issue. It has its genesis in an invited presentation by Saleem Badat on Ruth First and activist research at a colloquium on *Ruth First in the North – Understanding Activist Research* held in the United Kingdom in October 2021 and organised by the Ruth First Educational Trust, Durham University and its multi-institutional, interdisciplinary Knowledge for Use project concerned with demonstrating 'how to put scientific research and common knowledge together to build more decent societies'(Durham University 2024: n.p.). First had been a respected Durham University academic during the early and mid-1970s, and the colloquium was held on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of her assassination in Maputo in 1982. The colloquium sought to celebrate First's life and work at and beyond Durham and explore 'the issues faced by activist research in relation to objectivity' (Durham University 2021) It included presentations by Gavin Williams of Oxford University on 'Ruth First and Durham', by Jonny Steinberg on 'Ruth First's Prison Diaries: Writing about Oneself' and on 'Values and Social Science Research'.

Of course, the questions of research and activism and activist research, when undertaken by university scholars, raise the issues of the purposes, functions and roles of universities in general and in South Africa in particular (Alexander 2005; Choudry 2020; Nguyen 2021; Price 2020). Neo-liberalism and its pernicious impact on knowledge and universities has resulted in "academic capitalism" (Kauppinen 2015; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Venditti and Ferone 2012)—the incorporation of universities and their core activities into key instruments of the reproduction of capitalism and class rule and commodified, corporatised universities that are less 'sanctums of education and research than businesses that aim to maximise revenues and take advantage of the competitiveness of spaces in which they operate' (Vally, as cited in James 2021: n.p.) This has implications for the idea of serving the common public good (Calhoun 2006; Fisher 2005; Pasquerella 2016) and for Neville Alexander's invocation that 'academics should be accountable, not only to their colleagues, but also to the various constituencies beyond the institutional walls' of universities (James 2021: n.p.). Those external constituencies cannot be reduced to the state and business and their needs because of their funding and "purchasing power", they must, however, extend to subaltern social classes and their needs, and those of the institutions, movements and organisations that articulate and represent their interests.

Badat (2008) has observed that prior to 1994, some universities were important sites of critical and rigorous, yet socially committed, scholarship that spanned various disciplines and fields and often connected with the concerns of workers and the rural impoverished, the national liberation and other

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1   See the special issue of Globalisation, Societies and Education of September 2023 that addresses activist research.

movements as well as mass organisations, and found expression in various popular publications. Some activist scholars were both academics and members of left-wing political movements and formations and undertook knowledge production in both capacities and sometimes across those boundaries. They were denied academic posts, subjected to repression and denied media space to foster public debate. Such scholarship, whether critical or activist, was a marginal activity (Ahmed 2012; Chetty 2023; Ritzer 2006), in its extent and the number and proportion of academics involved, if not in its social impact. Today, critical and activist scholarship appear to remain marginal activities, with little strong and sustained connection with South Africa's marginalised and excluded social strata and their movements and formations. The lack of collaborative knowledge partnerships with social movements and their intellectuals (Guzmán-Valenzuela 2018; Nixon 2011; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) that can enhance understanding of conditions, power and struggles compromises the rigour and quality of humanities and social science scholarship; it also precludes the production of knowledge that can meaningfully inform strategies and policies for substantive social transformation.

Over the years, universities have connected with extra-university institutional and other actors in various ways, usually along ideological and political lines, essentially with the state and business and economic and political elites. Connections, if they existed, with working class communities and formations and their needs, were conducted initially usually as charitable, civic and volunteer activities and thereafter, as community engagement. Community engagement as *service-learning* (Arthur and Bohlin 2005; Checkoway 1997; Olowu 2012; Vickers, Harris and McCarthy 2004) emerged to link 'two complex concepts: community action – the "service" – and efforts to learn from that action and connect what is learnt to existing knowledge – the "learning".' (Stanton 2008: 2). Service-learning connects 'universities and communities with development needs'; an opportunity for scholars and students 'to partner with communities to address development aims and goals' and to build 'democratic commitments and competences in all concerned' (Stanton 2008: 3, 2, 3). There is also the idea of universities being social responsive to their political, economic and social contexts. While they must, indeed, be responsive, it does not mean that universities are institutionally involved in community engagement, or such engagement includes activist scholarship and scholars.

There is, currently, much talk in South Africa about the "engaged university" and engaged research (Douglas 2012; Emihovich 2009; Fitzgerald, Burack and Seifer 2022a, 2022b; Hoffman 2021; Kruss 2012). It raises the question of both the synergies and differences between activist research and engaged research as well as the place of activist research in the engaged university, if the "engaged university" is not to be defined in entirely state- and capital-centric terms and reduced to expanded relations between universities and the state and business. Boyer (1996), writing about the United States

(US), locates engaged scholarship in the idea of the common public good. He argues that universities had to become 'more vigorous partner[s] in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems – and must reaffirm [their] historic commitment to … the scholarship of engagement' as 'higher learning and the larger purposes of American society have been inextricably interlocked' (Boyer 1996: 18–19). The author observes that laws and universities connected US industrial development with university education and the preparation of graduates, that there was insistence on a spirit of 'serviceableness' and that US universities could not 'keep aloof and closet' themselves from the needs of the US and approval that some universities were 'as close to the intelligent farmer as his pig-pen or his tool-house' (Boyer 1996: 19). Post World War II, it was observed 'that universities that helped win the war could also win the peace' (Boyer 1996: 20), a view that resulted in significant funding being allocated for research. Boyer bemoaned the significant decline by the 1990s in the previous commitment to the scholarship of engagement, understood as 'creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other', enlarging human discourse, ensuring better lives for all and 'connecting the rich resources of the university' to urgent and important social problems in which universities are 'viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands but as staging grounds for action'. Importantly, this was not simply about 'just more programs but also a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission' (Boyer 1996: 32–33).

A conference held at the University of the Free State Senate in 2024, suggests that "engaged scholarship" has several features. It is 'an intentional effort to connect knowledge generated by staff and disseminated to the wider public to collaboratively address social issues', to make 'research relevant by bridging the gap between theory and practice in order to counteract the notion of scientific research and practical knowledge being mutually exclusive, with scientific knowledge occupying a privileged position', to undertake 'collaborative enquiry between academics and practitioners that leverages multiple perspectives ("epistemic diversity") to generate knowledge', break 'down established and isolated silos' (disciplinary boundaries, methods, ideas, etc.) and enable 'reflexivity in collaborative learning'(University of the Free State Senate Conference 2024: 3). The similarities as well as the differences between what has been posited as "activist research" and "engaged scholarship" should become evident.

Organisation of the volume

Research and Activism: Ruth First and Activist Research signposts Ruth First the person, the subject, her critique, her ideological, epistemic and social orientation. The volume engages First in relation to her body of work which is closely aligned to the politics of struggle during particular periods

and at specific moments of history. Central in this collection are readings that feature the attributes of activist research (in respect of the latter, the underlying interests, commitments and possible effects) to augment the meaning of First as an intellectual and her role in the ethics of left-wing discourse. What surfaces in this assembly of ideas is the value of First's intellectual activism. We maintain that beyond First's life and death, it is not simply her archive of knowledge that matters, but more so, her ideas in relation to (re)interpreting the world in order to fundamentally change it.

This volume, therefore, first, extends a focused and nuanced perspective that adds a fresh, robust and new dimension to thinking about First as an intellectual activist. Second, the chapters contribute to the paucity of knowledge on activist intellectuals, without constructing predetermined and overarching frameworks. Third, the chapters broach issues of an activist thinker who in her time and in the interpretations of her work, challenged received ideas that have currency in the contemporary context. Fourth, perhaps as a delimitation, this volume does not propose a unified way of viewing First as a person and as a subject.

Rather than summarise the ensuing chapters, the authors invite readers to provide their own lenses for interpreting the volume in relation to the featured contributions. However, a brief word is necessary about the content to navigate readers. Saleem Badat's revised text for the Durham seminar constitutes the first two chapters of Part One of the current book. He begins from the premise that it is not possible to undertake value-free social science research and contests the notion that activist research is biased, not rigorous and not to be taken seriously. Isaacman (2003) motivates that activist research 'must be judged on its own merits – the design and logic of the project, the quality of the evidentiary base, the analytical power of the argument, ways in which the scholarship resolves anomalies and builds upon and opens up new areas of inquiry, while challenging the inherited orthodoxies' (Isaacman 2003: 8). In Chapter Two Badat locates First's ideological, political and epistemic orientation by examining her biography and history as relevant to her activist research and then considers the nature, ends and interests of activist research. Thereafter, in Chapter Three, Badat examines key features of First's research and the institutional conditions that shaped her knowledge creation and argues that First's research was indisputably activist research. The author points to the challenges, ambiguities, tensions and dilemmas that are involved in undertaking activist research, the contexts and situations in which they arise, considers whether they can be resolved or only managed, and analyses how First addressed the tensions and with what success. Finally, Badat draws together some thoughts on First and activist research and contemporary challenges.

An astute critical reader raised some important issues on Badat's chapters that are worth indicating. First, he observed the 'lack of specification or definitional clarity about the concept of "activist"', that there are myriad 'activities undertaken by a wide range of people who are often described self-referentially

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and by the media as "activists"' (Critical Reader 2024).[2] He The Critical Reader argued that the concept of "activist" needed some thinking, and that is was not enough to assume its characteristics, but necessary to specify the 'special and different attributes' (Critical Reader 2024) of activists who undertake activist research. Badat agrees that clarifying the concept "activist" is important, however, he is not convinced that it is essential for his purpose. Badat stipulates the nature of activist research—indicatively, if not exhaustively. From that, one can read that activists who undertake research—activist researchers— quintessentially connect their research with political and social movements to realise political and social change. Activist research can, indeed, have other attributes—including the 'critique of conventional research, the development of analytical categories beyond those accepted as conventional, its use of methodologies [values and principles rather than simply methods]' that frame research (Critical Reader comments 2024). "Activist research" could include these characteristics; nothing precludes that.

Second, the critical reader posed how activist researchers would be different from other researchers who critique and elaborate alternative approaches to existing society, institutional conditions, academic theorising, and disciplines and curriculum. Is activist research 'simply about radical and critical approaches to socio-political questions' and more than an 'attachment to a political vision as contained in a liberation movement or ... a socialist state?' (Critical Reader 2024) In Badat's view, it is about both and more, including engaging the social relations of knowledge production, dissemination and publishing, and the choices, goals, methodologies and methods of research. Critical is connection with movements, however, it does not preclude activism that takes the forms of everyday insurgencies of scholars who individually and collectively contest Eurocentric academic cultures, epistemologies and curricula or the actions of scholars who use their research to build new movements for social justice. Badat notes that activist research may not only be left-wing in orientation, but also right-wing and liberal. Moreover, since "activist" research is defined by its explicit connection with movements, not all research of "activist researchers" may be activist—some may be just "critical research".

Third, the critical reader comments that the challenges of activist research under capitalism are different to when it is undertaken as part of building a socialist society and by functionaries of a socialist state. He adds that activist research loses its critical orientation or is "reshaped" when it takes the visions, goals and strategies of movements and states as given. Badat concurs; this applies in both contexts of anti-capitalist struggle and building alternatives to capitalism. In Chapter Three, in the section on challenges, Badat indicates the tensions and dilemmas that arise and must be mediated as best as possible. Finally, the critical reader clarified in an exchange that one concern is the 'unacknowledged

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2   Our thanks to the Critical Reader, an accomplished researcher, activist and activist researcher, within and beyond the academy, for his excellent critical reviewing of all the chapters.

limitations of "activism"' (Critical Reader 2024). He elaborated that beyond 'the whole of the^{on}aims, premises, choices, forms, methods, orientations, prejudices and outcomes of research and the relations of power in its production and dissemination' and 'descriptions specifically of the socially defined relational attributes, forms of democratic and collective account, mutuality and collaboration, collective definition of methods, aims and outcomes, and processes of research' there is 'the profoundly difficult limits of the nature of activist work – especially around its academic relationships and its NGOisation'. This 'raises questions about the nature of the power relations between intellectuals from wherever, social movements and communities' (Critical Reader 2024). The point about the limits of activist research is important. As will be noted, Asanda Benya addresses this issue in her chapter.

Part Two of the book is a reflection by a Durham collective on objectivity and research that takes on the concern that objectivity is compromised when undertaking activist research. The team is part of the Durham Centre for Humanities Engaging Science and Society project, 'Celebrating Ruth First'. Their research concerns are to document First's life and time at Durham from 1973 and 'her impact, not only on the people she came in contact with but also on the University and the wider community' and to undertake a 'philosophical study' that looks 'at how we balance objectivity with more politically participatory methods' (Durham University Centre for Humanities Engaging Science and Society 2024). They present the beginnings of a theory of objectivity that is especially geared towards social-activist research—OBFAR: objectivity for activist research. They make recourse to First's research while she was on leave from Durham University in Mozambique as an example of a self-conscious effort to ensure the objectivity of social-activist research. The argument is compelling and the chapter is compulsory reading for activist researchers in the useful guidance that it provides on the issue of "objectivity" and how it can be enhanced despite all the difficulties faced by activist research.

The Badat chapters in Part One serve as a point of departure for the chapters that feature in Part Three of the book. Authors were invited to engage and critique the Badat chapters and to pursue their own thinking and concerns related to activist research. The call to authors noted that topics could include the idea/meanings of activist research, the character of activist research, the commonalities and differences between activist research and critical research, the purposes, functions, roles and responsibilities of activist research, the roots of activist research in South Africa/Africa, the institutional locations of activist research in South Africa/Africa, activist research at universities and beyond universities, case studies of the dynamics and challenges related to activist research, generally and in specific, institutional locations.

In Chapter 5, Christine Hobden poses how Badat's view of activist research 'might be shaped differently if we began from another anti-apartheid activist who too is always described as both scholar and activist: Richard (Rick) Turner.' She observes that 'both First and Turner were deeply committed to resisting the

Apartheid regime and both viewed academic rigour and critique as necessary tools to do so effectively. Their disciplines and approaches were different yet both, in their life and work, were considered a powerful enough threat to the apartheid regime to be assassinated' For Hobden, Turner provides an approach to utopian thinking that in addition to practical involvement in social change efforts, can shape individual consciousness and 'the scope and orientation of ... projects of social change'.

In her chapter, *'Activist research in the age of climate change'* (Chapter 6), Janet Cherry reflects on Badat's chapters and draws 'lessons both from Ruth First's scholarship and from her lived experience as an activist-scholar in Mozambique'. Convinced that a regional strategy is imperative for sustainable development as part of a transition from fossil fuel, she links activist research and the role of universities in Southern Africa to developing such a strategy. The lessons have implications 'for the practice of research, bridging the gap between grassroots empirical research and state policy formulation and implementation' and suggest 'directions for the content of such research'. Chery advocates for 'cooperative and transformative approaches to the building of a sustainable economy'. Her exploration identifies four types of activist scholarship. One is 'critical scholarship of the left, which becomes activist scholarship when it is in direct support of popular movements.' A second type is 'critical scholarship in support of the state, in development of policy; this becomes activist scholarship when it reflects the voice of the "grassroots" in asserting a progressive policy agenda'. A third type of activist research 'is participatory research at the grassroots, which empowers the participants, and which can inform both policy and/or popular movements.' The final type 'is participatory action research, which intervenes to challenge power relations and empower the participants to explore alternatives.' Cherry does not consider the various types as 'distinct or mutually exclusive' and acknowledges that there are overlaps between some of the types. However, for Cherry, the typology usefully indicates that the most oppressed in society are best served by activist scholarship that has the greatest transformative potential.

Dale McKinley observes in Chapter 7, that 'a distinction needs to be made between the kind of activist research conducted by activist-academics in the academy and that undertaken by activist-intellectuals who are not just outside the academy but who are active members of the organisations, movements, networks and coalitions that are the "target" of the research'. McKinley notes that writing by academics on activist research (somewhat) tends to focus on issues that arise for academics and this volume could in part, be an example of that. In Choudry's (2013: 130) terms, such literature is 'more concerned with the implications of such work on individuals', university careers and academic disciplines, and its scholarly credibility, than on the considerable research and intellectual work generated from within activist/community organisations on which many movements rely for independent analysis of concerns relevant to them'. Notwithstanding the commitment of academics to support movements, the research and

political agenda 'is necessarily moulded and bounded by where the activist researcher is located and to/for whom, their work is directed'. McKinley presents activist research that is neither undertaken by academics nor by researchers removed from the movements and struggles that are the objects of their research, but by activist-intellectuals who are members of movements. The author explains why these distinctions are relevant.

Asanda Benya's Chapter 8 critically reflects on her personal experience, as a feminist activist scholar committed to socialism, of the complexities of activist research, undertaken in Marikana with a women's organisation, Sikhala Sonke, for over a decade. Concomitantly, Benya reflects on her work as it connects with her university teaching and how her position is viewed within the academy. Her chapter documents the challenges, contradictions, tensions and negotiations involved in activist research and that have to be mediated by feminist activist scholars to sustain their work and achieve the political outcomes that are sought. For Benya, if academics and intellectuals seek to participate in research and political struggles for social change, 'critical sensemaking and openness to our collective failures are imperative'. Her writing speaks to the dynamic of the relational issues and how that affects questions of accountability and power and importantly, the limits of scholarly activism. Harnessing conceptually Black feminist thought and social movement studies, Benya adds to the literature on scholar-activism. Given the challenges of activist research, Benya has become modest about the claims that she makes about her work, and acknowledges 'that there is a distance that, even as a committed activist scholar, [she] cannot bridge'. For Benya, the 'class dynamics between activist scholars and community activists cannot be erased or wished away'; they must be 'creatively and productively engaged'. It means that beyond 'good political intentions', scholars must continuously reflect on their purposes, power, personal responsibilities and actions and the benefits that may derive from their involvement critically to ensure that their involvement does not reproduce the existing social relations and inequities or generate new fissures.

In Chapter 9, Ntando Sindane addresses an important issue, in the aftermath of the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, the relation between law, activist lawyers and the "decolonial turn". The author outlines the meaning of the "decolonial turn" and its implications for the practice of law and its pedagogy. He also sketches the core characteristics that activist lawyers must possess if they are to transform legal practice and education that is predicated on colonial knowing, being and thinking.

In Chapter 10, June Bam focuses on the San and Khoi community as well as University of Cape Town (UCT) dialogues between 2017 and 2022 that raised questions about its institutional transformation which resulted in the establishment of the San and Khoi Research Centre in 2020. Bam reflects on the foundational research and work undertaken as part of a mutually designed knowledge and research partnership with Khoi-San communities and the challenges that arose for activist scholars at UCT's Centre

for African Studies. Bam notes that activist research has additional challenges 'if it remains at the margins of the system of higher education due to being '"soft"-funded' and 'when it remains under-theorised (hence invisibilised within contemporary mainstream discourse)'. Drawing on Freire and Macedo (1987), and the idea of naming the world as part of changing the world, Bam urges that 'we should speak *with* the people, not *to* them'; that 'theory is arrived at through practice, rather than inserted and validated in scholarship in the dated 'armchair intellectual way' of theorising without real engagements in social movements'. She calls for a 'a rethinking and systemic repositioning of scholarship activism in higher education in a democratically young and still deeply fractured South Africa'.

In Chapter 11, Petro du Preez begins by noting the Israeli genocide in Palestine, aided by western democracies, and the 'disbelief, frustration and helplessness [that] crept in'. Du Preez observes that her becoming a 'scholar/activist was re/configured through [her] ongoing intra-actions with posthumanism' and that her 'understanding of activism, [was] also re/configured in line' with the thinking of Rosi Braidotti. Braidotti writes that 'in defining activism as the process of becoming-political, Deleuze speaks of the European left of the 1960s and 1970s in terms of a specific sensibility, which he connects to a creative imaginary about possible futures' (Braidotti 2011: 268). Du Preez understands activism as the process of becoming-political, a 'creative and critical' process and describes her 'becoming-political through various creative and critical engagements'. For Du Preez, the chapter can 'be seen as introducing another way of understanding activism as radical self-styling that requires critique and creativity, which is different from dominant understandings of activism as outwardly mobilising social movements and campaigns. The author begins by discussing the posthuman condition, posthuman theorising and argues for methodological renewal in scholar/activism within this condition. She then explains agential realism as a post-humanist approach, unpacking the meaning of an 'agential cut' and 'agency' to queer scholar/activism. Du Preez proceeds to discuss scholar/activist entanglements by engaging with some of her activities related to becoming scholar/activist. This allows her to cut together/apart scholar/activist-abilities as it relates to response-abilities, sense-abilities, and in/ex/press-ability. Finally, Du Preez considers a neologism, 'intr/activism', and suggests that a scholar/activist may wish 'to think along with and through in their becoming.'

In Chapter 12, Ingrid Bamberg discusses using activist research to shift perceptions of institutional value and challenge social hierarchies and power structures at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of the Arts (KZNSA), a community-based non-government organisation in Durban, South Africa that seeks to promote the visual arts and support emerging artists. She argues that this is critical due to declining local support for the arts. She observes that soon after 1994 there were discourses of transformation and inclusion, but that a major problem remains— 'the normalisation of European culture and European

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models for art organisations and educational institutions'. Despite demands, as part of the 'decolonial turn', to decolonise institutions and their traditional practices, there is 'no clear evidence of the KZNSA, established in 1906, interrogating its legacy as a historically White organisation positioned in the formerly White suburb of Glenwood' and the subtle exclusion of Black South Africans in formerly White spaces continues. Bamberg's concern is that despite the professed commitment to equity and redress, the KZNSA has failed to engage substantively with its colonial legacy.

She draws attention to the appearance of graffiti art on the KZNSA exterior wall to question its 'belief in neutrality' and contend that its lack of an ideological or political position affects its orientation, work and impact. For them, Black South Africans experience 'covert forms of symbolic violence' that post-1994 are 'rooted in subtle mechanisms of coloniality of power'. Considering herself an 'activist researcher, their target is 'the epistemic violence caused by persisting colonial hierarchies in knowledge production'. The author is 'committed to unpacking the complexities of power structures' and 'to advance the interests and ideas' of those who are marginalised by cultural institutions (Piven 2010: 808). She shows how activist research can result in 'processes of meaning making and collaborative knowledge production' that destabilise social hierarchies. The research by this author aims to make power visible and help 'dismantle power structures', and she seeks to use her 'expertise to foster dialogue, share knowledge, and create inclusive narratives'. Bamberg considers resistance to change by those previously hegemonic and the position of neutrality as perpetuating epistemic violence as key barriers to creating a transformed institution.

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Conclusion

This volume is invested in recuperating, recovering and perhaps rediscovering Ruth First, over four decades since her passing. By bringing together original contributions on the creative tension of her assigned identities, we seek to offer new thinking about First the person, the subject and indeed, as an object of knowledge, to expand and complicate our understanding of her various legacies (whether intellectual, journalism or activism) and hope to stimulate renewed critical reflection about her life and work. We invite readers to engage the ideas that follow critically and to help to advance thought that can inform the practices necessary for creating the egalitarian future that First lived and died for.

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Chapter 2: Ruth First and the Nature of Activist Research

Saleem Badat

'Ruth First has come to be an icon of the revolutionary hero. This is to make too much of her. It is also to make too little. There is a danger that her real achievements, her bravery and her integrity, will be hidden behind the mirror. Ruth combined during her life the practical politics of the movement for liberation with commitments to investigating, researching and explaining' (Williams 2014: 13).

Introduction

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I have greatly admired Ruth First since my student activism days in the mid-1970s. Her theorisation and revolutionary stance in a 1978 debate with Archie Mafeje on politics beyond the 1976 Soweto uprising in the Review of African Political Economy shaped my thinking and that of other student militants of my generation profoundly (First 1978). In re/reading some of First's writings and especially the literature about her, I regret that she herself did not have the opportunity to turn her formidable intellect to the question of activist research. It is likely that it is an issue that she would have engaged or been requested to engage at some point in her life. We are impoverished for that, because, personifying activist research (and much else besides) and 'because she was Ruth' (Slovo 2007: 21), she would have undoubtedly addressed this matter with great erudition, candour, critical reflexivity, imagination, elegance and verve.

At the heart of First was her commitment to, and practice of critique. O'Malley clarifies the meaning of 'critique':

if one is to revolutionize human society in the interest of its perfection and welfare one must understand its nature, workings and failures, one must impart this understanding to others, and one must somehow affect the translation of this understanding into organized political

action which will transform society in the interest of the common good. The unity of theory and praxis (means) the inseparability of these three efforts in genuine social criticism. (O'Malley 1970: xiv)

If the three-fold process of critique begins with self-clarification as it must, in my view it is followed not by some simple transmission of 'this understanding to others', but by deliberative, thoughtful and critical engagement with peer scholars and diverse other publics that help to further enrich understanding and shape the very constitution of knowledge (Delanty 2001: 154). Knowledge is to be valued for enhancing our understanding of our natural and social worlds and making us wonder anew in fresh new and fertile ways. It is critical that research and knowledge are not judged in purely instrumental and utilitarian terms and are not sacrificed at the altar of "relevance", defined parochially and reduced to market or economic relevance alone. Scholarship and knowledge are connected materially in a myriad of ways with power—economic, political, social and personal—and First would concur with O'Malley (1970: 4) that they must inform social action in the interests of building egalitarian, equitable, humane and democratic societies in which all are able to live rich, rewarding, cultured, secure, healthy and dignified lives. In '[revolutionizing] human society in the interest of its perfection and welfare' in ways that, in the age of the Anthropocene, are environmentally sustainable and mindful of non-human existence, the unity of theory and practice is critical: if practice without theory is blind, theory without practice is sterile.

In this reflection on Ruth First and activist research, I start from the premise that it is not possible to undertake value-free social science research; this is simultaneously a rejoinder to criticism and dismissal of activist research as being biased, flawed, not rigorous and not to be taken seriously. Activist research 'must be judged on its own merits – the design and logic of the project, the quality of the evidentiary base, the analytical power of the argument, ways in which the scholarship resolves anomalies and builds upon and opens up new areas of inquiry, while challenging the inherited orthodoxies' (Isaacman 2003: 8). I pursue several questions. Who was Ruth First and what biographical details are relevant to the theme of activist research? Accordingly, in this chapter I proceed by locating First's ideological, political, epistemic and social orientation by focusing principally on her biography and history as relevant to her activist research. Thereafter, I consider the nature, ends and interests of activist research. Regarding First's research, was her research activist research, what examples can be provided, what were its key features and the institutional conditions of knowledge creation? I engage these issues in Chapter 3 and exemplify First's indisputably activist research. Noting her colleague and friend Gavin Williams' observation, I

also try to bring out from being 'hidden behind the mirror' her 'real achievements, her bravery, and her integrity' (Williams 2014: 13). Insofar as there are tensions and dilemmas involved in undertaking activist research, what are they, in what contexts and situations do they arise and can they be resolved, or only managed? Did First address the tensions; if so, how and with what success? I discuss the challenges, ambiguities, tensions and dilemmas that arise in the practice of activist research in the second part of Chapter 3. Finally, I draw together some final thoughts on First and activist research and contemporary challenges.

Locating Ruth First

Biography is important for understanding First's activist research and writing. A key feature of Eurocentric epistemology is the supposed irrelevance of 'the persona of the scholar', and the idea that scholars function as 'value-neutral analysts' (Wallerstein 1997: 95); however, 'disembodied and un-located assumptions about knowing and knowledge making' obfuscate 'the hidden geo- and bio-graphical politics of knowledge of imperial epistemology' (Mignolo 2011: 118). Calling 'into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower' because the 'knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically in the known', despite the fact that 'modern epistemology managed to conceal both and built the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity' (Mignolo 2011: 123). Grosfoguel weighs in that 'we always speak from a particular location in the power structures. Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies' within which we are located (Grosfoguel 2007: 213). Feminist scholar Donna Haraway also persuasively argues that knowledge-making is about 'location' and 'situated and embodied knowledges', not about 'transcendence and splitting of subject and object'—scholars must be 'answerable for what we learn how to see' (Haraway 1988: 583). The flaw of 'Western epistemic traditions ... that claim detachment of the known from the knower' is that 'they rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological a priori' (Mbembe 2016: 32). In this approach,

> the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context. (Mbembe 2016: 33)

Heloise Ruth First was born on 4 May 1925 in Johannesburg, the offspring of Jewish parents Julius First and Matilda Levetan who migrated from Latvia and Lithuania respectively to South Africa in the early 1900s (O'Laughlin 2014; Wieder 2013). Her 'parents were members of the International Socialist League and founder members of the South African Communist Party in 1921' (Marks 1983: 123); she followed in their footsteps ideologically and politically and joined the Junior Left book club at age fourteen (Wieder 2013). Growing up in 'a relatively wealthy Johannesburg community' and in a family that 'lived a privileged life as upper-middle-class White South Africans' (Wieder 2013: 35), First graduated from Jeppe Girls High School in 1941, where she was the Literary Prefect and won a prize for an essay, *'On Poetry'*. She was described as 'brilliant and powerful, but at the same time vulnerable' and as 'sharp-tongued but also shy' (Wieder 2013: 40). She herself wrote that the 'air of confidence' that she possessed, and that other people remarked on, was 'useful in keeping others from knowing how easily assailed and self-consciously vulnerable I was' (First 1965: 129).

On the eve of attending the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, South Africa, she made a speech outside the Johannesburg City Hall, where she attended political lectures and meetings with her parents from a young age; she was said to be a 'brilliant orator'. First joined the Young Communist League in 1943, and was editor of its newspaper (Wieder 2013: 48). She graduated from Wits in 1946 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, though most of her courses were in the social sciences and included Sociology, Social Anthropology, Social Economics, Democracy and Society, Native Law and Native Administration (Wieder 2013: 46). The five years taken to complete her degree was likely the consequence of extensive involvement 'in leftist political work – both at the university and in the community' (Wieder 2013: 47). At Wits, First helped found the Federation of Progressive Students, 'a radical student organization' (Wieder 2013: 50). She remarked that 'on a South African campus, the student issues that matter are national issues' (First 1965: 116). Wits brought her into contact with the likes of Nelson Mandela; her friendship circle included many future political notables and 'placed her in a non-racial world that did not exist for most White students' (Wieder 2013: 5). First 'is remembered as a comrade who questioned commonplaces and challenged her comrades' (Wieder 2011: 88). She 'participated in one of the first joint Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA)-African National Congress (ANC) movements, the Anti-Pass Campaign of 1944-45' and was 'elected to the Johannesburg District of the Communist Party of South Africa' (Wieder 2013: 48, 61). With the outbreak of the African Mineworkers Union strike in 1946, she resigned her job as a researcher at the Social Welfare Department to support the strike.

Subsequently, at age 21 she joined *The Guardian* (later *New Age*), remaining the editor of its Johannesburg edition for 17 years (Wieder 2013: 48, 56). From 1955, First was also editor of *Fighting Talk*:

a radical political and literary journal – a further indication of her wide-ranging interests. As a journalist, her expose of forced labour practices in the notorious Bethal district and her coverage of the Alexandra bus boycotts are deservedly well-known; an article ... in 1961 entitled "The Gold of Migrant Labour" was perhaps more far-reaching in its analysis. (Marks 1983: 124)

The journalistic investigations demonstrated to First 'South African capital's methods of controlling labour in its two most fundamental and brutal forms, on the mines and on the Bethal farms'; and 'confirmed and informed her Marxist understanding of South African society' (Williams 2014: 22). They also presaged 'much of the historical work and academic debate of the 1970s on the role of the mining industry in the construction of the apartheid state' (Marks 1983: 124).

First's 'writing on South Africa was, from the outset, hard-hitting and penetrating investigative journalism at its best' (Marks 1983: 124; Zeilig 2014: 135). The journalism and political activism of the 1940s and 1950s exposed her to conditions of labourers and provided experience that would later, be put to good use in her research and writing. The activism included helping to reconstitute the CPSA as the South African Communist Party (SACP) and establish the Congress of Democrats in 1953 and her involvement in drafting the Freedom Charter in 1955. It was to result in arrest and trial for treason between 1956 and 1961. Marks notes that:

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the germ of Ruth's later concerns is to be seen in this earlier work: her clear understanding of the exploitative axis of the apartheid state on the farms and mines of South Africa, her identification with the struggles of workers and peasants, her internationalism and the wider knowledge she gained of the problems of development and the transition to socialism. (Marks 1983: 124)

Walter Sisulu talks about First as 'one of the most dynamic personalities in the movement' during the early 1960s and as editor of *New Age* 'central to nearly everything' (Pinnock 2007: 220). In 1963, following the arrests of the underground leadership of the ANC, SACP and Umkhonto we Sizwe MK at Rivonia, First was arrested at the Wits University library and held in solitary confinement for 117 days, during which time she was ruthlessly interrogated, resulting in her attempted suicide. The following year, failing to obtain a passport, she and her three children left South Africa for England on an exit permit, where they joined her partner, Joe Slovo. She would not set foot in South Africa again. Re-establishing herself and

a young family in exile, she continued with her political activism through involvement in exile politics, addresses and speeches at anti-apartheid events. First remained a member of the SACP and was an ANC activist, however, she 'never hesitated to ask major and critical questions of them' (Zeilig 2014: 135). In exile, however, she 'had to find a new way of making a living' and 'so began a period of intense research, writing and teaching' (Williams et al. 2014: 9), which I address later.

In 1972, First was awarded a fellowship at the University of Manchester; thereafter she was appointed to a lecturing position in the Sociology department at Durham University, which she occupied until 1978. She taught courses on Sociology of Developing Societies, Sociology of Industrial Development, Political Sociology, Third World Social Movements, and the Sociology of Gender (Wieder 2011: 92–93). In her colleague Williams' view, her 'experiences as an activist and journalist brought both breadth and depth' (Wieder 2011: 92) to the Sociology of Developing Societies course and a student noted about the course on gender that it was 'challenging, stimulating, and often provoking furious discussions' (Williams 2014: 3). In 1975, First taught for a semester at the University of Dar es Salaam, an exciting milieu where she connected with various notable left-wing scholars. She was 'flushed with elation at the experience of development studies having some relevance, and students being responsive' (Williams 2014: 3). When presented with the opportunity to connect with the *Centro de Estudos Africanos* (CEA – Centre of African Studies) at the *Universidade (University) Eduardo Mondlane* in Maputo she grabbed it. In 1977, she spent time at CEA 'to lead a research project on the export of Mozambican migrant labour to the South African mines'; she subsequently resigned from Durham to become CEA research director in 1979 'in charge of setting up and running its research-based development course' (Wuyts 2014: 60). First expressed 'how important it was to be at home, geographically, politically and pedagogically' (Wieder 2011: 96). There will be a further discussion on the CEA experience in due course, an activity that was tragically cut short in 1982 by her murder in her office by South African security forces.

For Ralph Miliband, First was characterised by a 'quiet resolve' to 'struggle against oppression in South Africa', married 'to a sharply critical view of the shortcomings of the left' (Miliband 1982: 313–314). She was 'the least "utopian" of revolutionaries'; she recognised the failings of the liberation movements to which she belonged, yet did not doubt 'the justice of her cause or … the urgent need to strive for its advancement' (Miliband 1982: 313–314). She:

> was above all a political activist, who became a writer and scholar by force of circumstances and because she had a remarkable talent for social and political analysis. She was intellectually very tough, direct, precise, unsentimental, impatient with rhetoric and pretentiousness. She had strong opinions, definite perspectives. This might have made her rigid and narrow; but

it did not. She remained an intensely questioning person, with a great appetite for learning, with a free mind, an open ear and a great sense of the ridiculous. (Miliband 1982: 314)

John Saul comments similarly that she:

was a brilliant social scientist – albeit a revolutionary social scientist (and, again, she would have made no real distinction between the two, between her roles as revolutionary and as social scientist). For, as a social scientist, she knew that there was no substitute for clear thinking and hard work – for a genuine science. And she knew that solidly grounded revolutionary endeavour required and demanded no less. (Saul 2014: 121–122)

Her 'remarkable body of writing' that encompassed 'investigative journalism to memoir to political and literary analysis' was 'driven both by her political commitments and by her frank curiosity about people and the worlds they inhabited'. It was 'characterized by the clarity of her prose, her rigorous research, her careful use of the narrative form and her interest in addressing the widest possible audience' (Williams 2019). She contributed not only to the 'revolutionary struggle in Africa, but also to 'raising the intellectual and moral level of … discourse' (Saul 2014: 121). The SACP general secretary observed that 'the bomb that took Comrade Ruth's life was intended to deprive our movement of the services of one of its most gifted militants. We openly acknowledge the exceptional gravity of the loss to us caused by her death' (Kasrils 2020).

A colleague at the CEA writes that First was 'easy to like – charismatic, beautiful, an acute interlocutor, a generous friend, a creative organiser of research and teaching … She got on with things, despite self-doubts, and she aimed high.' She was 'a good listener' and 'usually self-confident, as clear and convincing in public lectures or interviews as in the classroom'. However, 'she was also capable of aggressive argument, sharp critique, mighty rows, witty asides and very cool rebuff' (O'Laughlin 2014: 45). Williams recalls First as 'elegant, forceful, efficient and often impatient' (Williams 2019). Some of her qualities elicited critical comments. Saul notes that he doubted that there was anyone who was familiar with her 'who didn't have difficult moments with her. She was tough, demanding, even occasionally domineering' (Saul 2014: 122). He, however, also observes that if tensions existed, they:

were not arbitrary ones, that almost invariably something important, intellectually and politically, was at stake. The seriousness of her engagement, the intensity of her concern, could never be doubted. Nor, if you were struggling to be as serious yourself, could such

moments cast any doubt upon her personal concern, her compassion, her continuing solidarity in the next round of whatever struggle, public or personal, was in train. (Saul 2014: 122)

Moreover, while her 'direct and sharp ways of delivering criticisms without any pretentions to political correctness … tended to put off or intimidate both friend and foe, it was not intended' (Manghezi 2014: 84–96).

First was shaped by her context and as an activist researcher who was a White, middle-class woman, she had to navigate personally and politically complex issues of race, class and gender as well as their intersections. She was 'caught in a world that made her, but in which she could not bear to live as it was' and 'struggled her entire life against the injustices of race and class in southern Africa' (O'Laughlin 2014: 44). First is credited as being 'an exemplar of turning that power and privilege against itself to serve the interests of the poor and the oppressed' (Cock n.d.). She was 'forged in a hard school, a revolutionary socialist and a woman fighting consistently and unflaggingly against racism, chauvinism and capitalist exploitation in the teeth of one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever seen and, fortunately for us all, she was ready to fight back for what she believed in' (Saul 2014: 122). It is observed that considering her 'very self-demanding, and unassuming' nature, 'the idea that she could ever become a symbol and an inspiration would have sent her into fits of embarrassed laughter. But her life and her death have made her so' (Miliband 1982: 314)—deservedly so!

Activist research: Nature, ends and interests

Having "situated" Ruth First, the subject, I now turn to the object of activist research and consider its nature, the ends and interests that it seeks to serve and the social function of activist researchers. Furthermore, I explore the connections between activist research and the development of political programmes, manifestos, plans, strategies, policies and tactics (PSPs, in short) and some of the ambiguities, paradoxes, tensions and dilemmas that can arise in undertaking activist research. To research is to answer a question on an issue or problem based on an ethical, dispassionate, systematic and disciplined inquiry that is informed by theoretical and ontological assumptions and is open to the scrutiny of peers and the wider public. Given the focus on First and her activist research, my concern is social issues and problems and social science research. The social sciences are concerned with understanding the dynamics of social life and explaining how societies work. They are 'about understanding the reasons people give for their actions in terms of the contexts in which they act, as well as analysing the relations of cause and effect

in the social, political and economic spheres, but also concerns the hopes, wishes and aspirations that people, in their different cultural ways, hold' (May 2000: ix).

C. Wright Mills observes that people are 'social and historical actors who must be understood ... in close and intricate interplay with social and historical structures' (Mills 1959: 158). One cannot understand the lives of individuals or the histories of societies without understanding the interconnectedness between individuals and social structure and biography and history. As distinct from:

> 'personal troubles', 'public issues' are 'matters that transcend (the) local environments of ... individual(s) and the range of their inner life. They have to do with ... the institutions of an historical society, with the ways in which various milieu overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter.' (Mills 1959: 8)

Sociologically, 'personal troubles' must 'be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history-making'. If the 'human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles – and to the problems of the individual life ... the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations' (Mills 1959: 226).

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The nature of activist research

Activist research spans the ideological and political spectrum. Piven notes that not all activist research is 'on the political left. A good many academics work to provide arguments and evidence aimed not at reducing inequality, but rather at legitimating it' not to expose 'the perverse consequences for humankind of American militarism and imperial overreach, but rather (to justify) American military and imperial expansion'. Such academics serve power, but logically, are 'scholar activists' (Piven 2010: 806–810). Activist research occurs within specific social and institutional contexts and relations of authority and power, even if it may seek to transform those contexts and relations. In relation to First, I confine myself to left-wing activist research, while mindful that her early research was undertaken as an independent researcher, to the institutional context of the university, as opposed to other contexts like extra-university institutions and political movements.

Edward Said argued that 'the intellectual always has a choice either to side with the less represented, the forgotten or ignored, or to side with the powerful' (Said 1996: 32–33), implying that no middle ground or neutrality is possible. Those researchers who style themselves as 'neutral seeker(s) of truth

and objectivity' with their 'disembodied and un-located assumptions about knowing and knowledge making', obfuscate 'the hidden geo- and bio-graphical politics of knowledge' (Mignolo 2011: 118). Activist researchers, in contrast, are open and transparent about their ideological and political proclivities. Activist research identifies the 'deepest ethical-political convictions of activist researchers' and allows 'them drive the formulation of ... research objectives' – the opposite of 'value free' research that 'suppress those convictions' (Hale 2017: 13–15).

Framed by critical theoretical discourses, left-wing activist research is concerned with the mutual interaction of social structure and conjuncture and human agency; how structure and conjuncture limit and constrain social action and outcomes, yet simultaneously, afford opportunities for human agency and social change. Activist research embraces Said's postulates that the world and society are ultimately made by people and can be understood through reason, that humans have the 'capacity to make knowledge, as opposed to absorbing it passively, reactively, and dully' and that 'critique that is directed at the state of affairs in, as well as out of, the university ... gathers its force and relevance by its democratic, secular, and open character' (Said 2004: 22). Activist research seeks 'to make more things available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labor, human energies for emancipation and enlightenment and ... human misreadings and misinterpretations of the collective past and present' (Said 2004: 22). While humans can produce knowledge there is, however, 'always something radically incomplete, insufficient, provisional, disputable and arguable about humanistic knowledge' (Said 2004: 12).

Activist research 'challenge(s) existing social hierarchies and oppressive institutions as well as the truth regimes and structures of power that produced and supported them. Not content simply to critique the status quo, (it) seek(s) to change it' (Hale 2017; Isaacman 2003: 3). Its goal is 'not to replace the theoretically driven quest for understanding of basic processes with 'applied' problem-solving'; rather it constitutes a 'category of research, which is both theoretically driven and intended to be put to use' (Hale 2017: 13). It is oriented to use by movements of exploited and oppressed social groups 'to formulate strategies for transforming these conditions and to achieve the power necessary to make these strategies effective' (Hale 2017: 13). Distinct from critical research, which makes recourse to radical critical theory, however, remains aloof from directly connecting with political and social movements, activist research seeks links with movements. Put simply, if all activist research is or should be critical research, critical research, while invaluable, is not activist research. Isaacman distinguishes between radical scholars:

> whose ideas, however provocative, remain totally ensconced in the academy, and their (activist) counterparts, who use their knowledge in the quest for social justice writ large. Although the boundaries between these two categories may, at times, be blurred, for the latter their intellectual work is always a critical part of their political practice, and vice versa. (Isaacman 2003: 3)

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Activist researchers:

> are driven by a mutually reinforcing intellectual and political agenda. At the core of this agenda
> are two major initiatives: one, to render audible the voices and concerns of the powerless
> and simultaneously recover the experiences of the disadvantaged and underrepresented
> which are routinely ignored, forgotten, or cast into the shadows of history; two, to support
> their struggles aimed at ending exploitative practices and dismantling institutions of
> oppression. (Isaacman 2003: 4)

Activist research is, thus, connected to political activism of different kinds—different degrees of
involvement 'in anticolonial and anti-imperialist' organisations and movements, 'promoting human
rights, global justice, and peace, ... grassroots organizing, working in transnational NGOs, or speaking
out as public intellectuals' (Isaacman 2003: 3). Because of its orientation and because much is at stake,
activist research demands 'empirical rigor, and a well-developed methodological canon that can guide
us to produce the best possible understanding of the problem at hand, the confidence to distinguish
between better and less good explanations and the means to communicate these results in a clear and
useful manner' (Hale 2017: 13).

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Activist researchers 'can bring to political activity an ability to identify realities which activists may
have neither the time nor the (opportunity) to discern. This may also help them to pursue their goals
more effectively' (Friedman 2015: 24). At the same time, 'by virtue of their direct critical participation
in the public sphere and their social role in the production, representation and dissemination of
knowledge, activist [researchers] are uniquely positioned to confront the prevailing dogmas and
inherited orthodoxies in the academy' (Isaacman 2003: 3–4). Their activism can help (and has helped)
to fertilise epistemological, theoretical, conceptual, methodological and analytical breakthroughs,
change the terms of debate and extend the boundaries of knowledge (Isaacman 2003: 29). Moreover,
knowledge, expertise and skills developed as activists can enhance scholarship in various ways.

Left-wing activist researchers may differ theoretically and in terms of political affiliations, yet share
tangible concerns: an anathema to capitalism and class domination with their attendant inequities of
wealth, income and opportunities; to neo-liberalism and its attempt to 'bring all human action into the
domain of the market' on the dubious grounds that 'the social good will be maximized by maximizing
the reach and frequency of market transactions' (Harvey 2005: 3) and to racism, patriarchy and all forms
of oppressive social relations and conditions. Their political goals may differ, yet they are committed
generally to anti-capitalist futures, to 'a moral order in which justice, equality and individual freedom are

uncompromised by the avarice of the few' and to 'political, social and economic arrangements where persons are never treated as means to an end, but as ends in their own right' (Prunty 1985: 133–140). Left-wing activists will concur that theory should 'analyze and expose the hiatus between the actual and the possible, between the existing order of contradictions and the potential future state' (Held as cited in Motala 2003: 1) and that knowledge should intervene in the social world. They could differ on whether it should be a 'weak interventionism' or 'strong interventionism'.

Instead of restricting themselves entirely to the academic terrain and engagement with only academic peers, activist researchers orient themselves to larger, wider and more diverse publics. Ideally, this involves activist researchers in reflexive communication—not simply the transmission of knowledge to 'users' in the wider society, but an argumentative, critical and thoughtful engagement that potentially shapes the constitution of knowledge (Delanty 2001: 154). Engagement beyond the boundary of the university with the wider public and the communication and shaping of ideas and thinking is integral to the public good function and a responsibility of the university. There is a 'long and honorable tradition of popular presentation of science' and 'popularization' should not be equated 'with trivialization, cheapening, or inaccuracy' (Gould 1997: 599). The 'concepts of science, in all their richness and ambiguity, can be presented without any compromise, without any simplification counting as distortion, in language accessible to all … people' (Gould 1989: 16).

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Ends, interests and social functions

In engaging the questions of the ends and interests of knowledge and the social function role of activist researchers, I draw on insights provided by Theodore Schatzki and Zygmunt Bauman respectively, with inflections from Weber, Habermas and Foucault. It should be evident that while they have "cognitive interests", activist research and researchers gravitate towards a concern with "practical ends" and "strategic interests." Insofar as their social function is concerned, activist researchers lean strongly towards a mode of reasoning that is interpretive rather than legislative. They serve as "interpreters" and perform an interpretive function rather than as "legislators" who play a legislative role of legislating social goals, policies and strategies. As will be noted, there are views that, rather than confine themselves to being counsellors to legislators, intellectuals should because of their expertise, directly legislate (Bauman 1987: 103–104). For reasons that should be clear, this proposition is an anathema for activist research, given its commitment to connecting with and serving social movements and advancing democracy.

Knowledge can serve various ends. According to Schatzki, one reason for social theoretical endeavour, 'is that it may be intrinsically valuable'. Since humans 'seek general answers and pictures of things' and

social theorising "fashions general accounts and analyses", it has value simply because of this' (Schatzki 2009: 40). Beyond being 'valuable for its own sake', Schatzki (2009) argues that 'social theory serves ends of two types'. The 'ends concerned are broader goals that social thinkers can pursue in developing theories that inform empirical research. The first type of end comprises cognitive ends. Prominent cognitive ends are description, explanation, interpretation and evaluation or criticism' (Schatzki 2009: 40). However, 'social inquiry and theory can aim at, not just cognitive ends, but practical ones too. Important practical ends include control (i.e., of society), mutual understanding among humans, the achievement of the good society along with the amelioration of social ills and ethical education' (Schatzki 2009: 41). The ends described are somewhat similar to those of Weber, who posits that researchers engage in science either as 'science for science's sake or for practical purposes, for orienting practical activities' (Weber 1964: 129–156). Weber adds that science contributes to practical life: 'to the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities', to 'methods of thinking, the tools and training for thought' and 'to gain clarity, which presupposes that the scientist is competent and possesses clarity' (Weber 1964: 150–151).

If social theorising can contribute 'toward the good society and to ameliorat(ing) social ills', it can also 'contribute to reflective political action' in various ways (Schatzki 2009: 41).

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> Political actions are likely to ... be insufficiently informed about contexts, and thus possibly self-defeating, if they are oblivious to theory and especially theory-informed research. Regarding goals, an important contribution that theory makes to political action is developing, clarifying, and defending values and ideal social arrangements. One cannot sensibly seek to change the world without some understanding of the good society or good state of affairs toward which change should work. Theory can clarify or propose such societies and states of affairs. As a result, clearheaded political change rests, directly or indirectly, on theory or theoretical ideas. (Schatzki 2009: 41–42)

'Practical ends' are linked to action, as 'their pursuit leads social inquirers both to advocate and to perform particular actions'—political actions, involvement in political and social movements, developing social policies, establishing research programmes and the like. To pursue 'practical ends' is to also affirm 'evaluation and criticism as legitimate components of research inquiry' since these 'are unavoidable if the point is to control society or to realise the good society. Self-criticism and -evaluation are required, moreover, for achieving mutual understanding or acting more clairvoyantly' (Schatzki 2009: 43). Schatzki argues that 'choice of ends is not without consequences', since 'the choice obviously affects a

researcher's subject matters, topics and projects. It also affects the forms of knowledge (s/he) produces, that is, the mix of factual statements, statistics, narratives, interpretations, generalisations, and models (s/he) fashions' (Schatzki 2009: 44).

Habermas identifies two kinds of rationality: communicative reasoning directed towards inter-mutual understanding and strategic reasoning geared towards utilising knowledge to purposefully achieve successful actions (Habermas 1984). In addition, he distinguishes between three kinds of 'knowledge-constitutive interests' that are linked to different methodological frameworks (Habermas 1972: 308). One is 'technical cognitive interest' in expanding 'our power of technical control' manifested by 'empirical-analytic sciences'. Another is 'practical cognitive interest' manifested by 'historical-hermeneutic sciences' that are interested in 'interpretations that make possible the orientation of action within common traditions' (Habermas 1972: 313). A third is 'emancipatory cognitive interest' manifested by 'critically oriented sciences' that are concerned with determining 'when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed'. Inherent in 'emancipatory cognitive interest' is 'self-reflection' (Habermas 1972: 310). Habermas argues that 'knowledge-constitutive interests take form in the medium of work, language and power' (Habermas 1972: 313). However, the 'configuration of knowledge and interest is not the same in all categories'. While it is 'illusory to suppose an autonomy, free of suppositions, in which knowing first grasps reality theoretically, only to be taken subsequently into the service of interests alien to it', it is possible for the mind to 'reflect back upon the interest structure that joins subject and object a priori: this is reserved to self-reflection. If the latter cannot cancel out interest, it can to a certain extent make up for it' (Habermas 1972: 313–314). I will return to the question of self-reflection later.

On the functions of the social sciences and researchers, in Bauman's view there are 'two distinct and alternative modes of philosophical and sociological practice that are best described as legislative and interpretive' (Bauman 1992: 115). They differ in their 'understanding the nature of the world, and the social world in particular, and in understanding the related nature, and purpose, of intellectual work' (Bauman 1987: 3). Researchers as 'legislators' make 'authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions' and select opinions 'which, having been selected, become correct and binding'. The 'authority to arbitrate is ... legitimised by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have better access' than others because of 'procedural rules which assure the attainment of truth, (and) the arrival at valid moral judgement'. The validity of the 'procedural rules (and) ... the products of their application' and their deployment 'makes the intellectual professions ... collective owners of knowledge of direct and crucial relevance to the maintenance and perfection of the social order' (Bauman 1987: 4–5). Researchers as

'legislators' take 'knowledge to the people'—the concern is 'to legislate, organize and regulate, rather than disseminate knowledge' (Bauman 1995: 74). From the perspective of the state, the tasks are 'to make the state policy rational, that is, effective and efficient' and 'to render the conduct of (dominated classes) manageable, predictable and thus harmless' (Bauman 1995: 76). Typically, the target of activist research for 'legislators' is the state, 'the monarch, the despot, the legislator, who was to be enlightened' rather than other actors (Bauman 1987: 102–103). Of course, there are views that instead of serving merely as counsellors to legislators, intellectuals, because of their expertise, should directly legislate (Bauman 1987: 103–104).

In contrast, researchers as 'interpreters' translate 'statements' that exist within the academic sphere and are regulated by its customs 'so that they can be understood' within other knowledge systems that are based on different traditions. Here, they do not select 'the best social order' (Bauman 1995: 5). In democratic societies, 'the hopes, wishes and aspirations that people hold ... are not for the social scientist to prescribe' because the social sciences are not 'able to predict human behaviour with certainty' and 'conditions in societies which provided for this outcome, were it even possible, would be intolerable' (Bauman 1987). The reason is that 'a necessary condition of human freedom is the ability to have acted otherwise and thus to imagine and practice different ways of organising societies and living together' (May 2000: ix). Instead, activist researchers must facilitate 'communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants' to prevent 'the distortion of meaning in the process of communication' (May 2000: ix). To this end, they must promote 'the need to penetrate deeply the alien system of knowledge from which the translation is to be made' as well as 'the need to maintain the delicate balance between the two conversing traditions necessary for the message to be undistorted (regarding the meaning invested by the sender) and understood (by the recipient)' (Bauman 1995: 5).

Bauman contrasts well between 'legislative reason' and 'interpretive reason'. If 'interpretive reason is engaged in dialogue', 'legislative reason strives for the right to soliloquy'. If the former 'is interested in continuation of the dialogue', the latter 'wants to foreclose or terminate'. Moreover, 'interpretive reason is unsure when to stop, treating each act of appropriation as an invitation to further exchange. Legislative reason, on the contrary, values all accretions only in so far as they promise to advance towards the end' (Bauman 1994: 126). Beilharz provides 'the Weberian reminder, that forms of authority ought not to be inflated or illegitimately transferred from one sphere into another' (Beilharz 2000: 87). Arguing against the 'legislator' as the 'umpire of truth', Bauman advocates for the 'interpreter' as a 'clarifier of interpretive rules and facilitator of communication', which requires a 'self-reflexive' process of continuous interpretation and reinterpretation (Bauman 1994: 204). Instead of social science as 'a legislating authority', that is 'motivated by legislative reason, reasons which asserts ... the right for the

ultimate say, for the last word', Bauman argues for a social science whose goal, through its 'compulsive interpretive urge', is 'to relativize the existing interpretations of reality, ... to expose ... the unwarranted claims to exclusivity of others' interpretations, but without substituting itself in their place' (Bauman 1994: 214).

Foucault similarly contends that the function of intellectuals is 'not to tell others what they have to do', not to 'shape others' political will (Kritzman 1990). Their role is 'to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematization'—the specific task of intellectuals—'to participate in the formation of a political will – as citizens' (Kritzman 1990: 265). Blacker (1998) is adamant that it is quite acceptable for activist researchers to critique and to not propose alternatives, to only hold a mirror and demonstrate the problems and possibly horrific outcomes that result from noble humanist ideals and good intentions (Blacker 1998: 348–367).

> As soon as one 'proposes' – one proposes a vocabulary, an ideology, which can only have effects of domination. What we have to present are instruments and tools that people might find useful. By forming groups specifically to make these analyses, to wage these struggles, by using these instruments or others: this is how, in the end, possibilities open up .... It is simply in the struggle itself and through it that positive conditions emerge. (Kritzman 1990: 197)

Kritzman warns that if the intellectual starts playing the role of 'prophet, in relation to what "must be", to what "must take place" – these effects of domination will return and we shall have other ideologies, functioning in the same way' (Kritzman 1990: 197). Activist researchers must guard against a discourse of "usefulness" that judges theory and research entirely on their utility as guides for social transformation and their recommendations for practice (Johannesson 1998: 300). In defining what is useful, activist researchers contribute to maintaining 'an elitist gap between those who produce recommendations and those who receive recommendations' and can play into the hands of political actors who 'are anxious for easy-to-install proposals to use (or at least to let the public think they are to be used)' (Johannesson 1998: 300). It is important to keep in mind that 'notions of usefulness ... are constructed notions' and to insist on broadening the 'notion of usefulness to include intellectual practices that problematize and conceptualize our strategies, stances, constructed notions, taken-for-granted ideas, experience, and so forth' (Johannesson 1998: 300).

Weber clarifies that:

> In practice you can take this or that position when concerned with a problem of value ... If you take such and such a stand, then, according to scientific experience, you have to use such and such a means in order to carry out your conviction practically. Now, these means are perhaps such that you believe that you must reject them. Then you simply must choose between the end and the inevitable means. Does the end "justify" the means? Or does it not? The [researcher] can confront you with the necessity of this choice ... but cannot do more, so long as [s/he] wishes to remain a [researcher] and not to become a demagogue. (Weber 1964: 151)

Critically, for Bauman, a social science 'of interpretive reason also lays bare the 'the matter of ... responsibility to make the choice. The good choice is not given, it is not there already waiting to be learned and absorbed. The choice is something you have to work for' (Bauman 1994: 214). Researchers can help those involved in developing political programmes, manifestos, plans, strategies, policies and tactics (PSPs) to give themselves 'account(s) of the ultimate meaning of [their] own conduct', which is 'not so trifling a thing to do' and to fulfil the 'duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility'. They will be more successful in accomplishing this 'the more conscientiously [they avoid] the desire personally to impose upon or suggest to [their audiences] their own stand' (Weber 1964: 152).

For Weber 'the very meaning of scientific work' is that its accomplishments become antiquated with the passage of time and that 'every scientific "fulfilment" raises new "questions"; it asks to be "surpassed" and "outdated"' (Weber 1964: 138). Quoting Tolstoy, Weber argues that 'science ... gives no answer to ... the only important question for us: "What shall we do and how shall we live"' (Weber 1964: 143). In the 'interest of science', Weber rejects adopting political views in research, since they could compromise the search for truth, however, he accepts that science does not require one to set aside their sympathies, only that one presents scientific conclusions that may be contrary to one's sympathies. Researchers must 'recognize "inconvenient" facts; that is, "facts that are inconvenient for their party opinions"' (Weber 1964: 147). While Weber argues the 'impossibility of "scientifically" pleading for practical and interested ends' on the grounds that such pleading is 'meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other', he acknowledges the possibility of 'scientific' pleading in 'discussing the means for a firmly given and presupposed end' (Weber 1964: 147).

Schatzki's take on prescription is somewhat different and creates space for a wider role for activist researchers. The author notes that 'choice of ends also affects the prescriptions for action that an

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investigator offers' and poses 'should activist researchers offer "prescriptions" to whoever they consider themselves serving?' (Schatzki 2009: 44). He observes that one view is to 'provide knowledge to populations and groups that should autonomously determine their own ends, policies and collective actions. Foucault is a fine example of such a theorist. Another view is that 'it is part of theory's job to offer prescriptions, social blueprints, and plans for action' (Schatzki 2009: 44). Schatzki's rejoinder is that 'this is a false dilemma. Theorists can prescribe courses of action or social arrangements, and people can ignore them. There is no reason to bar theorists from injecting whatever prescriptions they want into public space where, like recommendations from any quarter, their ideas can be discussed, adopted, or rejected' (Schatzki 2009: 44).

Given the challenges of activist research, which I address in the next chapter, critical reflection, self-reflection and 'epistemic reflexivity' become vitally important. In 'self-reflection knowledge for the sake of knowledge attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility' (Habermas 1972: 314). Emancipatory cognitive interest pursues 'reflection as such'; that is, 'in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one', and 'the unity of knowledge and interest proves itself in a dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed' (Habermas 1972: 315). It is 'false consciousness' to not reflect on knowledge-constitutive interests and confront 'the risks that appear once the connection of knowledge and human interest has been comprehended on the level of self-reflection' (Habermas 1972: 315). However, there can also be 'dangerous bewitchments of misguided reflection'. To avoid this, emancipatory knowledge-constitutive interest needs honest critique without lapsing into the 'illusion of objectivism' (Habermas 1972: 315).

Johannesson observes the irony of activist researchers advancing ideas and proposals on PSPs without due reflection 'on their investment in the practice of working with these ideas', with the danger of masking the possible continuities from themselves, rather than breaks with previous or existing PSPs (Johannesson 1998: 309). Bourdieu calls this process 'officialization'—'the group … masks from itself its own truth, binds itself by a public profession which sanctions and imposes what it utters, tacitly defining the limits of the thinkable and the unthinkable' (Bourdieu as cited in Johannesson 1998: 309). Activist researchers are 'epistemic individuals, rather than biographical individuals' who 'can become more critical of their ideas and practices by adopting what Bourdieu calls epistemic reflexivity'—self-analysis on themselves as contributors of ideas, their intellectual practice and the historical conditions and social relations under which their ideas are contributed (Johannesson 1998: 310). It also means paying greater attentiveness to how one's intellectual work could be represented and utilised in the service of the knowledge-power nexus (Blacker 1998). More is involved than researcher's interrogating their consciousness/unconsciousness; it extends to scrutiny of the unconsciousness of intellectual traditions

and practices, which is a collective enterprise rather than an individual burden. 'Epistemic reflexivity' facilitates activist researchers assuming 'greater responsibility, moral as well as practical, for their historically situated utopias' (Johannesson 1998: 312).

Connecting activist research and PSP development

If activist research and the process of development of PSPs is connected, it is found that there are different moments in PSPs' development: problem identification and definition, PSP formulation, PSP adoption, PSP planning and implementation and PSP review. Activist research can have any of the different moments of PSP development as its objects, engage with the concerns of all or specific actors involved in PSP development and can potentially shape the dynamics and outcomes of some or all the different moments. This shaping can happen through theoretical and conceptual work or concrete empirical analysis as well as through the analysis of PSPs or analysis for PSPs. If we link the nature, purpose, objects and concerns of research, we find that social research exists on a continuum. The different purposes of activist research mark it as research either concerned with critique or with concrete social transformation. On the one pole, there is research that is either entirely unconcerned with intervening in the world or that seeks to intervene "weakly"—the concern is principally cognitive ends and interests. On the other pole, there is research that seeks to intervene strongly in the world, as when the aim of research is to design PSPs—a concern with "practical ends and strategic interests". Between the two poles of non-interest in PSP and analysis for PSP is research that has as its focus, however, not its purpose, PSP development (a concern with "cognitive ends"); the analysis of PSP (whose concern could be "cognitive ends" or "practical ends") and different kinds of analysis for PSP (a concern with "practical ends").

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The purposes are linked to different objects of research. Analysis of PSP encompasses objects such as the analysis of existing or emerging PSPs, their impacts, outcomes and consequences, as well as the processes and dynamics of PSP development. Such scholarship could constitute either "basic" research that is entirely uninterested in PSP or research that is PSP-oriented. Analysis for PSP covers a range of objects: from analysis of the philosophical or theoretical underpinnings of PSPs or the structural and conjunctural conditions within which PSPs must be implemented, to analysis related to developing options for PSP and analysing their implications for values and goals, to designing concrete PSPs. Analysis of PSPs and analysis for PSPs can draw on a range of methodologies, methods (quantitative, qualitative) and techniques (documentary research, interviews, surveys, and collection and processing of statistical data using frequencies, cross-tabulations, regression analysis, etc.) (Hoppers 1997; Motala 2003; Muller

1993; Samoff 1995).[1]

The nature and content of activist research is shaped by various factors—its philosophical and theoretical orientations; personal inclinations, research interests; the theoretical, analytical and empirical questions that concern it, the institutional context of knowledge production, the time available and whether the research is self-initiated or commissioned. Some activist research purposely pursues PSP-oriented research as a matter of preference, or because it is a corollary of institutional location. Other activist research, especially that undertaken at universities, may confine itself to "basic" research, either on principle or because it has no affinity for PSP-oriented research; the latter could have PSP development as the object of research, but rather for the pursuit of knowledge than to contribute to its development. Activist researchers are shaped by biography and history, and their concerns are not static; they can and do oscillate between research that varies in nature and has different purposes and objects. In the process, activist researchers must navigate various and different possible ambiguities, paradoxes, tensions and dilemmas.

How research conceives its knowledge production, its motivations, the purposes it defines for research and its nature and accessibility are immaterial regarding the potential value for PSPs of research. All social research is potentially valuable for PSP development—on condition that the research has integrity, is rigorous and of good quality.[2] This is exemplified by First's *Barrel of the Gun*. First was not immediately concerned with PSP issues, however, her rigorous research and penetrating analysis meant that her monograph had great value for liberation movements concerned with genuine emancipation. It is also illustrated by Harold Wolpe's *Race, Class and Apartheid State* (Wolpe 1988), in which the author investigated through an impersonal, detached, yet unquestionably moral scholarship, the mutual interpenetration of past and present, events and processes, actions and agents and social structure and conjuncture in South Africa. Wolpe's (1988) concern was the social structures and conditions that frustrate social justice, yet make possible social struggles and the triumph of justice—a search for the mechanisms through which societies are reproduced or changed. Wolpe was not immediately concerned with PSP

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1   The issue of activist research and researchers and methodology, methods and techniques is a separate but important issue.

2   To avoid viewing the relationship between research and PSP development in over-rationalistic terms and to not overstate the role and importance of research in PSP development, the following points are in order. The reasons why the research was undertaken, the purposes that the activist researchers are pursuing and the accessibility of their research and writing will, of course, affect the *extent* to which the research is PSP valuable. The nature of social actors for whom the research is intended and the degree to which they are intellectually and politically receptive to activist research will also condition its value for PSPs. For various reasons, poor quality activist research, unfortunately, sometimes enjoys prestige among some social actors. Still, ultimately, the PSP value of research is not determined solely by activist research itself, but also by the take-up of the research, its impact, the uses to which it is put, and the effects that it has on the political terrain.

issues, however, his rigorous theorising and penetrating analysis meant that his monograph was highly PSP-related and relevant for the liberation movement.

Of course, the fact that activist research may be valuable for PSP development does not secure its influence in political movements, even when activist researchers are members of those same movements. Often:

> influence is long-term and indirect. It takes time for ideas ... to filter through .... And since ideas only take hold if they pass through many hands, there is a great gap between the article or book and the actions or opinions they trigger. Intellectuals have no control over these processes. (Friedman 2015: 24)

The value of activist research for PSPs is not guaranteed by its orientation or explicit PSP purposes. Rigorous research that is unconcerned with PSP development can be as invaluable, if not sometimes of greater value than that which deliberately sets out to inform PSP development, especially when that research is of poor quality.

If we draw together the concerns of knowledge and research, the nature of intervention in the world and the role of researchers, we find that Schatzki's social theoretical ends of knowledge represent a weak intervention in the world when concerned with cognitive ends, and a strong intervention when linked to practical ends. Similarly, when knowledge interests (Habermas 1972) are of a purely cognitive nature, they are a weak intervention, becoming a strong intervention when they are of a strategic nature. When, in terms of Bauman, researchers function as legislators, they intervene strongly in the world in contrast with when they function as interpreters.

Conclusion

I have situated First's epistemic and wider intellectual orientation by sketching her history and biography as relevant to her activist research. I have also considered the core characteristics of activist research. In the next chapter I explore First's research, how she tried to mediate its associated tensions and dilemmas and with what success. I also discuss the more general challenges posed by activist research before sharing final thoughts on First and activist research and contemporary challenges.

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Chapter 3: Ruth First's Activist Research and its Challenges

Saleem Badat

First and research

Considering the ends, interests and nature of First's research, her concerns principally with the analysis of and for PSPs, especially during her time at the *Centro de Estudos Africanos* (CEA – Centre for African Studies), and given her ideological and political dispositions, commitments and affiliations, her involvement in activist research and her status as an activist researcher is indisputable. First's activist research can be periodised in terms of research that was undertaken in South Africa prior to her exile in 1964 to the United Kingdom, research conducted in the United Kingdom and research between 1979 and 1982 as research director of CEA in Maputo. The research during the first two periods was largely self-initiated and principally undertaken individually as an "independent" researcher, as until 1973, she was not located institutionally at a university or at a research department of any institution or organisation. That changed with the move to Maputo in 1979: her research was then under the auspices of CEA, located at Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo. Here her research topics were either proposed by FRELIMO or determined by what was deemed useful to FRELIMO and research was undertaken collectively as a common endeavour with her comrades who were also academics.

The first decade in exile in the United Kingdom was an 'incredibly productive period' in First's life; the early years saw publishing of research undertaken in South Africa (Williams et al. 2014: 9). There was South West Africa, a book she had researched on and in Namibia (First 1963); a preface to and revision, editing and publication of *The Peasants' Revolt* by Govan Mbeki (Mbeki 1964); *117 Days* (First 1965), an account of her period in solitary confinement and a foreword to Nelson Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (Mandela 1973). Other books followed, based on new research while in the United Kingdom: A collection of essays in 1967, *South West Africa: Travesty of Trust*, with Ronald Segal (Segal and First 1967); the editing of Oginga Odinga's, *Not yet Uhuru* also in 1967 (Odinga 1967); *The Barrel of a Gun* in 1970 (First 1970); the 1973 co-authored *The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid* (First, Steele

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and Gurney 1973) and in 1974 *Libya: The Elusive Revolution* (First 1974).

The Barrel of a Gun was a 'towering contribution' (Williams et al. 2014: 9) and 'a classic study of military coups in Africa' that demonstrated both First's curiosity about Africa beyond southern Africa and that 'her ability to research, synthesize and compare extensive materials was simply astounding' (Williams 2014a: 23).

While 'the temptation must have been strong to excuse, extenuate, blame only the imperial past' ... (s)he was too honest, and she cared too much' (Segal 1982: 53). First affirms that the book makes 'harsh judgements ... of Africa's independence leaderships' but clarifies that it 'is primarily directed not to the criticism, but to the liberation of Africa, for I count myself an African, and there is no cause I hold dearer' (First 1970: xi). The book was 'a radical departure from ... studies on neo-colonialism that looked at the power exerted over Africa; instead, she focused on the nature of power inside the new states. What was the character of these regimes and the politics and projects that had emerged from independence?' (Williams et al. 2014: 9). It analysed how post-independent African countries were being 'held to ransom by the emergence of a new, privileged African class' (First 1970: 10) and established First as 'the foremost scholarly critic of the failures of national liberation, linking them to the role of the national bourgeoisie and the military' (Williams et al. 2014: 9).

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The Barrel of a Gun was 'highly critical of Africa's contemporary leadership (and) was probably one of the earliest works to take a long, hard look at the first decade of post-independence politics. First did not pull her punches, despite her clear acknowledgement of the colonial legacy and her analysis of the continued connections between imperialism and Africa's backwardness' (Marks 1983: 126). First 'asked difficult and provocative questions. What was it about the internal dynamics and weaknesses of decolonisation that led in some cases to successive military coups?' (Zeilig 2014: 135). In Fanonian vein, her response was that 'decolonisation' was a process in which the colonists bargained 'with cooperative African elites' and that power 'was transferred, through virtually unchanged institutions of government, to largely hand-picked heirs' (First 1970: 57). Or as Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it:

> the colonial phase of imperialism (produced) an African elite with the mentality that was in harmony with the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist countries. And often it was this African elite, nurtured in the womb of imperialism, with the cultural eyeglasses from Europe, that came to power or who held the reins of power during the neo-colonial phase of imperialism. And it means that this class, because of the cultural-mental outlook it took from the imperialist ruling classes, does not see any contradiction between itself and the needs of the ruling classes of the imperialist nations. (Wa Thiong'o 1985: 18–19)

Pertinent to this book, Wa Thiong'o also draws attention to university-educated intellectuals 'who rationalise ... a world view or an outlook which is in harmony with the needs and positions of the dominating nation, race or class' and express philosophical positions that justify domination and view 'history, philosophy and education as a reflection of no need to change' (Wa Thiong'o 1985: 19).

First commented trenchantly that the 'careerist heirs to independence preoccupied themselves with an 'Africanisation' of the administration, which more than even the transfer of political power, gave them openings previously filled by white men. Africanization, like the transfer of power, occurred within the largely unaltered framework of the colonial system' (First 1970: 58). She approvingly quoted Fanon's observation that the 'spoilt children of yesterday's colonialism and of today's governments, they organise the loot of whatever national resources exist' (First 1970: 11). Post-independence leaders who for First 'came to power mouthing the rhetoric of change faced the critical poverty of their countries with frivolity and fecklessness' (First 1963). They exemplified for her 'eloquent, inexhaustible talk about politics, side by side with the gaping poverty of political thought ... Mostly it is about politicking, rarely about politics. Politicians are men who compete with one another for power, not men who use power to confront their country's problems' (First 1970: 9). Marks notes that

> written in 1970, by one who cared passionately about the liberation of Africa, at a time when criticism of Africa's ruling elite was still muted on the left, this took the courage, intellectual integrity and independence of mind which characterised Ruth's approach to politics both within southern Africa and more widely. (Marks 1983: 127)

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Here, and especially given the concern with activist research and its connection with politics, it is pertinent to recall Weber. For Weber, 'three pre-eminent qualities' are decisive for political activists: 'passion'—in the sense of 'passionate devotion to a cause'— 'a feeling of responsibility, and a sense of responsibility' (Weber 1964: 115). Passion, however, is insufficient. It must be married to 'responsibility' as 'the guiding star of action' and a sense of 'proportion —both warm passion and a cool sense of proportion [have to] be forged together in one and the same soul' (Weber 1964: 115). Weber (1964: 116) argues that 'striving for power' is an 'unavoidable means' for political activists and 'is one of the driving forces of all politics'. The author, however, also draws attention to the tension between means and ends and distinguishes between 'conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of ultimate ends ... and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's actions' (Weber 1964: 120). In situations where political activists have profound understanding of the responsibility of their conduct and choose and act on this basis, Weber (1964: 120) observes that 'an

ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements'. The important issue for activist research and activist researchers is what are their 'pre-eminent qualities' and the tensions that they must mediate.

First travelled extensively in Africa, with 'multiple research trips to Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Ethiopia and Libya' (Wieder 2011: 92). In 'each country she interrogated the new regimes, most of which had emerged from recent national liberation movements. Each of her projects was committed to understanding the whole continent' (Williams et al. 2014: 9). This was new territory for her; as Williams notes, 'the study of north and west Africa made Ruth confront an unfamiliar world which she had to find the intellectual equipment to make sense of. She was rare among the exiles in wanting "to know about developments in independent African countries"' (Williams 2014a: 24). However, 'academic parochialism was anathema to Ruth; her work as an activist and scholar was as broad and sweeping as the continent that was her home' (Williams et al. 2014: 9).

Wieder observes that although First 'became very much a part of Britain's academic world in the mid-seventies, … she never left the world of progressive politics. Often her life as an academic and revolutionary were wed' (Wieder 2011: 94). She 'showed an interest in the rising New Left thinking and activity, and, unlike many in the exile ranks, sought to interact with them to test and refresh her Marxism and understand their viewpoint' (Kasrils 2020). In 1974, together with other left-wing scholars, First helped to establish the respected and extant journal *Review of African Political Economy*, which was 'committed to understand projects of radical transformation' and 'provided radical analysis of trends, issues and social processes in Africa, adopting a broadly materialist interpretation of change' **(**Review of African Political Economy n.d.).

Williams (2014b: 13) notes that 'Ruth combined during her life the practical politics of the movement for liberation with commitments to investigating, researching and explaining'. Her research and writing addressed diverse objects, but had certain core characteristics. Although 'her ideas came from the great store of revolutionary socialist thought … she continually re-examined, readjusted or reinforced them, by what she saw and learnt – and she was always learning – till there was something of herself in them, and they were enriched as a result' (Segal 1982: 53). She was a Marxist who 'was guided by Marxist theory, but hers was a critical … approach' with 'political strategies [having] to be based in a dynamic understanding of the present not deduced from teleological dogmas' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 26). Marxist theory was 'analytically powerful', a 'tool for critical analysis' (Gentili 2014: 111), but had 'to explain historical events and institutional structures' (Wieder 2011: 92) and pay attention to the specificities of time, place and space (O'Laughlin 2014b: 32–33). First's 'materialism was always historical'. If her research 'had a contemporary focus', she always elucidated the problems of the present by identifying their origins

in the past. She 'was not concerned with theory for its own sake' and 'did not engage with the dialectical controversies of the 1970s, when intellectuals were concerned to elaborate definitive versions of Marxist theories'. For First, 'theory mattered, but the point of theory was to explain events and to guide political practice.'

Williams argues that for First it was 'not individuals who make history or, at least, when they do, it is the context which makes this possible. She insists that social explanations must go behind the actions and motives of individuals to institutions, interest groups and social classes' (Williams 2014b: 20). Preoccupied 'with the "great social forces", classes or modes of production', Marxists 'abandoned the study of institutions to scholars on the right', forgetting 'that these abstract forces take institutional forms and are shaped by them as, at the opposite level of analysis, are the actions of individuals'. First, in contrast 'wanted to know how institutions worked, and was thus well placed to understand, to criticise and to appreciate the importance of the workings of institutions like armies and bureaucracies' (Williams 2014b: 20).

Three themes, it is suggested, ran through First's research and writing. One was that 'the proper focus of social explanation (was) capitalism, in all its complex forms'. She did 'not discount the importance of religion or nationalism or racism' nor did she reduce them to class or consider them as secondary to class; instead, she considered these 'phenomena are shaped by and acquire much of their significance from their situation in a social structure which has in turn, been moulded by the development of capitalism, in its different national forms, and its international expansion' (Williams 2014b: 21). Then there was 'her commitment to socialism, and her recognition of its problematic relations to nationalism, and to feminism.' Third, there was her:

> view that there are times when the masses are able to seize the political initiative from the hands of their rulers and shape the political agenda. If socialism is to be liberation, it depends on the exploited coming together to bring an end to their exploitation. As Rosa Luxemburg realised, revolutionary politics requires both revolutionary leadership and revolutionary theory, but both must be addressed to the class (or classes) who are to make the revolution. (Williams 2014b: 21)

For First, 'finding a good question was more important in research than finding the right answer'; neither questions nor answers 'could be read off from a fixed corpus of Marxist theory.' Her 'research was thorough; she worked hard to find sources and to get the facts right'. Her writing was always empirical,

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about facts (Williams 2014b: 20–21). Influenced by her investigative journalism, in which she 'had high standards for data collection, interviews, document gathering and reviews of previous literature' (Gentili 2014: 106), First sought 'to get to the facts ... The facts are out there. But they won't speak up for themselves. You have to get out and find them out – from interviews and documents, from books and personal observation. Facts have to be interpreted and communicated' (Williams 2014b: 20).

There were other discernible features of First's research and writing. Her friend, Ronald Segal, an accomplished writer and editor observed that:

> she had both the sweep and the closeness of vision to see only the necessary pieces that make up the whole. She never succumbed to the temptation, so strong when there is so much space to fill, of using words for how they sound rather than for what they mean. She had a proper respect for language, and that is why she used it so well. (Segal 1982: 53).

First's texts were 'peppered, at strategic points, with questions, strings of them. She always had more questions than answers and answers anyway raise new questions. There is always more to be known and more to be done ... Consequently, the form of the argument is always open-ended' (Williams 2014b: 20) with 'an open-ended view of things (allowing) scope for a qualified optimism' (Williams 2014b: 20).

An interesting question is how to reconcile 'this tendency to raise more questions ... with Ruth's political activism?'—they are not always reconcilable as activism drives towards action and questions must be suspended. On the one hand, 'we can never know enough to be sure of things, to be certain of the consequences of our actions. There are always gaps between our knowledge and reality. No amount of self-reflection will close them.' On the other hand, 'there are gaps between our goals and the means of accomplishing them. If we are to get things done, there is always a time when we have to decide'. The only resolution is action, practice (Williams 2014b: 20). First's propensity for action and for practice meant that she was not a 'historical determinist'. If 'the future is constrained ... the whole point of social analysis is to identify those constraints. But it is not pre-determined'. One can recognise the tragic failures of post-independent African countries and 'of socialist states without abandoning the commitment to try to realise the possibilities of political liberation and of the construction of socialism' (Williams 2014b: 21).

First had a distinctive style of writing, which sought 'to reach the widest possible audience. This required the interpretive skill of the essayist'. If 'arguments (had to be) built on evidence', they could also be 'presented through illustrations'. She 'enjoyed the narrative form. It structures an account, even when all the causal connections can't be established' (Williams 2014b: 20). She had the ability to write 'with

exemplary clarity, which enabled her to observe, to describe and to explain complexities. Having begun her career as a journalist, her style was distinct and definite. Her writing was incisive and to the point. Consequently her "academic writing" is better than writing by other academics' (Williams 2014b: 14).

The move to the CEA meant having to navigate a new terrain, new political and academic relationships, new ways of working and new responsibilities and tasks. First moved to Maputo:

> without any conviction that socialist revolution was inevitable in southern Africa, but she thought it was worth fighting for ... she was concerned with the ways in which teaching and critical research, empirically grounded in the history and political economy of Mozambique within Africa, could inform a revolutionary process in the region. (O'Laughlin 2014b: 26).

At CEA, First:

> devoted her attention to a multidisciplinary and many-faceted analysis of Mozambique's development strategies, in relation to the subregional economy and South Africa's commanding position. Her great clarity and intellectual vigour, her capacity for seeking out and encouraging younger scholars and directing their talents purposefully, and her persuasive advocacy of what she considered the appropriate course of action, all contributed to what was, by all accounts, an exceptionally creative period in her life and an invaluable contribution to Mozambique's political and economic future (Marks 1983: 127).

Her key task was to establish and coordinate the CEA's 'research-based development course' (Wuyts 2014: 60). It also extended to creatively navigating the PSP goals of FRELIMO and the university and ensuring that there was space for critical research.

For research, an important goal was to analyse the challenges of the inherited colonial economy 'for the transition to socialism in Mozambique' (Wuyts 2014: 60). The CEA sought to analyse the volume and dynamics of Mozambican migrant labour travelling to South Africa, its value and ramifications for the economy, the implications of any reduction and FRELIMO's understanding of these matters in the context of its economic ideals and policies. First had to fight for space and time for this kind of social research, the university rector implicitly questioning the need for such research and why seven months was needed for a project on migrant labour. Wuyts, a CEA colleague, argues that 'the dominant view ... was that applied research concerned filling in the details of an otherwise "known" problem firmly grounded in pre-established premises, assumptions and blueprints.' First was mindful that research had to not only

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be rigorous, it had to also be completed timeously if it was to effectively inform FRELIMO PSPs (Wuyts 2014: 61). Equally, she held and defended the alternate view that 'applied research inevitably involved an act of discovery leading to inferences and conclusions that might challenge established assumptions and ideas and, hence, might not always be expected or welcome. Applied research must enter into the domain of contested views about how to define a problem or look for its solution' (Wuyts 2014: 62). An important issue was 'the role of research in a process of transition: whether it involved passive execution or implementation of policy or instead active and critical engagement with policy' (Wuyts 2014: 63).

First persuaded the rector to agree to the 'proposed scope and duration' of the migrant labour research project, the rector taking 'quite a risk in letting the project go ahead because the space for engaged but critical academic social and economic research on the challenges of transition was virtually non-existent or frowned upon within the party and state structures' (Wuyts 2014: 63). Under Portuguese colonialism there was no left critical social science in Mozambique; in this context, completing the first project on mine labour on time became critical 'not just in its own right, but also to open up the intellectual space for a critical engagement with policy through research' (Wuyts 2014: 63). There were considerable challenges in mounting and completing the research project: apart from the time pressure, it was a collective project that had to forge 'into a reasonably coherent team', a 'heterogeneous group of 12 CEA researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds … and varied levels of research experience' (Wuyts 2014: 64). Various mechanisms were innovated to conceive and implement various aspects of the research, including fieldwork, to discuss findings and undertake writing and editing. First 'did all the coordination and the bulk of the editing, as well as writing a considerable part of the report herself'. Writing and editing 'left a few bruises on the way because the looming deadline allowed for little reference back to authors' and because First was 'an excellent, but also ruthless, editor' (Wuyts 2014: 68). To facilitate insight and use of the research, there were 'one-page summaries, which was about all that she thought many of our readers would manage to digest' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 52).

The final publication:

> was a rich mosaic of arguments, data tables, case studies, life stories, detailed interviews and songs … This was very much a reflection of Ruth's style of writing. It also reflected her attitude to dealing with theory in writing up concrete research. She read widely and was deeply interested in theory, always questioning, never taking anything at face value … In her writing, however, she never put theory up front, but it always played in the background. As an investigative journalist she had a nose for getting at stories and insisted that we should keep our writing as concrete as possible. For her, theory was not for display, but a vehicle to bring a story to life. (Wuyts 2014: 69)

O'Laughlin says that the way First organised the 'collective writing was for me both extremely productive and innovative' and although 'a more transparent process of editing might have led to more subtle argumentation', she 'opted for simplicity and timeliness' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 53). She recognises 'that it was the distillation of years of experience of political writing'.

> Revolutionary research must respond to different audiences with different genres– in South Africa Ruth had done different kinds of political writing and editing: investigative journalism, pamphleteering, drafting internal discussion documents ... In exile she extended the kind of writing she did: drafting hundreds of programmatic documents ... She also wrote well-researched and argued books, aimed at broad audiences, on issues in African politics ... In all her writing, Ruth matched voice to audience. She could be terse and economical in preparing submissions, more personal and expansive in her memoir, mocking and sarcastic in some of her popular journalism. (O'Laughlin 2014a: 53)

Significantly, 'her critical perspective' was not sacrificed on the altar of her commitment 'to Frelimo's project of socialist transformation ... On the contrary, she firmly believed that engaged but critical academic research – grounded in theory, but concrete in its analysis – was a necessity'. Mindful that 'the space for this type of research was virtually non-existent when she arrived in Mozambique, ... The Mozambican Miner was the vehicle to open up this space, cautiously but firmly' (Wuyts 2014: 69). For First, the CEA's task was to provide FRELIMO 'a source of hard-headed and independent advice from people who shared the party's socialist goals', to 'make this advice accessible to them, and to see that it was heard, if not always heeded. Her independence of mind, and the frank and direct way in which she expressed her criticisms, were not always welcomed within FRELIMO', however, 'they were always listened to ... she was a militant insider, speaking a language people understood' (Joseph Hanlon as cited in Williams 2014b: 19).

Linked to the activist research, there were innovations such as an interdisciplinary postgraduate course in development 'on issues of socialist transition in Mozambique within the context of southern Africa', with the curriculum built 'around the teaching of research by doing collective work' and aimed at both cultivating graduates and producing research. For First, the course was 'a vehicle to consolidate space for training Mozambican researchers to actively engage in concrete analysis and to explore alternatives about questions of transition, even if it meant raising awkward questions'. Given the limited pool of first-degree candidates, the course was opened up 'to people without formal university training but whose day-to-day work confronted them with the need to analyse problems as they emerged'—

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such as cadres who were intimately involved in thinking about and developing PSPs (Wuyts 2014: 71). Her key contribution was 'educating researchers to think independently and critically' (Wuyts 2014: 71). The opening up was controversial: although First was opposed to the university's decision that those without first degrees could only be awarded a "certificate of attendance", she had to settle for that. In a sense, First's and CEA's innovations posed vital questions of the purposes and roles of universities in post-colonial contexts and especially in a transition to socialism.

In 1981, CEA members produced the document '*Strategies of Social Research in Mozambique*'. It principally addressed three key issues: the choice of research problems, the approach to research and teaching and the "analytical unity" that cohered the CEA and guided its research and operations. The CEA was described 'as a research and research-training institute' and social research was located within the context of Mozambique as 'a socialist state, with a Marxist-Leninist party, engaged in a struggle which encompasses many fronts to build a socialist society, to develop a socialist economy' (Members of the Centre of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University 1982: 29–39). The 'choice of problems for research by the CEA … focused on problems of transforming production' because 'building a strong material base for a socialist society means above all transforming the systems of production inherited from the colonial economy' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 31).

The CEA's purpose was to provide 'information on the present conditions of production' so that interventions could:

> be devised to implement general strategy. Research problems are chosen, then, not only because they focus on particular problems in socialist development but also because the issues they raise can be drawn upon by organised structures within government and FRELIMO, who can not only respond to information, but also put it to work. (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 31)

It was not just strategy:

> 'in a particular sector of production' but also tactics that required attention. The CEA had come to learn that 'the process of transformation is one of continual struggle. This means that correct tactical positions are as important as strategy, and that good research provides the basis for the definition of tactical positions linked to strategy' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 34).

Given this, the CEA 'felt the need to respond directly in its choice of problems to the tactical questions which FRELIMO must confront in implementing its strategy of transition' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35).

This clarifies that the priorities and problems of research were defined by political concerns—indeed, 'research concerns must coincide with those issues which are on the development strategy agenda, and within the general plan of action' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35). Committed to the unity of theory and practice, they raised for the CEA the 'issue of the presentation of research results, and the audience to which they are directed'. There are important concerns if activist research is to serve practical purposes and be 'useful'. As the CEA put it, 'who is interested, and involved, in social research? How will they be able to apply it in practice?' It had 'become increasingly clear that (there) must ... be structures organised to respond to this information' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35). In the CEA's view, in the Mozambican context social research had to 'play an immediate and active role in the process of socialist transformation' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35), however, it was acknowledged that there were imperatives and constraints. There was 'often too little time for extended study, for decisions must be taken immediately'. In writing 'up research results', attention was paid 'not to the latest state of theoretical debate on the issue, but rather to the language and expectations of people working to implement FRELIMO line in concrete situations'. The advance of the revolution meant that what needed to be known was in flux. In this context, the CEA's aim was not 'to produce a series of definitive research studies but rather to make social research an acceptable step in the formulation and implementation of policy (Darch 2014: 38-43; Gentili 2014; Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35).

The CEA noted that while scholars working in Mozambique as an act of solidarity may have possessed advantages in education, training and research experience, they had 'difficulties in contributing to an activist conception of research'. The challenge was 'moving from a work experience which makes critique and opposition the important role of the radical researcher to one in which analysis is critical in form, because it operates within a perspective of social transformation, but has to confront the actual problems of that transformation' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 35–36). The approach of the CEA discussed earlier was clarified as follows:

> To attack both sides of this difficulty in making social research a practical tool of the Mozambican revolution, the Centre decided, firstly to combine research activity within a development course, so that theory and research practice could be undertaken together; and secondly to direct the course at students drawn from government and political

structures who would remain within their work places at the same time as they underwent their research training. (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 36)

It was acknowledged that 'these linkages of teaching and research, and between research and practice … are not necessarily easy to conceive, and they are even more difficult to maintain in practice. They confront problems and diverse interpretation in the application of Marxist theory and method; they also confront problems of educational method' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 36).

The CEA's 'ability to function as a collective in teaching, research and publication' was attributed to 'its participants' analytical unity as Marxists', the relevance of its work 'to the process of socialist transformation in Mozambique' and to staff and students sharing a 'common position with FRELIMO' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 37). It was stated that the 'unity' was not based on 'dogmas' or belief in 'invariable laws of history' or commitment to a socialist society; it was, rather, grounded in 'the application of scientific materialist analysis to the problems of socialist transformation in the concrete and specific historical conditions of Mozambique' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 37). Those teaching on the Development Course may have been Marxists, however, 'they saw Marxism as an open and evolving tradition, responding to changing historical conditions and new political struggles' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 54; 2014b: 32).

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Strategies of social research were determined by 'FRELIMO's consistent insistence on making Marxist theory serve the particular experience of the Mozambique Revolution' which implied 'discussion and debate based on knowledge of concrete conditions, and … challeng(ing) received wisdoms'. Concomitantly, engagement within the CEA sought 'to contribute to clarification of line – the definition of strategy of socialist transformation in specific areas and the formulation of tactical measures which will advance the process of transformation'. This meant that 'debate and discussion have limits and must be inserted within organised programmes of change'. It was for this reason that the CEA did 'not operate as a broker for independent research projects, as interesting and well-grounded in Marxist analysis as they may be. The unity of analytical approach is based and controlled, in the last instance, by unity of practice' (Members of the Centre of African Studies 1982: 37).

It is observed that First was a 'most magnificent example of a thinker/activist', however, was 'also constrained and caught up in (the) contradictions' of national liberation politics (Zeilig 2014: 136). First's leadership of the CEA was marked by some key features. For one, 'she brought to her post at the Centre a rare combination of gifts: a razor-sharp intellect, a flow of language which enabled her to communicate complex ideas simply, a deft organizational talent, an ethic of meticulous preparation, and an approach to teaching which firmly situated the student in society' (Slovo 1988, as cited in Harlow 2010: 58).

Second, it further demonstrated her 'extraordinary commitment to empirical research and fieldwork' informing PSPs, rather than dogmas or theory alone (Zeilig 2014: 143). The 'confrontation between theory and investigative research' meant that First's understandings on various issues surpassed those of FRELIMO and the South African liberation movements (O'Laughlin 2014a: 51). Third, First creatively ensured that there was space for critical research, despite there being 'a tight rope along which we had to walk, and limits to what could be said' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 51). She also asserted 'the right to take a critical and questioning view of the state' which 'put her in the dangerous position of all who "speak truth to power"'. She had to make recourse to 'all her powers of diplomacy and leadership to traverse this difficult landscape' (Williams et al. 2014: 8).

Fourth, First was not entirely complacent about FRELIMO and its policies. 'The Centre's research identified critical problems arising from Frelimo's policies' (Williams 2014a: 17) and 'the criticism of certain matters (was) relentless and very detailed, with the aim of helping FRELIMO to correct its mistakes' (Cahen 1982, as cited in Williams 2014a: 17). As Wolpe (1985: 76) notes, CEA research 'began with Frelimo policy and ended by questioning that policy – for example in relation to the collectivization of agriculture and the policy of large scale industrial development, to mention only two areas'. Another example is that although FRELIMO sought to end migrant labour, First 'struck a note of caution'. This could not be done 'by an appeal to the political commitment of the migrant. If it was to be done, "all its implications would have to be analysed"' (Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane 1998: 2-3; First 1983, as cited in Williams 2014a: 20). Indeed, any elimination of labour migrancy to South Africa that did not seriously and concurrently address the 'fundamental questions [of independent development strategies and mutually-supporting trade patterns] would at best be naïve idealism, and at worst cynical indifference to the needs of the people of Southern Africa in whose name such calls are usually made' (First 1981, as cited in Williams 2014a: 23).

Manghezi provides a further example. When asked by a prominent international visitor about FRELIMO's 'very interesting experiment ... to establish collective or communal villages aimed at ushering in rural development and prosperity for the communities', First's intervention 'was swift, direct, and to the point ... she remarked that the government policy to create communal villages was an unmitigated disaster!' (Manghezi 2014: 89). There was also her courageous public stand 'in a famous debate with Archie Mafeje in ROAPE, that the time had come to ditch the notion of a two-stage theory, even though her work on [other questions] had implied a single and necessary destruction of capitalism for any notion of liberation to be achieved' (Zeilig 2014: 140). As First wrote in 1978 in an article that was influential on my generation of student activists:

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I agree with those who argue against the conception of a revolution having to pass through a national-democratic before a socialist strategy ... The national and the class struggle are not part of some natural order of succession, but take place conterminously ... It is because national demands cannot be met under capitalism that the proletariat is the essential leader of the South African revolution, and the struggle for national liberation, given this political leadership – which has, I agree, to be asserted – will at the same time be part of the struggle for socialism. (First 1978: 98)

Isaacman (2003: 5), critically reflecting on the efforts of activist researchers in Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s, states that many 'were caught up initially in the euphoria of the day' and 'often failed to problematize and to critique FRELIMO's long-term agenda and short-term practices'. There was insufficient posing of 'critical questions about FRELIMO's capacity to implement a planned economy and whether there was sufficient space for effective democratic practices within a vanguard party' (Isaacman 2003: 5). John Saul weighs in that 'we overestimated the scope of FRELIMO's achievement and underestimated the seriousness of the weaknesses attendant upon its efforts' (Saul 1993, as cited in Isaacman 2003: 5). These self-critical ruminations bring home the challenge of activist research and the need for constant attention to and critical reflection on issues that include the conjunctural conditions in which activist research is conducted, the social relations under which it is produced, the institutional contexts of production, the (changing) nature of the terrain in which it is produced and for whose benefit.

Ruth First, it is clear, grappled with these and many other issues and sought to navigate the ambiguities, paradoxes, tensions and dilemmas of activist research to the best of her immensely creative abilities. A critical and independent spirit, her commitment to national liberation and a democratic socialism, but equally to concrete and organised revolutionary political action and practice instead of armchair theorising, saw her accommodate aspects of liberation politics and specific approaches and practices of southern African liberation movements that could otherwise have resulted in her exclusion or marginalisation from the political arena. First's partner, Joe Slovo, is on record that 'her connection to him protected her against those within the party who thought she should be expelled for the positions she took on a wide variety of subjects' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 49).[1]

Said speaks about 'intellectual's contribution' being the 'the exercise of that critical and relatively independent spirit of analysis and judgment' to avoid being 'a functionary ... completely given up to the policy goals of a government or a large corporation' (Said 1996: 86). While she pushed the bounds

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1   See also Gentili who writes that Slovo commented that were First "not his wife she would have been at risk of expulsion many times" (2014: 109).

of possibility at CEA, First unavoidably, if activist research desires to connect directly with political movements and to influence PSPs, consciously took FRELIMO's goals, priorities and general strategies as her own. In doing so, she inevitably compromised the independence and intellectual autonomy that she otherwise valued and personified strongly. It would be a harsh judgement to say that First's choice rendered her a simple "functionary" of FRELIMO. She certainly did not make a virtue out of whatever necessities confronted her, as radical activists sometimes do to rationalise dubious PSPs. She 'herself, considered the period she spent at the Centre to have been one of the most productive and militant in her life, precisely because political struggle was directly integrated into her everyday work of teaching, research, and writing' (De Bragança and O'Laughlin 1984: 162).

Challenges of activist research

There are numerous challenges in undertaking activist research and as part of such research, in maintaining the autonomy of intellectual work. Before turning to the ambiguities, paradoxes, tensions and dilemmas that arise in undertaking activist research on questions of PSPs, I want to first set out the instances where in my view no significant challenges arise for activist research nor for intellectual autonomy.

Where activist research is self-initiated, does not have PSPs as its purpose, is confined to the analysis of PSPs or to the analysis of the conditions in which PSPs must be formulated and implemented, no major problems are posed for the intellectual autonomy of activist researchers. There could, of course, be intellectual and political contestation on the findings that emanate from the analysis of PSPs and of structural and conjunctural conditions. Writing about the United States a decade ago, Piven observed, perhaps too sanguinely, that 'critical scholarship, even reform-oriented scholarship, is not a problem in an academic career, at least not any longer'. Instead:

> the tension between scholarship and activism is likely to arise not when we reflect in scholarly terms about social and political problems, but when we commit ourselves to the more troubling sorts of demands that advance the interests and ideas of groups that are at the margins of public life, the people who are voiceless, degraded and exploited. (Piven 2010: 808)

The tension becomes 'particularly acute' when scholars are committed to 'movements that try to advance the political causes of these groups, when we join our critiques of the institutional arrangements that the movements are trying to change to commitment to the movement itself' (Piven 2010: 808).

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Under various conditions it is also possible to undertake analysis for PSPs, including advancing explicit PSP proposals, and to function simultaneously, in the same space and time, as a critical activist researcher. One is where the research is unsolicited and there is no concern whether it is taken up by political actors. Another is where the research is invited or commissioned without any pre-conditions (adherence to values, goals and strategies) and activist researchers are indifferent to whether political actors embrace their analysis and proposals on PSPs. A third situation is where there is a total identity or significant congruence between the values, goals and strategies of activist researchers and the actors to whom the PSP work is addressed; however, as noted, intellectual autonomy is compromised when the foundational theories and analyses that underpin the goals and strategies of political actors are taken as given and not interrogated.

Beyond those observations, and to the extent that PSP development is a relatively open, accessible and public process, one important question is to which activities (PSP agenda setting, formulation, implementation, etc.) does activist research seek to contribute. PSP development occurs in a variety of spaces and institutions, including the state, government, political parties, political movements and organisations, labour and civic formations, social movements, civil society and the like. In part, the answer depends on the institutional location of the research and the political commitments, expertise, research interests and preferences of activist researchers. Yet, activist research is often state-centric and limits itself unduly by trying to influence only the state, government and political parties and not addressing the PSPs of other important actors or supporting them to engage the PSPs of dominant political institutions.

Although the state, government and political parties are key PSP actors, they are not the only or most important actors in all certain circumstances—this depends on structural and conjunctural conditions and is a matter for empirical analysis. In practice, many other actors could be involved in PSP development and sometimes they, acting individually or in strategic and tactical coalitions, could be key actors. It means that activist research must think carefully about the targets (institutional actors and subject audiences) of its research; there is not always a single key audience for activist research, but multiple and diverse audiences characterised by great heterogeneity and varied interests. This has implications for modes of communication as well as for forms of writing. Activist researchers may be proficient in only scholarly writing, with no or limited ability to write in other genres and to communicate with certain audiences and in a variety of languages.

Another issue is that the development of PSPs is not reducible to policy formulation and adoption, for two important reasons. What materialises in practice may differ from what was adopted officially as text. Popular struggles can shape PSP development as well as their outcomes and modify PSPs embodied in official texts. Crucial to the analysis of the outcomes of PSP development is to ask 'under

what conditions do these struggles occur; what are the conditions which structure them and affect their outcome. Of particular importance in this regard is the question of the form or structure of the political terrain in addition to the question of the form of the state' (Wolpe 1988: 23). In democracies, the different moments of PSP development may be relatively public, open and accessible to citizens and the law and political conditions may facilitate participation through various mechanisms and in various forms. Even in generally authoritarian and repressive contexts, the state and its apparatuses are seldom omnipotent, monolithic and impermeable to contestation around PSPs. Of course, the access and possibilities for participation available to different actors, especially disadvantaged and marginalised social groups should not be overstated. Social actors possess very different and highly unequal resources (specialist expertise, financial resources, strength of membership and organisation, access to institutions and public officials) that inevitably conditions their capabilities and capacities to participate in and shape PSP development.

What about the challenges that activist research and activist researchers face? They are numerous and varied and range from the integrity of activist research to the autonomy of intellectual work, from the differing imperatives of critical and reconstructive work to contestation in the definition of research problems, from the capabilities of activist researchers to communicating with diverse audiences.

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Integrity of activist research

Schatzki observes that sometimes the pursuit of 'practical ends' 'can distort the research process and subvert the attainment of truth ... If political-ethical tenets dictate the interpretation of information or which conclusions and explanations are pronounced and propagated, truth is a likely casualty' (Schatzki 2009: 43). Such an outcome is, however, not inevitable because:

> it is one thing for an enterprise to be carried out for the sake of, say, achieving the good society as the researcher conceives of it, and quite another for this conception of the good society to skew descriptions, interpretations, and explanations. Indeed, history teaches that the attempt to bring about a particular vision of the good society is usually promoted, not impaired, by the possession of truth. Only when a conception of the good society rests on false assumptions and ideas can the possession of truth undermine it. Whenever, or to the extent that, this is not so, the sensible and intelligent pursuit of practical ends seeks out truth. (Schatzki 2009: 43–44)

Schatzki concludes that 'the pursuit of practical ends' as in the case of activist research 'need not endanger good scholarship' (Schatzki 2009), on condition that it is undertaken with integrity.

Inasmuch as a 'commitment to political causes can produce ... insights' and catalyse theoretical, methodological and other innovations, it can also induce 'blind spots'; in activist research, therefore, 'like all intellectual work, must ultimately be judged on its own merits' (Isaacman 2003: 30). This means that it must satisfy the scholarly protocols associated with high quality research and publishing. Regrettably, all too often poor-quality research finds traction among political actors, either because it conforms with the interests of political actors or because of the 'entrepreneurialism' of some activist researchers.

Activist research 'can be messy, difficult, and even contradictory. Precisely because it is difficult to do well, it forces researchers to engage in self-reflection and raises the kinds of questions and doubts that are the mainstay of good scholarship' (Isaacman 2003: 30). In Chapter 2, I discussed the importance of critical reflection, self-reflection and "epistemic reflexivity" on the social relations and conditions that shape activist research, on activist intellectual practice, on hidden aspects of intellectual traditions and practices and the use of research in the knowledge-power nexus, for activist researchers to take ethical and practical responsibility for their research and the futures to which they seek to contribute.

Frequently, the rhythms, horizons and time frames of political actors who invite or welcome research on PSPs and those of such research are at odds with one another. The challenge is to retain the integrity and rigour of research, while contributing timeously to PSP development. Activist research committed to PSP-oriented analysis for policy that is located at universities could experience special challenges because of other scholarship and related responsibilities of activist researchers.

Autonomy of intellectual work

Said's statement 'never solidarity before criticism' pithily captures another challenge (Said 1996: 32). Activist researchers involved in or support political movements and causes can unwittingly subordinate their research to the PSPs of movements and causes and in the process, compromise 'the exercise of that critical and relatively independent spirit of analysis and judgment' and become functionaries of political actors (Said 1996: 86). Commitment to effectively realising political goals requires activist researchers to 'keep open analytical space for doubts and to be willing to criticize the causes and movements they support' (Isaacman 2003: 4).

One way that research can be subordinated is when the priorities and PSPs of political actors are accepted as given and not subject to interrogation, either willingly by activist researchers or as a condition by political actors for their engagement with the findings of research. However, activist research must be

able to investigate the philosophical and theoretical foundations and the empirical analyses of political actors that ground their definition of priorities and their PSPs. There are two reasons for this. One reason, Wolpe writes with reference to liberation movements, is that priorities and PSPs are 'based upon social theories and empirical analysis which may be incomplete or even erroneous'; another is that 'theory and analysis, and hence the research priorities to which they give rise in the liberation movement, are always problematic. That is to say, neither the theory nor the analysis of the liberation movement can ever be regarded as settled but are continuously open to theoretical and empirical testing' (Wolpe 1985: 75).

Activist research cannot make a virtue of what political actors consider inviolable and necessary and must investigate other possible frameworks and their implications for PSPs. As Foucault notes, 'in the name of ... knowledge' and 'by virtue of being citizens', we 'can and must question those who govern' or wish to govern about their 'ultimate aims, the general choices of their tactics, and a number of particular points in their programs' (Kritzman citing Foucault1990: 51–52). The reality is 'that theory and analysis are a site of contestation' within political formations' (Wolpe 1985: 75). Research could demonstrate that they rest on shaky foundations, with serious implications for goals and practices. As a 'fundamental point which cannot be overemphasised', activist research must treat the priorities and PSPs of political actors 'not as conclusions but as starting points for investigation' (Wolpe 1985: 75). For:

> if the role of research and writing is to be restricted entirely to providing the materials for and confirmation of already defined (PSPs), then this is to reduce research to a purely ideological function and to deny any autonomy or value to intellectual work and hence to the activist yet essential function of such work. (Wolpe 1985: 74)

In short, if activist researchers are to avoid becoming the ideological and political functionaries of political actors, they must be able to challenge the positions of such actors.

With respect to 'commitment to a movement' being balanced 'with intellectual independence' as in considering the priorities and PSPs of political actors 'not as conclusions but as starting points for investigation' and not being 'confined to them as an answer', Friedman contends that 'the task is impossible' (Friedman 2015: 83). I (the author) concur, however, the way that Friedman sets out the question makes his response far too blanket and unnuanced. I have suggested that it is possible for activist researchers to balance "commitment" and autonomy when it comes to certain kinds of PSP research and when they are not especially concerned whether their research finds favour or not or is used or not. As an aside, there is no reason movements should privilege activist academic research over activist research produced by non-academics and 'other movement activists [could] treat ... claims to

academic authority with a good deal of skepticism (sic)' (Piven 2010: 809). Regardless, the task becomes 'impossible' only when activist researchers are and seek to remain active members of movements (as First did). Friedman recognises that in this case:

> while it is easy to dismiss (the idea of balancing autonomy and membership by using movement priorities and PSPs as departure points for investigation rather than as conclusions) as a convenient excuse for being both an independent academic and a loyal movement member, it [does] address a real problem – the need for intellectuals who are committed to a movement to accept limits on their role lest they be seen to dictate to it. Many political choices cannot be resolved by academic analysis – since there are no right or wrong answers, they are best made by those with a mandate to make them. (Friedman 2015: 83)

A good example of accommodating party lines was the telling silence generally within the southern African liberation movements, around patriarchy and gender, which had profound consequences. Prominent South African Communist Party (SACP) stalwarts 'were very suspicious of Ruth First's association with feminists in Mozambique' and activist researcher Elaine Unterhalter observes that 'there was some criticism of the work we were doing on gender because for quite a few people women's place was supporting the struggle' (Friedman 2015: 199). If discussion of gender could have been viewed 'as a diversion from the tasks of the movement', it 'was a collective failure … but that does not reduce its damage to attempts to build an inclusive democracy' (Friedman 2015: 199). It is precisely through critique and contribution to open public debate that activist research manifests its value as a public good. If research is not approached in this way, activist research risks becoming entrapped, as in the case of Stalinism, in being 'a mere political instrument, never producing any knowledge … since it is already a political ideology' (Buci-Glucksmann 1980: 15). However, research, as Antonio Gramsci insisted, 'must produce knowledge for politics, without cutting itself off from the objective and scientific investigation of the world' (Buci-Glucksmann citing Gramsci 1980: 15).

The CEA's important efforts were scrutinised by Wolpe. Accepting that activist researchers would, in the name of academic freedom and on other grounds, oppose any attempts by states, institutions and universities to restrict critical research, Wolpe posed: 'Does this mean, conversely that where the regime is a regime of national liberation and perhaps, socialist in orientation, intellectuals and institutions of research and learning must give up their role, restrict their research and writing to practical and other problems defined by party and state?' (Wolpe 1985: 73). His response is ultimately in the negative.

However, Wolpe appreciated that for the CEA 'the priorities defined at the political level became also the priorities of social research.' Most projects were 'at the request of various government departments and in all cases had to have the approval of the provincial governor concerned to carry out fieldwork' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 37). Wolpe also recognised that 'the specificity and contribution of the CEA' lay in the priorities not being treated as 'conclusions but as starting points for investigation' (Wolpe 1985: 75).

As has been pointed out, the CEA's own concern was somewhat different and more limited: 'How can social research inform a process of socialist transformation in a context where socialism is a possibility?' First was attracted by the CEA because:

> there was a revolutionary process to be consolidated in Mozambique – a process that was unpredictable, that could fail. She thought that the education of knowledgeable cadres and the production of solid and timely research would be crucial for continuing momentum ... [W]hereas Wolpe's question was about limits, Ruth's was about possibilities. (O'Laughlin 2014a: 50)

The theory, problems, topics and priorities activist researchers pursue that are conditioned by social and institutional contexts. Wolpe's question about 'the relation of intellectuals to Marxist liberation movements is one of power not of teleology ... Does entanglement with power necessarily compromise the integrity of research?' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 37). Another who engaged this question was 'Geffray ... an anthropologist who worked in Mozambique and was familiar with the work of the CEA' (Geffray 1988: 71-86; O'Laughlin 2014b: 37). Geffray recognised 'the rigor and scientific value' that First 'assured in the CEA research' but criticised the CEA's rural work for having as its objects only certain issues, 'which precluded analytical recognition of realities that did not fit in a frame of socialist transition and worker–peasant alliance' (Geffray as cited in O'Laughlin 2014b: 37).

While there were good reasons for the CEA's focus, and 'all research focuses on some topics and excludes others' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 39) and not every problem can be researched, Geffray contended that CEA research enjoyed legitimacy because it subordinated 'the definition of the object of research to the priorities defined by the political line of the party' (Geffray, as cited in O'Laughlin 2014b: 38). Geffray also claimed that the CEA's influence 'was derived not from the connections' that its leadership had with FRELIMO leadership 'but rather from the support their research gave to the discourse of power and scientific credibility' (Geffray, as cited in O'Laughlin 2014b: 39). O'Laughlin, a CEA researcher, accepts that their 'research shared the discourse of power' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 39) and by implication that it wittingly accommodated itself to certain givens. On the matter of 'connections', links 'to leaders or ability to play

the political game matter much more than effective theorising and analysis and 'convincing argument. Arguments are often won not by who has the best logic and evidence but by who has a constituency'. Activist researchers rarely have a constituency' (Friedman 2015: 24–25).

Regarding analysis for PSP development and certain analysis of PSP that involve political formations to which activist researchers belong or whose ideals they share, such bodies may view the rationale for activist research as principally to justify and confirm PSPs, to provide them scientific respectability, effectively reducing activist research to an instrument of politics and activist researchers to policy appendages. Equally, activist research could unwittingly become PSP propaganda if it fails to distinguish between the vocations of science and politics and their different imperatives (Weber 1964). However, analysis of PSPs and even analysis for PSPs directed at or undertaken for political actors does not need to reduce activist research to a simple policy appendage and propaganda. It depends on the terms of engagement and on activist research ensuring that there is no unacceptable or significant compromise of scholarly values and intellectual autonomy. A necessary condition to defend, sustain and promote activist research and its integrity is the uncompromising assertion of the values of academic freedom and intellectual autonomy and their guarantee by political actors.

Increasingly, given political pressures and the intrusion of the market and the concomitant corporatisation, commodification and commercialisation of knowledge, such values must be asserted equally at universities. Over 60 years ago, C. Wright Mills noted the tendency to reduce scholarship to 'liberal practicality' – an 'a-political ... kind of democratic opportunism' in which 'the political' is 'identified with the proper functioning of the political status quo' and the 'political order itself is seldom examined; it is merely assumed as a quite fixed and distant framework' (Mills 1959: 88). Under neoliberalism such opportunism has grown, as has as the reduction of knowledge to largely instrumental and utilitarian ends. In addition, today the obsession with institutional rankings, the drive for 'third stream' income, the privileging of research in the natural and medical sciences, engineering and technology, parochial notions of "relevance" and growing transactional commissioned and consultancy research all impinge negatively on critical arts, humanities and social science research and on critical and activist research. It is vital that these conditions are challenged and that the value of activist research is promoted and defended. Indeed, activist researchers must 'work to fashion the environment that will nourish [their] activist commitments' (Piven 2010: 809).

Universities, moreover, generally approve, disapprove, emphasise and materially reward and punish through tenure, promotions and other "incentives" certain kinds of activities. Piven offers the salutary counsel that 'in the contest between scholarship and activism, the personal commitment to activism must be passionate and paramount if it is to survive the tension created by the dual path' (Piven 2010:

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808). A commitment to activist research, therefore, generally entails simultaneously struggling around the purposes, goals and roles of universities and reclaiming universities from the neoliberal, managerialist and obsessive and dangerous new performativity prescripts that increasingly define them.

As opposed to inviting and seeking engagement with activist research, key political actors could evince a disregard for, or a lack of interest in activist research. It is contended that within a decade post-1994 South Africa, 'from the point of view of the intellectual project of radical transformative change, of theory and practice', there was an 'end of reflection and theorizing', the growth of 'demands of immediacy and pragmatism' and the 'steady subsumption of the ends of politics to the means of administration' (Motala 2003: 3–4). The 'separation of politics and administration' is said to explain the drift on the part of the state to weak 'consultancy research and report writing' (Motala 2003: 6). Activist research, therefore, faces the challenge of both asserting the value of activist research and contesting consultancy research, with its often-dubious prescriptions and proffered 'solutions'.

Critical and reconstructive work

Earlier, I noted O'Laughlin's acceptance that CEA research accommodated itself to certain givens. While O'Laughlin's acknowledgement is honest, it is also about the difficult choices and trade-offs made by activist researchers like herself. As much as First and her other CEA colleagues sought to function as 'critical reconstructors', 'in their persons' they did not 'resolve the tension between critique and reconstruction' (Muller 2000: 278). It is not, as Muller notes, that activist researchers may not perform:

> both critique and reconstruction work, but that in their critiques and their reconstruction work respectively, the tension between the two modes is not held in dynamic balance, except perhaps where policy work if of a very general nature, or in exceptional cases. The more the policy work drives towards planning and implementation, the less can it entertain doubts about its constitutive grounds. Or, in Weberian terms, ends have to be accepted for means to be technically elaborated. And yet, just as planning must be practical and strategic, so critique is only coherent when it undertakes a systematic interrogation of those constitutive grounds. (Muller 2000: 278)

Muller adds that 'the argument is not about conceptual incompatibility so much as it is one about the social conditions that enable or constrain specific forms of intellectual work' and concludes that 'critics and reconstructors can only ... comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour'

(Muller 2000: 278–279). I concur with Muller that when the PSPs of political actors are not interrogated critically and used as the point of departure, it is not possible to undertake analysis for PSP that involves the production of PSP options and the design of PSPs and to function concurrently, in the same time and space, as a critical researcher.

Of course, activist research can and does oscillate between scholarship that is unconcerned with PSPs, and that concerned with analysis of PSPs and analysis for PSPs and between the social functions of "critics" and "reconstructors" and there is value in such movement. By undertaking high quality analysis of PSP and analysis for PSP, activist research that has PSPs only as an object and not as a purpose could obtain greater access to information and insights and enhance its rigour. In turn, analysis of PSP, and especially analysis for PSP could benefit greatly from high quality activist theoretical and empirical scholarship that has PSPs only as an object or is unconcerned with PSPs. If activist researchers are willing to and capable of oscillating between different kinds of research and fully comprehend the dilemmas of certain kinds of PSP research for the autonomy of intellectual work, notions of 'critical reconstructors' (or reconstructive critics) are perhaps gratuitous. If activist researchers and critics must 'comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour', there are still good grounds for consistent principled engagement between those who undertake research for different purposes and occupy different institutional settings (Watson 2002: 7–8).

Politics of problem definition

PSPs are concerned fundamentally with the 'politics of daily life – with issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and the dimensions of values generally' (Lankshear 1987: 231–232). Given this, they are necessarily characterised by conflict and struggles; to assume that they could be 'the result of simply identifying and choosing the alternative that is "best" (i.e., relevant … and enhancing) ignores the obvious political fact that the "best" has to be determined in the political crucible of competing interests' (Sroufe 1985: 119). Contestation may not be confined to only the moments of PSP formulation, adoption and implementation. It could be present from the outset, with conflict around what constitutes problems and priorities and how to define the social structure and conjuncture.

As noted, in analysis for PSPs 'defining the problem is both an interpretive and inherently politically loaded activity. Practitioners are frequently confronted with the dilemma of serious incompatibilities between rival accounts or interpretations of what constitutes "the problem";' indeed, 'for the entire duration of the … research process the stage of defining the problem is never surpassed' (Peters and Marshall 1999: 72–73). Challenges are acute 'when practitioners are faced with interpretations of a

problem proposed by policy-makers on the one hand and those of recipient populations on the other'. It is 'only by beginning with a problem and the search for a well-defined problem (i.e., one that is identified and defined within the full socio-historical context) can (activist researchers) analysts defend themselves against criticisms of serving centralist and bureaucratic values, or of being motivated by a technocratic imperative' (Peters and Marshall 1999: 72). The inclination to formulate 'solutions' to problems 'with inadequate problem definition' occurs typically when political authorities and researchers 'reduce complex societal changes to a simplified set of "actionable" policy problems in their own domain', when other domains that impinge on problems and PSP choices are not taken into account and when there is insufficient consideration of the challenges posed for countries, states, political formations and PSPs by conditions associated with globalisation (Mundy 2005: 7).

Activist researcher capabilities

The ability of activist researchers to produce high quality research that is either unconcerned with PSP issues or encompasses only analysis of PSP, does not mean a capability to produce good quality analysis for PSP or to generate PSP options or design PSPs. Likewise, an ability to produce good quality research for analysis for PSPs, such as analysing structural and conjunctural conditions, does not imply an ability to undertake other kinds of analysis for PSPs, such as producing imaginative PSP options or actual PSPs. A 'mastery in the discourse of critique does not necessarily transfer to mastery in the discourse of reconstruction ... each discourse has its own grammar, its own language game' (Muller 2000: 265).

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Analysis for PSP may also require activist researchers to possess political insights that they could lack and to become involved in politico-strategic calculations and institutional and organisational design issues for which they may be poorly equipped. Of course, capabilities are not innate or immutable and can be developed.

Research and writing

'Creative inquiry and the exploration of new methodologies' (Isaacman 2003: 4) of the kind associated with First is another challenge for activist research. Today, it means critical questioning of Eurocentric epistemology and its universalising ambitions and serious blind spots, drawing on the insights of the "decolonial" school and advancing theorising from different epistemic, social and geographical locations. It also 'entails listening carefully to those whose voices the privileged and powerful strove to silence. It necessitates the discovery of buried or little-used sources, demands a critical reading of texts and an

appreciation of the politics of memory' (Isaacman 2003: 4). The use, for example, of oral histories and neglected written materials of social movements, grassroots organisations and coalitions are important antidotes to simple and unnuanced master narratives (Alegi 2020: 560). Such data sources are critical for reinserting into historical accounts important ignored, forgotten, neglected or marginalised social actors as makers of history. The valuing, collection and preservation of more diverse voices ensures that it becomes 'a discursive space in which non-elite actors have the power to show their scholarly interlocutors that local voices, experiences, and memories must take their rightful place in the larger historical narrative' (Alegi 2020: 562). They also help to expand and reconstitute the archive, which is fundamental for decolonising history (Alegi 2020).

Regarding activist researcher writing for political causes and political formations, Suttner comments about Wolpe, a close comrade of First who shared much in common with her, that his 'inaccessible style did not help. If an activist with an academic background had no time to read dense theoretical texts, how much more would this apply to those unfamiliar with the academy? By contrast, First, a journalist, was accessible and this enhanced her credibility' (Suttner as cited by Friedman 2015: 78). Thus, 'intellectuals may be ignored not because political organisations are intolerant or anti-intellectual (although they can be both) but because academics give no thought to how to ensure that their ideas make an impact on busy people with much else on their mind' (Friedman 2015: 78).

Four points are pertinent here: (i) The form of writing, such as its style, tone, precision, idiom, specificity and so forth, will be shaped by factors such as the nature of the target audience, whether the object is PSPs of a substantive, symbolic, material, procedural, distributive or redistributive nature, the degree of change in PSPs that is envisaged, etc. (ii) The form of writing—a tone of exuberant, confident certainty versus a more circumspect, restrained and cautious one—may be shaped by issues like the extent of confidence or compunction about the PSP analysis being advanced, the speed and time frame proposed for changes, etc. (iii) The PSP text's status will be a further determinant of the form of writing—discussion documents tend to be 'writerly' texts, while actual policy documents strive to be 'readerly' texts (Barthes 1974). (iv) Written texts on their own could have limited efficacy in influencing the development and outcomes of PSPs. Oral communication in real time with opportunity for meaningful engagement is often critical for winning support for PSPs.

Reform and revolution

It is noted that ostensibly radical PSPs seemingly committed to social transformation 'often obfuscate … the reality of power and historically entrenched privilege' (Motala 2003: 7). When activist research

must advance PSPs framed by macro-political and economic orthodoxies that leave the structural bases of power and privilege largely untouched, as has been the case in post-1994 South Africa, dilemmas obviously arise. There are no simple or easy formulas for mediating the dilemmas, since they may involve choices, decisions and trade-offs related to matters of values, goals and complex strategic and tactical considerations.

Abrams (1982: 3) emphasises that 'what we choose to do and what we have to do are shaped by the historically given possibilities among which we find ourselves'. Between the social reproduction of existing societies and their social transformation there is often considerable scope and opportunities for reforms that can erode the status quo, advance social transformation and create a new terrain for its pursuit. It is infantile to not struggle for reforms, especially when confronted by authoritarian and repressive political regimes and deeply entrenched and pervasive economic and social inequalities. A century ago, Rosa Luxemburg posed: 'can the social democracy be against reforms? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reform?' (Luxemburg 1970: 8). The author's answer was an unambiguous 'certainly not' instead, 'the daily struggle for reforms ... within the framework of the existing social order is a means of working towards the "final goal". Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is the means; the social revolution, its aim' (Luxemburg 1970: 8).

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Beyond simplifying manoeuvres

Activist research undertaken for designing PSPs could be confronted with intractable paradoxes and tensions in reconciling dearly held values and goals. In such situations, as Morrow argues, recourse could be made to various 'simplifying manoeuvres'. One simplifying manoeuvre is to refuse to acknowledge that there are any dilemmas—a kind of moral blindness. A second simplifying manoeuvre is to elevate one value or goal above all others and use that value or goal to guide PSP choices. A third simplifying manoeuvre is to rank values and goals in advance so that if there is a conflict between them one will take precedence. In the latter two cases, the effect is to privilege one value or goal above another (Morrow 1997). There is a fourth path: for activist research to reject simplifying manoeuvres; to strive to pursue values, goals and strategies that may be in tension simultaneously; to creatively mediate paradoxes, balance competing goals and formulate PSPs that satisfy multiple imperatives. It means openly and honestly confronting difficult social dilemmas and choices and making unenviable decisions. Trade-offs that become inevitable are made transparently, deliberatively and with full consciousness of the implications for values and goals. This creates "public space" for debate and contestation on PSPs

intellectual and policy debate. The function of such "public space" is 'not to institutionalise' actors beyond the state and political parties or to reduce activist researchers to ideological functionaries but to 'enable society to hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making' while those actors and activist researchers 'maintain their autonomy' (Melucci 1985: 815).

Repression

Finally, activist research, especially in authoritarian and repressive contexts, can exact a considerable cost. Ruth First's brutal murder in 1982 by apartheid security forces was the most dramatic and tragic exemplification of the dangers and consequences of activist research. Other researchers have also paid considerable prices for their activism, in the form of physical attacks and dismissals, denial of tenure, ostracisation, witch-hunts and the like on the part of states and political actors as well as universities.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, I located Ruth First politically, epistemically and socially on the understanding that, contrary to Eurocentric epistemology, 'the persona of the scholar' in epistemic activity is highly relevant, that it is necessary to focus on the 'knower' because the 'knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically in the known' and that we speak and act from distinct social locations 'in the power structures'. I also sketched my take on activist research in terms of its ends, interests and commitments, briefly delineating ambiguities that arise in undertaking activist research. In this chapter (Chapter 3), I examined First's activist research, periodising it based on self-initiated and independent research undertaken in South Africa in the 1960s and in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and thereafter, the directed research at the behest of FRELIMO conducted at CEA between 1979 and 1982. I also analysed activist research's theoretical and methodological approach, central themes and key features. Finally, I identified the challenges faced by activist research and discussed how First and the CEA attempted to navigate various tension and dilemmas related to their research in the service of FRELIMO.

As noted, Ruth First was complimented for enhancing 'the intellectual and moral level of (left-wing) discourse' (Saul 2014: 122). Her political commitment shaped what she researched and wrote on; it provided the questions to be researched, but not the answers. Her 'work on Africa is still of vital importance today. Her questioning of democratic and revolutionary change, the role of nationalism in social movements and the failure of earlier experiments in development and radical change (in some of which she directly participated) are also our questions'. We would indeed 'benefit enormously from

returning to Ruth's extraordinary work and research' (Williams et al. 2014: 10), taking it as a starting point and enriching it through the rigorous activist research with which she was associated and that she undertook with great thought and flair. We would not only take the political priorities and PSPs of political movements as points of departure, however, depending on location and the bounds of possibility, would want to also critically interrogate the foundational philosophical and theoretical premises and the analysis that informs those priorities and PSPs. Drawing on the lessons of the CEA and of activist research in South Africa and elsewhere, there is a dire and urgent need 'to examine alternative paths to radical and pro-poor transformation in Africa from the devastation and debris of neoliberalism, austerity and crisis' (Williams et al. 2014: 10).

Belonging to a tradition that sought to not just interpret the world, but to change it (Marx 1845). First recognised that longing for, and hope in a more radical and just future 'is not the same as certainty'. She understood that 'we learn from documenting, critically analysing and discussing attempts to change the world' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 40). For First, the harbinger of a different, egalitarian future was political and intellectual activism and struggle and direct and practical involvement in political movements. 'Involvement in collective organisation, uniting and connecting struggles, was central to (her) conception of a revolutionary process' (O'Laughlin 2014b: 48). O'Laughlin makes the important point that:

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> belonging to an organisation means finding a basis of unity with many whose viewpoints on many issues does not correspond precisely to one's own. The practice of struggle itself leads to learning, debate, changing of positions. Ruth pushed constantly at boundaries, risking expulsion, but she did not put herself outside the organised institutions of the anti–apartheid movement. There are, unfortunately, no fixed infallible criteria for determining when a revolutionary movement has definitively become its opposite, nor for predicting whether or not it will do so. (O'Laughlin 2014b: 34)

Gillian Slovo refers to First as 'the critic, the outsider who questioned orthodoxy ...' (Slovo 1997: 111). To my mind, she was, more accurately, an insider outsider: a respected liberation movement militant for almost four decades, but simultaneously one possessed of an independent and critical intellectual disposition. This position was paradoxically an asset and a constraint. It allowed First to push the bounds of possibility in terms of critiquing shortcomings within the liberation movement and pursuing critical activist research. However, even though she subscribed to the idea 'of the agency of "popular forces", it is suggested that she was somewhat muted in rejecting 'socialism from above' (Zeilig 2014: 142). Hostile to dogma, First remained, ultimately, loyal to the liberation movement and her 'disagreements with the

South African Communist Party were not public' (Williams 2014b: 32). And no matter how creatively she undertook activist research at CEA, for it to be "useful" she accepted (had to accept if she wished to be involved in the liberation movement) as a given, FRELIMO's PSPs, a limitation that meant, whatever her misgivings may have been, those PSPs and the theory and analysis that informed them were not interrogated.

Saul rightly observes that regarding post-1994 South Africa, 'we can never know' what First's views would be; however, to pose the question of what would she say, is to recall 'how courageous, independent-minded and strong a writer-activist she was', and how much 'her clear and principled voice' is missed (Saul 2014: 124). Kasrils suggests that 'while there is much Ruth First would have been thrilled about, she would have been appalled at the state of the ANC and country today ...she would have raised her trenchant voice against the corruption, mismanagement, appalling conditions of unemployment, poverty, and violence against women' (Kasrils 2020). Suttner observes that while 'her independence of thought is beyond doubt', First 'did not always see the way to manifest her views or her disagreement as best served by "speaking out" beyond the organisations to which she belonged.' She understood 'that there is a time to speak and a time to hold one's peace where more harm can be done by articulating a view in a particular way at a particular moment in time' (Suttner 2017: n.p.). The author adds that First 'did not raise her views publicly because it would have endangered the unity of a liberation movement and SACP under siege' and that her conduct 'was justified and necessary at the time'. Suttner, however, emphasises that First's conduct 'does not make the invocation of unity a justified basis for suppressing dissent at all times and certainly not now, at a quite different time' (Suttner 2017: n.p.). On the same question of what First's views would be today, another liberation movement stalwart, Albie Sachs, rightly says that this 'is a pretty fruitless enterprise'; her life, however, is a 'continuing reminder ... to be alert, to be critical, but critical in an engaged way, critical ... with the view to improve, advance' (Wieder n.d.: 1).

Segal writes that 'Ruth First's life was essentially a political act. And her death was, of course, a political act as well, of a hideously different kind. She would have wanted our celebration of her life, and our grief and our rage at her murder, to be, above all, a political act' (Segal 1982: 52). A fitting 'political act' is to strive to 'advance' in the spirt of First—'to rethink old orthodoxies', renew 'Marxism as an open creative revolutionary tradition', without imagining that in the age of neoliberalism 'contemporary capitalism is a completely new animal' or that 'old questions about how to contest the power of the capitalist state are irrelevant today' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 57) or that "identity politics" disconnected from social structural conditions that sustain and reproduce racism, patriarchy and other oppressions is a sufficient response. It also means popular struggle of all kinds on many fronts that coalesce, so that struggles do not remain parochial and isolated, but are universalised. If contemporary activist research and activist researchers

seek to contribute to such an advance, they must address similar ambiguities, tensions and dilemmas that confronted First and summon the same indomitable spirt, political commitment and creative and fertile engagement with research that characterised her person and life.

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Part Two

Objectivity and Activist Research

Chapter 4: Towards a Theory of Objectivity for Activist Research

Nancy Cartwright, Sam Foglesong, Katherine Furman, Byron Hyde, Gabriel Nyberg, Karina Ortiz Villa, Helena Slanickova

Introduction

Activists have a commitment to social change. They are not impartial in their purposes. When it comes to knowledge-producing activities, this chafes against our intuition that this sort of work should be done neutrally or at a distance. The worry is that objectivity is compromised. This chapter takes this worry seriously and presents the beginnings of a theory of objectivity that is especially geared towards social-activist research—OBFAR: objectivity for activist research. It uses the South African anti-apartheid activist Ruth First's work while she was on leave from Durham University in Mozambique as an example of a self-conscious effort to ensure the objectivity of her social-activist research. It is the work of a team of philosophers from Durham University's Centre for Humanities Engaging Science and Society project, 'Celebrating Ruth First', and from the University of California San Diego project 'Objectivity in Activist Research'.

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The problem in brief

Activists committed to social change are not impartial in their purposes. Insofar as knowledge-producing activities are concerned it raises issues of this being undertaken "neutrally" or at "a distance". This is what Ben Geiger describes as the perceived tension between 'advocacy' and 'objectivity' (Geiger 2021: 788). Our special interest in this chapter is objectivity, since it relates to scholar-activists whose research topics coincide with the object of their activism. We call this concept "objectivity for activist research" or OBFAR. Amid the current "culture wars" and the resulting tension between information and social, political and cultural values, the stakes for making sense of the concept OBFAR are especially high.

"Objective" research involves some concern with "getting things right", that is, a commitment to

something like truth, accuracy, reality or factual correctness. Objectivity for activist research should also involve such a commitment, despite researchers' concerns to further the interests and values of the cause associated with their research. The concept of objectivity, even when applied to this kind of research, should capture something about the research's concern with truth/facts/reality. Any research project that finds some conclusion only to further the aims/values of a particular cause with no regard for truth/fact, clearly should not be counted as an objective one, even vis-à-vis that cause. This should, however, not be taken to mean that the primary goal of an objective research project is "the pursuit of truth"; these things need only be attended to along the way. Given the research purposes, what must be found and the intended use of the findings, concerns about objectivity will centre around whether the researchers have used the right methods and processes given those purposes. Objectivity requires due diligence to get this right. We can summarise this as: objectivity requires using the right methods to achieve the right—that is, accurate enough—results for the purposes to be served.

But there is more to think about with respect to purposes. You cannot simply take these as given. Those who commission research are often vague about exactly what research questions they would like to have answered, which is not surprising, since they are seldom sufficiently expert in the scientific details to know what might matter. For instance, suppose the aim is to reduce rural poverty in Britain and you are a poverty activist commissioned to design a measure to estimate its extent. There are notoriously a great many subtle decisions to be made in the design of a poverty measure that can matter to the results, the significance of which is hard for someone untrained in economics to grasp. Do you first count individuals or households? How do you count children? Old people living in a household? What about those living alone? When it comes to the measure itself, do you only want to count the number below a designated threshold, or do you want a depth of poverty measure? Is the threshold an absolute or a relative one? To answer these questions in a sensible way, you will need a far better sense of what the research purposes are than just "to reduce rural poverty". You will have to think carefully and in more detail about what they really are in the concrete – or what they should be. If you do not take due diligence to think this through, you are not making the kind of effort required to get your research methods and the results it produces right. You are failing in your duty to be objective. Objectivity demands that you find the right purposes for your research to serve.

Note too that the problem of identifying the right purposes does not go away if commissioners are explicit in their specifications. No matter how carefully one sets out a list of desiderata, much will still be unsaid. It will almost always be possible to do what is on the list, but in a way that clearly does not satisfy what was intended, even if the commissioners could not have articulated all those intentions explicitly themselves. You are not being sufficiently objective if you get taken up with what is explicit and

pay insufficient attention to all else that is presupposed implicitly. The distinction here is between the letter of the specification and the spirit of the specification. Consider, for example, Pierluigi Barrotta and Eleonora Montuschi's (2018) discussion of the Vajont dam disaster in the Dolomite Mountains in 1963 when a landslide into the reservoir behind the dam created a tsunami over the top of the dam that killed over a thousand people down the valley. Barrotta and Montuschi argue that the engineers focused too much on the purpose of building a dam that stands and not enough on the safety of the people down the valley in situations that could foreseeably occur, as with a big landslide. As a result, the engineers invested too little in researching landslides and made overly optimistic estimates about their likelihood. Their research met the specification to the letter, however, it did not do all that was required.[1]

It should not be supposed that the explicit purposes are sacrosanct. If your research uncovers suggestions that serving the explicit purposes might undermine other goals of the cause or do harm to those the cause cares about or to others, and you avert your gaze from those suggestions instead of giving them due consideration, again your research is not making sufficient effort to get it right. More generally, whenever research is to be used to affect the world, objectivity—taking due diligence to "get it right"—cannot be constrained just to doing your best to use the right methods and to get the right results that follow those methods. In these cases, there is a duty of care to do research that serves the right purposes. Since the primary reason for much social-activist research is to affect the world, this duty looms large there. Therefore, OBFAR requires using the right methods to achieve the right results for the right purposes. Of course, researchers are not expected to be perfect. Rather, what the duty of care for OBFAR demands is what could be expected of a reasonable person with reasonably appropriate skills making reasonable effort.

We have said our aim is to provide the beginnings of a theory of OBFAR. This differs from offering a definition or characterisation. That is because we think that characterisation without surrounding theory is of little use. The point of a theory is to tell you more about the feature in view—in our case OBFAR—so that you can devise ways to find out when it obtains and ways to encourage or prevent it in your own practice. What is more, you can come to an understanding of what you can do if you have it and what the advantages and disadvantages are of securing it. After some preliminaries in Part Two, we begin the serious work of this chapter in Section Three by exploring the arguments that social-activist research is by its very nature beset by the risk of bias: this is the criticism that it cannot be objective and, even if it can be, it is very unlikely to be. Thereafter, we lay out what our theory of OBFAR looks like so far. Currently, the theory has two major parts. First, in Section Four we identify several threats to objectivity

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1   For more on objectivity, Vajont dam and duty of care see Cartwright et al. 2022.

that activist research may be especially open to, and second, in section five we describe five strategies—two social and three individual—that can help avert these threats. These are strategies that can contribute to objectivity in any kind of research, but that seem especially relevant to activist research.

What then of Ruth First and her research in Mozambique? We turn to this issue in Section Six. Ruth First was clearly deeply committed to ending apartheid in South Africa and to enabling socialist revolution in Southern Africa. Because of this, some critics have maintained that her work was biased (Santos 2012; see also remarks in First 1980 and First and De Bragança 1980), for the same reasons, we revisit this issue in Section Three. In response, other scholars and colleagues have offered lively and well-argued defences that it was not (De Bragança and O'Laughlin 1984; O'Laughlin 2014a, 2014b). What do we have to add to this discussion? In section three, we note that it is not possible to do research without risk of bias. It is like driving your car in a populated area. You cannot avoid the risk of an accident—a child may dash in front of you at any time or another driver may come ploughing into you from the side. You can, however, take steps to reduce the chances that these risks will result in harm by "defensive driving"—keeping your car in good condition, educating yourself about safe-driving techniques and developing skills in them, staying alert both to traffic conditions and your own state, anticipating hazards and avoiding risky manoeuvres. Research is the same. The risk of bias cannot be eliminated. However, steps can be taken to guard against harmful effects ensuing from it—like the five strategies we outline in Section Five. What we can add to the discussion of Ruth First's work in Mozambique is the observation that, though not under the descriptions we give, First made serious and painstaking efforts to deploy all five of the strategies that we identify to diminish the chances that the inevitable risk of bias would undermine the objectivity of the research. Her research is an admirable example of a job well done in this respect.

Section Two: Some preliminaries

To begin with, a quick note on the notion of activism is used here. Activism has at least two associated uses. One of them is narrower, denoting grassroots direct action towards a broadly left-wing political end. The labour movement, the Animal Liberation Front and the US Civil Rights movements are exemplars of such activism. The second is much broader: it encompasses any deliberate attempt to enact social, political and moral change. On this conception, not only are Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela and Greta Thunberg activists, but oil magnates, politicians and lobbyists are too. We shall assume the second, broader sense of activism in this paper. This is because, as we shall see, the mechanisms and worries extend to both definitions.

Second, our aims and methods are as follows. Given that the results of activist research are

intended to be used to do things in the world, activist researchers have a special duty of care to choose the right methods to produce accurate enough results for the right purposes. We are not trying to capture what "objectivity for activist research" really means or what it might be generally taken to mean. Instead, we aim to devise an account of objectivity that can be appropriately used in evaluating activist research. Hence, we are not doing a philosophical analysis of a concept but rather we are conceptual engineering. Let us expand. Philosophers spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to accurately understand and apply complicated concepts. We ask questions of the kind, "What is X?" where X is some weighty, important concept—in our case, objectivity. In this sketch, philosophical research is largely descriptive; success depends on accurately describing concepts that are in some sense "out there" in the world and identifying when we can and cannot accurately apply them. A recent movement, surrounding the use of conceptual engineering as a philosophical method, suggests that we should be dissatisfied with our progress in these pursuits. Even for our most fundamental concepts such as truth or justice—there are multiple and varied proposals for how to make sense of them, and very little (if any) consensus as to which are the most accurate and in which contexts they are most appropriately used.

Conceptual engineers offer both an explanation for and a solution to this lack of progress. By way of diagnosis, conceptual engineering suggests that our lack of clarity and consensus over how we should accurately characterise and use our concepts stems from defects with the concepts themselves or with our conceptual scheme more broadly. The solution, conceptual engineers tell us, is that we need not make do with our existing, defective conceptual tools. Instead, we can fix those that are defective and do away with those that are broken beyond repair. We can even develop entirely new concepts when we find that our conceptual scheme does not equip us with the tools needed to perform specific tasks. Rather than struggle to understand our old concepts, conceptual engineers say we should be working to improve our conceptual scheme by repairing or replacing old concepts and developing new ones so that we will be equipped with the right concepts for the purposes at hand.

Our work on a theory of objectivity for activist research is largely in this spirit. Objectivity is an important evaluative concept which allows us to signal a variety of virtues about our knowledge-producing endeavours. We have identified a particular kind of research—namely, activist research—that the existing concept seems ill-equipped to handle. Given that the results of activist research are intended to be used to do things in the world, activist researchers have a special duty of care to choose the right methods to produce accurate enough results for the right purposes. OBFAR makes demands over and above those made by objectivity in non-activist research settings. Rather than getting embroiled in discussions about what the concept of objectivity is supposed to mean in various contexts, we aim to

lay the groundwork for a theory that describes a new concept, one especially fitted for activist research. In this vein, this chapter does not attempt to offer a precise explication of our OBFAR concept, it begins instead by drawing the rough boundaries of the concept (namely, as noted, that OBFAR requires taking reasonable care to use the right methods to achieve the right results for the right purposes). In Sections Four and Five, we work to clarify the concept and its appropriate usage further by adumbrating some of the special kinds of risks objectivity is open to in activist research and developing a set of strategies to reduce the chances that these risks will undermine objectivity.

Third, we leave open the question of where the burden for enacting objectivity should fall. In many cases, it seems a heavy burden to place on an individual researcher who may not be well placed to think through all the issues involved. In this case, it is important to ensure that there are institutional and structural aids in place to support the pursuit of objectivity. We should, however, also note that there is a responsibility on individual researchers to do their best to be objective. Some people may just not be very able at this, for this reason, they should refrain from taking on the research or ensure that they do it with others more knowledgeable.

Fourth, there has recently been a spate of work trying to define objectivity, in the manner of the "What is X?" philosophising described above. We think these characterisations can, without too much distortion, be grouped under three main headings: those who want objective research to be value-free, those who want it to be free of judgement (that is, not "subjective") and those who want it to "get it right". It will be clear by now that our account is for a concept that falls in the third category. That is because we think the other two are generally not possible for activist research. If you want research that is value- and judgement-free, do not look to activist research. However, be careful what you wish for. More recent work in science studies argues that little in science can be objective in either of these senses.[2] Hence, you may be in danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

More radical research has even suggested that there is no such thing as objective research in the first place. The criticisms that there is no such thing as objective activist research are multifarious and often confused, which is not to say that all concerns about objectivity are misguided. However, the conclusion that objectivity is impossible in activist research goes well beyond what those arguments support (except insofar as one is willing to conclude that real objectivity is impossible in research tout court). Critiques that attack the possibility of objective activist research do so on at least four separate grounds that tend

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2   Whilst it used to be thought that science was value-free (Ackerman 1980; Brecht 1959; Friedman 1982; Habermas 1971; Popper 1945; Root 1999; Weber 1949;), since the beginning of the twenty-first century it has been widely accepted amongst philosophers of science that science is in fact value-laden (see Agazzi and Minazzi 2008; Elliot 2011; Forge 2009; Gonzalez 2013; Kincaid et al. 2007; Lacey 2002; Lekka-Kowalik 2010; Machamer and Wolters 2004).

to be conflated together:

1. that the sharp dichotomy between facts and values does not stand up to rigorous analytical scrutiny (Gross 1965: 385) and further, that value-neutrality is impossible (Habermas 1971: 331);

2. that claims of apolitical scholarship are ideological sleights of hand, the 'myth' of writing objectively being promoted on behalf of the institutions with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo (Drew and Taylor 2014: 158.; see also Lather 1986, 1992) and, further, that it is the responsibility of academics to be politically engaged (Chomsky 1996);

3. that all knowledge is positioned, which comes from both feminists (Harding 1987; Smith 1987; Stanley and Wise 1993) and poststructuralists (Peters and Burbules 2004); and

4. that appeals to objectivity preclude or obfuscate considerations regarding the need to be attentive to the voice of those researched (Drew and Taylor 2014: 160).

However, the way we are using the term "objectivity"—as OBFAR—differs from the notion under attack by these opponents. OBFAR, by virtue of the fact that it is to be conceptually engineered for activist research, is precisely aligned with these criticisms, consisting of those very features that are normally found to be in opposition to the idea of objectivity. OBFAR is a characteristic of research that is political, value-laden, positioned and specifically attentive to its research subjects, and this characteristic is obtained when that research is conducted objectively—that is, when it gets it right despite these special challenges. In this way, we aim for our conception of OBFAR to absorb the criticisms against other notions of objectivity, and we deem one of its strengths to be that it possesses those virtues which are bemoaned as lacking in competing notions.

Fifth, we will discuss a very brief introduction to the period of Ruth First's work. First arrived at Durham University in 1973, having come to Britain from South Africa after being imprisoned and then exiled in 1964 by the apartheid government for her activism. She joined the sociology department where her erudition and tenacious spirit of enquiry left a lasting impression on her students and colleagues. After four years at Durham, First travelled to Mozambique on leave where she led a research project on migrant labour. One year later she was appointed research director of the newly formed *Centro de Estudos Africanos* (Centre of African Studies) (CEA) at Eduardo Mondlane University. First had long been away from southern Africa and was keen to re-immerse herself in the politics of the region. In this chapter we consider the relationship between First, the CEA and the nascent FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de*

Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique) government alongside debates about the objectivity of activist research.

Whilst at the CEA, Ruth First insisted on training Mozambican students and government cadres in the methods of critical inquiry and research. In doing so, she hoped 'to make social research an acceptable step in the formulation and implementation of policy' (Centre of African Studies 1982: 37). According to the director of the CEA, Antonio de Bragança and her former colleague Bridget O'Laughlin, First believed that the academic work she was to do in Mozambique would not only support the socialist transition there, but also play a direct role in undermining the apartheid government in South Africa (De Bragança and O'Laughlin 1984). First's main research project at the CEA was "The Mozambican Miner", a seven-month study that sought to understand the significance of migrant labour to the Mozambican economy. By the end of the project, First and the CEA hoped to advise the FRELIMO government on how they might disengage from this predatory labour practice that benefited the South African economy to the detriment of Mozambique's. As we have noted, many academics would consider a union like this between research and activism to be bound to undermine objectivity. We will now proceed to review some of their reasons.

Section Three: Activism and objective research

The sceptical view

The idea that activist research cannot be objective is commonly expressed, however, it is difficult to find detailed arguments for this thesis in print. Although it certainly is informed by the view-from-nowhere—the value-free conception of objectivity mentioned above—the specific moves in the argument made are, commonly, merely alluded to rather than explicated. In this section, we will consider some of the explicit discussions of the issue—starting with Bas van der Vossen's (2015) work on activism in political philosophy before turning to Tommy J. Curry's work (2017). Our focus will be on clarifying their charges that activist research involves additional barriers to "getting it right", before raising some hesitations with the extent to which these barriers to objectivity exclusively apply to activist research. Despite our responses, in the sections following this one, we take the sceptics' worries seriously and use them to form the basis of our conceptual development and clarification of OBFAR.

Van der Vossen (2015, 2020) claims that political philosophers should not be activists, since this violates a professional duty. He argues that if someone assumes a certain role, they thereby shoulder a professional duty to avoid anything that is likely to make them worse at performing that role. For instance,

it is wrong for a surgeon to go out drinking the night prior to a complex operation. Likewise, professional inquirers, such as scientists and philosophers, have a duty to abstain from habits of thought, cognitive dispositions etcetera that make them worse reasoners and therefore, less likely to get it right (Van der Vossen 2015, 2020). Van der Vossen argues that partaking in activism makes inquirers more prone to various types of cognitive biases. Citing research from behavioural economics and social psychology, the author identifies several effects that political engagement seems to have on reasoning. Most of these focus on the strength of an in-group self-identification (for example, how strongly one identifies oneself as a Democrat or Republican) and its effect on evaluation of policy.

Generally, the studies that Van der Vossen cite point towards a strong correlation between political engagement and cognitive partisanship—a phenomenon where outcomes, policies etcetera are judged based on whether it is enacted by a member of one's broad political group. For instance, one study that Van der Vossen cites claims to show that conservatives are surprisingly prone to support generous welfare policies if proposed by Republicans, and similarly for Liberals when Democrats support austere welfare measures (Van der Vossen 2015: 1051). The conclusion of this study is that our evaluation of certain programmes, policies and outcomes are heavily influenced by our political "tribe" membership—we tend to be much more lenient to those who share our tribe and much more critical of those who are opposed to it, even in cases where a friend and a foe are proposing the same thing.

Additionally, Van der Vossen claims that these studies suggest that the more politically engaged one is, the more prone one is to make these errors. In short, scholars who engage in activism become more prone to biases like in-group bias and confirmation bias. This causes inquirers to negate large swathes of information that does not mesh well with their favoured hypothesis or to interpret information in a manner that flatters their favoured hypothesis (Van der Vossen 2015). Being predictably more prone to these biases by engaging in activism, they become worse at accurately processing and correctly searching for information, supplying principled justifications for their inferences, etcetera: they fail to be sufficiently objective. Political philosophers have a professional duty to uncover the truth about politics, and by committing themselves to research on behalf of political causes, they put themselves at risk of biassing their inquiry to the detriment of the ability of their research to find the truth. This conflicts with their professional duties. Van der Vossen claims this goes against what he calls the 'Principle of Responsible Professionalism', which states that people engaged in a profession have a prima facie duty to not indulge in habits, activities etcetera that predictably make them worse at their jobs (Van der Vossen 2015: 1047). Political philosophers thus, betray their professional commitments by undertaking activist research. Therefore, activist scholars betray their professional responsibilities, as Van der Vossen (2015) accounts.

While Van der Vossen's arguments specifically target political philosophers, the same arguments can

be extended to activist research more broadly. Scientists and other researchers are humans, after all, and likely to display these biases too. A researcher could, for instance, downplay the importance of evidence that runs contrary to those that support their favoured cause or be excessively accommodating of weak evidence in support. Going beyond Van der Vossen, the threat of bias can be even worse. Van der Vossen argues that activist commitments produce biases that threaten the objectivity of the research—which is our topic here. Curry (2017) criticises intersectional feminist researchers and scholars not only for failing at objectivity: he also claims that these kinds of activist theoretical and methodological commitments can perpetuate and solidify concepts and stereotypes that in turn, produce significant harm to the communities labelled. This can happen if, as Curry argues, the research smuggles in preconceived notions of gender, society and power which then not only skew results, but solidify harmful concepts that Curry calls 'stereotypes and antisocial caricatures' (2017: 169). For instance, the research may assume a social hierarchy or distribution of power that obscures unique ways in which individuals who lie at the intersection of these categories can be victimised or marginalised.

Curry's objections extend Van der Vossen's concerns about activist research: if activist research has a distinct agenda in mind when formulating research questions or conducting substantive research, then not only can researchers produce incorrect results from their research, they can further reproduce and solidify harmful theoretical frameworks. One of the targets of Curry's attack is feminist-based research. He claims that researchers who embrace a feminist ideology run the risk of letting their results be driven primarily by feminist concerns, overlooking the experience of other marginalised communities, like those of Black males. Their experiences are conceived through a feminist lens rather than on their own terms (Curry 2017).

Issues with the sceptical accounts

While Van der Vossen and Curry's arguments are intuitively plausible, they suffer from several significant drawbacks—at least when applied to activist research. The first is that the type of risk-taking in scientific research that Van der Vossen abhors seems to be part and parcel of scientific practice, even that conducted from the ivory tower. Indeed, risking confirmation bias, groupthink and careless adoption of background assumptions and methods to yield desired results is far from absent in non-activist research. The history of science has plenty of cases where respected contributors to their fields were unwilling to cave in to convincing challenges to their theories and models or fell victim to the sorts of biases that Van der Vossen is worried about (Curry 2017; Van der Vossen 2020).

Let us look at some examples. Robert Millikan, in his research on deep-space radiation in the 1920s

and 1930s, kept trying to vindicate his theories about cosmic rays and atoms long after significant issues with his favoured hypotheses were presented and collaborators had moved on, in part due to a desire to cling to a theory that vindicated his cosmological and theological beliefs (Galison 1987: Chapter 3). Albert Einstein's and Wander Johannes de Haas's determination of the gyromagnetic ratio of the electron was influenced by background expectations that led Einstein and De Haas to determine the g-factor to roughly 1, which was in line with their theoretical expectations. Another physicist, Samuel J. Barnett, attempted to replicate Einstein and De Haas's results and obtained a g-factor closer to 2, which is the accepted value today. However, when he learned of Einstein and de Haas's experiments being 'obviously influenced by Einstein's theory and experiment' (Galison 1987: 67), Barnett performed a new set of experiments that put the g-factor between 1.1 and 1.4 (Galison 1987: Chapter 2). Physicist and historian Monwhea Jeng (2006) argues that Barnett's decision, and later research on the subject, was likely influenced by the bandwagon effect. This is only a small selection of the many episodes from the history of science where ivory tower research has been significantly influenced by bias.

Episodes such as these suggest that the same effects that Van der Vossen worries commonly affect activist research, also appear in one of the most successful and influential bastions of the ivory tower—physics. Indeed, every research project comes with background assumptions, desiderata, favoured methods and priorities that can potentially bias researchers and their results. There are also discipline-wide biases at work—the so-called "received wisdom". As such, the risk of bias is in some way always present. Therefore, engaging in ivory tower science presents similar risks. We do not mean to suggest that scientific inquiry is, therefore, not objective enough to pursue. Much of the social organisation of science is designed to keep the harmful effects of bias in check, both in the ivory tower and in activist research. Consider an analogy with the institutional arrangement of criminal procedures in adversarial legal systems. The defence and the prosecution are both assumed to be biased towards their own side. If a judge is biased, the verdict can be tried at a court of appeal or be kept in check by the jury, or there may be a panel of judges in higher courts, etcetera. Checks and balances and other institutional designs work to keep such biases in check, so that the harms caused by vicious or inattentive agents within them are minimised. Any system that relies on the raw virtue of its members is ripe for exploitation. It would be irresponsible of any public institution to rely entirely on the innate incorruptibility and competence of its politicians, judges and civil servants. Venues for accountability and insight are a must, lest corruption and arbitrary use of power set in. This is why liberal democracies often have a "separation of powers" of the core branches of government, so that they can balance and check each other.

The same holds for the ivory tower. Arrangements such as these are present in science as well. Peer review, access to raw data and stringent epistemic requirements for confirmation exist in part to weed

out such biases, be they rooted in political partisanship or scientists clinging to pet theories. We shall list some safeguards against these in Section Five. These mechanisms and their function are, of course, slightly idealised and surely do not catch all instances of biased research. Corruption is not absent from the ivory tower, just as it is not absent in parliaments and legal systems, even those with the most rigorous checks and balances. However, the risk is accepted in the case of ivory tower research and there are mechanisms in place to keep these in check. Thus, singling out activist research in particular, as Van der Vossen does, seems unjustified. Thus, we deny that introducing risk in this context is necessarily unethical. It is a necessary part of scientific research. If scientists can be biased by working together in laboratories or under shared theoretical frameworks and that is acceptable in the ivory tower, then the same ought to be acceptable for activist researchers.

Of course, a sceptic might reply that while the biases that the ivory tower suffers may be unavoidable, activist research is not. Activist research has the same sources of bias as the ivory tower and adds another risk factor by being explicitly charged with furthering the concerns of a specific cause. To borrow Van der Vossen's (2015: 1047) example, suppose that Sam the surgeon fails in his professional duties by not getting enough sleep before a surgery. Perhaps the urgency of many of his surgeries leaves him sleep deprived and this is an inevitable part of his job. This is regrettable, but ultimately a necessity to save lives. This, however, does not excuse Sam showing up hungover to the surgery—drinking adds an unnecessary risk. Analogously, we can choose to engage in research that does not have this additional and avoidable source of risk. Thus, the sceptic argues, we ought to abstain from engaging in activist research since abstaining from it takes another risk of bias out of the equation.

To answer this charge, it is worth noting that activist research need not make researchers worse at finding the truth, at least tout court. This is because there are mechanisms that not only can keep risks to objective research at bay, but can make activist research more likely to achieve the epistemically correct outcome. In other words, working with an activist goal may promote objectivity. This addresses any worries about introducing risks one could choose not to take. In some cases, by allowing a research programme to pursue activist aims, the findings qua activist research could turn out to be more objective, such that not taking a stance on political and social issues would make the outcome worse. Hence, there are cases where taking such risks is not only acceptable, but desirable. Below, we shall list some of the reasons for thinking overt adherence to a specific cause can produce better research:

First, as Rico Hauswald (2021) points out, activists may well be alert to research topics and questions that are not recognised in mainstream research. Philip Kitcher (2001, 2011) has argued that we need "well-ordered science", by which he means science that is aligned with society's democratic aims. Surely biomedical research as a whole is not well ordered, given that only a small portion of all biomedical

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expenditure is spent on studying disease affecting the world's poorest people. For instance, despite jointly making up 21 per cent of the global disease burden in 2003, malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea and tuberculosis received only 0.31 per cent of the money available globally for health research (Reiss and Kitcher 2009: 264). Perhaps being "well-ordered" is not the same as being "objective" in many senses of objectivity, however, we think the two are close together in cases where there is a duty of care to "get it right", as in the case of biomedical research, which generally has a predictably high chance of being used to affect things in the real world.

Second, the fact that the welfare of people or things they care about is at stake may well make activist researchers take special care and effort to get their results and purposes right. For instance, in his defence of activist research, Charles Hale notes the increased stakes when conducting activist research: 'It is the difference between the momentary sting of critique from fellow colleagues, and the grave responsibility of having a direct and demonstrable impact on the lives of people and on a given political process' (Hale 2001: 15). Or, as Nathan Geffen (2010: 53) describes his work as a member of the South African HIV/AIDS organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC): 'There was a sense of desperation behind our eagerness to learn: nearly every week a member of TAC or someone close to our members died. We needed to be well informed not just for our intellectual stimulation, but because the lives of our members were at risk'. Similarly, socio-cultural anthropologist Christopher Anthony Loperena explains that the research he was engaged in on indigenous land rights and commerce in Triunfo de la Cruz forced him to 'understand the high stakes and political salience of the research [he] was conducting' (Loperena 2016: 333). In addition, activist researchers are incentivised to care about potential blemishes to a cause's reputation if the research turns out to be poorly conducted or a victim to the types of pitfalls discussed in Section Four. As their research guides and justifies a given cause, finding and spreading spurious results can do significant damage to the cause's legitimacy.

For a third view, we can look to Sandra Harding's (2015) version of standpoint epistemology and the strong objectivity that it promises will come with it. Standpoint epistemologists claim that the standpoints of marginalised groups are less prone to bias than those of non-marginalised groups. The dominant groups' worldview, including its conceptual scheme and the questions deemed worth investigating, is significantly shaped by the goals and aims it has, which generally exclude the aims, conceptual schemes and methods that marginalised groups have and rely on. Because they grow up and live in societies catered to the perspectives of dominant groups, marginalised groups are well-acquainted with them. However, since they also inhabit their own, marginalised perspectives—their standpoints—they have access to marginalised perspectives as well, in a way that members of a dominant class do not. Harding argues that some scientific inquiry is biased due to an unchecked vicious reliance on background

assumptions embraced by dominant social groups. Harding's case studies focus on androcentric values and background assumptions (Harding 2015: 26–29). She argues, for instance, that medicine used to treat women's bodies as identical to those of males except for a few features such as average height and reproductive systems (Harding 2015: 26–29).

The claim that marginalised standpoints are neglected in political decision-making and other forms of representation is common in fields that accommodate activist research, anthropology being a noteworthy example. In these fields, research is often conducted specifically to bring marginalised people, issues and agendas to the fore, because they are not given their due attention by dominant modes of inquiry. The claim here is not that the activist researchers themselves necessarily occupy marginalised roles. Ruth First, for instance, occupied a very privileged position, both racially as a White person in apartheid South Africa and socio-economically. Rather, the point is that activist researchers are more likely to attend to the issues and concerns of the marginalised during their activism. Activist research can, therefore, rectify failures of objectivity by challenging dominant assumptions and ideology, casting light on issues previously not given due attention.

We see this explicitly in Ruth First's academic work. In the first editorial of the *Review of African Political Economy* (RoAPE), a publication of which Ruth First was a founding member, the editors describe their

purposes as providing a "counterweight" to orthodox African political economy at the time. Mainstream research was largely conducted outside of Africa and RoAPE's editorial board and argued that this provided an incomplete picture of the continent. On their account, researchers were unable to pick out the most salient topics of inquiry, resulting in research projects wide-off the mark. The response of the RoAPE editorial board, all of whom had spent substantial time working on the African continent, was to set up their own journal that could draw more Africans into the academic conversation (RoAPE 1974). Notably, they were not only concerned with drawing Africans into the debate, they were also worried about objectivity (even though they used different language to describe this). In the proposal for the new journal, they described the aim as being: 'a need ... for a *cold hard look* at the internal structures and the external forces ... for a more thorough understanding of the historical dynamics and the contemporary nature of African domination by imperialism and the prospects for total liberation' (Allen et al 1973). There will be more discussion on the case of Ruth First's sociological work in Section Six of this chapter.

Returning to the sceptical view, the tight connection between activist research and bias does not support the conclusion that activist research predictably increases the net-risk of bias. Whether it is a bias-promoting factor is a case-by-case matter. Nevertheless, even if activist research can play an objectivity-promoting role, we would not wish to allow the biases that might naturally come with it to threaten using the right methods to achieve the right results for the right purposes. The fact that this can

readily happen in the rest of science is also not a good enough reason to allow it for activist research. That is why we have made efforts to compile a catalogue of specific threats that being committed to the interest of a cause—like a political movement or a pharmaceutical or an oil company—might raise. We turn to this next.

Section Four: Special threats to OBFAR

We want to begin by making it clear that in this section we are not talking about outright violations of research ethics, like deliberately "cooking the books" or misinterpreting your data, using a method that you think will favour the results you would like to find even though it is not appropriate to the subject, misreporting results and the like. This kind of behaviour is not to be condemned because it undermines objectivity, but rather because it is sheer dishonesty.

There are of course many motives for dishonesty in any kind of research and many motives to be honest. Is there likely to be more dishonesty among activist researchers? We know that there have been well-known cases which have been accused of bordering on it, like pharmaceutical companies designing trials with very specific treatment regimes and very carefully crafted descriptions of the outcome that their other research suggests are the most likely procedures to produce positive results. This happens even though the regimes may be difficult to reproduce in real use and the very specifically crafted outcomes may bear only a superficial connection to outcomes of real concern. However, as noted in Section Three (Issues with sceptical accounts), there can be special incentives to be fastidious in activist research, both because researchers care about getting it right for the cause they believe in and because of the fear of reputational damage to the cause if mistakes or dishonesties are exposed. Naturally, outright dishonesty is to be avoided in any kind of research and there are usually standards and sanctions in place to discourage it no matter the topic.

As we noted in the second part of Section Three, the worries raised by objectors like those discussed in the first part of Section Three (The sceptical view) are not about outright deliberate dishonesty. They are rather about risks created by unconscious or half-conscious leanings, assumptions, habits and wishes. These are less amenable to direct policing and they are what we concentrate on here—things that can be broadly gathered under the umbrella "ostrich effect": avoiding recognising unpleasantries. Because of their activist commitments, activists may be prone to not notice suggestions that arise while planning or conducting research that there might be information indicating unpleasant conclusions for their cause its advocates or the course of actions favoured by it or, from among all acceptable methods for pursuing the research, be prone to choose ones that are less likely to turn up such unpleasantries.

We allow that the risk of "putting your head in the sand so you don't see impending troubles" will be a live one for much activist research. Therefore, we take it to be part of the researchers' duty of care to be alert to this risk and make special efforts to keep it from undermining the objectivity of their work. Here we compile a list of unpleasantries we have identified where the ostrich effect may intrude into activist research, as a guide for what to watch out for.

To avoid the ostrich effect, we recommend activist researchers be especially alert to suggestions that there might be evidence suggesting that:

1. The results are being too driven by the ideology of the cause and are not sufficiently responsive to the facts. This is the primary charge levelled against Ruth First's work in Mozambique, which we discuss in Section Six, where we also discuss the strategies she took to avoid dangers from this and other risks to objectivity.

2. Conclusions are being exaggerated to encourage impact. Consider a group of activist researchers who repeatedly fail to influence their own movement or the wider world in the way that their research suggests best. At what point and to what extent will they be inclined to change their research practices or change the way they present their results to increase their chances of having an impact on a cause which is dear to them?

3. The research assumptions/methods are based on theories and empirical analyses that are incomplete or erroneous. As we have noted, theory, method and background assumptions necessarily enter empirical research at some stage and it is all too easy for one or more of these to be incorrect or wrongfully applied. For example, if you base your analysis on a theory that assumes that the actors in the community under study are concerned about the well-being of others and are cooperative and this turns out to be false, your research results are likely to turn out to be incorrect. Of course, you cannot be expected to investigate every assumption and theory that your research relies on, some aspects must be taken as a given for research to proceed and others dealt with through a series of caveats. However, matters are different when there are reasons to think that a theory/method/interpretation you make use of might be creating incorrect results. In that case, your research has failed in its duty to be objective if a reasonable person with appropriate training and skills exerting due diligence in that situation could be expected to take note of these reasons, but failed to do so. This is analogous to the case in the natural sciences, where scientists must accept their background theories, assumptions and equipment set-up for experimentation to

proceed. However, if they have reason to believe that something has gone wrong—like an anomalous finding—they are expected to go back and check on things. In chemistry, for example, this might involve checking the equipment used (such as reaction vessels, the inert gas supply or the hotplate used to heat the vessel) and checking the reagents (are they out-of-date or contaminated?). Similarly, in social research, if there is reason to suspect something has gone wrong, the researcher must go back and check their set up. In the social sphere, however, this will involve checking methods and social assumptions, rather than whether the beakers are clean and the chemicals are within their expiry dates.

4. A favoured course of action, though it might succeed in its immediate aims, might (a) have harmful side effects, or (b) not after all serve the ultimate aims of the cause or its overall benefit or (c) both. Campaigns, policies and similar efforts can be misguided. A feature thought desirable or conducive to achieving the goals of the cause may turn out not to be very helpful or be counterproductive to its ultimate goals. For instance, suppose you undertake research on banning nitrate salts because the cause you work for thinks such a ban will reduce cancer rates, because lowering cancer is conducive to its ultimate aim of better health. But suppose there is evidence to suggest that the ban will cause an uptick in botulism that harms more people than nitrate-derived cancer would. You are not being genuinely objective in your research if you fail to take notice of this evidence and act on it as far as is practicable in the circumstances.

5. The scope of the research ignores other groups or causes that might be affected. Consider, for instance, a campaign in which an underrepresented group fights the government about an issue which affects a second, smaller or less-represented group, where the first group's demands would make the second group worse off. Land use in rural Sweden seems a case in point, where Sami legal institutions called Samebyar are used to dictate and represent land use for reindeer herding, which is an exclusive right for these institutions. Samebyar hold exclusive control over land usage over the areas under their purview, motivated by a desire to protect their land from mining industry, forestry etcetera imposed by the Swedish majority group which can harm herding profits. However, given the large amount of influence the Samebyar have, and since they are controlled by herders only, Sami people who work in less lucrative fields like fishing and hunting are often locked out from working inland under the purview of Samebyar. This leads to Sami fishermen and hunters being unable to work because

the scope of Sami rights to govern their land are restricted to institutions that pursue herding, and efforts that aim to increase the political standing of Sami people might be inadvertently harming Sami people who are not in the herding profession (Amft 2000; Blomkvist 2019).

6. A course of action favoured by the cause or a claim it holds dear may be mistaken. For instance, suppose you are a union-affiliated researcher whose research has turned up evidence suggesting that a company's highly unpopular decision that has caused a strike turned out to be reasonable or even necessary for the company to stay afloat, contrary to what the striking union members believe. OBFAR demands that you not ignore this inconvenient evidence nor overplay contrary evidence that confirms the favoured hypothesis.

7. The research itself will put a burden on some other group or cause. This is a problem much in view nowadays, especially in both medical and anthropological research. Researchers often go into a community, gain the knowledge that they want and leave without creating knowledge or benefits that are useful to the community on which the research is conducted, in essence using them as means and not ends in themselves. A common example of this is developing a drug using data from a study population, with the drug that is produced from the research being too expensive for the study population to buy. Your research design is not genuinely objective if you simply avert your gaze from this unpleasantry rather than adjusting the design to serve the studied community as well or trying to develop a different design without this drawback. Researchers in transcultural social sciences are increasingly aware of these risks and are working on strategies to do better (Kouritzin and Nakagawa 2018).

8. The cause, its priorities, its aims, its advocates or those it aims to serve are not as they seem, and not so deserving. The notorious behaviour of members of the UK government with respect to observing the Covid restrictions which the government had imposed on everyone is a good example here. A pro-government investigative journalist or a pro-government think-tank researcher may easily have been slower to notice the evidence of the violations by the prime minister and others—they are not so virtuous as they seemed to be (and ought to have been!)—than would be an anti-government researcher.

Also, noble movements can get hijacked by those with less noble motives and subtly bend the activities

of the movement to benefit themselves. These can include research activities like setting research questions and research agenda. There are, for instance, several notorious cases of hijacking of Christian charity by church leaders for their own use, as in the Singapore City Harvest church scandal where church founder Kong Hee was found guilty of misappropriating some S$50 million of church funds with the help of five key church leaders. Approximately S$24 million was invested in sham bonds to bankroll the pop-music career of Hee's wife. A strong church supporter employed to carry out research on how to increase church attendance may be slow to notice such small signs. Or, once the idea has emerged, they may feel outraged at the thought it might be happening and overestimate the evidence to that effect.

Other cases of well-intentioned research being hijacked can be found in development aid. Here, intermediaries—those working between aid organisations and communities—have incentives to not improve the situation on the ground too much because then they will be out of a job. Therefore, they might pass on subtly incorrect information to the organisation's researchers. This can corrupt the research questions and outcomes, and researchers may be slow to notice the problem because of their optimistic view of the programme and those who are receiving it.

Section Five: Five strategies to prevent the risks turning into harms

Here we identify five strategies that can help secure OBFAR. We adopt this approach (rather than, for example, listing precise conditions that activist research must meet for it to be counted as objective) for two reasons. First, as the examples we have looked at throughout this paper suggest, instances of activist research are diverse and all look very different. That we could produce such a list of conditions that would be applicable and instructive for all these contexts seems unlikely. Second, even if we were successful in producing such a list, it is not clear that it would be helpful for actually thinking about activist research on the ground. At least part of our aim in engineering OBFAR stems from our concern with helping those involved in doing and evaluating activist research. Providing activist researchers with a list of objectivity conditions for their research with no practical instruction as to how to meet these conditions seems unconstructive. Therefore, instead we conceptually engineer OBFAR by way of practical advice to activist researchers. The extent to which some research programmes follow these strategies can also be used as a measure for those interested in evaluating that programme's success in securing OBFAR.

Though our five strategies are not entirely distinct, we deem it a good idea to highlight each separately to get as much as we can in clear view. All five strategies are already familiar in research literature, however, we think they can be particularly helpful in ameliorating the kinds of threats outlined in our

catalogue in Section Four. The first two have to do with community norms and structure, the next three with the behaviour of individuals. Being able to identify "best practice" makes it easier to recognise when there are "red flags" associated with specific pieces of research (see, for instance, examples from Oreskes and Conway (2010)).

Foster pluralism of viewpoints and methods in the broader and narrower research communities

Much criticism has been levelled against various academic fields that are openly activist for being intellectually homogenous. This includes accusations against so-called "grievance studies", that is, fields such as ethnic studies and women's studies that openly advance left-leaning causes. Critics of these fields argue that they select strongly left-leaning scholarship, utilising methods that are prone to the type of confirmation biases Van der Vossen worries about (Lagerspetz 2021) or are over-reliant on qualitative methods with the suggestion that qualitative methods are never sufficiently rigorous (Bright et al. 2016). Similarly, evolutionary psychologists have come under scrutiny for (a) pursuing research that implicitly seeks to bolster a conservative agenda and (b) setting up alternative journals without standards commonly used in mainstream journals (for example, allowing the journal's editors to publish in the very same journal and allowing review by unqualified reviewers) (Carl et al. 2018). The argument here is that the fields in which activist research is performed, overtly or covertly, are composed of individuals and groupings with very similar perspectives, methods and ideologies. The concern is multi-layered. Part of the problem is that if everyone in a research community is similarly minded, this will restrict what gets viewed as a legitimate academic problem worthy of inquiry. It is, however, also a problem of methods—if activists are more prone to use specific methods, such as participatory action methods, this provides fewer intellectual tools for inquiry. Indeed, Hauswald (2021) acknowledges that the problem is not necessarily with the potential biases of activist researchers, but rather the overrepresentation of activists with the same activist affiliations within a single field. This is not a very radical call for action. At this point, it is not a call demanding interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research; it is restricted to the point that, as with all research, activist or not, all due precautions must be taken to offset the dangers posed by too much similarity of viewpoint and method.

According to Helen Longino's highly influential work on the community sources of objectivity, while venues for transformative criticism from alternative and sufficiently different scientific communities exist, scientific inquiry can be objective—or rather, for Longino, this is all we could mean by 'objective' (Longino 1990: Chapter 4). Longino's account of objectivity requires there to be avenues for critical

engagement from alternative points of view (1990: Chapter 4). Similarly, Hasok Chang's doctrine of interactive pluralism defends theoretical diversity as a desirable goal on the grounds that having several different interacting and competing systems of practice engenders various benefits that arise from these interactions (Chang 2012: Chapter 4).

We agree that in conjunction with accusations of not engaging significantly with other fields that offer the type of multi-perspectival criticism Longino calls for, activist research runs the risk of becoming immune to critical engagement from sources outside a single research programme. This means that trying to maintain perspectival and axiological heterogeneity is crucial. Of course, homogenous research programmes do not preclude good science, nor does heterogeneity ensure it. If all the systems of practice on offer are inadequate, no amount of cross-paradigmatic cooperation is going to wield good enough results. A robust method or vetting process can help make up for these shortcomings.

Activist causes, however, do not always have the luxury of waiting for such interactions between different research programmes to kick in. The issues activists attempt to address are often time sensitive. If an activist researcher takes the phenomenon they are studying as harmful or unjust, then ending it as quickly as possible becomes paramount. Communication across systems of practice or disciplines are seldom quick (Fam and O'Rourke 2021). Getting two different systems of practice to successfully communicate is not trivial, hence, transformative criticism from other research communities might not be available to all activist researchers, given the typical time limitations placed on their work. This makes it important for an activist research programme to try to achieve as much diversity of method and viewpoint within the research group itself.

Activist researchers can foster objectivity by cultivating a pluralistic approach to their research programme, aims and methods, bringing in as many as possible to subject themselves to transformative critique. This is something we will see illustrated in Ruth First's research programme about the Mozambique miners, where self-conscious attention was paid to who joined the research group and how they were trained and to the kinds of interactions and reviews of methods and results undertaken internally. This is also seen in First's work in the establishment of RoAPE (discussed earlier), where part of the aim of the journal was explicitly to draw more Africans into academic discussions of political economy at the time.

Ensure the work meets ordinary high standards for the disciplines and methods employed

Homogenous research programmes, however, do not preclude good science from taking place. One of the lessons learned from Thomas Kuhn and Imre Lakatos is that scientific inquiry needs some level of homogeneity and relaxation of critical standards to get research done at all. A plurality of research programmes is for naught unless at least some of them have good evidential standards and methods employed. A robust method or vetting process can help make up for these potential shortcomings. In cases where activist research borrows from already existing practices and standards, conforming to them is essentially playing by previously established rules. If a piece of activist research conforms to regular standards of inquiry for a given field, it is difficult to object to the evidential power of the piece of research in question without appealing to an evidential double standard. Therefore, wherever possible, sticking to established best practices, standards of evidence and methodology in a given field (given that these themselves are sound) is a good guide for getting it right. Moreover, it will generally have the side benefit of increasing the chances that others outside the activist movement will take the research results seriously. This comes with its own risks. Of course, there is the risk of potentially deeply entrenched prejudices within a particular discipline that Kuhnian 'normal science' treats as 'business as usual' (Kuhn 1962). However, we must have some common language and mode of inquiry to get anything done. And the risk of going one's own way can be more severe, given that we then lose out discipline-wide checks on practice.

Failure to comply with disciplinary norms is a serious red flag that something troubling is afoot with a particular piece of research. For instance, when AIDS denialists—those who believe that HIV does not cause AIDS—started to be rejected from mainstream medical journals, they established their own. This was an indicator that they were no longer taking the rules of producing good medical science seriously enough. But it also meant that they missed out on the benefits of peer debate. Seth Kalichman, in his account of this case, describes the self-removal of AIDS denialists from the medical establishment as granting them a kind of 'invisibility' from the rest of the field, allowing them to drift further and further away from good scientific practice (Kalichman 2009: 1).

Actively seek out uncomfortable truths and inconsistencies

Critical inquiry, however, does not have to come from the outside. To ensure that one's research programme does not fall victim to wishful thinking, researchers can actively seek out to find and test

"inconvenient truths". These are hypotheses or phenomena that can seriously undermine the integrity of the research programme, such as assumptions that are crucial to the research efforts or, as noted in our catalogue of threats, about what the aims of the research should be, or of the value of those aims or about whom achieving those aims might serve and whom it might harm.

Actively seeking out potential shortcomings ensures that the breadth of inquiry does not stay within a research programme's familiar and comfortable arsenal of research questions and that the programme gets continuously pressured and challenged by internal formative criticism. A research team of both "insiders" and "outsiders" can help here. Insiders can have a good eye for internal contradictions and neglected research questions when compared to outsiders, by virtue of their deep knowledge of their own research programme's ins and outs. While outsiders from other research programmes can identify shortcomings that arise due to blind spots in the programme's priorities and chosen methodology, insiders have a sophisticated and well-informed understanding of the desirable views that are difficult to reconcile with the programme.

For instance, an activist researcher working on projects in favour of legalising euthanasia might, in their course of study, find evidence that challenges received views of other pro-euthanasia activists, which requires that they rethink and/or accommodate the evidence. Suppose, for example, that autonomy is valued by pro-euthanasia activists at large, and an activist researcher uncovers evidence that the consent process tends to be autonomy-undermining, say by withholding information or making a patient choose to be euthanised under autonomy-undermining circumstances, such as under the influence of cognition-impacting drugs or extreme poverty.

Similarly, in the US, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe conducted their own research in opposition of the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Their research unearthed the inconsistencies in the environmental impact studies conducted by the US Government and exposed the uncomfortable truths about the ways in which the concerns of Indigenous people were dismissed and/or hidden by traditional ways of doing research. Their research allowed for an injunction to win in court and jump started new environmental impact studies that sought to correct this problem.

Continually engage with the ethics and politics of the research and undertake regular critical self-reflection

A central element of OBFAR is critical self-reflection. Activist research has a duty of care to mitigate risks to objectivity by constantly asking whether there are any biases (such as sexism, racism or a commitment to a company commissioning the research) that illegitimately shape the way the research programme

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is constructed, how the research is conducted or how the data are analysed. The activist-research community must, therefore, pay special attention to risky areas where biases may lead to failures of objectivity. In Section Four, we listed several places where suggestions of unpleasant truths might arise. OBFAR requires that activist research be attentive to these and other such risks. This allows for the researcher to interact with the research in a more honest manner and to produce research that contributes to finding the truth.

Often, critical self-reflection comes out of a horizontal dialogue between activist researchers and the people they are doing research on behalf of. This entails an acute awareness on the part of researchers that they are political and historical beings and that they bring their own conceptions and ideals into every step of the method. As Charles Hale writes of the methodology he encourages for anthropologists:

> [A]ctivist research methods (horizontal dialogue and broad-based participation in each phase of the research; critical scrutiny of the analytical frame; thorough critical self-reflection) would tend to be antithetical to the political goals and vision of the people in question. In short, activist scholarship methods themselves embody a politics, which the authors affirm and critically explore; this affirmation, in turn, far from an admission of "political bias," is a step toward deeper reflection on the entanglement of researcher and subject and, by extension, toward greater methodological rigor (Hale 2008: 8).

To see how activist-research methodology of the kind Hale recommends can help eliminate threats from bias and create a richer understanding of nuanced topics, we turn to the case study of Christopher Loperena and the Garifuna land-rights struggle in Honduras. It is worth noting that Latin America has played a central role in the reconceptualisation of current social-scientific methodologies within the last several decades. Mainly, Latin America's history with neo-liberalism and western imperialism left many Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in these countries sceptical of the motivations and methods employed by social scientists, including anthropologists and sociologists, as disengaged from the communities that they study. Loperena struggled with this in Honduras as he had to navigate the different communal factions and his own commitment to the struggle of Garifuna land rights whilst still being able to maintain a broad understanding of the politics surrounding the debate. As Loperena describes:

> In retrospect, this approach allowed me to deepen my engagement with local politics in Triunfo, but it was far from a straightforward alignment with an organized group in struggle.

> Rather, I had to decipher local communal divisions and "take a side." Doing so required a deep and recurrent engagement with the ethics and the politics of research. Was I "right" to take sides with the pro-land defense communal faction? Would I ever be able to gain insight into how community members situated on the other side of the conflict understood tourism as a mode of development? (Loperena 2016: 336)

This constant engagement and critical self-reflection allowed Loperena to gain more meaningful insight into the complexities and nuances of the land-rights struggle in Triunfo. He came to understand that his notion of "community" was significantly different from how community was understood by the Garifuna and saw the development of local politics and experienced first-hand the violence against pro-indigenous land rights activists that was obscured in earlier attempts to document the struggle. This caused Loperena to refine his research questions and methodology which in turn, caused the data to more accurately reflect the nuances of the land-rights struggle.

Make concerted efforts at transparency about what was settled on and why at each choice point in the research

It is standard advice from philosophers that researchers should be "transparent" in their practice. Philip Kitcher (2011: 155) argues that science loses its credibility when the values involved in its production are too opaque. James Wilsdon and Rebecca Willis (2004) argue that science should be "see through". Inmaculada de Melo-Martin and Kristen Intemann (2018) argue that the values used in the process of science should be transparent, so that they can be available for public scrutiny (again, this indicates the ways that these categories overlap). Much of this literature focuses on the values being transparent, in which case the activists seem to have an advantage, given that they wear their values on their sleeves. The larger concern, however, is transparency of the whole scientific process.

Transparency here is tricky. Transparency itself does not definitely secure objectivity. Stephen John (2017), for instance, argues that the leaking of the emails of the scientists at the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in 2009—so-called "Climate Gate"—undermined the credibility of the science, since it exposed the messiness of the scientific process. However, one might respond to John (2017) that this enhanced the objectivity of the research, even though the public were not ready to appreciate the complicated reality of how science gets done.

Whilst transparency is not always a straightforward win for the objectivity of research—one might be transparently racist or homophobic in one's work—a lack of transparency is a red flag. There is an

apocryphal story about a Johannesburg archaeologist who claimed to have discovered a bone that would require that the human origin story be substantially revised, however, he refused to allow anyone else to see the bone. He claimed that it needed special protection due to its fragile condition. As a result, nobody believed him. Regardless of the actual veracity of this anecdote, it shows that a lack of transparency is a real issue for indicating the objectivity of research. This is of special concern for activist researchers, whose work might be under scrutiny.

Section Six: Ruth First in Mozambique: A research programme dedicated to objectivity

Much of Ruth First's work in Mozambique was subject to the kind of critique we have described from Van der Vossen. For instance, French sociologist, Christian Geffray, who worked in Mozambique at the same time as Ruth First, thought that the close relationship between the CEA and FRELIMO blinded them to certain realities about the peasant class in Mozambique (Geffray 2009). Indeed, Geffray and others worried that the Marxist homogeneity that characterised the research team at the CEA restricted their capacity for critical engagement. Colin Darch, a colleague of Ruth First's at the CEA, recalls western academics like Tom Young bemoaning the untrustworthiness of research done by "red-feet" (a derogatory term used for sympathisers of a revolution) (Darch 2014). Others, like First's contemporary Bridget O'Laughlin, reject claims like these that the research of the CEA was hampered by their ideology and the closeness of their relationship to FRELIMO.

There were concerns about CEA's entanglement on several fronts. First herself, was 'deeply concerned that the work of the CEA would not be politically compromised by charges of involvement with the ANC's armed struggle' (O'Laughlin 2014a: 26–27). We do not deny that their research faced significant risks, but rather point out that Ruth First and her team took great self-conscious efforts to try to be objective and mitigate these risks, employing all five of the strategies we identified in the last section. It is helpful to look more closely at how First and the CEA approached their research in Mozambique, since it provides some real examples of how all five of our strategies can be used to combat threats to objectivity.

Ruth First was simultaneously involved in both academic research and activism and saw the former as essential to the success of the latter (Saul 2014). Her commitment to reflexivity and seeking out contradiction and uncomfortable truths [Strategies 3 and 4] is ubiquitous in the testimonials of her colleagues: 'When our ways of working began to stagnate, when we were no longer consistently coming into contradiction with our own practice, she forced us to react, to criticise, to move ahead' (De Bragança and O'Laughlin 1984: 172). At a social science conference in Maputo shortly before her assassination,

Ruth First spoke about the limits of theory and ideology: 'How with a theory of contradiction can you do a better analysis of these contradictions at play? Instead of having these umbrella omnibus theories that we cart around saying the working class does this, the petty bourgeoisie does this, the peasantry is like this. Well how?' (First 1982). First was always willing to part with presumed assumptions when the evidence directed her elsewhere.

Ruth First and the CEA were also keenly aware of the challenges presented by their close relationship to the FRELIMO government. In the same speech in Maputo, First also addressed the challenges presented by this relationship:

> You've no choice if you want to be a social scientist in a struggle, you've no choice but to work through those institutions which are creating change. It doesn't mean an unproblematic relationship, that doesn't mean it's a service role, that doesn't mean that it's thought control or blind acquiescence. That means that given a certain realm and a certain terrain the struggle goes on in that terrain and the questions are how to work, how to research and how to teach. They are continuously questions which you have to confront, they take a different form on different occasions, and contradictions are at play. (Ruth First speaking at the social science conference in Maputo on the 13th of August 1982)

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Michel Cahen, another colleague at the CEA, suggests, 'It would be wrong to attribute to the researchers at the Centre a systematic complacency with regard to FRELIMO. To the contrary, the criticism of certain matters is relentless and very detailed, with the aim of helping FRELIMO to correct its mistakes' (Cahen 1982: 114). Mark Wuyts, who worked closely with First on The Mozambican Miner, said at the conclusion of the project, 'At the time, I do not think any of us, including Ruth, were fully aware of how critical the Mozambican Miner would turn out to be in terms of questioning FRELIMO's policies, not just on matters of employment and migrant labour, but also on agriculture and on macroeconomic development' (Wuyts 2014: 69). Throughout her work in Mozambique with the CEA, Ruth First demonstrated a willingness and commitment to disagree with FRELIMO whenever the evidence suggested she do so.

Her academic activities in Britain before her appointment at Durham and her research in Mozambique are witness to her concern to train in and to maintain professional standards in her research. For example, during her exile in England, in 1966 she enrolled in courses at the London School of Economics (LSE). As Alan Wieder (2011: 91) reports:

> At LSE she met scholars from across the world … and she had the honour of studying with

> Belgian-born Ralph Milliband, a one-time student of Harold Laski and one of the leading anti-Stalinist theoreticians of New Left politics. Ruth took Milliband's courses at LSE, and ... Milliband admired Ruth First.

Further witness to her efforts to maintain high professional standards is the pains First took to engage with well-trained researchers with established professional expertise and to bring them to Maputo and the CEA, and her extended efforts to provide serious training to the students at the university who would be gathering data. It is significant that the researchers she recruited came from a variety of disciplines, as Strategy 1 recommends. Among these researchers was Bridget O'Laughlin, a US-trained anthropologist who came from Stanford University where she was an assistant professor and whose later work placed her in a group dubbed "the rock stars" of agrarian studies (O'Laughlin 2013). Another was Jeanne Penvenne, who came to Maputo to conduct her PhD research in history at Boston University's African Studies Centre; during her research in Maputo 'the combination of archival research and oral histories [that] would become the hallmark of her historical methodology' at Tufts University (Rankin 2018).

A third was First's own Durham student Judith Head, who went on to work in the Sociology Department at the University of Cape Town.

With respect to the training of the students, Wieder (2011: 98) remarks:

> Students and staff went throughout the country, set up camps and learned about and worked with tea workers, contract harbour workers, small farmers and cotton workers. Correspondingly, connecting their theoretical training and field work, they learned about the colonial aspects and exploitation of family agriculture, cheap contract labour, the petit-bourgeois trader class and technological exploitation. These were all issues that were later expanded upon in Ruth's posthumous book, Black Gold, a publication that came out of CEA work.

We see further evidence of her attempt to maintain high professional standards in the research even when under time pressure as well as of the pluralism of approaches she adopted for the research programme in the painstaking way she constructed the methodology for the research for Black Gold. For instance, in 'Working notes on Black Gold in the Ruth First papers, Senate House Library, London, 1977' we find the plan for method to include:

- **Review the literature on**
  - Migrant labour
  - Peasant economies in labour reserve areas
- **Construct questionnaires for miners' and peasants' household**
- **Other techniques for complex social issues**
- **Preliminary**
  - Open discussion with many different community representatives (teachers, men's and women's movements ...)
  - Attend meetings, participate in the work of peasants
  - Consult local archives, administrative records
  - Visit agricultural stations, training schools
- **Analysis**

The work plan indicates not just that close attention was paid to method, but also attention to methodological and evidential pluralism—note the combination of archival, observational and interview methods. Also note the range of research respondents included—teachers, peasants and migrant labourers. You can also see an explicit discussion of the methodology employed in the published results, in the Introduction to Black Gold, which reveals the same kind of attention to the variety of methods and the use of several different kinds of evidence used. This is very close to the strategies of pluralism that were recommended in Section Five of this chapter and is indicative that objectivity was being pursued.

For another example, here is what First's colleague, Brigitte O'Laughlin, says of her work and the CEA on another issue:

> [O]ur research on labour process in the port of Maputo in 1981 initially came from a request that we look at the difficulties faced by the port in assuring a regular supply of labour from rural areas around Maputo. In our counter-proposal we drew from our reading on the changes in the organisation of port-work in Southern Africa and elsewhere, on theoretical reading on Taylorism and "socialist emulation", discussions with Robert Linhart (1976) who was invited to the CEA by Ruth and Aquino, and by our preliminary interviews with port-workers that indicated that by 1981 most of them were living in urban or sub-urban areas and that the reasons for labour shortages in the port had little to do with the seasonal demands of peasant production. (O'Laughlin 2014a: 38)

These detailed descriptions of working practices indicate another element of good practice associated with objectivity—transparency. In Black Gold there are clear descriptions of methods, such as who was interviewed, why and the details of the questions that they were asked (First 1983: 5). This is indicative of transparency in method. Black Gold also shows transparency in values. There is no effort to suppress the values and purposes of the research, rather First and her co-authors are explicit that their work is aimed at assisting the Mozambican government and citizens: 'In other words the focus is on those aspects which have the most immediate implications for the government and the people of Mozambique' (First 1983: 3). Furthermore:

> The purpose of this study, which was undertaken within two years of Mozambique's independence, was to assist in the elaboration of a socialist alternative to a system of labour which grossly exploited the working class, which disfigured agricultural production in the southern regions of the country. (First 1983: 5)

There are additional ways in which First and her colleagues promoted transparency. A standard suggestion in contemporary philosophy of science to improve transparency is that work be made available for public scrutiny, to prevent troubling values from being smuggled into the scientific process (De Melo-Martin and Intemann 2018: 126–7). We see this kind of impetus across Ruth First's work, especially in her work as co-founder of the journal, RoAPE, where the explicit intention was 'to be informative, seriously argued and thoroughly documented without jargon, heavy footnoting and the turgid unreadable prose of most academic publications' (RoAPE 1973). Having more readable content allows for greater scrutiny from a wider audience, thus, increasing the prospects of objectivity.

To summarise, it seems there is some question about how much impact Ruth First's research in Mozambique had. Her legacy and that of the work she did with the CEA in Mozambique is complicated. Gavin Williams suggests that the research done by the CEA did not have an immediate impact on FRELIMO policies. Similarly, in a 1985 study on migrant labour in Mozambique, Grete Brochmann indicates that FRELIMO officials largely ignored many of the recommendations that emerged from the Mozambican Miner (Brochmann 1985). However, regardless of the uptake of Ruth First's work in Mozambique, what about its objectivity? We have claimed that a sensible notion of objectivity for activist research does not require that research be value free nor that it be free of subjective judgement. It should, however, require due diligence to use the right methods to achieve the right results for the right purposes. We hope that our brief discussion here has made it clear that while Ruth First was at the CEA, she regularly and self-consciously made serious and varied efforts to guard against the risks of bias and to secure

objectivity, which are essential when undertaking activist research. Current and future scholars hoping to engage in activist research would do well to study the methods and practices of Ruth First and the CEA. As her friend and colleague Gavin Williams said about her in an interview with Katherine Furman in Oxford, July 2022:

> You couldn't turn development into (just) South Africa. She took that on and she did it well, she did everything well. She didn't know how to do something badly. She was never sure that what she was doing was good enough but actually she never, ever, to my knowledge did anything badly. (Furman 2022: personal interview, clip 4 of 19: 01:31-01:54)

Conclusion

Activists have produced a wealth of considered, interesting and useful research on topics related to their activism. In many cases, this research not only contributes to our shared body of scientific knowledge, but also to the achievement of their own aims and the advancement of the causes. We looked at Ruth First's work throughout her career on topics closely related to revolutionary socialist causes as an exemplary case.

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Accounts of the kind that we looked at in Section Three which are sceptical of the possibility of objective activist research, overlook these important knowledge-producing activities by activists. They point to a variety of additional obstacles to "getting it right" that activist research presents—for example, the involvement of social and political values and various cognitive biases. They suggest that due to these risks, there are almost no circumstances in which the research that activists conduct should be counted as objective. We agree that paying attention to such risks to "getting it right" is important and we think such risks should be taken seriously, however, we do not agree that these preclude objectivity for activist research. Instead, we take it that responsibly navigating these risks and obstacles is a key component of objectivity in activist research.

In this chapter, we have combined these thoughts with the methodological insights of conceptual engineering to begin to develop a theory of objectivity for activist research, OBFAR. We have focused on flagging and clarifying the threats to fact-finding that we think are associated with activist research (Section Four) and on providing some guidance on how these obstacles can be appropriately navigated by activist researchers. The resulting OBFAR concept allows us to give good activist research the merit it deserves, whilst clarifying the demands that objectivity in such cases makes over and above what we might expect to find in non-activist settings. Objectivity for activist research, we think, does not demand

that activists desert their causes nor that they abandon their partisan values nor that they abstain from engaging in research at all. It does, however, require due diligence to use the right methods to achieve the right results for the right purposes in the face of the additional challenges that their position might pose for "getting it right".

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Part Three

Research and Activism

Chapter 5: Rick Turner and Engaged Political Philosophy as Activist Research

Christine Hobden

Introduction

Saleem Badat's detailed exploration of anti-apartheid activist and scholar, Ruth First's life and work presents a compelling exposition and theorisation of activist research. Activist research on this account represents the unity of theory and practice (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume); for the activist scholar, understanding and knowledge creation must be effectively translated into 'organized political action' with transformative aims (O'Malley as cited in Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Ruth First, Badat argues, would agree that research and knowledge 'must inform social action in the interests of building egalitarian, equitable, humane and democratic societies in which all are able to live rich, rewarding, cultured, secure, healthy, and dignified lives' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). In Badat's contribution, the work of 'inform' is cached out with an emphasis on 'the development of political programmes, manifestos, plans, strategies, policies and tactics' (PSPs), and further with an emphasis on research questions that emerge through active membership in political movements (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Badat's account begins from a close reading of the life, scholarship, and activism of Ruth First, and in doing so, leads us to a particular view of activist scholarship.

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In this contribution, I raise the question of how this view of activist scholarship might be shaped differently if we began from another anti-apartheid activist who too is described as both scholar and activist: Richard (Rick) Turner. Both First and Turner were deeply committed to resisting the apartheid regime and both viewed academic rigour and critique as necessary tools to do so effectively. Their disciplines and approaches were different, yet both, in their life and work, were considered a powerful enough threat to the apartheid regime to be assassinated: Turner, aged 36, was shot through a window of his Durban home in early 1978 after a five year banning order (Keniston 2013), and First was killed on the orders of Craig Williamson by a parcel bomb in 1982 at the age of 57 (South African History Online 2011a).

Badat describes activist research as oriented towards social change: 'Not content simply to critique the status quo, (it) seek(s) to change it' (Isaacman as cited by Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). He argues that First's status as an activist researcher is 'indisputable' given her research's focus on analysis of and for PSPs (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). This emphasis on social change is evident too throughout Turner's work, as I will argue in the sections that follow. Yet, the introductory chapter to Turner's 1972 *Eye of the Needle*, is titled '*The Need for Utopian Thinking'*. In today's disciplinary language "utopian thinking" might be more accurately classed as ideal theorising: that is, developing normative accounts of how society ought to function, the pursuit of unpacking what the ideal is. While Badat's presentation of activist research includes the 'analysis of the philosophical or theoretical underpinnings of PSPs' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume), I will argue that Badat's analysis does not fully capture the fullness of the role of what Turner termed utopian thinking in achieving social change. I argue that a Turner-inspired understanding of engaged political philosophy highlights the role that normative theorising of the ideal can play in transforming activists and shaping the foundations of activism in its scope and orientation. Following Badat's emphasis on the role of positionality in activist research, I argue that beginning from a different example of activist research can shed new light on the study of activist research.

Feminist and decolonial scholarship has convincingly argued for attention to how positionality can shape scholarship–both in what questions we interrogate, the ways we do so, and how we understand and frame the subsequent data and research conclusions (Dotson 2011; Collins 1986; Mellor 2022; Kumalo 2020). Badat too points to this: 'not just ends but also the theory, problems, topics and priorities that activist researchers pursue are conditioned by social and institutional contexts' (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume) and argues, the analysis of First's activist research supports, contrary to 'eurocentric epistemology', that the person of the scholar is deeply relevant and speaks and acts from distinct positions within power structures (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume). At times, drawing attention to positionality is a powerful critique of work that has failed to identify significant blind spots that directly influence the impact of a policy or theory, typically on a marginalised group. In political theory, a prominent example of this is the work of Charles W. Mills and Carole Patemen on the gendered and racial blind spots in social contract thinking (Mills 1997; Pateman 1988). In other cases, as I suggest here, attention to positionality and starting points creates space for expansion rather than tension: many, overlapping stories provide a richer, more textured picture and can serve to surface the core direction or truth of the matter at hand. This chapter, therefore, aims to present another lens on activist research, not in contrast to Badat's, but with the aim to widen one's view when reflecting upon and undertake activist research.

As an illustration of this way of approaching knowledge creation one can turn to recent research on the constellation Pleaides. Ancient communities around the world have myths about this constellation

(McClure 2021; Norris 2020; Norris and Norris 2021). Scholars have noted, that while these myths differ in some details, almost all of them have seven sisters or characters, with one that is in hiding, lost, or killed (McClure 2021; Norris and Barnaby 2021). Today we typically can only see six stars to the naked eye, however, the overlap of these different ancient myths points towards a deeper understanding of the history of the constellation. In puzzling how separate ancient communities such as those in Ancient Greece and Aboriginal Australia came to share similar myths, astronomers have used modern tools to analyse the motion of stars in the constellation to identify how stars that once looked like two to the naked eye now appear merged as one (Norris 2020; Norris and Barnaby 2021). Our knowledge of the constellation is enriched by our access to these myths told from different places—the myths while different in many respects, together provide a direction forward in knowledge creation both in our understanding of the skies and in the ancient communities living under them.

In what follows then, I argue that Turner's life and work can provide a different starting point to fruitfully expand how we think about the different dimensions and opportunities of activist research. In our aspirations for social change, this inclusive and multi-layered approach to activism and knowledge creation is essential to creating sustained resistance and tools for building a more just society. In exploring his utopian thinking and his written reflections on the value of utopian thinking within an oppressive state, I argue that a Turner-inspired approach to political philosophy can serve as another dimension of how scholarship can participate in the project of social change. This contribution is thus, framed in line with Turner's openness to engaging with a wide range of anti-apartheid ideas and approaches, so long as they are aimed toward social change (Keniston 2013: 99). It offers a kind of scholarship that is boldly ambitious in what it calls upon us to aspire to, but at the same time, unambitious insofar as it positions itself as one contribution upon many in the project of knowledge creation (Hobden 2021: 6). My hope is that this contribution adds one further dimension to consider as we grapple with how best to create research and research communities that instigate, guide, inspire and implement projects of social change.

Situating Rick Turner

Turner and First occupied different geographical and intellectual spaces; while the active period of their scholarship overlapped, their geographies did not. By the time Turner returned from his PhD studies at the Sorbonne in August 1966 (Keniston 2013: 38), First had left South Africa for the UK and she remained there throughout Turner's active years at the then University of Natal (1970-1978, including the five years he was a banned). First moved to Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA) at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane

(Centre for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University) in Maputo in 1977 (South African History Online 2011a), only a few months before Turner's death in January 1978 (South African History Online 2011b).

Intellectually, Turner was a trained philosopher in the existential tradition, a training that shaped his life and activism deeply just as First's journalism can be seen to have informed her later approach to research (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). After completing his PhD at the Sorbonne in Paris, Turner returned to South Africa to assist his mother on their family farm, but soon 'found his footing as a radical educator within the liberal and left-wing student movement' (Keniston 2013: 39). Turner kept an 'open house' on the Stellenbosch farm, Welcarmas, where 'serious political issues' were discussed and where the central activity was 'engaged, critical conversation' (Keniston 2013: 49–51). While the apartheid secret police deemed such gatherings as parties with inebriated students, biographer Keniston described the farm as a sort of 'free university' space (Keniston 2013: 39, 48). In the following years, Turner continued to create these spaces of radical and critical engagement in Durban (Keniston 2013: 102), where he moved to take up a position as lecturer of political philosophy at the University of Natal in 1970 (South African History Online 2011a.), and engaged too with a wide variety of other left groups, remaining radical, however, politically 'ecumenical' (Colman as cited in Keniston 2013: 51). Turner's commitment to social change would often manifest in the expression of his ideas, in opportunities to give lectures, to teach, or to create space for critical discussion. It was, however, also pragmatic, guided by the principle that one should not rule out anyone who was willing to work towards social change: 'he was determined enough to find any and all potential openings for change in South Africa' (Keniston 2013: 100). Turner engaged with a wide range of individuals and civil society organisations, and was an active part of a number of resistance movements and moments (Keniston 2013: 99). From his early days back in the Western Cape, Turner was part of the University of Cape Town's (UCT) student sit-in to protest the government preventing the hiring of Archie Mafeje (Keniston 2013: 43–45; South African History Online' 2011b), and in Durban he was an active advisor to the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) (Keniston 2013: 66, 114). Turner's scholarship focused not only on the utopian, but also on the analysis of conditions on the ground, as seen in his participation in writing a detailed account of the 1973 Durban Strikes (Keniston 2013: 126).

Perhaps most centrally, Turner's activism was expressed in teaching. He viewed teaching as a tool towards freedom (Keniston 2013: 77), a fundamental belief that informed his critique that existing schooling and teaching methods controlled and trained students to live out specific roles in a hierarchical social structure (Keniston 2013: 86–88). His own style of teaching was instead deconstructive (Morphet as cited in Keniston 2013: 79). Turner's teaching aimed to 'un-train', to create space for students 're-evaluate their value systems' and their societies (Keniston 2013: 77). This approach had a lasting impact on Turner's

students and often developed into engagements well beyond the classroom (such as aforementioned gatherings at his home and participation in student meetings and protests) (Keniston 2013: 82). Turner, along with others, set up an organisation, Education Reform Association, which aimed to be a platform for students, teachers and parents to critically engage with each other and share ideas around schooling in South Africa with the aim of 'triggering' changes in the system (Keniston 2013: 91). And, even while living under a banning order, together with others Turner set up and developed materials for the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE), an educational programme for workers that functioned ultimately as a type of correspondence course (Keniston 2013: 154–157). Here we see some similarity to First who is described as 'flushed with elation' at the experience of teaching in Dar es Salaam where her subject, development studies, was seen to have relevance and the students were responsive (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Her research at CEA was motivated by the need for research-based contributions to the work of consolidating the revolution, but also, relatedly, the education of those in whose hands the revolution rested (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume).

This brief introduction into the life of Turner highlights just how fully he as a scholar was an activist: the many ways he participated in and initiated action towards change. Utopian thinking was one (albeit central) tool among the many that Turner brought to his activism, including his teaching style, charismatic ability to bring people together, and his driving commitment to find a way to break through 'the cracks in the system' (Keniston 2013: 100). Turner's analysis of the South African political context did not become a driving force of change. Perhaps this is because his ideas did not fully capture the complexity of the given moment, or simply because activists at the time chose a different direction. We should also consider that Turner's ban in 1973 prevented him from continuing to bring these ideas into the resistance discourse (Keniston 2013: 128, 133). However, Turner's philosophical thinking was described as a 'catalyst' and his role as a thinker and teacher is described time and time again as transformative for those who encountered him (O'Meara as cited in Keniston 2013: 133, 234).

On Badat's description of activist research, the fact that Turner's theory of participatory democracy did not form the basis for a political movement's PSPs (political programmes, policy, manifesto, plans, tactics or strategy) would exclude it from the category of activist research. Drawing upon Turner's existentialist perspective, the following section presents the case for activist research of a different kind. This expanded understanding of the role of research within activism better encapsulates the full range in which the work of the scholar can be integral to the work of changing society.

Turner's activist utopian research

Turner was a committed existentialist who drew little to no line between his academic, political and personal lives: 'he was committed to making his life choices consistent with his political philosophies' (Keniston 2013: 69). The title of Billy Keniston's biography of Turner, *Choosing to be Free*, captures the role of this core existential commitment: the idea that, ultimately, we are radically free, there is always a choice. Turner's resistance and activism was rooted in claiming this freedom, even within a deeply oppressive state. In Turner's personal life, this manifested in, for example, openly living with and marrying Foszia Fisher in defiance of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. Dan O'Meara recalls Turner speaking of this in exactly these terms of freedom: 'I have chosen to be free and I accept the consequences' (Keniston 2013: 76). In his academic life, Turner's existentialist philosophy was present in his commitment to the 'necessity of utopian thinking', and the role it can play in understanding and evaluating our own society, identifying the changeable, and more boldly envisaging a changed society (Turner 1980).

Turner's *Eye of the Needle* illustrates that he understood his writing as a tool to work towards concrete social change. We might think this is despite its utopian nature, yet Turner argues in the opening chapter, 'The Need for Utopian Thinking', that it is because of its utopian nature (Turner 1980). We can see this aim of influence in the fact that the book's envisaged audience shapes the approach to the issues at hand. The book was first published in 1972 as a publication of the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPROCAS), thus, consciously reaching a particular audience of white liberals, who Turner addresses explicitly. In the book, and other work, Turner makes use of Christian frameworks and examples—see, for example, Chapter 2, 'Human Models: Capitalism and Christianity' (Turner 1980) and in 'What is Political Philosophy?', the use of the principle of 'love thy neighbour' (Turner 1968: 1–2). Turner himself was not a practising Christian, and later converted to Islam to marry Foszia Fisher (South African History Online: 2011a). Yet, he strategically made use of examples and addressed issues that were relevant to his audience, an audience who he explicitly aimed to convert to agents for more radical societal change. *The Eye of the Needle* is, therefore, both explicitly framed as utopian thinking, that is theorising of the ideal, and explicit in its aim to create social change. This combination is ostensibly in tension, however, through closer analysis provides insight into the role of research in changing not only policy, but people themselves.

In the opening chapter of *Eye of the Needle* Turner explicitly challenges South African liberals. Here, Turner appears to be priming his readers to better receive his radical theory of participatory worker democracy through explaining and arguing for the value of utopian thinking and openness to the full extent of what is changeable within society. He accuses white liberals of falling within those who do not

account for the full realm of the possible: instead, white liberals fail to distinguish between the 'absolutely impossible' (such as a lion becoming vegetarian) and the 'other-things-being-equal impossible' (such as a Black person becoming prime minister of 1970s South Africa) (Turner 1980: 1). In failing to make this distinction, liberals aim too conservatively in their work for change, offering up their "old goats" in an attempt to protect their prize lambs, but never imagining or acting toward a world where the predator can be resisted head on (Turner 1980: 1). One of the goals of the book can be seen as convincing white liberals to radically rethink the realm of the changeable. For Turner, society and the liberals who he addresses, treat political and social institutions as mountains which we have to work around (Turner 1980: 2). The existentialist Turner argues instead that social institutions are fundamentally changeable—there is always a collective choice. While there might be limits through the imperatives of human nature and organisation, for the most part our institutions seem settled only because we live within one small moment of time—and when we view these institutions within history, we should notice that social institutions can and do change (Turner 1980: 2).

Much of Turner's published philosophical work does not provide specific policy guidance to political movements or activists, yet it does significant work to re-orient the scope of activist work and to inspire more radical ambitions. This could appear to be a strong contrast with First, who was described as 'the least utopian of the revolutionaries' (Miliband cited in Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). I would suggest, however, that this phrasing mis-frames the contrast between First and Turner. This use of utopian appears to point more to the idea of idealistic than the idea of ideal theorising. It highlights First's dedication to paying attention to the facts on the ground and the ways that policy needed to better respond to these realities: much of her research centred on analysis of, and for, the development of political programmes, manifestos, plans, strategies, policies and tactics (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). And, importantly, it speaks to her commitment to not take movement policy and ideological priorities as a given to work within, but as starting points that remain subject to critique and evidence-based interrogation (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). First's political commitments provided the 'questions to be researched, but not the answers' (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume). This use of rigorous critique and analysis to inform policy creates activist research that prioritises close working relationships with those developing policy to inform the relevant research questions. At the same time, however, it remains critical to ensure the production of independent research that can better steer the movement (rather than producing research to back up existing ideologies). Turner too argued for this kind of close attention to the facts, to always begin with interrogating the reality of the context, however, this understanding of context was used by Turner as a foundation for theorising the ideal, rather than for research aimed primarily at informing policy.

Elsewhere I have introduced what I term 'engaged political philosophy' as a philosophical research approach rooted within the work and life of Turner (Hobden 2024). In laying this out briefly below, I aim to highlight that the distinction between First and Turner is not a contrast between the idealist Turner and the pragmatist First, but a distinction between scholars who, both committed to resistance and change, focused on different aspects and stages of revolution toward a changed society. First's activist research provided on-the-ground and practical support and guidance (and challenging critiques) to a liberation movement as it developed policies and strategies. Turner's scholarship was oriented toward a prior step in the process of societal change: convincing people that change is possible and widening the scope of what that change might look like in our political imagination. Turner used the theorising of an ideal society as a tool to challenge the ideological frameworks through which we engage with the reality around us and to shed light on implicit assumptions about society and institutions. Utopian thinking, as Turner terms it, brings ideological frameworks and implicit assumptions into dialogue with other possible ways of being and so provides the tools to better identify assumptions and challenge them (Turner 1968: 1).

Engaged political philosophy as a form of activist research

Others have argued that Turner's approach to political strategy can be viewed as one that started with the utopian and worked backwards towards more tangible strategies and goals (Keniston 2013: 108). In other words: begin with an account of a good society, follow with an analysis of the obstacles to that society and then suggest political strategies based on the above (Nash as cited in Keniston 2013: 108). This approach is contrasted with the more familiar goals and strategies of those working for social change: 'developing strategies to respond to immediate problems' (Keniston 2013: 108). While this flipping of the order aptly captures the tension Turner experienced in much of his activism, a deeper exploration of Turner's approach to utopian thinking reveals too the activist strength in the philosophy itself—in its development and in engagement with it. Here I argue for the value of the activist nature of engaged political philosophy, not in the kinds of political strategies it produces (although it may do this), but in the prior work it does in transforming individuals and widening and orienting the scope of activist ambition for social change. This argument does not claim that First's work had no theoretical grounding, rather it points to the particular value in Turner's approach of producing normative theory of the ideal that was rooted within its context and explicitly, a part of the project of seeking to change society. Through an analysis of Turner's life and work we can identify four main (overlapping) steps of a philosophical research approach that aligns with his use of utopian thinking as a tool of resistance and

activism and, I argue, provides a useful method for activist research today.

First, one needs to understand the societal context. This includes working to verify and understand the basic facts and background to certain events as well as identifying how these facts are implicitly interpreted (Turner 1968: 1). In order to get to the heart of what is changeable in a society, Turner believed we need to understand the contingency of our present, as just one moment in history, and the implicit assumptions and beliefs that shaped our behaviour and our interpretation of the world around us in this moment (Turner 1980: 5–6). Our everyday actions and institutions are a representation of these implicit assumptions, and through interrogating them we can better understand ourselves, our society, and the foundations for our utopian vision (Turner 1968: 1).

Second, and related, one needs to understand one's own position within the societal context. Turner argues that our theory should be shaped by, and even at times constrained by, considerations of what a given principle would look like in action in the context in which we are theorising: 'moral principles are useless without an understanding of the situation' (Turner 1968: 2). Who develops and implements this theory is thus, a central consideration. The positionality of the scholar can also shape one's ability to be aware of the full extent of the possible, since, for example, privilege may obscure certain obstacles or structural injustices that ought to inform theory. Beginning with an understanding of context and positionality is likely to appear obvious, particularly to activist researchers of First's kind. For the development of ideal theory, however, it requires articulation to distinguish what Turner understood as utopian thinking from other forms of ideal theorising that begin from first principles.

Third, one begins to develop the utopian theory, rooted in the analysis of steps one and two: utopian thought here is an 'invitation to begin the process of trying to change the society in a particular direction' (Turner 1980: 99). It is utopian in that it imagines the ideal society to which we aspire, however, it is not utopian in the sense of the impossible. Steps one and two are central in the work they do of identifying the changeable—those things that are not in fact imperatives of human nature or organisation, but products of our collective choice, assumptions, and beliefs. This provides the scope in which the utopian, or ideal, society can be articulated. One value of this step is that this scope is often much larger than it seems when we focus on more immediate tasks. It is limited only by absolute possibility, not restricted to only that which is 'other-things-being-equal' possible (Turner 1980: 1).

Fourth, the theorist should bring the theory back into dialogue with our context. This helps first, to deepen the theory and enrich it, considering its relationship to the context and its application within the context. It also plays a role in evaluating and understanding our society. Turner argued that to see our society against the 'yardstick' of the utopian gives us the tools to truly evaluate, diagnose, and understand our society as a first step towards changing it (Turner 1980: 99). It is only here that Turner turns to more

concrete strategies for change, as illustrated in the postscript to the *Eye of the Needle* (Turner 1980: Chapter 9). The philosophical work has prepared us and laid the groundwork for such thinking—it has provided tools to identify and challenge the implicit assumptions and beliefs in society and through envisaging the utopian society, it has built a new (and Turner argues, more accurate) ideological lens through which to interpret, analyse, and change our society (Turner 1968: 1).

We might worry that this kind of utopian thinking falls prey to the concerns raised in Badat's chapter about prescriptive or legislative scholarship that dictates to the people or the state what they ought to do and in so doing, removing or undermining, important democratic values of agency and political decision-making (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Schatzki, as Badat usefully points out, rightly highlights that this is a false dilemma: prescriptive theory, or in the Turnerian language, utopian theory, can be brought into public discourse as one theory to consider alongside others with the public having freedom to discuss, adapt or reject it (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). In addition, Turner widens the scope of how we might consider the value and use of utopian thinking; and is consistently described as the opposite of narrowly prescriptive, using utopian thinking as a tool to facilitate others' critically engaging in their own beliefs and views rather than presenting his own (Keniston 2013: 77–79).

The role of utopian thinking for Turner is not then to point to what we must do in terms of concrete actions nor simply to point only to the ends for which we must aim. Utopian thinking as a process provides at least four valuable tools to activism: first, it challenges activists to consistently reflect and evaluate the realm of their activism—to be bold, but rooted in context, in determining what it is that is open to change in society; second, utopian theory can be used as a device against which the current society can be analysed, providing frameworks and models to better understand why the current society is the way it is, and to more accurately evaluate and diagnose the morality of our current society and its institutions; third, utopian thinking is itself transformative insofar as it is an act of freedom within an oppressive society and requires a critical examination of one's own and one's society's beliefs and assumptions; finally, utopian thinking provides the activist with an antidote to cynicism, to some of that hope of which Turner was consistently characterised by those around him (Keniston 2013: 235). Viewing normative and prescriptive theory in this way offers new insight into the role it can play in activist scholarship and responds to concerns of a tension between the robust participatory nature of democratic movements and normative theory that prescribes the "right" way forward.

Conclusion

In deeply oppressive societies, pragmatism, immediacy and small victories animate resistance movements: each life matters and so each victory that protects or improves lives is rightly, deeply valued. We have seen too, in the case of South Africa, the central role in resistance of the slow and painstaking work of organisation, and the essential role that researchers played in the development of policy in the post-Apartheid era. Turner's approach of thinking through utopian theory does not suggest we should turn away from pragmatism or organisation. I have argued that a Turner-inspired approach to utopian thinking does not remove us from the practical tasks of social change, instead it can have a central role in shaping the individuals within, and the scope and orientation of, our projects of social change. My hope is that this look at activist research, beginning from a different position, can enrich our perspective on the different ways, and the different stages in which, the project of knowledge creation can play a role in our pursuit of social change.

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Chapter 6: Ruth First in the Twenty-First Century: Activist Research in the Age of Climate Change

Janet Cherry

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw lessons both from Ruth First's scholarship and from her lived experience as an activist-scholar in Mozambique in the 1980s and reflect on Saleem Badat's earlier chapters on activist research. I relate activist research and the role of universities in Southern Africa to the need for a regional strategy for sustainable development in the context of the transition from fossil fuels in the twenty-first century. I draw key lessons for the practice of research, bridging the gap between grassroots empirical research and state policy formulation and implementation; as well as suggesting directions for the content of such research. This is both at the micro or local level, where I advocate cooperative and transformative approaches to the building of a sustainable economy, and at the macro, sub-regional level where integrated, decentralised and sustainable use of resources, as well as both old and new technologies to build a more just economy, are explored.

Through this exploration, four types of activist scholarship are identified. The first is the critical scholarship of the left, which becomes activist scholarship when it is in direct support of popular movements. The second is critical scholarship in support of the state in development of policy; this becomes activist scholarship when it reflects the voice of the "grassroots" in asserting a progressive policy agenda. The third is participatory research at grassroots level, which empowers the participants, and which can inform both policy and/or popular movements. The last type of activist scholarship is participatory action research, which intervenes to challenge power relations and empower the participants to explore alternatives. The third and fourth types of activist scholarship are illustrated with examples from Southern Africa. These are not distinct or mutually exclusive categories of research, and there are overlaps between them, especially between the second and third types; yet the typology may be useful in indicating that the scholarship which empowers those who are the least powerful in our society, is the activist scholarship that has the greatest transformative potential.

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Climate change and the sub-regional context [1]

The Southern African region has borders; however, nature does not acknowledge these borders. All human societies in the region are dependent on what nature provides. The food-energy-water nexus in the region exists within the global political economy, within a global system of production and within a global food system. This global system has, over the past two hundred years, resulted in climate change which is having, and is going to have, a particularly harsh impact on this region. Ruth First, working as an activist scholar in Mozambique forty years ago, held this understanding of the regional political economy at the centre of her work. As her friend, comrade and colleague, Bridget O'Laughlin (2014: 30) wrote:

> she thought and worked with (and drummed into us) the concept of a Southern Africa as regional "system" historically forged by a distinctive form of capitalist production grounded in migrant labour, concentration of capital in South Africa and racialised political dualism. She knew that most South Africans and Mozambicans did not think about the region in this way, but part of her mission was to explain why an enduring revolutionary project depended on their doing so.

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This chapter takes as a starting point the sub-regional context, as well as the global context of climate change. By the sub-region I refer specifically to South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Research conducted over the past decade in this sub-regional context is explored, reflecting on what Ruth First was doing in relation to training researchers and in relation to policy research and the question of "what she would do now", in changed circumstances. The assumptions made are that there is an overriding imperative to respond to the challenge of climate change. This response is determined both by the position of these countries in the rapidly decarbonising global economy, and by the need for resilience to the climate shocks which the sub-region is already experiencing. Within this context, the focus is on the poorest residents of the poorest countries in the region. How can they participate in the

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1   This chapter is based on research conducted by students in the Department of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, as well as action research projects which I have led over the past decade. The detail of each of these research projects is published elsewhere, however, the overall topic of scholarship in the context of climate change in the sub-region was first presented at a seminar at the Rhodes University Institute of Social and Economic Research on 16 March 2012, entitled *'Africa Burning: Southern African livelihood strategies in the context of climate change'*. A decade later, as part of a sabbatical research project on 'Emancipatory scholarship, climate change and sustainable development alternatives in Sub Saharan Africa', I travelled to Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, visiting research projects and institutions and presented *'Emancipatory scholarship, climate change and sustainable development policy in Southern Africa: Towards a regional approach'* (Guest lecturer at Malawi University of Science and Technology, 20 September 2022; Guest lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 29 September 2022). I draw on these unpublished lectures in this chapter, as well as on my field visits in 2022, on the findings of the research projects and on related secondary sources.

transition from fossil fuel? What is the potential for them to benefit from this transition, rather than be victims of it?

Mozambique and Malawi are among the poorest countries in the world, measured in terms of GDP per capita; Zimbabwe is not faring much better, despite the enormous wealth generated from the sale of gold and diamonds over the past decade. South Africa remains the regional hegemon, the only economy with a strong industrial base, an agricultural sector producing a surplus for export, and an economy that despite chronic unemployment and drastic inequality, is large enough to absorb millions of economic migrants from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique (The Global Economy 2023).[2] I argue that a dual strategy is needed: an integrated approach to the transition which builds on mineral resources for development of new "green" industries, and simultaneously the building of decentralised, democratised, resilient and sustainable agriculture, food, water and energy systems. I explore how to engage in the creation of such an integrated regional strategy through critical and activist scholarship.

What Ruth First did

> In this regard it continues to bear emphasising that Ruth First was a brilliant social scientist – albeit a revolutionary social scientist (and, again, she would have made no real distinction between the two, between her roles as revolutionary and as social scientist). For, as a social scientist, she knew that there was no substitute for clear thinking and hard work – for a genuine science. (Saul 2014a: 121)

Reflecting on the work of the Centro de Estudos Africanos (CES) (Centre for African Studies) in the 1980s, through CEA (1982) and others who worked with Ruth First in Mozambique in the context of the transition to socialism, there are lessons to be drawn in the context of the twenty-first century, where we face a different transition: the transition from fossil fuel. This transition involves a fundamental change in production systems, which were the primary concern of the CAS when Ruth First served as research director. Badat notes Ruth First's innovative intervention in creating an:

> interdisciplinary postgraduate course in development 'on issues of socialist transition in Mozambique within the context of southern Africa,' with the curriculum built 'around the teaching of research by doing collective work' and aimed at both cultivating graduates and

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2   Poorest countries, GDP per capita PPP, 2023: Mozambique US$1494, Malawi US$1683, Zimbabwe US$3515, South Africa US$14284

producing research. (Wuyts 2014: 71 as cited in Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume)

The CEA (1982: 31) emphasised 'the unity of research with teaching and the application of research' and did this through 'field studies on production; a focus on the problem of transforming of production systems'. The same review of the work of the CAS described their work as 'field studies on how state farms and agricultural producer co-operatives, growing and consolidating together, could be the basis for transforming family agriculture' and emphasised that 'in all of these studies the research was concerned to show that the process of transition must be studied as a whole'—and linked to policy formulation and implementation. As the CAS researchers emphasised:

> The purpose of the Centre is thus to provide information on the present conditions of production in order to permit that concrete measures be devised to implement general strategy ... Thus the aim of the CEA has not been to produce a series of definitive research studies but rather to make social research an acceptable step in the formulation and implementation of policy (CEA 1982: 35).

Mark Wuyts, a colleague of First's at the CEA, explained the relationship between research and policy:

> Applied research must enter into the domain of contested views about how to define a problem or look for its solution.' Very much in issue was 'the role of research in a process of transition: whether it involved passive execution or implementation of policy or instead active and critical engagement with policy'. (Wuyts 2014: 62, as cited in Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume)

Ruth First, as an activist scholar, was concerned primarily to contributing effectively to the transformation of society; the critical yet supportive nature of the empirical research and its application as policy was an ongoing tension:

> There is the difficulty of moving from a work experience which makes critique and opposition the most important role of the radical researcher to one in which analysis is critical in form, because it operates within a perspective of social transformation, but has to confront actual problems of that transformation. (CEA 1982: 35)

Badat's chapters on Ruth First emphasise the exploration of 'the connections between activist research

and the development of political programmes, manifestos, plans, strategies, policies and tactics (PSPs, in short)' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). While all such research must be critical—'if all activist research is or should be critical research, critical research, while valuable, is not activist research' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume)—it is not necessarily autonomous. Yet the question of autonomy of the activist scholar can only be resolved in specific context:

> I have suggested that it is perfectly possible for activist researchers to balance 'commitment' and autonomy when it comes to certain kinds of PSP research and when they are not especially concerned whether their research finds favour or not or is used or not. In any event, the task becomes 'impossible' only when activist researchers are and seek to remain active members of movements (as First did). (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume)

Some of the tensions between critical research, autonomy and activism are explored in the examples below. What are the concerns of activist research? Badat notes, quoting Isaacman (2003: 4), that at the core of the agenda of activist research are two 'major initiatives': to 'render audible the voices and concerns of the powerless' and to 'support their struggles aimed at ending exploitative practices and dismantling institutions of oppression' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume).

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How is this to be done? The research should not only be critical, it should be empirically rigorous and clearly communicated (Hale 2017: 13 as cited in Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Badat notes that activist researchers, by definition, do not restrict themselves 'entirely to the academic terrain' but instead 'orient themselves to larger, wider and more diverse publics'. This 'engagement beyond the boundary of the university with the wider public and the communication and shaping of ideas and thinking is integral to the public good function and responsibility of the university' (Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume). Using the above criteria, four types of scholarship—two of which may be defined as activist scholarship but in a narrower definition—in the context of the transition from fossil fuel in the sub-region are identified here.

The first, is the critical scholarship of the 'left' outside of the state: those who, following First, as 'the foremost scholarly critic of the failures of national liberation' (Williams et al. 2014: 9) are profoundly disillusioned with the development path, severely critical of the governing parties and their policies and providing clear warnings of the dangers of continued resource exploitation. Their activist scholarship takes the form of criticism and sometimes of engagement with social movements to contest policy.

The second, is those who conduct critical scholarship with or for the state; some, like Rob Davies, did both in more than one state in the region. This includes those engaged in "evidence-based" policy research, drawing on the work of economists to test the viability of particular development policies for

national governments or regional institutions, in this case the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This category includes scholars based at universities in the region and elsewhere in the world who adopt a "progressive" scholarship in the sense that the unstated intention is to assist in formulation of policies which will, if not end exploitation and oppression, at least build a more just and sustainable society.

The third and fourth types of scholarship are the subject of the research projects working with the grassroots. One involves empirical field research with the poorest residents of the region, analysing livelihoods, production systems and labour migration from the bottom up. The other aims at the more radical goal of interventions to change power relations at local level, and possibly even production systems at regional level. These are the activist-scholar projects described below. First, we assess the profoundly divergent scholarship of the first two types.

Divergent scholarship of the sub-region since Ruth First

John Saul's 2014 book *A Flawed Freedom: Rethinking Southern African Liberation* is dedicated to 'Ruth First, activist, scholar and friend, a martyr in the struggle to achieve freedom in her own country.' A decade into the twenty-first century, Saul painted a grim picture of Mozambique and the subversion of the socialist transition that First was engaged in in the early 1980s, referring to the 'cruel inequality between elite and mass' (Saul 2011: 97).

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Noting that 'mega projects in the extractive sector' are one pillar of Mozambique's development strategy, Saul (2011)agrees with Joseph Hanlon's critique of the role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in creating a new elite; what Hanlon (2021) terms an oligarchy operating within a 'mafia, resource-curse state'. Much of the critical scholarship of the region in the past decade has reflected a profound disillusionment with the development path followed, and a harsh critique of both states and institutions of regional cooperation, notably the SADC.

Hanlon and others have termed the new elites in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, oligarchs, analysing the often-corrupt patronage systems that have emerged, linked not only to global companies and extraction of mineral resources, but to foreign aid and IFIs. Hanlon noted that when Guebuza became president of Mozambique in 2004, he had become rich:

> in part by using his role as transport minister to gain key contracts … He used his tenure (as president) to restructure the Frelimo party into a much more tightly organised patronage system. Government contracts and civil service jobs depended not just on membership but working for the party – and the oligarchs. (Hanlon 2021: 403)

In addition to criticism of Southern African governments, much critical research has focused on the political economy of the region and the situation of the countries in the global capitalist economy (Vieira et al. 1992); the dependence of the sub-regional economies on "extractivism", economies based on mining and fossil fuel extraction, the repatriation of profit and the unequal terms of trade faced by countries of the region (Bond 2006; Toussaint et al. 2019). The new journal *Feminist Africa* published an edition in 2021 on '*Extractivism, Resistance, Alternatives'*, and scholars including Samantha Hargreaves and Isabel Casimiro have built a network of feminist and environmentalist scholars in Southern Africa. A recent study of "green extractivism" in Mozambique (Bruna 2022) warns us of the dangers of the link between extractivism and the transition from fossil fuel; asking the critical question: who benefits?

In some cases, this critical scholarship translates into activist scholarship: researching and providing support for social movements including anti-extractives movements such as the Amadiba Crisis Committee, Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), WoMin (Women in Mining Affected Communities) and others. An article outlining the latter organisation (Mapondera and Hargreaves 2021: 139) succinctly summarises the critique, recounting the experiences of women and noting that 'These are snippets of stories addressing the experience of millions of women across Africa who carry the externalised costs of a development paradigm founded on the large-scale exploitation of natural resources. This extractivist model has been privileged as the development pathway out of poverty for many countries in Africa'.

Badat points out that 'the use, for example, of oral histories and neglected written materials of social movements, grassroots organisations and coalitions are important antidotes to simple and unnuanced master narratives' (Badat in Chapter 3 of this volume). While this is important, the involvement of grassroots organisations and movements in the research process takes this one step further: how do such organisations change the master narrative through their actions?

Other activist-scholars focus on the transition from fossil fuel through the mobilisation of civil society and labour movements around the "just transition" agenda; in South Africa this takes the form of two civil society coalitions, the Climate Justice Charter movement and the Climate Justice Coalition, with the leading activist scholars along with Satgar (2019), being Lenferna (2024) and Williams and Satgar 2013,respectively, who fall into the first kind of scholarship and who in addition, are directly involved in the support of social movements and attempting to contest the state around policy directions. This research is self-defined as outside of the state and is usually 'against the state' (Van der Walt 2019), being highly critical of the ruling parties in the sub-region, in particular the ANC, Frelimo and ZANU-PF. The key lesson that Saul draws from the past few decades is instructive for activist scholars in the current context of climate crisis:

In fact, the principal lesson to be learned from recent southern African history, including that of South Africa, is not so much 'what not to do' as it is the high cost to be paid for choosing 'not to dare' – not to dare to be self-reliant and economically imaginative and not to dare to be genuinely democratic and actively committed to the social and political empowerment of the people themselves. (Saul cited in Williams and Satgar 2013: 214)

We will return to this in the exploration of the kind of activist-scholar research that involves the "empowerment of the people themselves". But of those who worked with Ruth First in the context of the Mozambique transition to socialism, it is of interest to contrast the subsequent research roles and findings of John Saul, Bridget O'Laughlin and Rob Davies, among others. Rob Davies is perhaps the closest exponent of the second type of scholarship, those who conducted critical scholarship for or with the state, in both Mozambique and South Africa. Davies, who had studied at Sussex with Mike Morris in the 1970s as one of a group of structuralist Marxist scholars, moved to Mozambique and worked in the CEA for 11 years, from 1979 to 1990. Davies provided "critical support" through the CEA in order to contribute, as De Branganca and First directed, 'to the advance of national liberation in southern Africa in general, and to the building of socialism in Mozambique in particular' (Davies 2021: ll). Returning to South Africa in 1990, Davies became co-director of the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape and began research for both the ANC and SADC on regional cooperation. His subsequent role as a politician was closely tied to his research on the political economy of the region, and he served in various capacities in the Trade and Industry portfolio from 1996, serving as Minister of Trade and Industry from 2009 to 2019.

Also in the second category are activist-scholars who work "outside but with the state", and who continue to work in research in Southern Africa particularly in the field of industrial policy and regional integration, such as Mike Morris and Paul Jourdan.[3] Morris et al. (2011) countered the resource-curse argument with evidence of the opportunities for sustainable industrial development in the context of transition from fossil fuel. Part of a research project called Making the Most of Commodities Programme (MMCP), they argued that commodity exports may be linked to development of manufacturing industries, and that the terms of trade as well as the pressure for decarbonisation were favourable for certain Southern African minerals production. Working from the assumption that economies that are dependent on commodity production 'must work within the given structure of the economy, to

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3   Mike Morris is academic who was a labour organiser in Cape Town in the early 1980s; Paul Jourdan spent 18 years in exile in Mozambique and Zimbabwe before returning to South Africa in 1991. I doubt that either of them would classify themselves as 'activist scholars'.

transform it', they note that climate change will result in disruption of agricultural production systems; yet, there are prospects for diversification, through regional integration of value chains as well as through exports. Jourdan (2022) illustrates this with an analysis of green minerals and the value-chains for batteries, including lithium, lead-acid and vanadium batteries, and the stimulus provided by the imperative to adopt renewable energy technologies both in vehicles and in embedded generation of electricity.

Other research in the region in the tradition of Ruth First and the CAS is of migrant labour and rural livelihoods. This falls into the third type of activist-scholar: those who conduct detailed empirical research with the peasants and migrant workers of the region. As two such examples, Ruth Castel-Branco has conducted detailed field research on labour, cotton cultivation and cash transfers in Mozambique and anthropologist Lars Buur has conducted studies of the Mozambique sugar industry. Castel-Branco engages with the range of policy debates and proposals for a more just future in the region:

> 'In Southern Africa, proposals for 'post-work' utopias have ranged from repeasantisation, as the semi-proletariat seize control of the means of production through land occupations (Moyo and Yeros 2013); to democratic collectivisation, as producers co-construct solidarity economies based on cooperatives (Satgar 2007); to a radical politics of distribution anchored in new forms of political claim-making based on citizenship (Ferguson 2015)' (Castel-Branco 2021: 4)

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> Other detailed progressive social policy research has related to cash transfers, the welfare state and the role of the state (Seekings 2015, re cash transfers and the welfare state; Van Niekerk 2013 on the social democratic welfare state); these fall into the category of critical research informing policy, as does Davies' research. Castel-Branco's thesis examines the 'potential of publicly funded cash transfers in advancing such a radical politics' (Castel-Branco 2021: 4) In Maputo, the Institute for Economic and Social Research (IESE) serves as a logical successor to Ruth First's CEA, with its focus on climate justice and the role of civil society in the energy transition. This involves the identification of challenges for citizen deliberation on the just transition in regions producing oil and gas, such as Cabo Delgado. This includes current use of participatory mechanisms in development planning, and the thorny question of how tax revenue from mega projects is used; as well as engagement on land use and the displacement of people by such projects and how compensation for such loss of land or livelihoods is allocated and used (IESE 2022). Such research may fall into the first or second type, depending on whether it is critical of the state, or assisting the state in developing policy.

What to research? Policy directions linked to climate crisis and activist scholarship

Given the urgent need for response to climate change, there are three broad directions for policy research. The first is energy policy and the potential for decentralised energy though renewables, given the natural advantage that Southern Africa has regarding sunlight, as well as significant wind and water resources. Second, this in turn is related to "green industrialisation", the use of carbon-free energy to industrialise. In the region, South Africa is heavily coal-dependent; in terms of its commitments to the global Conference of Parties (COP) process, it must engage in a transition away from fossil fuel; Mozambique has opted for a path of oil and gas extraction. While there is a strong argument—in line with the position taken by the climate justice movement that there should be a complete halt to new fossil fuel exploitation—there is an important distinction to be made between hard commodities (minerals) and energy commodities (coal, oil and gas). There is significant potential for "green industrialisation" using the minerals found in the region; the use of green minerals to develop renewable energy industry and value chains, for example, lithium-ion batteries (LIBs).

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Decentralised energy through photovoltaic (PV) solar can also provide many advantages in development programmes in both urban and rural contexts, from mini-grids to provide electricity to remote villages and stimulate their economy, to embedded generation and grid-feed-in to provide sustainable electricity for national development. There is significant potential for linkages with government policies for low-cost housing, urban development, sustainable villages, internet access, health and education, using PV solar as illustrated by the Centre for Community Technology at Nelson Mandela University;[4] Similarly, PV solar can support social development policies, in particular cash transfers to rural areas to stimulate production for local markets; strong local economic development policies and support for rural agricultural hubs, providing access to technology, finance, banking and capital. Affordable clean energy for low-income households through PV solar is one of the obvious "quick wins". In the most transformative versions, as explored by the Transition Township project described below, the patterns of ownership and resource distribution in the society may be irrevocably altered by renewable energy: the kind of structural transformation in production relations that Ruth First was aiming for. Such an approach is not in conflict with the need for green industrialisation using the region's mineral resources to develop the renewable energy industry, as well as other industries, notably

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4   The Centre for Community Technologies at Nelson Mandela University is engaged in software development for many such applications, for schools, clinics, waste recycling centres, etcetera.

transport, through electric vehicles and green hydrogen. A "green steel" industry is also potentially viable as part of an integrated and sustainable industrial development policy (Trollip et al. 2022).

The third, and related, direction for policy is food systems. Agriculture policy in the region must also be linked to climate change, both to climate threats and to the urgent need for transformation of food systems. Modern agriculture is heavily fossil-fuel dependent, and the systems of food storage and distribution are likewise. Woods et al. (2010: 1) argue that technology, renewable energy and changes in management 'will all play important roles in increasing the energy efficiency of agriculture and reducing its reliance on fossil resources'. The dominant policy focus on development of industrial agriculture and exploitation of other "soft commodities" for export is inappropriate for climate resilience and food sovereignty in the region as well as for preservation of global biodiversity and long-term food security. Industrial ocean fishing is particularly problematic, with regional restrictions on commercial fishing being necessary, however, difficult to enforce. Other "soft commodities" based on natural resources such as forestry must be treated with extreme caution and careful management, if allowed at all, given the risks of biodiversity loss and the role of forests in carbon capture. Commercial agriculture which is carbon intensive requires policies which restrict industrial animal production and the use of fossil-fuel based fertilisers; other aspects of the sub-regional food system, such as sugar cane, are also problematic. Policies which advocate their replacement with low-carbon and drought resilient alternatives suitable to the sub-region; diverse and nutritious, drought resistance crops are being supported by international NGOs and tested in some countries in the sub-region, but with little traction to date (Paul 2017). Given that large parts of the sub-region remain dependent on subsistence or household farming, which are most vulnerable to climate shocks, rather than move to capital-intensive, carbon-intensive industrial agriculture, it may be possible to transform small-scale farming and build sustainable local economies through the use of renewable energy and other appropriate technologies.

In terms of the "what to research", in the context of climate change and the imperative of a just transition from fossil-fuel dependency to a sustainable development path, it is imperative for engaged scholars and activist-academics to focus research and work on the following areas:

- Sustainable agriculture, sustainable marine resource use, coastal livelihoods and food sovereignty;
- Regional and local markets and value chains within the food and energy system;
- The political economy of energy and water, including decentralised solutions and decarbonisation of food systems;
- Technological innovation and indigenous knowledge systems in food production; sustainable meat and alternative protein sources; animal rights and food justice; nutrition and health; and

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- Labour migration, employment and livelihoods in regional food systems.

The practice of activist-scholarship: Some examples

In terms of the "how to research", the just transition from fossil fuel demands engaged scholarship. This should involve grassroots research into the realities of life for most people of the region, avoiding the elite biases that Chambers (1997) pointed out. It should also involve transdisciplinary research that is rigorous, empirical and critical, and provides an integrated regional perspective. The provision of critical support to government departments at various levels, in the different countries of the region, through such research is an additional role for activist scholars.

Two types of activist research are explored here, illustrated with examples of research conducted in the identified countries over the past decade. These respond to the third and fourth types of activist scholarship outlined above, that is, grassroots empirical research (type 3) and action research which pilot alternatives (type 4). The first is "type 3", grassroots empirical research, and refers to the kind of field research which Ruth First carried out for training government officials in the CEA: detailed empirical research on the livelihoods and production systems of rural areas, with "ordinary people" as participants. In most cases they are subsistence farmers and female householders, which are not mutually exclusive categories. In the examples given, this research was carried out using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods, designed to empower the participants, drawing on their experience and knowledge of their own reality. Done properly, the research process itself can not only yield more accurate empirical data than conventional survey research, but can change power relations, as Chambers (1997) argues in his seminal book, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. This book is used in the Department of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha in teaching methodology and in training students for research. Many of the students in this master's programme are, like the CEA students, government officials in departments including rural development, agriculture, environment, local economic development or social development. As argued by the CEA (1982: 36): 'The research projects chosen involve fieldwork so that students can experience themselves how data is collected and organised and analysed. In part the fieldwork is of course also intended to put students and staff directly in touch with problems of transition at the base level.'

The examples provided below, conducted in the 2000s, some thirty years after the CEA wrote the above, are of the research practice of students in the Development Studies programme at Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha. The students employed PRA methods, conducting detailed research in the rural villages in the dry districts of Zimbabwe.

Participatory research in rural livelihoods research: Zimbabwe

The research of Julius Musevenzi (2012) and Admire Muzapi (2022) provide two examples that demonstrate the effective use of PRA in documenting rural livelihoods in dry districts of Zimbabwe. Musevenzi (2012) documented what he termed 'desperate diversification' of livelihoods during the worst period of economic collapse in Zimbabwe, over the decade from 2000-2010. Muzapi (2022) used participatory methods to engage rural women in documenting their changing roles in agricultural production between 2000 and 2019. As men left the villages in the context of drought to engage in migrancy and artisanal gold mining, women took on many of the traditional male roles in agriculture. Interventions to promote drought-resistant small grains, using conservation agriculture techniques, allowed for improvement of food security in some cases. The details of the findings of these scholars are not given here. What is highlighted is the methodology which involves the participation of the residents in a way that does not favour domination by the "big men" of the village. Musevenzi (2012) and Muzapi (2012) used daily time charts, livelihood ranking and scoring among other tools which allow for maximum participation as well as accuracy, and a gendered analysis in the case of Muzapi.

Action research in conservation agriculture: Malawi and Mozambique 155

The second kind of research is Participatory Action Research (PAR), premised on empowering communities at grassroots level to take action, and in the process changing power relations and testing alternative systems. Inspired by the experience and scholarship of Anisur Rahman in Bangladesh (Rahman 1992), scholars in the Department of Development Studies engaged in three PAR research interventions in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa, and worked with students in the sub-region engaged in such action research. Such projects typically involve partnerships with government at some level, and/or with NGOs engaged in the field, as well as organising and training community members to become researchers, designers and implementers of the intervention.

As most of the residents of rural areas of the region are subsistence farmers, the focus of much of this research is on sustainable farming, cultivation of food crops, and resilience in the context of drought. The PAR of John Mussa Paul (2017) in Malawi, working with NGOs in implementing a Farmer-Neighbourhood Model, was effective in empowering smallholder farmers and building solidarity as well as resilience to climate change, through using conservation agriculture methods such as minimum tillage.

In Mozambique, NGOs are similarly partnering with scholars and students from the polytechnics and with small farmers in central Mozambique, implementing climate-smart agriculture methods involving

one hundred "model farmers" in central Mozambique—Manica and Sofala provinces—where the RAMA-BC programme (Resilient Agriculture and Market Activities – Beira Corridor) is being implemented.[5]

Climate smart agriculture, using methods of conservation agriculture which are resilient to drought, involves minimum tillage and intercropping to ensure food production in areas where rain-fed agriculture is practiced. Testing the yield from intercropping is being done on nine farms, through having some fields as control sites (without intercropping) and some with intercropping. The "model farmer" model for promoting conservation agriculture is similar to the 'farmer neighbourhood model' implemented by Paul (2017:). In central Mozambique, the "multiplier model" is used, in this case with a farmer who was displaced from his family *machamba* by Cyclone Idai and was allocated land nearby. He is successfully farming this land as part of the multiplier model; the farmer grows four different kinds of sweet potatoes as well as fields of cassava. In addition to this farmer's fields there are several other farmers in the area who are engaged in this programme. The crops are planted as part of a plant multiplication programme, where the cassava stalks are sold back to the NGO and then distributed to other farmers in the area.

Other research interventions involve a vermicompost experiment at the ISPM (Instituto Superior Politecnico de Manico). This experiment in agroecological farming methods has a group of students working on different aspects of the research. The scientific research is combined with local economy: the compost is used in food production; and a buy-back system for obtaining the waste is being established at the local fresh produce market.

Researchers from the University Zambeze, Beira, Mozambique, are conducting an experiment on movable kraals, using the manure to improve soil fertility and reduce the cost of fertiliser.

Participatory action research in urban townships: South Africa

In 1982 the CEA observed that 'these linkages of teaching and research, and between research and practice'—the kind of scholarship practiced in the CAS and described above—'are not necessarily easy to conceive, and they are even more difficult to maintain in practice' (CEA 1982: 36); and this is certainly our experience. Badat points out that: 'When activist research must advance PSPs framed by macro-political and economic orthodoxies that leave the structural bases of power and privilege largely untouched, as has been the case in post-1994 South Africa, dilemmas obviously arise.' (Chapter 3 in this volume)

In engaging with this dilemma, the Department of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela

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5   I am indebted to Nic Dexter from Land o Lakes, who, in April 2022, took me on a field visit to these projects and introduced me to the farmers and the students.

University, Gqeberha, has explored the piloting of alternative pathways, in partnership with both local government and civil society, in a model of activist scholarship using PAR methodology for piloting sustainable research interventions in both urban and rural communities.

Over the past decade, three such action research projects have been implemented in Nelson Mandela Bay. One such project is Participatory Design and Joint Action Projects for Sustainable Development (known as JAP). JAP is a DAAD-funded partnership with Wismar University, Germany, whereby students in development studies, architecture, human settlements and engineering exchange visits and participate in designing and building structures in South African townships. These structures include waste recycling facilities, spaza shops and food gardens, sometimes in combination.

The second such project was the Sustainable Settlement Pilot Project (SSPP), where the Development Studies Department of Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, partnered with the Department of Human Settlements in the Province of the Eastern Cape in South Africa to explore the in-situ development of an informal settlement in an environmentally sensitive coastal forest. Residents were involved as a community research team in testing appropriate technologies for building houses as well as service provision in the form of renewable energy, water capture and sewage management. The third project is the ongoing Transition Township project which involves Community Owned Renewable Energy (CORE), Community Owned Circular Economy (COCE) and food sovereignty, including permaculture and aquaponic systems in the urban township of Kwazakhele, Gqeberha.

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Central to this participatory action research are cooperative relations of production, empowering residents of working-class townships both through the research process and through changing relations of production. Ruth First emphasised cooperatives in the context of rural Mozambique, while recognising the necessarily important role of the state in the transition to a more equitable economy. Hence, the Transition Township project aims to pilot new forms of production, both in terms of the technology used (renewable energy, aquaponics, recycling and 3-D printing) and in terms of the relations of production and ownership of the means of production (the establishment of neighbourhood cooperatives using sustainable production processes and equipment on public space). In this respect it reflects the understanding of the CEA, transposing the 'socialisation of the countryside' with the socialisation of the township economy, and the transition to socialism with the transition to a decarbonised economy. The fundamental concern is with 'not only the enlargement of the economic productive base, but the re-ordering of class relations, the process of transformation from old production forms to new' (CEA 1982: 32). This is the most radical form of activist scholarship, one which transforms relations of production and patterns of ownership.

The details of these action research projects are documented elsewhere (Brennan, Cherry and the

Kwazakhele Community Research Team 2019; Cherry and Prevost 2023), however, what is important here is the reflection on activist scholarship. There are two key points of analysis. The first is the relation of the researcher to "the community" or "the participants". Whether in an informal settlement, a village or a township, the participants are neither subjects nor beneficiaries. They are themselves researchers, decision-makers and participants in the planning, design and implementation of projects. Moreover, they are the owners of the outcome of the project, whether a recycling business or a cooperative, a housing settlement or a PV solar installation. There is always some level of organisation involved, whether there is broader mobilisation, whether the pilot is replicated as part of a movement—a cooperative movement, a food sovereignty movement, a just transition movement—is dependent on the second key point. This is the relation of the scholars, the community and the project to the state. When such innovative projects happen within an institution (the university in this case), the scholar retains autonomy; if it is conducted as an autonomous or self-sustaining community project, it has little hope of influencing policy or effecting widespread change in the economy. When it concerns local government or other government departments attempting to innovate in policy, the complexities and challenges are greater. As Badat notes, there is no guarantee that the results of such activist scholarship will be adopted by governments. 'Of course, that fact that activist research may be valuable for PSP development does

not secure it influence in political movements, even when activist researchers are members of those same movements. Often, 'influence is long-term and indirect. It takes time for ideas ... to filter through.' (Friedman quoted in Badat in Chapter 2 of this volume)

Summarising the four types of activist-scholarship, there are distinct differences between them regarding both strategy and methodology. The first, the activist scholarship which provides the critical evaluation of existing systems, is in some cases, used by social movements, openly in opposition to the state in many cases, contesting policy and putting forward an alternative vision. The second is the type of activist-scholarship related to policy development, as in the case of research on the green mineral value chains and green iron. Such research may be commissioned by a government department or an international organisation such as the SADC or a UN agency. The intention is that it feeds directly into policy, in this case with the ultimate aim of promoting sustainable development in the region; yet this may then become a matter of political contestation, as in the case of energy policy in South Africa. While the scholar may not define him/herself as an 'activist scholar', and this type of scholarship does not meet the criterion of reflecting the voice of the voiceless, it is seen in this analysis as complementary to the third type of activist research, which is the empirical research conducted through participatory methods with most of citizens of the countries in the sub-region: these are the residents of villages in the poorest countries on the world, the residents of informal settlements on the fringes of big cities and the

unemployed residents of townships in the most unequal country in the world. The information gained from such research is essential in informing the policy decisions made by those reading the reports of the second type of scholar. The argument for localisation is not an argument against regional integration; localisation (not national-local as in "local content" being produced within national borders, but local as in "local economic development" [LED] at municipal or village level) may be complementary to regional industrial development and a strategy of using commodities produced in the region to develop the new sustainable industries based on "green minerals" and renewable energy.

The fourth type of activist scholar, arguably the most radical form of activist scholarship, is the one who intervenes to change power relations and structures of society through research, and who uses participatory action research to explore an alternative future, in the context of the meeting the challenges of the present.

Policy must be informed by global imperatives of climate, as well as by the realities experienced by the poorest citizens of the sub-region. Universities can play a role at both levels; which they do in scientific research (the uYilo eMobility programme for example), agricultural research (the Malawi polytechnic students as an example) and research informing economic and industrial policy (as illustrated by Morris, Trollip and others). The other two types of activist-scholar may conduct action-research or participatory research at grassroots level. In the case of participatory research (PRA for example), the method of research may be empowering to the participants, but may not lead to any significant change; it may be used simply to collect evidence (agricultural extension workers in the South African Department of Rural Development are trained in PRA methods, for example). In the case of PAR, as in the examples illustrated above, they would attempt to effect change through the research, to implement pilot projects to test new models of economy, urban design and farmer support. In this sense PAR is experimental research with human actors. It is differentiated from randomised trials (which also may be a very effective tool for policy evaluation) in that it aims to change power relations. Activist-scholars may work within social movements that represent these residents and may assist such movements to achieve their goals. Activist scholars may also work with NGOs or Quangos to develop or influence policy. And activist scholars may work directly with government, or across the boundaries of civil society and state, across the boundaries of "grassroots" and "blue sky" research, to find solutions to pressing problems.

Conclusion: What would Ruth First have done?

From the examples of activist scholarship above, there are a few lessons about the relationship of the university to the state, the relationship of activist-scholars to the state and scholar's role in the agenda for

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sustainable development and social justice in the sub-region.

What would Ruth First have done? Given her legacy and her commitment, it can be assumed that First would have analysed the "big picture" as well as the grassroots experience of ordinary people in the poorest of countries. She would have considered the economic realities of global trade in the twenty-first century, but with the imperative of finding a just economic transition from fossil fuel. She would not have dismissed the analysis of the political economy and the power relations that govern the production and distribution of goods and services. SFirst would have centred her conclusions and policy recommendations using the empirical truths gained from research on the ground to argue for a more just and sustainable economy for the region.

On 14 April 2022, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the nation about the devastation of the floods on the coast of KZN and Eastern Cape: 'This disaster is part of climate change. It is telling us that climate change is serious. It is here. We can no longer postpone the measures we need to take to deal with climate change' (NPR 2022). There are alternatives that can be supported and tested and shared across the region to enable an answer to the challenges of food and energy security and climate shocks. Using our imagination, they can chart the way towards a just and sustainable future. As Ruth First noted, in another context, another century: 'A different force is stirring, among the secondary-school students, the urban unemployed, the surplus graduates of the indulged coastlines, the neglected and impoverished of the northern interiors.' (First 1970 cited in Pinnock 1997: 197)

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Zimbabwe: Midlands State University (Tukwi Magosi Research Institute; Dept of Development Studies); University of Zimbabwe

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Chapter 7: Research as an Act of Activist-Intellectual Resistance: Two Case Studies of Oral Histories and Archiving in South Africa

Dale T. McKinley

What kind of activist research?

The one thing that can be counted on when it comes to those who inhabit the "left" side of the political-ideological spectrum is that we engage in lots of disagreement and debate. Although in practice it can, and often has, led to debilitating division, sectarianism and stasis, in principle, such debate and disagreement is not a bad thing; further, this is definitely the case when it comes to interrogating what constitutes "activist research" and who carries it out.

While activist research can certainly be carried out by those in the centre and on the right-side of the ideological spectrum, in general we can agree that most activist research (at least since the start of industrial capitalism) has been carried out by those who identify themselves as being on the left of that spectrum. In other words, those, who in thinking and practice imbibe an anti-capitalism that seeks (non-capitalist) systemic change of the political, economic and social status quo. In the words of Charles Hale, 'the practice of activist research asks us to identify our deepest ethical-political convictions, and to let them drive the formulation of our research objectives' (Hale 2001: 14). Similarly, activist research (as defined above) 'challenge(s) existing social hierarchies and oppressive institutions as well as the truth regimes and structures of power that produced and supported them. Not content simply to critique the status quo, (it) seek(s) to change it' (Isaacman 2003: 3).

However, when it comes to who carries it out, a distinction must be made between the kind of activist research conducted by activist-academics in the academy and that undertaken by activist-intellectuals who are not just outside the academy, but who are active members of the organisations, movements, networks and coalitions that are the "target" of the research.

Much of what has been written about activist research (somewhat) understandably revolves around academics, since most of it comes from the keyboards of those same academics (Choudry 2013; Hale 2017; Piven 2010). The key tropes of what has been written in this regard centre on how left academics

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can move beyond the various institutional, ideological, relational and methodological confines of the academy and the specific disciplines within which they operate. This is largely because most researchers who identify themselves as being activists and on the left, are to be found within the academy and its ancillary institutions.

In this regard, Choudry (2013: 130) reminds us that the 'literature' on activist research is 'more concerned with the implications of such work on individuals' university careers and academic disciplines, and its scholarly credibility, than on the considerable research and intellectual work generated from within activist/community organizations on which many movements rely for independent analysis of concerns relevant to them'.

As such, the character, content and impact of this kind of activist research largely emanates from and revolves around, the frame of the academic research terrain. This is the case even if connections are made with and the research can assist, grounded, grassroots activists, organisations and movements struggling for change.

Isaacman (2003: 4) is correct to note that, in general, activist researchers 'are driven by a mutually reinforcing intellectual and political agenda' that simultaneously seeks to: 'render audible the voices and concerns of the powerless ... recover the experiences of the disadvantaged and underrepresented (and) ... support their struggles aimed at ending exploitative practices and dismantling institutions of oppression.' However much such a general agenda represents positive intention and contribution, it is necessarily moulded and bound by where the activist researcher is located and to/for whom, their work is directed. The irrepressible activist-academic James Petras succinctly captures the consequent conundrum: 'the (historical) problem of intellectual engagement is related to the audience to which it is directed' (Petras 1990: 107).

However, the kind of activist research that I am sharing and profiling here is not undertaken by academics housed in universities nor by researchers who are "outside" and not part of, the organisations and struggles which they are researching. Rather, the research is conducted by activist-intellectuals, some of whom might have academic credentials, but are not formally located within the academy, and who are part and parcel, as activists, of the organisation, movement, network, etcetera being researched.

This distinction is important for two crucial reasons. First, because the institutional and/or organisational "location" of the activist researcher directly and consciously shapes the associated power balance around as well as character and content of the links to and collaboration with, the research "subject(s)". Second, because the terrain that frames the work of the researcher also directly and consciously shapes the ways in which the research is purposed and used. As Choudry (2022: 17) states, 'the purpose to which the research is put and how it can be used may be a better indicator of what

constitutes activist research than specific methodologies'.

My own personal research journey over the last 35 years provides confirmatory testimony. A prime example is the research I conducted on the historical strategy and tactics of the African National Congress (ANC). Initially this was carried out as a PhD student located within the academy. Even though I was also politically active in anti-racist and national liberation solidarity student organisations and my PhD was broadly supportive of the national liberation struggle in South Africa, the research was conducted within the formal methodological requirements of the academy and with the sole purpose of completing an academic degree.

However, once I had re-located out of the academy and become an active member of the African National Congress (ANC) and subsequently a leader in the South African Community Party (SACP—the ANC's alliance partner), the locational, methodological and relational frame as well as the core purpose of the research, shifted dramatically. Besides now being inside and actively part of the organisational "objects" of my research, and in the process generating a range of new and very different political and personal relationships, I was now no longer institutionally part of the academy and no longer bound to its framing methodological and research/degree requirements.

Accordingly, Choudry (2013: 130) points out that:

> relatively little work documents, explicates or theorizes actual research practices of activist researchers in concrete locations outside of the academy in activist groups, NGOs or social movements. Intellectual work, knowledge production, and forms of investigation/research undertaken within activism are sometimes overlooked or unrecognized but nonetheless inextricably linked to action in many mobilizations.

This is particularly the case when it comes to activist research undertaken by those outside the academy (even more so by those directly involved in/with grassroots organisations and struggles) focused on oral histories and archiving involving community organisations, social movements and activist networks/coalitions, that 'encompass a diverse range of materials, approaches and practices' (Choudry and Vally 2018; Flinn 2011). This kind of research not only surfaces and makes accessible the 'wealth of printed, recorded and digital materials' produced but also allows for those materials to act as 'a resource through which to explore and understand radical politics and their histories in ways that inform present and future actions' (Choudry 2022: 14).

These then can act as 'important forms of documenting actions, campaigns, developments and debates, which are otherwise not always visible and accessible to those external to these organisations

and their struggles as well as to newer generations' (Choudry 2022: 14). In short, research becomes an act of resistance; in other words, as a part of helping to create and document a grounded, organic organisational and practical resistance and as part of contesting and resisting intellectual gatekeeping and constructed histories in which the lives and struggles of the poor and workers are used for other purposes, agendas or are simply forgotten.

What follows below are summary examples of two research practices/projects, centred on oral histories and archiving, that I undertook as an activist-intellectual over the last twenty years. The first project was undertaken over a three-year period (2007-2009) and involved community organisations and struggles in which I had been active and in practical solidarity with, for several years. The second project was also undertaken over a three-year period (2010-2012) and focused wholly on the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), of which I was a founding member (since its formation in 1999) and elected leader for close to a decade.

These case studies represent the kind of activist research "within activism" that most often escapes the attention and recognition of those in the academy, but whose character and impact were, and remain, inextricably embedded in and linked to the involved activists, organisations and movements, alongside their ongoing struggles for basic dignity, to tell their "stories" and to effect radical change.

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Case Study One: Forgotten voices in the present

Context and purpose

The key impetus behind this research was a desire to contribute to an alternative history of the South African transition. "Alternative" in the sense of offering a different kind of history than that which has constituted the dominant trope of South Africa's historiography since the democratic breakthrough of 1994. As such, the main purpose was to produce a collection of individual oral histories from residents in three poor communities that constituted a meaningful representation (collection of "stories") of South Africa's post-1994 political, social and economic history as lived and experienced by the oppressed and marginalised majority. The three communities were: Maandagshoek—a deep rural community in south-eastern Limpopo Province; Rammolutsi—a peri-urban/small town community in Northern Free State Province; and Sebokeng—a large urban community in Gauteng Province (McKinley and Veriava 2008).

The fact is that South Africa's post-1994 history has been largely constituted as a 'history from above', created and told from the perspectives and experiences of a small and powerful minority. It is a history that predominately emanates out of the institutional frameworks and processes within which elites operate,

constantly being told through the voices and agencies of those who possess political, economic, social and cultural power and position. Effectively then, it is a "history" of, by and through an elite that relates mainly to state and corporate institutions, elitist societal processes and macro-nationalist narratives. Its telling has, and continues to be, constantly refracted through the lens of the pre-1994 past; that is, the "liberation struggle", the negotiations process and/or leading figures and movements in them (Ballard et al. 2006; Bond 1997; Desai 2002; McKinley 2003).

The counter-desire inherent in this research is to provide a "history from below", an alternative to this elitist construction and telling, a history that can capture a strong representation of individual and community perspectives and experiences of most South Africans who are politically marginalised, economically oppressed and socially forgotten. It is an attempt to give "direct voice" to those who have been marginalised and/or excluded from the production and telling of South Africa's post-1994 history. Here, those voices are not solely seen, heard and told as the tick-the-box responses of the poor to practical exigencies (as has been the dominant case since 1994), but come directly and voluntarily from the very space and place within which such voices are themselves constructed, experienced and related.

However, it is not only South Africa's post-1994 "history" that is problematic. On a more theoretical and analytical note it would appear, if available research and literature is anything to go by, that South African "history" itself is presumed to be something that relates predominately to the pre-1994 era. It is as if 1994 drew a line across the "map" of historical discourse/narrative and understanding, that the "new" South Africa does not belong to the country's overall exegesis of history since it is a "story" that is unfolding and whose only "identification" is its beginning. Analytically, the post-1994 period, since it remains fluid and "contemporary" (in the classical historical sense), is thus seen as having no end and therefore, no basis for enjoying historical status.

Further, and in specific relation to oral history, the serious lack of post-1994 oral history studies and research, and more especially emanating from the terrain of activist research, points to a serious gap in the theoretical and practical approach to, and understanding of, oral history itself. In other words, it is as if oral history is something that only can apply/be applied to the "forgotten" past, with the method of orality being the mechanism to revive and tell that "forgotten" history.

While there is a sizeable literature dealing with the political, social and strategic character and struggles of various social movements and organisations in poor communities in the post-1994 period, none of this can be seriously classified as falling under the methodological rubric of oral history. Much of this literature derives from advocacy and academic work by those outside of such movements and organisations, is predominately analytical in content and relies heavily on written "histories" (Ballard et al. 2006; Ballard et al. 2005; Barchiesi et al. 2003; Bond 2004; Pillay 1996). It should also be noted that

the "targets" of this literature are politically and socially active individuals, movements and community organisations who are engaged in active social and political struggles, mainly centred around the delivery of basic services such as water, land, housing, education, health etcetera. What this clearly reveals, is the general dearth of research that would provide sustained comparison with the purpose, approach and content of this project.

All of this raises several fundamental questions: Where does more recent history (in this case, South Africa's post-1994 social, political, cultural and economic history) fall in relation to the telling and capturing of history itself? Is history not a "thing" that becomes history as it happens and is thus, best understood, shared and has impact, not as something that has already happened, but that remains in motion, from one "history" to the next? Can oral history be solely applied (as a methodological tool) to an "alien" or "forgotten" past that can likewise, only be resurrected and told through the oral genre?

What about contemporary memory and experience counting as history and being related through oral testimony/stories as a means of ensuring that it does not become (generically) "alien" and is not "forgotten"? If the poor are not encouraged (and facilitated) to tell their stories as they have been/is happening, does this not point to an inherent desire to create a "history" that can then be "told" at a later stage, when it has no impact other than as an act of, and exercise in, academic memory recording and societal remembrance?

At the heart of the kind of activist research that this project represents, is the direct recording and "telling" of how those whose voices are mostly marginalised and often ignored, make their own truths and their own meanings of history, wherever and whenever that history is to be found. In this sense then, the nomenclature associated with such research becomes central to its source and character. This is especially the case in relation to poor communities in the post-1994 era, where the human and social relationships engendered by marginalisation and poverty create a popular, individual and collective "public" memory of life—a "living heritage". This research does not suffer from the problem of filtering and forgetting precisely, because the history recorded and "told" is derived and presented from the source as well as being lived in very meaningful and practical ways.

History, and more particularly recent history, is a contested concept and reality. In whatever way it is conceptualised, accessed, told and recorded, there are universal questions and challenges. How and why are certain individuals chosen/not chosen to tell their stories (gender, race, class)? Can there be a separation of personal stories from the broader socio-economic and political narratives and histories that might be dominant at the time of telling? How might the positionality and purpose of those doing both the recording and telling, inform the character of the subsequent interaction and content of what is told? There might also arise the issue of negative past experiences with researchers and how this affects the ways in which stories are shared and told.

Approach and scope

The first phase of the research involved a "scoping" exercise. This consisted of on-site visits to each of the three selected communities to identify and liaise with community organisations, activists, structures and some residents, as well as choose a community activist as project liaison. This activist then assisted in identifying a cross-section of community activists and residents and organising interviews, including, when necessary, simultaneous translation during the interview.

In the second phase, much longer on-site visits were made to each community to conduct in-depth interviews (all of which were recorded both on a digital audio recorder and on a DV-camera) as well as to capture additional video footage of the community and its surrounding areas. Besides ensuring there was formal consent for both audio and visual recording, the narrators were able to do the interview in the language of their choice.

Interviews were conducted using the "Life History Method". This method seeks to conduct the interview more as a conversation, with any specific, directed questions put to the narrator flowing from the general conversation and/or issues the narrator raises. Within the context of the narrator's post-1994 lived history, this allowed the narrator to better define and shape the story being told. Where narrators gave interviews in a language other than English, such interviews were later transcribed into English from the original audio recording. Over the course of an eighteen-month period, a total of 55 interviews were conducted.

A third phase was then given over to a second round of interviews with selected individuals from the first round, to have more in-depth conversations related to key issues raised. A fourth phase involved a brief return visit to each community where all of those interviewed (and in some cases family members) were provided with a hard copy of their interview and shown a draft version of the video documentary alongside selected audio-visual excerpts from their interviews. A feedback discussion ensued which then informed the final (fifth) phase of production of both the research publication and the documentary.

This research does not "run away" from the crucial questions and challenges as raised in the previous section. While acknowledging the ever-present challenge related to relations of power, both between researcher and research "subjects" and amongst the research "subjects" themselves (Choudry 2015), from the beginning, we were completely open and upfront with all involved about who we are, what we were trying to do and why we were doing it. Indeed, many of those in the three "target" communities who assisted and participated in the interviews/conversations were fellow activists and residents involved in the same affiliated umbrella movement and activist struggles as the researchers. The research makes no claim to represent the full panorama of post-1994 lived experience and views of the poor majority in South Africa. Likewise, it makes no claim that these life stories constitute a particular historical "truth",

but simply that they are living "voices" that have largely been "forgotten" and which form part of a history that has been so selectively constructed and told.

There are, and will always be, competing interests, perspectives and experiences and thus, histories told even when it might appear that those sharing and telling their histories are more socially and economically homogenous, that is, within a poor community. As such, those interviewed in each of the three poor communities represent a variety of voices from within that community and cut across age, gender, social status, work situation and political organisation affiliation. Such a representational cross-section of "voices" from poor communities provides a parallel representation of rural, urban and peri-urban realities that encompass differing, but key historical, geographical and socio-political "characteristics" of the post-1994 period.

Those "characteristics" include, but are not wholly limited to, issues of: land (its ownership, distribution, usage and associated relations of production); basic services (availability, affordability and provision); social, productive and representational relationships with the state and the private sector; levels and content of political and social activism (vis-à-vis the dominant political trends and activities in both pre- and post-1994 South Africa) and, geographical location and ethnographic make-up. Underlying all of these is the larger issue of the ways in which the development of the specific community has been affected? by the dominant (macro) post-1994 political and socio-economic trajectory and how this development is linked to the pre-1994 character of that community.

Outcomes

As far as I am aware, this research project produced, for the first time in the post-1994 era, a formal and open archived collection of such oral histories, housed (in written, video and audio formats, both in hard copy and electronically/online) with the South African History Archive (SAHA). For over a decade this has been available for researchers, policymakers, academics and ordinary South Africans. This archive represents a unique but modest contribution to contesting and supplementing the existent "history" of the South African transition and provided a foundation upon which further and activist linked advocacy, research and oral history work can be pursued.

Besides the collection at SAHA, a 167-page hard-copy publication was produced to provide a more popular and accessible representation of the full archive. In the publication, excerpts from the collection of interviews were organised according to each "target" community from which they were taken and further highlighted by reference to key subject matters, alongside an index which provided a more easily referenced guide to "accessing" these subject matters. Besides all those involved in this

project, the publication was made available (in both hard copy and DVD formats where applicable) to key government departments at various levels in South Africa, non-governmental organisations, research institutes, libraries, resource centres, individual researchers, activists, social movements and other community organisations.

Further, a half hour documentary was produced as well as a DVD containing all the interviews. Written versions of the oral histories recorded can undoubtedly contribute significantly to the history of the South African transition being made today, and to the ways in which the activists, organisations and residents involved imagine and understand themselves and their struggles.

There is, however, much that written histories foreclose in their re-presentation of oral histories, having limited choices available in terms of the act of writing permits. Recent activist and popular education experience has illustrated how other forms of media, such as video, often allow for information and experiences to be much more accessible and to be shared amongst much wider audiences, with greater appeal and effect (specifically in relation to ongoing struggles and activist approaches) and often serving to complement the written word. This is especially the case in respect of poor communities where literacy rates amongst older adults remain low. Video records not only serve as a "living" archive of events and ideas, but also provide a space through which histories may be crafted and interpreted to speak differently in and to the present.

The documentary brings together key components of selected interviews, alongside additional footage, as another way of "telling" the stories recorded. It provides a powerful alternative visual history of the transition that can counter mainstream versions which tend to silence, sensationalise, or criminalise "voices" of the poor and of those critical of the project of nation-building and reconciliation. Likewise, it can be a means through which people can interact with their own histories as collectives and use these visual representations for their own purposes of mobilisation, strategising and critical reflection and debate.

Case Study Two: Transition's child, The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF)

Context and purpose

What the 'Forgotten Voices in the Present' research confirmed was the need, and indeed imperative for activist-intellectuals to record and archive the post-1994 stories/histories of activists, residents and organisations in poor communities. It is within such a context that the parallel need for a more specific focus on organised, community-based, social movements that emerged in the post-1994 era as a direct

response to the political and socio-economic conditions, within which poor communities found themselves, was identified (McKinley 2012).

Many such movements had, by the time this research project got underway, been in existence for years, produced a large amount of organisational and campaign/media material and had a significant amount of mostly academic research and analysis as well as journalistic writing focused on them. Yet despite this, no formal archives of such movements and their community components nor corresponding written and oral histories existed.

The APF, like most of South Africa's post-apartheid social movements during the early 2000s, was an organisation that cut across all three dominant models/categories used to classify social movements; namely, "old" movements which directly challenged the state seeking reform or revolution, the notion of "new" movements based on identity-oriented concerns whose target was less concerned with the state and more about society, and social change, more broadly, or the "new-new" global movements which together challenge a unilaterally imposed understanding of and pathway for, globalisation (Ballard et al. 2006). Indeed, the APF did not fit neatly into any one of either the dominant analytical schema or assigned categories that constitute the main components of social movement theory emanating (largely) from the academy.

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Similarly, the APF was a movement whose creation, subsequent development and ongoing practical engagements and struggles did not conform to any particularistic (social movement) theorisations of formation, mobilisation and/or activity. While sharing many of the macro stimuli and characteristics (for example, neo-liberal globalisation and societal shifts from the realm of production to consumption) of more recent social movements all over the globe, the APF was fundamentally shaped by its uniquely South African condition/experience. This included apartheid-inspired constructions of race and class, the post-apartheid political dominance of a multi-sided liberation movement which has included "old" social movements (such as unions) and the exigencies of specifically crafted neo-liberal social and economic policies in the context of extreme socio-economic inequality and the energetic pursuit of a deracialised capitalism.

As such, the APF's social movement character and "status" was driven by a mix of structural, distributional, and identity pressures/characteristics. In this sense, the APF was neither theoretically exceptional nor common in respect of the sources and corresponding explanations of its origins, development and activities. In the words of Ashwin Desai (2002), South Africa's 'movements of the poor must be celebrated for being what they are: relatively small groupings of awakening antagonism in a sea of political apathy, nationalist ignorance and informal repression'.

Indeed, the APF's relevance (and thus, also the research project undertaken from "within") stemmed

from the reality of the ANC state's betrayal of the broad working class, inclusive of the underemployed and unemployed, both organisationally and politically. Its very existence was a direct result of this and the accompanying capitalist neo-liberalism that was subsequently pursued. The movement's role was to (partially) fill the organisational and political/ideological vacuum that had been created, to offer a new avenue for the voices and struggles of the poor and a means to impact on the most basic needs of the poor majority through mass mobilisation, action, organisational coherence, political engagement, educational initiatives and the creation of a new consciousness of the possibilities of radical change.

My own direct and close activist involvement as a founding member and then elected leader over a ten-year period, provided a unique set of practical experiences, organisational relationships and overall insight into/of the APF. Not only did this ensure unique access to the full panorama of the APF's documents, materials etcetera, but also to past and (at the time) present leaders and community affiliate activists. In turn, this allowed for a much more organic understanding of and relationship to, the organisation which in turn, created unique avenues for associated impact and use of the research.

Approach and scope

The overall scope of the research was threefold:

> **First**, to collect and produce a formal electronic and hard-copy archive of all available material from within the APF and its community affiliates, from those networks and coalitions of which the APF was initiator or member, as well as all research, analysis and commentary on and about the APF from outside the movement, inclusive of that produced by other activists, organisations, academics and the media. This material also included paraphernalia, for example, t-shirts, posters, stickers, banners etcetera.

> **Second**, to produce a formally archived collection of oral histories, in both audio and written formats encompassing both personal and organisational/movement components, from selected APF and associated community affiliate leaders, activists and members. The research was conducted with the support of the South African History Archive, which became the repository of the entire archive.

> **Third**, to produce a brief written history of the APF consisting of a critically informed paper, based on the collected archive along with selected excerpts from the oral histories recorded.

What this allowed was a space for personal reflection and analysis and, the raising of critical and crucial questions and issues deriving from the collected archive as well as from my own activist experience and journey in the APF.

Methodologically, the research was framed by the following components:

Preparatory meeting

A preparatory meeting was held with APF's elected leadership (the office bearers) to explain the content and character of the project to ensure that there was a full understanding of it, and "buy-in". This was followed by a summary presentation of the research project to the APF's "Coordinating Committee" which consisted of five representatives of each of the APF's (at the time) twenty-plus affiliate community organisations. In both instances, many questions were asked and there was extensive discussion on the purpose, scope and potential use and impact of the research "products", all of which helped make the project a more collective, participatory endeavour.

The collection of materials

All documents, both original and copies as well as various paraphernalia and audio-visual materials, were collected over a two-year period in the following ways: a) through the APF's own office files and records; b) through individual leaders, activists and members both at the APF and community affiliate levels; c) through my own substantial personal APF archive collected over a period of twelve years as a founding member, activist and elected leader; d) through individual academics and activist-intellectuals both within and outside South Africa and e) through desktop research and physical research conducted at university and public libraries.

Identification of interviewees

All key APF activists and leaders, both past and (at the time) present, who held elected positions of leadership, had been responsible for various sub-committees and specific projects in the APF and/or had been active over a period in the APF and with its struggles, were identified for interviews. In relation to APF community affiliates, a cross-section of affiliates from each of the four APF regions and representing different "types" of communities (for example, formal township residents, shack settlements, urban flat/warehouse dwellers) were selected. Past and present elected leaders and key activists of these affiliates were then identified for interviews.

Conducting of interviews

Two general questionnaires were drawn up, one for APF activists and leaders and the other for community affiliate activists and leaders. Each interviewee was asked general questions regarding several broad categories related to personal as well as organisational and political history, practical struggles, challenges, problems and personal experiences and perspectives. Where possible, questionnaires were provided to each individual interviewee prior to the interview taking place. There was no specific time limit set for any interview with the lengths ranging from less than one hour to over four hours. Each interview was recorded on a digital (audio) recording device. Each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form and all agreed (the consents form part of the archive). All interviews were conducted in English and transcribed into written documents.

Besides the more "straightforward" task of collecting and recording various materials of, and about the APF, the approach to gathering oral histories was designed to cover the following areas and issues: general personal and APF movement/community organisational history; basic demands and issues engaged; organisational strategy and tactics; responses from the state; relations with political parties and other social movements and/or community organisations; levels and content of political and social activism and, key problems, challenges, failures and successes both organisationally and politically. Underlying these was the larger issue of the ways in which the history and development of the APF and/ or its community affiliates had been shaped and effected by the dominant (macro) post-1994 political and socio-economic trajectory in South Africa.

Once all the above had been completed, hard copies of the 112-page research publication accompanied by a DVD of the same were provided individually to all interviewees, while further batches were distributed to all affiliates.

Outcomes

Similar to the 'Forgotten Voices' project, this APF research was (at the time) a first. In other words, the first time such an archive of materials and oral histories (by an activist-intellectual from within the movement) was collected, organised, distributed, housed and made publicly accessible. The various component outcomes ('products') of the research consisted of:

- A material archive containing all available materials and documents of the APF and its community affiliates, alongside materials produced (for example, from news/media outlets, independent sources and through academic research) on the APF and its affiliates was collected, collated,

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organised and filed into a formal archive housed at SAHA. These materials include: organisational, political and administrative reports, minutes of meetings, research reports, discussion documents, press statements, interviews, academic and other research articles and essays, media articles, pamphlets, paraphernalia, as well as organisational and outside video and audio productions and raw footage.

- An oral history archive derived from interviews with selected APF and community affiliate leaders, members and activists. All interviews were digitally (audio) recorded in English and transcribed into a written format. The interviews, both in written and audio forms, were then collated, organised and placed in a formal archive housed at SAHA.

- A written history (publication) as well as a DVD of the same. Utilising the archival materials collected, alongside excerpts from the oral histories, a hard copy publication as well as a DVD were produced. They included the brief history, extracts from the interviews as well as the interview lists, forms and questionnaires, while the DVD also included visual representations of selected materials collected. Two launches of the publication and archive were held, one internal to the APF and the other public.

By way of conclusion

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One of the difficulties that animated both research projects was choosing "research subjects", both at the community and individual levels. The three communities chosen in the oral history project are objectively, however, not directly representative of those whose voices have been "forgotten". As such, there are inherent limitations therein, to the full panoply of stories of the poor and working class. Also, even though my own organisational and activist positionality and example allowed for a more organic and horizontal process and engagement, the realities of racial and class differentiation were, even if recognised, real.

Regardless, on a cumulative basis, the two research undertakings provide unique activist framed, comprehensive, multi-form storytelling and histories, of some amongst the "forgotten voices" as well as of one of South Africa's key post-1994 social movements. The formal, multi-form, historical and archival repositories produced are, in parallel, important and positive contributions to the thinking and work of social movement researchers, activists, community residents, academics, politicians and government officials. As such, they go some way in contesting "outsider" and purely academic and analytical "histories" as well as organisational and struggle perspectives of social movements.

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Chapter 8: Critical Sensemaking: Negotiations, Contradictions and Compromises of a Feminist Activist Scholar

Asanda-Jonas Benya

Introduction

This chapter focuses on my experiences as a feminist activist scholar in Marikana over the last twelve years. While I focus on my work with a women's organisation in Marikana, *Sikhala Sonke*, I also briefly describe how that work connects with what I teach at the university. My reflections here attempt to grapple with some of my experiences and challenges in my academic and activist work and how being a feminist activist scholar is generally viewed within the academy. These messy reflections demonstrate my negotiations, tensions, contradictions and compromises. I enter this conversation on feminist activist scholars and scholarship as a feminist with a socialist orientation whose work is at the intersection of labour, gender and race. Conceptually, I draw from black feminist thought and social movement studies hoping to add to this growing body of work on scholar-activism (Benya and Yeni 2022; Bezuidenhout et al. 2022a; Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Choudry and Vally 2017; Dawson and Sinwell 2012; Fakier and Cock 2018; Hlatshwayo 2018; Motala 2017; Vally and Motala 2022; Vally et al.).[1]

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[1] I see the history of Fatima Meer's Institute of Black Research, SWOP, and the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand, as well as Bernard Magubane, Mamphela Ramphele, Fatima Meer, Neville Alexander, and Archie Mafeje's work, as falling within this tradition.

Rootedness or the oscillation of activist scholars

Activist scholars are often seen as equally "rooted" within the academy and communities or movements where they work. This "double-rooted" identity does not always hold.[2] Some are more rooted in the academy than communities and vice versa, however, others "oscillate" and are intermediaries in both spaces. I use the label "activist scholar" to mark not my rootedness, but my oscillation, which should not be equated to voyeurism—as I hope to make clear in this chapter.

I oscillate between both spaces and cannot, with great confidence, claim roots or rootedness in either of the two spaces. I move between these spaces often with unease, with an awareness of their connections and distinctness from each other. One space is the University of Cape Town (UCT), where I have been teaching since 2015, and the other is Marikana, where I have been involved with a women's organisation as an activist since 2012.

These two spaces are connected, though not equally; they are geographically separate, but socially entangled with financial circuits of capital linking both spaces, resulting in uneven yet combined development. Monies flow between mines in Marikana and UCT. For example, in 2015, the UCT Retirement Fund held shares worth R9 582 722.00 in Lonmin, the mine at the centre of the Marikana massacre (Lucas 2015). Before 2012, Lonmin also donated money towards the building costs of the university's New Engineering Building located on the Upper Campus (Omar 2015). Some UCT students are children of miners or come from the same labour-sending areas as miners. What happens in Marikana features on the pages of books that occupy UCT libraries. The distinctions between the two spaces are primarily economic, UCT has many resources, while Marikana scrambles for resources taken out of it for historical, contemporary, social and political reasons. The connections and disconnections are salient, but so are inequities. I move between these spaces as a feminist who is an activist scholar.

From an activist scholar to a feminist activist scholar

I came into activism from a labour background. Workers' experiences were at the forefront of my earlier academic and activist work. Later, I realised that workers have different experiences. Gender plays a significant role in how people make sense of their work, and their day-to-day experiences are mediated

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2   The idea of "double-rootedness" borrows from Leslie Bank's work on migrant identities in the Eastern Cape. In a book recently published on critical engagement with public sociology, edited by Bezuidenhout et al. (2022) and in Webster in the same book, they use the concept of a "balancing act" between an immersive scholarly engagement and a detached engagement.

by gender, sexuality and race, amongst other things. To appreciate this gender lens, feminism became a vehicle through which to make sense of workers and in particular, women—especially in underground mining, the bastion of masculinity. Through an analysis of the workplace that takes gender seriously, my orientation and identity shifted, and I began to see myself as not only an activist scholar, but also a feminist activist scholar. While activist scholars are concerned with social/political and economic, feminist activist scholars are cognisant of the fact that injustices are gendered and disproportionately affect women, sexual and other minorities. In our struggle for liberation, justice and equity, gender analysis and a feminist orientation have become crucial and are driving forces. While there is a distinction between activist scholars and feminist activist scholars, it is also important to note that some activists, while deeply committed to feminist ideas and praxis, do not emphasise or use "feminist", they instead use activist scholar as a shorthand for the feminist activist scholars. In this paper, I use both to mark the distinction above and foreground the orientation of my work in Marikana.

What is a feminist activist scholar?

There are contestations on what constitutes an activist scholar and feminist activist scholar and what marks their research and scholarship (Choudry 2020). While activist scholars and feminist activist scholars can be on the right or left of the political spectrum (Piven 2010), my focus below is on those who are on the left and are pursuing anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-sexist and equitable futures. The standard definition of an "activist scholar" or feminist activist scholar seems to be that it is an identity attributed to those who are "double-rooted" within academic institutions and social movements; it is those who research and participate in radical political work instead of purporting a neutral positioning, it is the engaged scholars who get "dirty" and are driven by a social justice imperative instead of a distant and disengaged posture and a positivist-oriented refusal to work towards social change. It is those who, through research, challenge dominant power relations, including patriarchy, instead of wittingly reproducing it. They work towards changing inequities and not only critique (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Bobel 2007; Burawoy 2005; Choudry 2020; Peterson 2009; Said 1996;). In other words, their work is linked to social change structures such as movements and unions and does not purport to be 'neutral' or 'value-free' (Isaacman 2003). To emphasise, activist and feminist activist scholars are 'open and transparent about their ideological and political proclivities' (Badat chapter 2 in this volume). They are engaged and want to change the world around them. They strive to remain critical and 'faithful to

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evidence' in their scholarship (Bezuidenhout et al. 2022b).[3] Feminist and other activist scholars are united by their shared commitment to "rigorous critique" of power and injustices (including at a personal level), contextually grounded theorising inspired and informed by "close observation" and involvement in action, in the hopes of inspiring practices and actions for social change.

Feminists and other cultural workers expand the above notion of activist scholars by adding those who theorise from "the personal" and those who theorise creatively and infused emancipatory creative practices within radical politics. Within these traditions there is also a reframing of what constitutes the "political" to include the personal, big and small acts that are directed at and disrupt power in public and private spaces. The personal, therefore, is a critical and legitimate starting point in their activism and theorising, it is a political 'point zero' (see work by Desirée Lewis', Sylvia Tamale, Charmaine Pereira, Amina Mama, Pumla Gqola, Elaine Salo, Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, Patricia McFadden and Patricia Hill-Collins). Equally, creative and biographical work is seen as a site for theorising their and people's conditions (Collins 1990; Hames 2012, 2016; Hooks 2003). They are also involved in undoing and disrupting oppressive structures and building people's power. This personal point-zero is essential to keep in mind as some conceptions of activist scholar tend to value only impersonal, public, grand and distant political "actions" or practices and not personal, intimate, private actions, thus, excluding some scholar-activists who are not necessarily on the "front lines" of struggle but "other" frontlines such as the household, the church, small women's groups etcetera.

While some feminist/activist scholars are indeed located within universities, there are attempts to expand this definition to include those who may be located outside universities; in spaces such as movements, in unions and those involved in knowledge production, analysing, theorising, producing tools and the language for profound critique (Choudry 2020; Mdlalose 2014). To make sense of those outside the academy, I find Gramsci's notion of 'organic intellectual' or Said's 'amateur intellectual' instructive (Said 1996). While these intellectuals can also be activist scholars, it is essential to note that that is not always the case. For example, some union "organic" intellectuals do not necessarily consider themselves activist scholars. The concept of (feminist) activist scholar, therefore, remains contested in all spaces. Some of these contestations come from activists who critique activist scholars (Mdlalose 2014) and others from academics who advocate for modest claims (Kesselman 2022; Bezuidenhout et al. 2022a). Some of these critiques foreground power relations between activist scholars and activists and

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3   See Badat (Chapter 2 in this volume) and Isaacman (2003) for more on the differences between critical and activist research. See O'Laughlin (2014) for more of Ruth First's critically engaged research work and Badat (Chapter 2 and 3 in this volume) for an interrogation of what that work looked like during First's time in Mozambique. For more on recent scholarship on critical engagement from the global South, see Bezuidenhout et al. (2022a).

thus, labour daily in movements instead of "theorising" daily or "making sense" of struggles with some distance. I do not engage with these critiques, but only want to note that the definition, scope and goals of activist scholars I am working with here remain contested from above and below.

Drawing from others before me, my conception of feminist activist scholars' weaves together the above complementary conceptions of feminist activist scholars. This conceptual patchwork is productive, since it allows me to move between different scales and spaces (community and university, private and public, etcetera) when analysing my political and intellectual involvement in Marikana. Even though this chapter focuses on work I have done in the academy as a student and as a faculty member, I also connect and infer on political work I have done in other activist and solidarity spaces not necessarily "for research". In my reflections, I hope to tease tensions in my work as an activist scholar. This is my way of making critical sense of my political work and role, and opening up space to attend to my and our collective failures (for more on tensions that come with being an activist scholar, see also Tarlau 2014; Bevington and Dixon 2005). I aim to add to this scholarship and to ongoing debates about navigating power and positionality for activist scholars.

Entering Marikana

I had driven past Marikana for years, often without giving it a thought, between 2008 and 2012 while travelling between Johannesburg and Rustenburg for my research. I first went to Marikana shortly after the Marikana massacre, which happened while I was doing an ethnographic study of women miners in one of the big platinum mines in the Rustenburg region. When I went, however, it was not for research. After the massacre, I entered Marikana as an activist who had gone to be "in community with" workers, women and the broader community.

When the massacre happened, my team and I had just finished preparing our stope for blasting, and some were already making their way back from underground to the surface. While we knew of the intensity of the tensions and the workers' strike at Lonmin, we did not anticipate that workers would be shot and killed in what has become known as the Marikana massacre. Only upon reaching my shaft did I learn about the cold-blooded massacre that took place in the mine less than forty kilometres away from where we were working. It was later, upon my arrival at the mine hostel/residence, that the news of the brutal killing of mineworkers sunk in. We watched the evening news, shocked at the scenes that had unfolded during the day. The following morning at the shaft, the milieu was different; workers were shocked, and some were mourning their friends, comrades, "homeboys" and relatives. Workers did not want to go underground; they stood in groups recounting the television scenes and calls received and

made to relatives in Marikana. They were consumed by the events we had all witnessed. Drilling and working, considering the massacre, was the last thing on their minds. It was this massacre, these scenes and conversations at the shaft that led to my frequenting Marikana to commiserate with those who were directly affected by the massacre. Elsewhere, I detail how I entered the community and the process of connecting with community members, especially women (Benya 2015a). Therefore, my engagement as an activist birthed my scholarly engagement.

My work with the women, however, started days after the massacre, first, during the memorial service of the slain workers when I had gone to show solidarity with workers, wives and relatives of the deceased and the community at large. On that day, I joined women who were cooking and teams setting up the tent for the memorial service. When we arrived, there was still shock in the community, anger at the arrests and death of workers at the hands of the police. There was a sense of disbelief and an urgency to organise and re-strategise to continue with the demands for a salary increase to R12 500 per month. While cooking and dishing up, women talked about abuse by the police who were terrorising them and their families and the hardships in Marikana. Some hoped that the spotlight thrust on them would bring about positive changes. These conversations and subsequent visits led to my long-term political relationship with women in Marikana. As outlined elsewhere (Benya 2015a), I also temporarily and from a distance worked alongside the broader Marikana Support Campaign (initially Marikana solidarity campaign) that activists in Johannesburg formed.

Marikana women's long history of organising

My main activist work in Marikana over the years has been with *Sikhala Sonke*, a women's organisation which was formed shortly after the Marikana massacre. While the recognition and adulation of "women in Marikana" are recent and came into public discourse after the Marikana massacre of 2012 due to the political work of women in the community, it is essential to note that these women have a more extended history which precedes the massacre and the formation of *Sikhala Sonke* which has come to represent women in Marikana. As Benya (2015a, 2015b), Bruchhausen and Naicker (2018), Madi (2018) Naicker (2016, 2018) and Ndibongo's (2015) work shows, women in Marikana had been organising under different formations long before the Marikana massacre. Prior to 2012, women were formally and informally organising around their exclusion from mine jobs, housing, water and sanitation, all of which were urgent needs in the Marikana area. Most also organised under the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) and local church structures (Benya and Yeni, 2022).

Sikhala Sonke, therefore, while formally formed in 2012, emerged from a more extended history of

women organising in the community. It was also the leading organisation I worked closely with in the community since 2012. Shortly after the massacre, my involvement included visiting the community weekly to be "in community with" women. This involved the day-to-day activities of activists, organising and attending meetings, gatherings, marches and workshops with women, and meetings with local government officials, especially when women were organising marches (Benya 2015a). It was at these women's weekly meetings that *Sikhala Sonke* was formed. My relationship with women in the community has since deepened from an activist scholar who was in solidarity with women, workers and the community, co-organising marches demanding justice for Marikana, attending sessions at the Marikana Commission of Enquiry, to one where I became actively involved, alongside others, in documenting and analysing the meanings of Marikana with and from the perspective of women, but always in community with *Sikhala Sonke* (Alexander et al. 2013; Benya 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Naicker 2016; Ndibongo 2015; Paremoer 2012; Saragas 2015, 2017).

While I initially engaged as an activist mobilising with women in the community, later I also began engaging as a scholar, trying to make critical sense of what had happened in Marikana and grappling with questions that people were holding and posing. The questions people were asking, at moments of deep frustration and emotion, were sometimes directed at me. At other times, they were posed rhetorically to make sense of the massacre that had happened in the community, a place people called home, by a government that they had voted for and brought into power, a government led by a former liberation movement, a political party that they still believed in and had canvassed for. The questions were not only about the massacre that had taken place before their eyes in Marikana, but also about notions of citizenship, belonging, and political identity in post-apartheid South Africa. For Marikana residents and those who lived around Marikana, everything was upended by the massacre.

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Contributing to "sensemaking"

As I argue elsewhere (Benya 2016), the Marikana massacre was a moment of rupture for me as a feminist activist and a scholar. Having studied about and witnessed the constantly jolting crises in South Africa's industrial relations, I never imagined we would see a massacre, one that was geographically (about 30-40 km from where I lived at that time) and politically so close to my activist and scholarly work. Because of the proximity of the massacre and because what had happened was unconscionable in a post-apartheid workplace, I wanted to be involved. As an activist-scholar, it was crucial to be present and contribute to the "sensemaking" community members, families and the public were engaged in.

From the start of the strikes in 2012 until the "last wave" in 2014, Marikana strongly featured in the

public's social imagination, albeit in different ways. First, there was a demonising of workers and anti-poor and anti-striking mineworker rhetoric. Later, as more data emerged about the strike, the negotiations, the position and direction some were facing as bullets were fired as well as the close range at which some were shot, the more in-depth analysis began. What emerged from that analysis was that what had happened was indeed a premeditated mass murder—a massacre. As the narrative changed, so did attitudes nationally, with people beyond Marikana showing great empathy and solidarity—though this was not generalised. The shift from anti-Marikana public sentiments to solidarity was primarily because of deliberate narrative change work by people in Marikana and those who were their allies as well as unbiased reporting by some journalists. The narrative change work included community members, workers, and women in Marikana, who constantly corrected the biased language used by some of those who were in their midst, from journalists to academics and activists. For example, instead of people in conversations saying, "workers died here", community members and worker leaders in Marikana insisted that there be clarity on who killed workers and how. For example, instead of the above short statement, people were encouraged to be specific and recognise that 1) mineworkers were killed, 2) for demanding a living wage, 3) some were shot on their backs while running and 4) they were killed (or massacred) by the police. Indeed, the narrative shifted locally. Nationally, it was after a few days that we

188 began to see a shift in how the massacre was reported. The shift was decisive after a report in the Daily Maverick (DM), which ultimately became a book, emerged (Marinovich 2012, 2016). The DM report, documentary on the massacre and subsequent books outlined 1) how workers were killed, 2) that they were not violently charging at police as earlier reports had suggested and 3) that some workers were hiding (Alexander et al. 2013). The police hunted them down under and between rocks, cold-bloodedly killing them while joking about it (Desai 2014). The Marikana killings came to be known as a massacre, not a tragedy (Alexander 2013).

For years after the Marikana massacre, workers in surrounding mines and activists at local, national and international levels have continued to organise and demand justice for Marikana. These actions have kept the spirit of Marikana alive. Marikana has, thus, come to symbolise and to be seen as an active site of resistance against the then-normalised low wages and normalised exploitation by South Africa's mining capital. Chinguno (2013a, 2015), Grossman (2016) and Sinwell and Mbatha (2016) unpack the lengths of this spirit of Marikana. Naicker (2016) shows us how the "Spirit of Marikana" influenced and strengthened the resolve to fight in communities struggling for justice in different parts of the country. Some came to call themselves "Marikana". Grossman (2016) shows how that same spirit of Marikana inspired other Marikanas and what some have called the "NUMSA moment" and student protests in 2015-2017. Across South Africa, workers and students revolting against oppressive systems said, "We are

Marikana". The connections, therefore, between Marikana and other struggles were constantly evoked as people tried to make sense of Marikana and its meanings in the post-apartheid context.

The context: Engaging in and with Marikana

Here, I want to focus on what being a feminist activist scholar has meant in the work I have been doing with women in Marikana. My work in Marikana traverses several spaces; the first space is the university where, through my research and teaching, I have been trying to make critical sense of the Marikana massacre and to engage with the broader scholarship on it, getting students to critically reflect on the different meanings of Marikana (Alexander 2013; Alexander et al. 2013; Alexander 2016; Bond 2013; Chinguno 2013a, 2013b; Chinguno 2015; Magaziner and Jacobs 2013; Naicker 2016; Naicker and Bruchhausen 2016; Pillay 2013). With students, some of whom were in primary school when the massacre happened, my course introduces them to debates on the meanings of Marikana. In addition, as a teaching team, we have developed teaching exercises and tutorial activities to deepen students' critical understanding of Marikana. These include, but are not limited to writing critical reflection pieces that focus on asking questions about the massacre, labour theory, political economy, mining industrial complex, the history of mining, the different players both historically and in contemporary times, watching short critical videos and connecting them to concepts, popular "facts" and myths and getting them to sift through facts and myths and make up their mind drawing from research papers and other peer-reviewed data, watching documentaries and writing op-eds etcetera. By using and drawing from creative modes of expression (for example, poems, song lyrics, artwork or biographies), we invite students to inhabit a different identity and ask questions about the massacre, the political economy, mining capital and life in Marikana from multiple perspectives.

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 In class, we have also drawn connections between Marikana and the experiences of other working-class communities in South Africa. For example, several informal settlements have sprouted up in recent years across many provinces, notably in the Western Cape. Residents of these informal communities deliberately chose to call their settlements Marikana to draw attention to the similarities in their living conditions and those of mineworkers in Marikana and to show solidarity with the people of Marikana. Drawing connections between Marikanas in different provinces and the original Marikana in the North-West province is especially important for students who struggle to connect social issues across space and time; issues that concern working class communities in Cape Town and Marikana, which is seen as a far-away mining town that has no connections to them or their lives. They also have difficulties imagining the massacre and connecting the struggles as they were barely ten years old when the Marikana massacre took place.

In addition to teaching accredited courses about Marikana in classrooms, the UCT Marikana solidarity forum hosts public discussions, seminars, exhibitions, documentary screenings and dialogues annually in August. We host these events to keep Marikana's memory alive beyond our classrooms and generate discussions across campus about social justice issues that concern others outside the ivory tower or the university on the hill, as some refer to UCT.

The second space where I have been trying to make critical sense of the Marikana massacre has been with the Marikana community, especially women. Here, I have been involved as an activist for women in the *Sikhala Sonke* women's organisation for the past twelve years. While I attempt to connect the two, my main focus in this paper is on the second space—the community and the women's organisation and my role between 2012 and now. I reflect on how I negotiate my activism in Marikana as someone who is also tied to and has a teaching position in the university, and thus, has some power and enjoys a certain distance from Marikana that no level of deep engagement and commitment can erase.

Revisiting Marikana

It has been twelve years since the 2012 Marikana massacre. While some things have changed in Marikana, more remains the same (Benya and Chinguno 2022). Workers' demands in 2012 still haunt their workplaces and labour relations broadly. This ghostly haunting is seen in the experiences of community members and women who have been central in making ends meet considering retrenchments, the rise in subcontracting that came with the take-over of Lonmin by Sibanye, and an inactive, sometimes absent and uncaring state. Indeed, conditions in Marikana have worsened (Benya and Chinguno 2022). However, twelve years after the massacre, the nation and activists seem to have forgotten or moved on from Marikana. I want to focus on this forgetting or moving on in the section that follows and the complexities of resolving it for activist scholars.

The challenges of keeping struggles alive in public discourse

What does it take to keep struggles alive in the public imagination when many other struggles come, shock and sometimes seem to "overtake"? While things have not necessarily improved in Marikana, the spotlight has shifted from the massacre. We have struggled to keep the political momentum and spotlight on righting the injustices in Marikana. By "we", I include activists and especially activist scholars who were active in Marikana and those who were actively in solidarity with the affected families and the community.

Beyond theorising and documenting about Marikana by activist scholars over the past twelve years, there must be more sustained political work to keep the momentum and focus on Marikana.[4] At most, we activist scholars have been involved in periodic visits to Marikana, commemoration events in August and a few concrete activities in between that put pressure on those in power to address the plight of people and community of Marikana, the injured and families of slain workers. On the main, only some campaigns have kept the struggles of Marikana in public discourse. The silences and forgetting Marikana raise questions about our inability to sustain struggles and our long-term commitment as activist scholars to political work that does not affect us materially. Our inability to sustain and improve our involvement was raised and admitted at several ten-year commemorative events hosted in 2022. At these events, there were calls to reinvigorate activism around Marikana, to be more present in Marikana and to show continuous solidarity, because conditions have not changed, and people feel forgotten even though lives were lost. At these events, families, Marikana women and the injured felt that matters were urgent and dire in Marikana. They felt that the spotlight had shifted elsewhere, and people had forgotten about the massacre. However, the struggles continue for families, for the injured and the larger Marikana community, including women.

The shift of focus from, and silence about Marikana has become more pronounced in recent years. Between 2012 and 2015, a critical mass of scholars and community activists still worked closely with different workers, community and women structures in Marikana (Ndibongo 2015; Padi 2018; Sinwell and Mbatha 2016). Marikana massacre commemoration events were hosted across different parts of the country. Until 2015, there was still a hive of activities organised to get people outside Marikana to connect and support those in Marikana. Activities organised to connect struggles or "conscientise" communities outside Marikana included the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) sponsored Feminist Tables targeting feminists across the country, worker and community workshops, regular solidarity visits and media campaigns directed at keeping the spirit of Marikana alive beyond the platinum belt (Benya 2015b; Fakier and Cock 2018). Since 2016, however, fewer activists have been involved in Marikana. Part of the withdrawal of some scholars and activists can be explained by the "take over" and monopolisation of the Marikana massacre and struggles by political parties and its mobilisation by some unions for their ends to the point of barring people from entering the community, policing the mountain where the massacre took place and surveilling outside visitors to Marikana.

Even with these challenges, the withdrawal and silence about Marikana remains a concern that activist scholars must contend with. It has been twelve years since the massacre, and even fewer activist

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4   SERI has been an exception in this regard.

scholars are organising around the Marikana struggles and taking the time to go back to or are active in political work in Marikana beyond scholarly interests. We have collectively turned Marikana into an August "event", with fewer and fewer activities in between, even as we strive to keep the memory of the massacre alive. Our attention and commitment to the daily struggles of workers have been compromised. In my recent "visits" to Marikana, women have lamented how they feel alone, forgotten and discarded by the broader collective of activists and activist scholars who were constantly present between 2012 and 2015 and now return closer to August. Widows and families have expressed feeling alone and let down by the public and the government. In conversations with some widows and family members in 2022 at the National Arts Festival in Makhanda and at a reflective workshop organised by SERI in 2022—one of the few consistent organisations that have been supporting families in Marikana—family members remarked that when they talk to people about court cases that they are still attending or Marikana related activities they are involved in, some lament "is that *thing* still ongoing?" Others indicated that they have been alone, with only a few still fighting, not just walking beside them. This indicates a broader public and national disremembering of the struggles in Marikana.

These challenges raise critical questions for activist scholars who move on to other struggles and make minimal effort to connect struggles on the ground beyond theorising about the connections. As activist scholars, we must confront the challenge of sustaining our political efforts and deepening our involvement, even when we have moved on to other struggles. Because of our inability to confront this challenge, activist scholars have been deemed opportunists and involved in a struggle to advance their careers and political credentials. What is to be done remains a challenge we need to confront.

External influences, power and accountability in movements

While above, I pointed out our inability to keep the momentum and struggle alive in the broader public imagination, here I focus on what led to this challenge in the case of *Sikhala Sonke*, and ultimately, the group's demobilisation.

Some challenges confronted the *Sikhala Sonke* women's organisation from the get-go. These challenges were partly due to internal dynamics typical in political structures and movements and external influence. From my reading of the situation and conversations with women in Marikana, some challenges emerged from how we, as "outside" activists and activist scholars, engaged with the community and the women of *Sikhala Sonke*. These included our avoidance of dealing with small fissures that were present from the get-go, our disregard for and inability to read power dynamics between the different groups of women in Marikana (because of nationality, social capital, language, political affiliation), how and who

we engaged with as "outside" activists and who we unintentionally side-lined and emboldened in the process and our solidarity work.

How did our involvement as activists and activist scholars influence the organisation? We came to Marikana from different places and under various names, and the women in *Sikhala Sonke* had also organised under different formations before joining *Sikhala Sonke*. Most of us who were not from Marikana had access to resources and forms of capital (financial/legal and media) that we could mobilise when needed. While women and *Sikhala Sonke* were often consulted, at times, we consulted individuals, not the group, and the rest of the women were expected to follow. Because of the way we worked at the beginning, we ended up bolstering some individuals instead of the collective, either because of language difficulties on our part or because of who was vocal at meetings or had access to a cell phone and was in an area with a reliable network and connections to outsiders.

A small thing, such as having a cell phone and reliable network, was the difference between getting calls, being invited, being consulted first on issues and being informed first about external decisions or activities versus others. Our invitations to women from *Sikhala Sonke* to either the university or other movements in the big cities and other places to be "conscientized" and share their experiences, to participate in training and schools, thus, created what some social movement scholars call "stars" and "elites" or "activist elites" within *Sikhala Sonke* (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Freeman 1972). While some of the "stars" remained rooted in the organisation, others began operating as individuals to the demobilisation of the collective. As women in Marikana noted, some individuals became more important than the collective and were emboldened by outside material support, contacts and social capital that they were accumulating over through their involvement and for being one of Marikana's faces.

At this moment, we failed to reflect critically, hold each other accountable and ask each other critical questions at these multiple junctures of organising around Marikana. There were always more urgent matters to address. This contributed to unhealthy and anti-democratic dynamics within the women's structure. As these issues played out in the background, some women activists left, a few remained, and the organisation slowly crumbled. We did not take any responsibility or honestly reflect on our role in what was happening internally and locally. Some activists did not even know that the support rendered was also causing internal divisions because we operated and showed solidarity from afar and periodically post-2015.

Because we (outside activists) were distant from the day-to-day actions, we were blind to the power dynamics and constant shifts within the women's movement. As such, we failed to understand the nuances of what Marikana women activists were saying (in the euphemisms) as they navigated political involvement, the need for support, material struggles, and access to external networks.

There were also open conflicts within the group that outside activists and activist scholars evaded and avoided partly because we did not want to "interfere" in what seemed like personal battles. On the one hand we wanted to be involved in the broader struggles, but did not want to be involved in the organisation's struggles, which was an unsustainable contradiction on our side. With hindsight, these were political and material struggles. While we did not want to be seen as being aligned with any "faction", problems festered, and our "non-alignment" resulted in our paralysis in the face of challenges.

It was only seven years later, at feminist and organising schools and at workshops, that questions began to emerge. However, by then, many women activists had left *Sikhala Sonke*; some were disgruntled and unhappy with the organisation, being side-lined by activist scholars who made little effort to learn local languages to ease communication and deepen relations.

Organising activities and disorganising movements: Confronting power within

What I allude to above did not start after 2015; even in the early days, we were not deliberate about how power operated within and outside the women's structures and how power was configured before and after the massacre. We did not consider the challenges an organisation formed out of trauma, by people from different formations and political orientations might face. We mainly paid attention to what was before us, organising activities and events, what was said and not what was unsaid; we focused on what we considered to reflect the growth of the women's movement, the changes in political language that some activists were using, we focused on visibility and presence of women at various activities where the Marikana banner was flown high to empathetic audiences. We paid attention to rotating leadership positions and not to who had power and how that power was mobilised and used to discipline or sideline others quietly. We were fixated on "action" and visibility on the outside; we did not ask pertinent questions about organisational health and the strength of relationships. The movement dwindled, and we looked for easy answers that fitted our "double-rooted" and highly mobile scholar-activist lives.

As a result of a combination of factors, including our failures to ask difficult questions of those we were "close to", even organising and mobilising women, we gave way to the demobilisation we now sit uncomfortably with. We went with the flow. The women who were not vocal or who did not speak English disappeared into the background as we struggled to communicate with some due to language differences. Twelve years on, it seems we have collectively reduced our involvement to politically empty solidarity visits that sometimes look like charity work instead of politically charged work that is about changing oppressive and exploitative structures and practices.

Activist research and the academy

Above, I have reflected on the work I have been involved in in Marikana and the challenges the women's movement has faced. I reflect as someone who has been actively involved and, at times, accompanying and in solidarity with the women. In this section, I will briefly reflect on how that work is viewed within the academy. While teaching about the Marikana massacre, a turning point in the history of South Africa, is given space, there is very little reckoning and appreciation in institutions of higher learning on what activist scholarship entails, including the investments that go beyond spending time with people only to do interviews or collect data.

Besides the rhetoric of engaged scholarship, what activist scholarship involves, the demands on scholars (resources and time) and why it is crucial, are outside of broader academic conversations. The emphasis at our institutions and at times, in our departments, as many before me have argued, is on quantifiable research outputs that (in South Africa) are recognised by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and can fetch subsidies. It is not a research output if it is not in a DHET academic journal (Dawson and Sinwell 2012). Research is, therefore, equated and reduced to articles. As Choudry (2020) notes, this view disregards the critical work of building relationships, nurturing and sustaining them that is often involved in 'socially and politically engaged research'. Indeed, this relationship building is not work valued in the academy, nor can it be made visible when quantifying research 'outputs, or partnerships or future collaborations', yet it is critical.

When the university wants to "recognise" activist scholarship, it seems that the primary goal is often to appropriate that work for its ends and not to value it for the contribution it makes in communities/movements and thus, see how best to allow activist scholars to do justice to it along-side other expectations the university has on them. It, therefore, seems like a double bind; if it is recognised, there is a danger of 'institutional capture' (Cox 2015). If not recognised, it continues to be on the margins, and those academics who engage in it are not seen as serious scholars unless they can publish in academic journals (Dawson and Sinwell 2012). While Said (1996) presents marginality as productive and a site where one can sharpen one's critical insights, it also comes at a cost within the academy (and sometimes benefits outside the academy).

The work required of activist scholars necessarily means that they must balance meeting targets (for grants, for peer-reviewed publications) with teaching and research and deep involvement in communities. Because maintaining this balance is challenging, they are often seen as uncommitted or in-productivity and lacking intellectual rigour. As Choudry (2020: 42) argues, 'intellectual rigour and capacity for reflection, abstraction and theorising are not the monopoly of those who claim neutral,

scientific distance from the subject of their inquiry or the content of what they teach'. It is the purview of all of us.

Conclusion

Women's organisations in Marikana face many challenges. However, my focus in this chapter is on the challenges we must contend with as feminist activist scholars to sustain our work and attain the broader political goals that inform it. If we want to be involved in research and political action that inspires social change, then critical sensemaking and openness to our collective failures are imperative.

Considering all the challenges I highlighted above, I have come to be modest about my claims about my work as a feminist activist scholar. I acknowledge that there is a distance that, even as a committed activist scholar, I cannot bridge. The class dynamics between activist scholars and community activists cannot be erased or wished away through silence and evocations of non-alignment. They must be creatively and productively engaged to tackle what Tarlau (2014: 63) calls 'unresolvable contradictions' of activist scholars.

If indeed we write, research and get involved to contribute to the "toolkit" that supports struggles (Piven 2010), we must commit to confronting power within movements as we search for a different world and aspire to contribute towards its realisation and to new relevant (sociological) theories. Thus, we must grapple seriously with our power from our initial involvement, remain self-critical, and not be blind to internal challenges brought on by our involvement. In addition to good political intentions and moral imperatives, we constantly need to critically reflect on the whole spectrum of our actions.

This includes engaging with and about the benefits we accrue, the political mileage we gain and the social capital we fortify by our involvement, even as we remain marginal within our disciplines and institutions. In reflecting on our work as activist scholars and its impact, we must consider actions, practices and power and ensure that our involvement does not produce new hierarchies or reproduce and cement old hierarchies (Choudry 2020).

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Chapter 9: Lawyers and Activism in the Context of the Decolonial Turn

Ntando Sindane

Introduction

The subject of activist lawyers has been widely written about in South Africa. Most accounts trace the emergence of activist lawyers from the 1910-1914 grouping of legally trained "natives"[1] who collectively converged to form Africa's oldest liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC) (Plaatje 2007).[2] Activist lawyers (not all of them were connected to the ANC) of that period and neighbouring eras included, the likes of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Alfred Mangena, Richard W. Msimang, Desiree Finca, Anton Muziwakhe Lembede, Wycliffe Mlungisi Tsotsi, Thulani Gcabashe, Vincent Joseph Gaobakwe Matthews, Massabalala (Bonnie) Yengwa, Godfrey Mokgonane Pitje, and many others (Ngcukaitobi 2018).[3]

In more recent years, two prominent names immediately come to mind when discussing activist lawyers, namely Bram Fischer and Albie Sachs. The latter was a prominent member of the anti-apartheid movement, who served as foremost supporter of *Umkhonto weSizwe* (ANC armed wing), only to become one of South Africa's first constitutional court judges shortly after the 1994 democratic breakthrough. Sachs is an example of what activist lawyers were, in the sense that the roots of his activism stem from

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1   Black people referred to themselves as "natives" – this labelling is a matter of scholarly contestation in certain quarters.
2   Plaatje broadly recounts some of the ANC's earlier missions to Crown to negotiate the place of Black people in the racist arrangement of the newly formed Union of South Africa.
3   For a broader reading on the history of South Africa's first Black lawyers, see Ngcukaitobi (2018).

his days as a law student at the University of Cape Town in the early 1950s.[4] Whilst in Europe, Sachs completed his PhD studies in law, culminating in a doctoral thesis entitled *Justice in South Africa*; the text was banned in South Africa. The various spaces that Sachs found himself in did not deter his activism—instead, he found ways to support and advance the goals of the revolution.

Two scholars, Drucilla Cornell and Karin van Marle have co-authored a book (with Sachs) about the activism of Albie Sachs (Cornell et al. 2014: 1–126). The book's first chapter is titled, 'Comrade judge: Can a revolutionary be a judge?' (Cornell et al. 2014: 9–47) where they carefully probe the possibility for a liberation movement fighter to become an officer of the court, and specifically, a judge.[5] To respond to this question, the authors demonstrate the role that Sachs played in the liberation movement. In the main, Sachs was tasked by the then president of the ANC, Oliver Reginald Tambo, to draft a Code of Conduct for *Umkhonto weSizwe* combatants (Cornell et al. 2014: 14). The Code of Conduct was a product of Tambo's concern that there was a breakdown in discipline and ethics in the *Umkhonto weSizwe*'s military camps. In the main, the Code of Conduct was an instrument to instil the ANC's democratic values in its military wing. Sachs drafted the Code of Conduct (Cornell et al. 2014: 15).[6] which, among other things, forbade the use of torture as well as various other 'non-ethics of war'[7] in *Umkhonto weSizwe* military actions. The draft was presented and duly adopted by the ANC's 1985 conference in Kabwe (Scholtz and Scholtz 2011: 551–574). It was apparent throughout his life as a student leader and a lawyer, that Sachs committed himself to activism and the struggle to liberate South Africa from Apartheid (Cornell et al. 2014: 19).

As gleaned from Ngcukaitobi's careful reading of history, we can observe that activist lawyers of the yesteryears had one thing in common—they were responsive to the community struggles of their

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4   Historical accounts show that in 1952, as a student activist, Sachs joined in mass protests and the Defiance Campaign led by the ANC—he mobilised fellow White students to occupy chairs at the local post office, that were legally reserved only for Black people. This was the beginning of his long life in the struggle against racist segregationist apartheid regime. Subversive mobilising against the apartheid state meant numerous arrests, tortures, and related harassment by the regime, which ultimately led Sachs to exile, first in England, then later to other parts of Europe. He later moved to Mozambique after it gained independence from Portugal, where he continued doing underground activist work for the ANC and *Umkhonto weSizwe*.

5   Notwithstanding its obvious scope, it is interesting to note how Cornell and Van Marle overly emphasise Sachs' activities as a judge more than his earlier years as first a student activist, and later as a freedom fighter. Oddly, the younger Sachs was more radical and subversive to the empire and it begs the question why his peacetime activities are the object of such greater attention/focus.

6   Cornell and Van Marle demonstrate that it is in this role that Sachs was already shaping/crafting the type of jurist that he would later become, because his investment to humanity and democracy insofar as armed responses to the apartheid regime completely mirror his insistence on the jurisprudence of *Ubuntu/Botho* and as well as his embrace of feminist jurisprudential discourse as a judge under the moral and legal mandate of the new Constitution.

7   The image of the "non-ethics of war" relates to those atrocities committed by the army that has won a battle and then proceeds to enslave, kill, rape and maim the people of the conquered territory.

respective epochs, and they went beyond the call of their legal demands/commitments to put their legal, spiritual, professional and intellectual wits in the aid towards defeating some of the challenges facing their community (Ngcukaitobi 2018). The 1910-1914 cohort rose against the 1910 Union of South Africa arrangement (Dladla 2018),[8] that created the present-day South Africa, on the backs of exploited Black people and which ultimately gave birth to the rise of ultra-Afrikaner nationalism that established apartheid in 1948.

Apart from individual activist lawyers, there are also organisations, associations and related formations that engage in social justice activism by way of lawyering that works on behalf of and serves purely as a public purpose.[9] Most of these organisations work in defence of vulnerable communities and persons who are unable to afford legal fees. These organisations include, but are not limited to, organisations such as the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), the Dullar Omar Foundation, the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), + Section 27, the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC), the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), the Free State Centre for Human Rights and others.

This chapter grapples with the question as to how we should define or think about activist lawyers in the post-apartheid era, particularly in the aftermath of the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, which presented South Africa, and indeed the legal academy, with what decolonial scholars refer to as the decolonial turn.

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It is with the background set out above that the argument of this chapter is propounded in four segments, following this introduction: the second segment maps the decolonial turn, where this segment intends to substantively (albeit briefly) demonstrate the meaning, essence, and ethos of the decolonial turn and its practical implications for how we think about and re-imagine the practice of law and its pedagogy. The third segment follows through from the definitional clarity as hedged in the second segment, by proffering three characteristics of activist lawyers in the context of the decolonial turn—it argues that these characteristics are a legitimate starting point in the quest to exorcise legal practice and education from the vestigial clutches of colonial knowing, being and thinking. The last and final segment is the conclusion to this chapter.

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8   Dladla explains that the Union of South Africa was a newfound romance between the British and the Afrikaner after centuries of bitter wars between each other, over land that did not belong to them in the first place.

9   In personal conversations with Karin van Marle and Danie Brand, I am often drawn to the irony in "public interest litigation" or "lawyering that serves a public purpose". They both insist that lawyers are officers of the court, and that courts are public institutions, therefore, all litigation should realistically and inherently be in the interest of the public; this includes private and commercial law litigation. Prevailing distinctions between public and private law litigation wrongly create perceptions that private/commercial law litigation is a matter of private citizens, and therefore, not bound by public policy imperatives.

Mapping the decolonial turn

Although contemporary mappings of the decolonial turn tend to over-emphasise and unduly place it with the theorisation of decolonial scholars from South America and some parts of Europe (and therefore, the United States of America), a deeper reading shows that Africa (Mudimbe 1988),[10] and the diaspora have been central in significant epochs that presented a decolonial turn (Robinson 2021).[11]

Theorisation as relating to the decolonial turn is an offshoot of the broader intellectual discourse on decolonisation. Most contemporary scholarship on decolonisation accordingly draws its lexicography from Frantz Fanon's insights encapsulated in his two seminal writings, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon [1952] 1986)[12] and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon [1963] 1967).[13] A deeper reading of Fanon's seminal works helps crystalise the contextual relevance of decolonisation and the emergence of multiple decolonial turns even after the cessation of official colonialism and related imperialist conquests.

Contemporary scholars of decolonial theory, thus, begin the discourse on decolonisation by distinguishing between colonialism and coloniality:

> Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image

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10 Mudimbe unpacks the various epochs in the various decolonial turns that have defined Africa's long resistance to colonialism and related imperialist conquests.

11 In an almost similar fashion to Mudimbe, Robinson extensively grapples with the numerous decolonial turns that have defined Black and African people's unending resistance to colonialism, capitalism, slavery, sexism and all other episodes of oppression facing them. For example, Robinson is one of the foremost scholars in the study of the spectre of racial capitalism where he provides an annotated account of the limitations of Eurocentric criticisms of capitalism, because it was bereft of an appreciation of the racist and anti-Black nature of capitalism.

12 In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon broadly engaged in a rich psychoanalytic study of racism in the colony. Fanon warns that the colonial society is facing a crisis of White racism and that this will eventually lead to a rupture. Racism creates a society that is divided into two distinct realities, these are the zone of being and the zone of non-being, Fanon explains that, first and foremost, coloniality is a dehumanising experience that places humans (White people) at the zone of being and subsequently places colonised bodies (Black people) in the zone of nonbeing.

13 In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon broadly considers two broad topics, (1) the reality and material conditions of the colony moments before political independence, and shortly thereafter, and (2) the impact of colonial wars on the psyche of the coloniser and the colonised, as evidenced through varying degrees of mental disorders.

of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 4)

Walter Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* serves an appropriate starting point (in the context of this chapter) when historicising discussions about the decolonial turn. He explains that in the sixteenth century, Spanish missionaries came into contact with people from the Global South and declared that people shall be judged (engaged with) on the basis of their (in)ability to read/write and use the alphabet (Mignolo 2012: 3). Mignolo posits that this was the beginning of what he calls colonial difference and the Atlantic imaginary (Mignolo 2012: 13).[14]

Towards the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the yardstick was no longer the ability to read/write in alphabets, but rather "history"—the resultant effect of this was that those who could read/write in alphabet were said to have had a history, and those who could not read/write in alphabet had no history (Mignolo 2012: 3).

The function of relegating to "sub-human", people who could not read/write in alphabet, and declaring that their inability to read/write in alphabet to also mean that they do not have a history, is at the centre of the coloniality of knowledge, it is what Mignolo refers to as the 'subalternization of knowledge' (Mignolo 2012: 12–13).

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A fundamental understanding of the essence of the decolonial turn can be drawn from another of Walter Mignolo's work; 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto' to understand the meaning of the decolonial turn:

> The Decolonial Turn is the opening and the freedom from the thinking and the forms of living (economies-other, political theories-other), the cleansing of the coloniality of being and of knowledge; the de-linking from the spell of the rhetoric of modernity, from its imperial imaginary articulated in the rhetoric of democracy (Mignolo 2011: 48).

This definition accepts that the #MustFall moment presented South Africa with a decolonial turn, this is an epochal inevitability that seeks to complete the incomplete task of decolonising our society. The decolonial turn is thus, a fundamental rupture that happens when a specific colonial society undergoes a notable action that seeks and calls for radical change (Motimele 2019: 205–214). This rupture may be evidenced in different epochs of history—for example, the youth uprising of June 1976 could legitimately

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14 Mignolo (2012: 3) defines colonial difference to mean 'the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary by enacting coloniality of power to transform differences into values'.

be understood as a form of a decolonial turn, since the uprisings brought about a precise rupture that had the impact of changing South Africa's course of history (Sindane 2023: 60).

To be sure, the June 16 generation of students precipitated a rupture that had the South African society questioning (with the intention to de-link) the colonial modes of control that insisted that a colonial and regressive Afrikaans language should become the medium of instruction in South African schools. This decolonial turn presented the academy with an opportunity to extensively engage with the epistemic toxicity of language in colonies—wherein the oppressor used language as a weapon to replicate and reinscribe his image in the imaginations of the colonised and thus, deepen their colonial malady. Although language was at the centre of the dispute, the June 16 moment was also characterised by broader colonial entanglements and the people's multipronged resistance to it.

A fundamental rupture as the cornerstone of the decolonial turn presented by the #MustFall moment is carefully studied by Motimele (2019: 205) as follows:

> Yet, the true rupture presented by the unified activism of students and workers was in the critique they presented of a neoliberalized university, hierarchical bureaucratic structures, an institutional culture still defined by Whiteness, and dominant epistemological paradigms that foreclosed the possibility for an indigenous intellectual project ... Students and workers refuse to be keepers of neoliberal-time by disrupting their roles as human capital with a focus on issues of racial, sexist, classist, ableist, and epistemic exclusion and exploitation.

The concept of 'neoliberal-time' is a marker that Motimele uses to define the totality of three realities that beset the prevailing Eurocentric university, these are curriculum-time, capitalist-time and production-time (Motimele 2019: 205). Implied in these three is the ubiquity of neo-liberal trappings that define the very essence of a colonial university. To Motimele, the decolonial turn presents itself as a rupture to disrupt these three realities in the quest of a radical imagination for the future university that is free from colonial and capitalist sensitivities. Indeed, these ruptures, although canvassed in the context of the university, is a mirror of the South African society in general. For example, Mpofu-Walsh (2021: 25) uses the concept 'tensions' to extend 'neoliberal-time' from the university to South Africa in general—the author argues that the post-1994 reality is a constant tussle between two contradictory/competing visions. On the one hand, a democratic and egalitarian vision that is known as a 'the New South Africa' and on the other hand, a conservative and oppressive vision that he refers to as 'the New Apartheid' (Mpofu-Walsh 2021: 25).

Whereas 'neoliberal-time' in the context of the university speaks to the oppressive/capitalist insistence

on the conclusion of the academic programme(curriculum-time), the need to optimise university profitability (capitalist-time) and throughput (production-time) (Motimele 2019: 205), 'tensions' is defined by two markers, (1) a firm shift towards neo-liberal orthodoxy where national economic policy imperatives are concerned and (2) the fact that the new Black-led state replicates and reproduces the oppression of its predecessors (Mpofu-Walsh 2021: 27).

Although Mpofu-Walsh can carefully demonstrate 'neoliberal-time' (in the make of "tensions") beyond the confines of the university, he concedes that it is only students who have validly responded to the challenge of the decolonial turn:

> The living ghosts of segregation surround South African spaces, causing recurrent protest and social rupture... The 'Must Fall' moment was a new generation's first expression of disgust at the new apartheid ... Student protests of the mid-2010s should, therefore, be read as a challenge to the very foundations of post-settlement South Africa – one that revealed the spatial contradictions inherent in the new apartheid, just as student protests of the 1970s and 1980s had done with apartheid. (Mpofu-Walsh 2021: 45–47)

Martinez-Vargas (2020: 112–128) carefully observes that the #MustFall student protests and subsequent demand for higher education to be decolonised constitutes a legitimate engagement with the fiction and poetics called upon by the decolonial turn. Most importantly, she observes that a critical component of decolonising higher education includes dismantling the prevailing objective and universal worldview that assesses knowledge according to its own standards of truth and thus, ignores other knowledge systems. Martinez-Vargas addresses a misperception of decolonisation as meaning the doing away of the Western epistemic system; she correctly argues that a turn to the pluriverse does not mean dismantling Western knowledge(s), instead it says that there should be diversity in the knowledge systems that exist. Furthermore, Martinez-Vargas appreciates that epistemic and ontological turns are an invitation to re-think concepts and norms that have been long accepted as the golden truth.

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Having briefly mapped the decolonial turn,[15] the chapter investigates decolonial imaginations of an activist lawyer in a legal practice. The chapter argues that an activist lawyer, in the context of the decolonial turn embraces the need to completely rethink, dismantle and undo the very strictures, formalities, tropes, and traditions that define legal practice today. The exercise of defining, assessing and thinking anew about the meaning of activist lawyering in the context of the decolonial turn is part and

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15   The scholarship regarding the decolonial turn is vast, for further examples, see Grosfoguel (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2011a, 2017), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), Snyman (2015).

parcel of the proposal made by various decolonial legal scholars (Sindane 2021),[16] whose scholarship is said to constitute a prophetic intellectual engagement (Sindane 2022).[17] Examples of decolonial critical scholars who have made calls for a complete rethink of legal practice, the LLB curriculum and legal practitioners, include Madlingozi, who sharply criticises South Africa's constitutional polity, arguing that it is founded on elitist pacts that do not reflect the material and spiritual aspirations of the people on whose behalf it claims its genesis. The central thesis of his argument is two-fold: (1) that the perennial protest by marginalised communities is impelled by the fact that the constitution does not rise to the demand of decolonisation and (2) that the constitution's failure to live up to decolonial demands can be understood by studying the ambivalent racial melancholia and the double-consciousness of South Africa's political elite (Madlingozi 2018). Elsewhere, he has argued that the constitutional moment presents itself as one that seeks to undo colonial conquests, yet it serves to deepen and entrench imperial gains (Madlingozi 2017). This is an argument that is echoed by Modiri, who broadly draws from Africana Existential philosophy to make a multipronged critique of South Africa's post-1994 situation, he critically analyses the epistemic, spiritual, political, and social conditions that define South Africa's reality after the proverbial 1994 democratic breakthrough (Modiri 2017). Modiri's approach is one that sums up the prevailing situation as that of anti-Black racism as being definitive of all facets of South Africa's lived reality. Elsewhere, he argues that instead of resolving the crisis of institutionalised anti-Black racism, the Constitution breeds and perpetuates anti-Black norms and tropes (Modiri 2018: 300–325).

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A thorough distillation of the decolonial turn as presented by the #MustFall moment has reasonable implications for legal practice. Three issues are salient: (1) the totality of the legal practice edifice remains largely untransformed and contributes to ontological/epistemic ruptures, (2) the reality of an untransformed legal practice and judiciary calls for the need to challenge the very foundations of a legal system that has been inherited from apartheid without any substantial change and (3) the work that must be done to attain a substantial paradigm shift in society's imagination of the role of lawyers must completely transcend what we currently know and have accepted as normal/procedural/conventional/customary.

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16 Sindane argues there is a difference between decolonisation and transformative approaches to law, the latter tends not to overemphasise the triumph over apartheid and colonialism, whilst neglecting coloniality and the prevailing vestigial force of colonialism that is affixed in the colonial global matrix of power.

17 Sindane draws from similar work done by theologians to honour the intellectual insights of Allan Boesak, where he was described as 'the Prophet from the South', Sindane argues that decolonial critical legal scholars also engaged in intellectual prophecy in their different scholarly texts, where they predicted the precarity of post-apartheid South Africa, and the inherent weaknesses of the constitutional project in resolving the unresolved question of decolonising our society.

Three characteristics

Below, the chapter sets out three characteristics of an activist lawyer in the context of the decolonial turn. These three are drawn from the theorisation regarding the decolonial turn; they are an exploratory engagement between theory and praxis. To be sure, the chapter accepts the invitation of the decolonial turn to think about and imagine newer types of activist lawyering in the times of a subtler type of colonialism.

(1) A lawyer who is situated, contextual and conscious.
There is a Christian adage that posits a suggestive metaphor: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs 9:10, New International Version). In the context of the decolonial turn, the beginning of all wisdom does not lie in fear of the Lord, but rather in attaining a deeper consciousness and awareness of the world, its intricacies and all the granularities that define it. Various activist theorisations on behalf of people in pursuit of liberation from the bondages of any kind of systematic oppression tend to place consciousness at the zenith of their discourse. Depending on each one's persuasion, others claim that the first of all wisdom is class consciousness (Marx and Engles [1848] 2008),[18] whilst others would say it is Black consciousness (Biko [1978] 2002: 29),[19] and yet others might refer to national consciousness (Maher 2017).[20] An activist lawyer, in the context of the decolonial turn, is one who is conscious of the coloniality of our prevailing situation. They appreciate that although colonialism has been defeated *de jure*, it persists *de facto*, and this is evidenced in its vestiges that continue to define power, property and human relations in the colony, long after the defeat of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 4).

Consciousness of the context of the global matrix of power, allows legal practitioners to be able to appreciate the various ills that continue to bedevil South Africa, post-1994, and be sensitive in their articulation and conduct. For example, a lawyer who is conscious of coloniality would readily be able

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18 In laying out the manifesto of the communist party, Marx and Engels jointly argue that one of the crucial steps in waging a worker-led people's revolution, communists have the task to mobilise workers into effectively raising their consciousness. Essentially, class consciousness is pitted as a constitutive ingredient in how exploited working-class masses respond to capitalist oppression and expansionism.

19 Biko ([1978] 2002: 5) defines Black Consciousness as follows: 'The first step therefore is to make the Black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of Black consciousness.'

20 Ciccariello-Maher hedges national consciousness as central to not only decolonising dialectics but as a ploy to enact substantive epistemic decolonisation.

to embrace different approaches to the law—such as the proposed jurisprudence of Steve Biko (Modiri 2017). Modiri explains that the jurisprudence of Biko (also known a jurisprudence of liberation or post-conquest jurisprudence) can be an alternative way for lawyers to respond to the afterlife of apartheid racism that continues to permeate the corridors of legal practice and the judiciary today:

> In any event, an exploration of Biko's contribution to a post-1994 critical jurisprudence in my view unavoidably necessitates an engagement with CRT [critical race theory] to the extent that it was the first serious endeavour by Black legal scholars to insist on the theoretical relevance of race to legal inquiry; to make sense of Black suffering and alienation in/under the law and to develop "racial analytics" with which to study. critique and transform law (Modiri 2017: 14)

This reading of the jurisprudence of Biko necessitates a deeper engagement with the racist reality of our times, the law and all its instruments. It hollows out and disavows the notion that 1994 defeated apartheid and exorcised the judiciary and legal practice from its racist characteristic. At the centre of the jurisprudence of Biko is a reading of legal history as one that is not divorced from the deep-rooted racist architecture of this country and its judiciary.

Some law scholars shy away from engaging in a contextual reading of history and caution that race-infused readings of history may unreasonably amount to grand narratives, and that this would be highly problematic (De Vos 2001). Indeed, this is a view that is echoed by Froneman and Cameron in the case of *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* (2016), where they felt that the majority's reading/conception of the racist history/present of South Africa unduly relied on grand narratives rather than a nuanced enunciation of history:

> What does concern us is the broad statement in the third judgment that embraces the implication of the first judgment, that any reliance by White South Africans, particularly White Afrikaner people, on any historically rooted cultural tradition finds no recognition in the Constitution, because that history is inevitably rooted in oppression... What does that mean in practical terms? Does it entail that, as a general proposition, White Afrikaner people and White South Africans have no cultural rights that pre-date 1994, unless they can be shown not to be rooted in oppression? How must that be done? Must all organisations with White South Africans or Afrikaners as members now have to demonstrate that they have no historical roots in our oppressive past? Who decides that, and on what standard? (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: paras. 130–131)

Put plainly, the (all Black) majority expressed themselves through Judge Mogoeng, asserting that the street names in South Africa's capital are an embodiment and reminder of this country's ugly past (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another 2016: para. 8). This observation was shared by (the White duo of) Froneman and Cameron. (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: para. 164). Their bone of contention lay in what they perceived to be two critical contradictions. First, how the Black judges construe history in contrast to them and second, their disagreement about the meaning of culture and whether White people's culture can be realistically divorced from its violent, racist and oppressive characteristics (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: para. 131). To be sure, Froneman and Cameron were of the sincere opinion that it is somewhat of a grand narrative to assert that White people's culture is directly connected and proportional to oppression, and that the majority's opinion on this matter is not only regrettable and unfortunate, it is also not within the ambit/tenor/ethos of the Constitution (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: para. 131). Furthermore, Froneman and Cameron felt that this country's ugly history (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: para. 164) does not exclude White people from the new South Africa; it also does not take away their right of cultural and historic belonging (*City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another* 2016: para. 157).

As was the case in the *City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality v Afriforum and Another*,[21] it is worth noting that the debate on how legal history should be read takes a racial uniqueness in a peculiar manner, where White judges take the one position, whilst their Black colleagues take another. The race positionality of each of the judges is glaringly conspicuous. All of this happens in a South Africa that seeks to present a farcical mirage of unity in diversity, a rainbow nation and a successful reconciliation project.

A lawyer with a deepened consciousness of the coloniality of our times will also be a lawyer who is honest about their privilege and positionality. Activist lawyers must be frank about their positionality and privilege; this frankness reasonably allows them to be able to lend their privilege to the struggles of other people. The importance of being conscious of one's privilege is that it is only when one is conscious that they can lend their privilege to those who are disenfranchised/oppressed by that privilege.

(1) A lawyer who is actively partisan

The suggestion that activist lawyers must be partisan is controversial in the sense that it contradicts the traditional liberal paradigm that draws a distinction between subjective and partisan politics, and

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21 The split between the majority and minority judgement was glaring based on colour-lines, with Black constitutional court judges on the one side and their White colleagues on the other side.

"neutral" and "objective" legal interpretation (De Vos 2001: 4). One of the most common features of post-1994 legal practice is its formalist/positivist legal culture that tends to create a purist façade of law—insisting that the law is a science that is above, and indeed divorced from, politics (Zitzke 2017: 185–230). De Vos (2001: 4) accordingly observes:

> In order to deal with this dilemma without jettisoning the liberal project, most judges, lawyers and legal academics believe that they must find a way to uphold the distinction between law and politics through the identification of objective criteria for judicial decision-making. To this end, they search for devices or criteria that may be employed to place a rhetorical, symbolic or what they perceive to be a factual distance between their own personal views, opinions and political philosophy, on the one hand, and the interpretation of legal provisions and the outcome of a particular case, on the other.

Indeed, this is a distinction that is drawn by other legal scholars:

> Political action is a way of being part of the world, of engaging in the world in all its multiplicity and complexity. Important here is to insist on the distinction between politics and the political, the former reflecting the notion of partisan politics, the latter, as articulated by Jean Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue Labarthe, calling for a retreat from partisan politics in order to reflect on the meaning of politics. This distinction is crucial for an understanding of the relation between law and politics, also when teaching law to students. At the heart of a critical jurisprudence lies the awareness of the need to retreat from partisan politics and to embrace a continuous rethinking of the political (Van Marle 2019: 209).

In part, liberal legal academics sometimes fail to appreciate the historicity of partisan politics in the people's efforts to defeat racism, sexism, colonialism, apartheid, and slavery. To them, forming part of political/social/ecumenical movements is optional, and can somewhat be likened to a hobby, but to oppressed people, joining these movements and being partisan is an existential commitment (Lenin 1905).[22] The oppressive web of systems in the colonised world are designed to not only throttle oppressed peoples, but to kill them. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that organisations such NAACP, ANC, SACP, ZANU, ZAPU, FRELIMO, PAIGC and other liberation-movements-cum-political-parties were not

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22 Lenin warns that the emergence of non-partisan sentiment among working people only serves the interests of the bourgeois class, who revel in both non-partisanship and disunity of the people on the underside.

formed out of boredom nor the exercise of some superfluous liberal liberties—no, they exist precisely in response to a polity that was set on killing and disenfranchising Black and colonised people. Indeed, these organisations and related formations afforded oppressed and colonised people a platform to organise among each other and set up networks of resistance. All things considered, the distinction of politics between a small letter "p" and capital letter "P" (the proverbial distinction between politics and the political) constitutes an abstract theoretical supposition that is bereft of praxis and context. It is apt to conclude that for a people waging a struggle against persisting colonisation and its entangled webs of oppression, being partisan is inherently essential.

Activist lawyers, in the context of the decolonial turn would precisely choose to be partisan, because they would have an appreciation that the struggle for substantive freedom/liberation is yet to be won. Most importantly, they would disabuse themselves from the illogical surmise that suggests that the only way to achieve clarity and better perspective of issues is to retreat from partisan politics.

(1) A lawyer who is NOT ideologically promiscuous

The opposite of ideological promiscuity is ideological steadfastness. By 'ideological promiscuity', I am referring to the often-present flexibility where lawyers distance themselves from the political implications, undertones and overtones of the issues brought to them by their clients. Present legal strictures expect a lawyer to have indifference to the moral merits of the case of his clients. On the same score, by "steadfastness" I mean an approach where a lawyer does not consider themselves as merely a conduit for legal disputes, but situates their own politics within their work.

I deliberately set this characteristic out in the negative, because I intend to decisively critique brazen ideological promiscuity that defines current legal practice. On the same score, ideological steadfastness does not mean a dogmatic and zealous commitment to a specific idea, instead, it means an appreciation that ideas are central to our imagination of a different future and society. To be sure, the decolonial turn allows us to insist on ideological steadfastness.

To demonstrate the promiscuous vs steadfastness dichotomy, I rely on Advocate Dali Mpofu SC: In 2014, following the Economic Freedom Fighters' (EFF) intensive campaigns for Gareth Cliff to be punished for his racist comments on social media, his employer, Multichoice TV decided to fire Cliff from his role as an on-screen judge in a popular show, Idols SA. Aggrieved by the decision to fire him, Cliff approached Advocate Dali Mpofu SC for legal counsel. As it so happens, the good advocate duly represented Cliff. The courts eventually found Multichoice TV channel to have wrongfully and unlawfully sacked Cliff. At the time, Mpofu was serving as the National Chairperson of the very EFF that not only campaigned for the dismissal of Cliff, but was (and is) ideologically positioned as the bastion of the

struggle against racism in all its manifestations. When probed about this, the EFF said that it took strong exception to Mpofu's decision to represent an unrepentant racist, however, reluctantly respected his decision/explanation that he was duty bound, as a legal practitioner, to provide legal assistance to all members of the public, regardless of who they are.

In some versions, Mpofu is said to have used the example of medical doctors and surgeons, saying that they are duty bound to give medical assistance to even those persons whose ideological positions they do not agree with. Whereas, he is partisan (because he is an EFF member) Mpofu falls short when it comes to ideological steadfastness—it begs the question as to why he is a member of a political party that fights against racism, when he gladly aids, defends and advances racism through his professional work as a lawyer. Mpofu's conduct is perfectly sensible in the prevailing legal practice norms, however, it is untenable in the context of what is expected of activist lawyers in the era of the decolonial turn.

Two salient facts can be gleaned from Mpofu's decisions, actions and subsequent reasonings, (1) he considers the task of lawyers as divorced from politics, and political struggles and (2) that there is an ideological discord between Mpofu as a lawyer and Mpofu as an activist. Both speak to the spectre of ideological promiscuity that haunts legal practice today.

Bloem (2022) considers Mpofu in her PhD thesis titled: *The Requirement of 'Fit and proper' for the Legal Profession: A South African Perspective.* Specifically, Bloem studies the findings of the disciplinary hearing in *Legal Practice Council v Dali Mpofu*, where the former was called upon to discipline Mpofu for his conduct at the State Capture Commission of Inquiry, where Mpofu rudely told opposing counsel to 'shut up' (Bloem 2023: 117). What is interesting about the proceedings of this disciplinary hearing is that Mpofu submitted that he felt insulted by the statements made by opposing counsel, when she accused him of 'political grandstanding' (Bloem 2023: 120). It is in the context of the claimed insult that Mpofu told opposing counsel to "shut up". The Legal Practice Council found Mpofu not guilty on the charges raised against him. Mpofu does not explain what inference he drew by the accusation of "political grandstanding". This is neither explained by the findings of the hearing, nor the person who made the accusation. In my opinion, Mpofu finds offence in this accusation because, to him, any insinuation that he is making a political statement in the course of his work as a lawyer is an insult. This is squarely in line with the strictly positivist notions of the law as something that is separate (and above) politics. The contradiction with Mpofu, specifically, is that he is a leading member of a political movement. Bloem concludes that the reason why the requirement of fit and proper is beset with contradictions and uncertainties is that there is a lack in a critical approach with due consideration of moral and ethical values.

Apart from Bloem, the requirement to be 'fit and proper' for entering the legal profession has been

studied by other law scholars, for example, Slabbert explains that a legal practitioner fulfils a dual function by assisting the client on the one hand and by promoting justice in society on the other hand (Slabbert 2011: 224). This, in my view, already means that the lawyer must embrace the fact that the law they practice is not merely for the sake of the law or their clients, but for society at large. A broader societal role inevitably means that there should not be a chasm between the law and politics.

With the decolonial turn as a background, I argue that Advocate Mpofu is a perfect example of what activist lawyers should strive not to be: ideologically promiscuous lawyers who are nothing but mercantilist intellectual mercenaries who take on cases without evaluating the impact of their acceptance of any and every matter presented to them. Activist lawyers have a neat appreciation that there is no distance between the political and the personal.

Conclusion

This chapter has carefully demonstrated that the #MustFall moment presented a decolonial turn to South Africa, and that this was a clarion call, specifically to lawyers requiring them to think anew about their role in society.

Although not exhaustive, the chapter argued that three characteristics are definitive of an activist lawyer in the aftermath of the decolonial turn. These three characteristics are (1) activist lawyers must be situated and contextual in their handling of legal matters—this means that they must be attentive that they exist in a society that is still riddled by the stubborn scum of the vestiges of colonialism that continue to fester long after the official cessation of colonial/imperial conquests; (2) activist lawyers are partisan, in the sense that they do not relegate themselves to merely their law firms/chambers and related law societies, they fully immerse themselves in academic, political, social, ecumenical and related mass movements—they fully comprehend that they should put their skills to the exercise of advancing a service above self, and for the betterment of their community and (3) activist lawyers are not ideologically promiscuous, they understand their role as one beyond "pay as you go" and value-neutral narratives, but rather as agents of change who are committed to a definitive worldview and polity.

Although the focus of this chapter is on legal practice, I accept that legal practice is presently governed by various laws and policies and these include the Legal Practice Act 28 of 2014, and others. Present legal strictures are at odds with the three characteristics of an activist lawyer in the context of a decolonial turn that I proposed in this chapter. This is not inimical to the material reality of coloniality, which appreciates that although South Africa and its legal profession have been formally decolonised, the standards and patterns that define the requirement of fit and proper in the legal profession still mirror Eurocentric

sensitivities. To this end, the chapter insists that if there is any seriousness to the calls to decolonise the law and the legal profession, lawyers should pay heed to the epistemic/conceptual opportunities that are presented by the decolonial turn.

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Chapter 10: Systemic Imperatives for Activist Scholarship in South Africa: The Case Study of the San and Khoi Research Centre, University of Cape Town

June Bam

Introduction

This chapter reflects on a five-year period (2017 to 2022) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which involved San and Khoi community dialogues with the university, raising questions about its institutional transformation and the establishment of the San and Khoi Research Centre (SKRC) in 2020. The reflection here also covers the first two years of foundational research and work which commenced in a co-design research and knowledge partnership with the Khoi-San communities. This request for the co-design process was initiated by the civic activists and explicitly named as such in the first meeting at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) in August 2017. The process was, as expected, complicated and presented various dynamics and challenges for activist scholars at the CAS at UCT.

Over a decade ago, the CAS at the University of Cape Town made a conscious and strategic decision to open its gallery doors to local and national community activists. The aim was to encourage the communities in their diversity to hold regular dialogues and exhibitions on social and economic justice, especially after the Marikana mineworkers' massacre on 16 August 2012 by the post-apartheid Black regime. These intense and socially engaged research dialogues with social movements were initiated by well-known social activist scholar and professor, Lungisile Ntsebeza, who took up the National Research Foundation (NRF) Chair and A.C. Jordan[1] Chair (as Director of CAS) in 2012.

In August 2017, a highly motivated small delegation of the Western Cape Legislative Khoisan Council[2]

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1   Named after African Literature scholar Archibald Campbell Jordan (1906-1968), former senior lecturer in African languages at UCT who famously committed to keep the doors of the White university "ajar".
2   Established as an informal network under apartheid in 1980.

requested a meeting with CAS after attending the annual Neville Alexander[3] Commemoration event in its gallery. From the outset, they raise 'the unfinished business of the TRC' in response to the dialogues at the event on the ongoing unresolved land and language questions in South Africa. These unresolved issues (from the community's perspectives) were: one, the land question; two, the language question; three, the Khoi-San genocide of the 1700s and four, the "unmarked" grave sites of people enslaved in the previous Cape slave colony on what is today the university's middle campus. The grave sites represent slavery and continued exploitation in the present for descendant communities. These unmarked graves are located, ironically, immediately outside the entrance door to the university's "Africa House" and where students do not (as became generally apparent in the #RhodesMustFall student critiques of the Eurocentric university) study, for instance, the relationship between these grave sites and South Africa's history of exploitation of indigenous and Black people.[4]—The UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement (undated),[5] states the following, 'the history of those who built our university - enslaved and working class black people - has been erased through institutional culture'. The statement goes on to call that the university 'pays more attention to historical sites of violence, such as the slave graves beneath the buildings in which we learn'.

The Khoi-San delegation questioned why the historically White university been allowed to commit the crimes of racism towards local indigenous and enslaved people with impunity? The delegation focused its attention on this question and identified their four concerns (as outlined above) as "directly related" to the late Neville Alexander's activist scholarship on land and language in South Africa, including the erasure of indigenous languages such as *Khoekhoegowab* in the colonised present Western Cape. The CAS had a responsibility to ensure these truths in historiographical scholarship. Exploitation of farmworkers and foetal alcohol syndrome, they stressed, are all related to the Land Question.

Addressing historical economic and political injustices of colonial conquest over roughly 200 years in the Cape earlier than the 1800s has remained largely unspoken in the national narrative except since the emergence of "Khoi-San revivalism" in the late 1990s and related scholarship undertaken by the late historian Jatti Bredekamp as director of the Institute for Historical Research at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) at the time.

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3   Neville Alexander (1936-2012) was a well-known social activist scholar on the Cape Flats who advocated multilingualism and non-racialism.

4   A point made by #RhodesMustFall activist Wandile Goosen Kasibe (2015) in general about UCT's culture without reference specifically to the grave sites.

5   These were often anonymous and undated statements due to security police surveillance and victimisation of student activists on campuses at the time. Here, the author also draws on her own experience with teaching the UCT #RhodesMustFall student leadership at CAS in the aftermath of 2015 when the "deep architecture" of the university was discussed in seminars in the course she convened from 2017 on 'Decolonial Theory and Practice'.

With the United Nations Declaration of the Decade of Indigenous People (2000-) and the repatriation from France and the burial of Khoi woman Sarah Baartman (2002) shortly after, the questioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the sacrifices/compromises made by the negotiated settlement had gained renewed impetus amongst Khoi-San-identified communities. A further impetus came with the work of the Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande's National Institute of Human and Social Sciences (NIHSS) precolonial catalytic project founded in December 2013, which gave traction to critically address the colonial archive, and to ask questions about who writes and validates our pasts before 1652. Lungisile Ntsebeza was appointed NRF chair of this NIHSS precolonial project at UCT and the delegation approached CAS knowing this. They insisted not only on a knowledge and research partnership on these issues, but also requested an ethical accountability from UCT beyond the basic terms of the San Code of Ethics of 2017 (!Khwa ttu n.d.), such as accounting to the community on the unethically acquired human remains of the Khoi-San people, which had to be urgently repatriated to "source communities". These remains were considered "title deeds" to the land, the "race"' collections harked back to the days of race science that once flourished in South Africa's White universities in the 1920s, and in some instances, into the present. This to them was evidence that the university, despite its occasional Black leadership and transformation in student demographics and staff, was still systemically racist, and a place of "Aboriginal"[6] exclusion and 'othering', causing ongoing trauma to the local Cape communities where the institution was historically located and implicated. The community called for a TRC on higher education in apartheid South Africa.

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At the time of the delegation's visit, social activist campaigns for Khoi-San "Aboriginality" and related claims for restorative justice were already around 30 years in the making in urban areas in South Africa, and the limitations of the TRC were widely engaged within extant scholarship for at least two decades. However, what was indeed a first was its direct approach to a historically White university to establish a community activist research and knowledge production partnership with Black activist scholars on these issues at CAS, and to locate such a partnership within "African Studies" discourse on land and democracy. The community's approach was also opportune in the post-RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and FeesMustFall (#FMF) contexts (2015/2016) when these student movements had by then attempted to wrench open public dialogue on persistent colonial and apartheid "heritage symbols" on historically White campuses, starting with the questioning and removal of the statue of mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes on UCT's upper campus (March-April 2015).

The #RMF and #FMF student movements had given the local Khoi-San communities the confidence to

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6   A term used by the delegation to denote a symbolic acknowledgment of genocide in the South African context—not as understood in the Australian context.

physically enter the corridors of knowledge power at UCT and the self-assurance to push the knowledge production frontiers even further, starting with local pre-colonial history. CAS was also considered the "safe" home for #RMF student activists who did its popular post-graduate courses on "The African Studies Archive", "Problematising the Study of Africa"[7] and "Decolonial Theory and Practice". The community demanded access to the "inaccessible" African Studies Library and Collections, which they felt held the colonial and apartheid "secrets" of their "denied" pasts. The question of the land that UCT occupies as settled in precolonial times for thousands of years by the San and later, the Khoi, was raised.

Co-designed dialogues at CAS

The dialogues and co-design process with this community came with expected complicated "race" dynamics. Not only was the issue of "tribalism" a troublesome one for activist scholars at CAS, but also the notion of "descendant" communities as 'related by established or recognized lines of descent' (Peterson et al. 2015: 147), which held 'the dangers of an ethnic framework'. Legassick and Rasool had by then, almost twenty years earlier, brought to light the secret "race" collections in museums in their seminal work *Skeletons in the Cupboard* (Legassick and Rassool 2000), and Peterson et al. (2015) problematised various Khoi claims to the indigenous body of Sarah Baartman in 2002. As scholar activists in African Studies, we ourselves were ideologically schooled in Marxist historiographical intellectual traditions in the 1970s and 1980s (in our political activism) with its critical take on "tribalism" and its emphasis on non-racialism and class. CAS also chose an intellectual strategic vision in promoting Archie Mafeje's often marginalised scholarship—such as his critique of the application of dogma in Marxist revisionist theories on social and capital reproduction. The inaugural African Studies major included Marxist feminist critiques of structuralism and "capital" that followed much later than Mafeje's scholarship on same in the early 1970s (for example, works such as Bhattacharya 2019). Scholarship in the Global South has particularly critiqued the limitations of Marxism in its wide scope and variations as a methodological framework and a form of cultural and epistemological "capital" (Bhattacharya 2016: 19–20). Imposed on political and economic realities through the hegemonic language of English and related cultures and intellectual thought, such dogmatically imposed frameworks of analysing society validated knowledges as an 'imperialist style of doing history' (Bhattacharya 2016: 33).

Given the largely shared scholarly, ideological and political backgrounds we came from at CAS (social movements, feminism etcetera), we were from the outset immensely sceptical and suspicious

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7   The course controversially introduced by Mahmood Mamdani which led to his expulsion from predominantly White UCT in 1996.

of the "tribal" formation and positioning of the delegation. Unlike feminist scholarship and research in Indian historiography which decades ago already offered critiques of Marxist analysis on structural reproduction theory as in the work of Tharu and Lalita (1991) on *Women Writing in India from 600 BC*, feminist scholarship critical of Marxist theories by indigenous scholars in South Africa remains significantly marginalised and invisibilised by mainstream western feminist theory. Disconcertingly, even Black male patriarchal leftist Marxist theorists tend to see such scholarship as "exclusionary" or as not "scholarly"; such critique is often embedded in pointing out lack of reference to feminist scholarship in the west. It is only very recently that South African Black and indigenous feminist activist scholarship has emerged to position itself substantially through edited volumes in mainstream historiography as in the work of Lewis and Baderoon (2021), Muthien and Bam (2021) and the monograph by Bam (2021). And even then, these scholars, who come from Marxist activist traditions, are very careful not to find easy validation in theorisations on "culture", "reproductive theory" and "capital" outside of local African material and social realities. Tharu and Lalita (1991: 37) argue for 'powerful and complex feminist inheritances that trouble universalisms', and that 'patriarchy is not isolatable' (1991: 42) from what we could possibly understand as the 'political economy' of not only knowledge, but also capital.

Despite our decades of activism and scholarship on "race" and democracy as scholars at CAS, we could not simply dismiss the delegation's request for dialogue because of the "race" talk. We were aware that UCT remained largely untransformed in significant ways and visibly alienated from the local communities and their knowledges. This was an uncomfortable reality. "Socially engaged research" at the university was largely limited in its mandate to scheduled "fieldwork" with alienated communities. What would it have meant for Rhodes to 'fall' at UCT in how we conduct research and produce knowledge? Should we listen openly to what was brought to us by the community? We could not simply in response, capitulate to the safety of academic seminar rooms, scheduled short field trips in remote areas, or find refuge in pristine "peer-reviewed" journals. It was clear from the outset that we had to engage diverse working-class articulations in the absence of a broad social activist movement such as the non-racial United Democratic Front (UDF) which was launched by over 400 organisations in the Cape Flats "Coloured" township of Mitchell's Plain in 1983 and was abruptly disbanded by the African National Congress (ANC) to make way for political negotiations in 1991. Members of the Khoi-San delegation to CAS were former lead Cape Flats UDF civic activists on the issues of housing, and we had to find with them a new shared language of activism as scholars and civic activists in tackling the four issues (outlined above) with academic rigor and intellectual honesty—however difficult.

Engaging new and uncomfortable hauntologies

From the beginning, finding this "shared language" was challenging given the tensions and contradictions in the dialogues around discomforting "othering" terms like "the Nguni people", the "us" and "them". Another troublesome term that kept coming up persistently was "tribe". In the non-racial UDF years, identity issues seemed politically and ontologically far less complex, and what seemed on the surface to be "Verwoerdian" apartheid ideologies could be easily dismissed by the collective. However, after 1994, activist scholarship became more complicated as we could simply not ignore the silences and visceral contradictions that come in their various ontologies of "race" that persistently haunt both ourselves and communities in South Africa. There were factual realities connected to these new ontologies of "race" such as the omission of Khoi and San languages in the post-apartheid Constitution of 1996 when the / Xam language in the Coat of Arms was a political concession embarrassingly granted with hindsight. Enslavement at the Cape constitutes the largest percentage of South Africa's almost 400-year period of colonial history—yet it is mainly assigned as a "provincial" tourism curiosity, though it could be argued that it marks the foundations of the development of apartheid racial capitalism (the infamous pass system and the creation of racialised Bantustans). Hence, if it is racial capitalism that we are trying to undo together with higher education's complicity in this, then surely this discomforting delegation brought with them the ghosts we could no longer ignore in South Africa.

Some two decades ago already, Muller (2000) reflected on this new emerging reality for activist scholars in higher education in South Africa when we did not anticipate that an intellectual elite that was part of the liberation struggle, with its ostensibly shared vision with the masses, would gain political and economic power to the exclusion and suppression of communities of the oppressed and socially marginalised. However, Muller was not entirely correct in this claim, as these predictions were made by the Unity Movement and other Marxist intellectuals in their various political writings in the 1980s and early 1990s. To them, it was anticipated that there would in fact be a "changing of gear" in South Africa in February 1990, which meant a "repositioning" for activist scholars. What the Unity Movement missed was to anticipate what this would mean in terms of new post-Apartheid working-class articulations (such as through expressions of indigeneity) and the practical implications for activism grounded in such a reality. Muller's accurate prediction of engagement in a future South Africa 'with a messy complexity of lived experience' (Lather 2000: 62, as quoted in Muller 2000:) should however be noted.

These lived experiences of the working classes in post-apartheid South Africa are relentlessly haunting. McLaren et al. (as cited in Borg et al.2002) point out that this 'haunting' of the oppressed and exploited is found in the Communist Manifesto of 1848 when Marx and Engels wrote of "the spectre" of Communism that was "haunting" Europe at the time. The term "spectre" was, therefore, not new

when it was taken up by Derrida 148 years later, who defined 'spectre' in philosophical terms such as in 'the frequency of a certain visibility – the visibility of the invisible'. The spectre can by its very enforced invisibility 'violently pay us a visit', 'demanding to be understood in the singularity of its temporality or historicity', calling for the haunting to be resolved in its inherent contradictions to become a reality. It is the suspicion of negative "hauntology" (the "spectre" assumed as pathologically "demonic") that, one could argue, some South African Marxist activist scholarship has rigidly inherited, refusing to engage the unfamiliar, discomforting, unpredictable, indeterminist and horrific forms that such "spectres" do take in the present diverse working-class articulations, such as "Khoi-San". This observation on the persistence of Marxist dogma was amongst a wide range of self-proclaimed Marxist scholars and civic activists who identify invariably along the spectrum of the various post-Eurocentric Marxisms in responding to the community and their interpretations of present societal issues at the CAS conference held from 23-24 January 2020 (Centre for African Studies n.d.). If this spectre is not recognisable, such as in the articulation of structuralist class struggle, then it is assumed by such Marxist scholars as disavowing "class struggle" in favour of "tribe" and "race" and therefore rendered "reactionary". It is often assumed by such scholars that "intersectionality" discourse founded through Black feminist scholarship in the 1970s in the United States somehow settles the debate on validation of new forms of struggle from a Marxist perspective. Yet even very contemporary scholarship within Marxist feminism that stresses the importance of intersectionality persists with the 'mode of production' discourse (Mojab and Carpenter 2019).

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McLaren et al. (as cited in Borg et al. 2002: 149) argue that 'global capitalism has a way of reshaping, reflecting, reinflecting and rearticulating dissent'. It is therefore, imperative for radical scholar activists to engage working class hauntologies in whichever form they choose to visit the corridors of epistemological power in post-1994 South Africa. These ghosts 'speak through the lips of the dead and serve as the medium through which subjugated histories are released into the present' (Borg et al. 2002: 151). The dead is hauntingly present amongst us in the way that the Gramscian spirits haunt the cultural Marxists in their post-modern intellectual diversity (Borg et al. 2002: 151). We need to, therefore, engage discomforting hauntologies as social activist scholars 'in order to understand our own histories' (Borg et al. 2002: 151).

Praxis and new theorisation within a local African realities

South African activist scholars within the Marxist Unity Movement Tradition[8], for instance, drew often

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8   Based on primary source archival research by the author on the content and analysis within the Teachers' League of
     South Africa's *The Educational Journal*, from 1915-1989. See Bam (1993).

dogmatically on Marx in the 1980s, such as atheism and the evolutionary nature of societies from the indigenous "primitive" to the more "evolved" socialist state. Whilst Marxism was informed by class analysis, it was never really decolonial as we understand it as African feminist activist scholars engaged in praxis within social movements, including indigenous women's movements in South Africa, today. New scholarship in African Studies on understanding the material pasts considers ritual, and that which can be understood beyond biologism as determining gender—but doing so by engaging research methodologies within the African realities of indigenous languages, proverbs and cultures such as kinship (which is not western-gender defined). Scholarship over the last few decades on the limitations of Marxist structural reproduction theory is well-known and needs no rehash here. The essence of the critique is that such theory should not be universalised as they do not speak to local realities. As stated by Nigerian scholar Oyekan (2014: 8), western socialist feminism based on Marxist interpretations in its occupation with gender and class debates, has not met the needs to provide helpful analytical tools for African feminism that concerns itself beyond the grasp of western feminism and African-American feminism. This critique has long been studied in Indian feminist historiography on the "precolonial" which troubles Marxist structuralism. The work of Tharu and Lalita (1991: 60) illustrates this critique with their discussion on the development of women's idioms in 'precolonial' India through poetic ritualistic performances of the bhakti movements in 'the open fields' against the upper castes. They note that these resistance movements were critiqued within Marxist intellectual traditions as 'without political importance'—yet these could be considered as 'a rejection of patriarchy' (Tharu and Lalita 1991: 60).

Importantly, the aim of this chapter (in its very limited scope) is clearly not to provide a detailed overview of Marxist theories, critiques and interpretations globally and locally—but to merely illustrate the challenge of engaging the persistent inherited Eurocentric frameworks as encountered in this case study. The community shared their narratives of how they make sense of contemporary lived realities and interpretations of the precolonial past at the conference at CAS in January 2020. They performed and narrativised their various articulations on "indigeneity". Some of the Marxist scholars responded critically, revealing dogmatic frameworks of thought (as expressed as critiques of the community's feminist water rituals and circles, for example). Such critique expressed notably by mostly Black male Marxist scholars, showed that until recently, South African scholarship in historiography needed a rethink of how knowledge is produced and validated. How do we theorise these new articulations of class struggle beyond inherited and persistent dated Marxist frameworks? The question of "indigeneity" as new articulation of working-class struggle was never really explored within the South African historiographical context, which compelled the need for recent scholarship on historiography to do so. Examples are Bam et al. (2018) which arose out of two NIHSS national conferences organised by CAS with historians (including from the leftists and various Marxists traditions), archaeologists and

communities who participated respectively in 2017 and 2020 (Bam 2021; Muthien and Bam 2021). The 2014 conference highlighted the "knowledge trap" of discourse and methodologies on "the precolonial" and the Eurocentric inability to read the indigenous past in new ways that matter. The communities were absent from this conference which took place at UCT prior to the RhodesMustFall student protests that erupted on its campus. Because of the fixed and repeated western discourses and methodologies at the 2014 conference, we realised at CAS that the trap lay in the disciplines and that the discourse had to be opened up across the disciplines and through the inclusion of scholar activists, feminists, civic activists and communities who identified as "indigenous". The second conference held in 2017 was organised in partnership with the Centre for Non-racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) at the then Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University,[9] which included a strong cohort of leftist and Marxist scholars and activists who were prepared to critically reflect on their own theorisations in dialogical engagement with the communities. This conference resulted in the publication of *Whose History Counts? Decolonising Precolonial Historiography* edited by Bam et al. (2018). At the conference, the communities questioned the prevalence of Eurocentric theories and theorisation of their realities instead of theorisation from the people and in their own languages, proverbs, rituals and ancient philosophies. When were the European classical texts written and what were the intellectual and knowledge traditions in southern Africa at the time? The latter was pointed out as signalling a colonial epistemicidal approach to knowledge, that is, a dismissal of ancient traditions of knowledge-making that existed into the present.

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An important key classical text that influenced Marxist doctrine—notwithstanding there have been many and diverse interpretations and influences—is Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1981), which was first published in 1859. Wang and Iggers (2015: 20) argue that this text is considered key for understanding Marxist doctrines globally because in it, Marx formulates his conception of society and history, hence its relevance for historiographical critique as it analyses economic production of the structure of society and historical consciousness. This key Marxist text has been influential in South African activist scholarship, yet it was written in Europe at a time when South Africa was already colonised for almost two centuries. Chakrabarty's (1992) critique of Marxist theoretical universalisation in the seminal '*Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history*' is focused on Marx's "capital" discourse that does not consider local specificities outside of Europe, including knowledge and culture. Marx ([1859] 1981: 216), therefore, writes with expected Eurocentric prejudice about African civilisation, such as the claim that 'Egyptian mythology' 'could never become the basis of or give rise to Greek art'. And Marxist historical materialist philosophy, derived from Hegel, is equally prejudiced

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9   Since named Nelson Mandela University.

towards African indigenous ontologies, arguing that the 'mythological attitude towards nature' demands 'artistic imagination independent of mythology' (Marx [1859] 1981: 216). Marx argues further, 'Greek art and poetry give us only aesthetic pleasure, like childhood pleasure – but a stage we should not return to' ([1859] 1981: 217). Unity Movement historiography intellectuals wrote critically about Greek civilisation as "African", departing from this Eurocentric Marxist analysis, however, never embraced the existent and ever-present spirituality of the Khoi and San in their midst, including within themselves. It is, therefore, important to break through the limitations of still present structural Marxist thought as expressed at the national conferences hosted by CAS in 2014, 2018 and 2020 in engaging communities and even dismissing their identity articulations and positioning against (what they consider as) "western" and "Eurocentric" theorisation of their lived social and economic realities in the present.

Lenin (1951: 20) informs us that the doctrine of Marx was shaped and influenced by German philosophy, English political economy, French socialism and French revolutionary doctrines. Our Marxist activist sensibilities, therefore, missed the importance of spirituality in dialoguing with the dead (our ancestors) on the unfinished tasks of transformation from the spaces they were excluded and only hosted as "bones" for scientific study. Intergenerational community knowledge practiced since ancient times on the land on which historically White universities stand, such as through the "Khoi-San" *Ausi,*[10] predates nineteenth century Marxist theory of society and progress by centuries. By the time Marx was writing about praxis, rock paintings which recorded daily activities and theories of everyday materialist struggles, and resultant historical consciousness, had already existed for close to 20 000 years in southern Africa. It is no longer a debate that these communities sit with these unacknowledged and insightful deep knowledges of the long *durée* (duration).

Furthermore, whilst acknowledging an established tradition of Marxist feminist critique of structural analyses that admittedly go back decades, it is more helpful to draw on our own recent feminist scholarship in Africa on matricentricity and discourse beyond reproductive biologism.[11] Scholarship on limitations of feminist theorisation outside our lived realities in southern Africa (even by Marxist and leftist scholars in their diversity) is widely critiqued. Discourse in analysing and theorising our own African realities is widely recognised—at least since the days of Mafeje's critical scholarship on Marxist "articulation" theory (Mafeje 1981) which has only been recently recognised in higher education. Mafeje's critique of this Marxist theory on "modes of production", for instance, still circulated in the disciplines of archaeology as late as the early 2000s. Adesina (2008) notes Mafeje's critiques as countering "alterity" and "extroversion". Similarly, limitations of scholarship from outside in theorising our own realities from

10   The *Khoekhoegowab* word that survives on the Cape Flats for "matrilineal knowledge holder".
11   See for example the work of Babalwa Magoqwana in Bam et al. (2018).

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a feminist critique of structural Marxism have been well argued in recent work such as by South African feminists Lewis and Baderoon (2021), Magoqwana (2018) and Muthien and Bam (2021)—notably all come from Marxist historiographical traditions as activists. Nigerian feminist scholar Oyewumi (1997) inspired South African Black feminists in her critique of western and White feminist misrepresentations (including Marxist feminists) disavowing African realities. New questions have been asked, such as how do we liberate the narrative of who we are through more helpful and relevant theories that speak to our African realities such as rematriation, and against universalising theory with its origins from outside, rather than as authentically embedded within local intellectual traditions and realities? How do we recognise omissions in even our own scholarship and presumptuous theorisations? In other words, what *kind* of knowledge matters and *whose* knowledge matters (Lewis and Baderoon 2021: 2)?

The establishment of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum

With the delegation's visit to the University in 2017, the ancestors came to commune at CAS as they rose from the quickly covered shallow graves of South Africa's TRC. They had metaphorically woken up in the drawers of the university's bio-medical sciences laboratories and the unmarked graves on its middle campus and entered swiftly through the gallery doors where the #RMF student leaders chose to routinely gather since April 2015. CAS became a site of hauntology for intellectual seances communing with the late Steve Biko, the late Archie Mafeje and the controversial Mahmood Mamdani who returned to UCT in August 2017 (after a deliberate absence from the racist institution for 20 years) to deliver the T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture.

The delegation raised this "haunting" as their consciously chosen points of departure in engaging CAS on their concerns for transformation at UCT. Boesten and Scanlon (2021: 10) contend that highlighting impunity for historical wrongs can be a powerful tool in the struggle for accountability in the present.

We agreed with the delegation to meet once a week and commenced with the process of acknowledging the university's epistemological complicities in race sciences and the systemic exclusion of radical African scholars like Archie Mafeje,[12] Mahmood Mamdani,[13] and intellectuals within local indigenous communities.

In these regular dialogue meetings, several community members focused on the strategic use of

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12 Archie Mafeje (1936-2007) was a renowned African anthropologist who suffered discrimination and exclusion at UCT, leading to the known "Mafeje Affair" and student protests of 1968.

13 Mahmood Mamdani is a Ugandan African professor and former A.C. Jordan Chair (Director of CAS), who suffered discrimination and exclusion at UCT, known as the "Mamdani Affair" in 1996.

the past for present political and economic aims, rather than for a rigorous scholarly engagement with the past and how it explains our ontological racialised and "tribalised" present. The tensions we were challenged with as a result of our chosen focus, could probably be described more closely by Todorov in *Hope and Memory* (2003: 197) in the depiction of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, as a woman with two faces, one turned toward the past, the other toward the present. One of Mnemosyne's hands held a book in which memory can read the past, the other a quill (which we assume refers to Todorov's writing of the chapters that followed). This image is similar to the inspirational Ghanaian Sankofa bird metaphor; looking back in order to look forward. Todorov argues that the work of memory, thus, respects two requirements—fidelity to the past, utility in the present.

After the many dialogues on academic rigour versus the San and Khoi community's agendas, the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum (comprising community leaders, civic activists, academics and students) was formed at CAS in 2018 as a knowledge and research partnership to address the community's issues. The forum comprised the delegation members, civic activists, students and academics. The author was Acting Head of African Studies in 2017-2018 and had the default role of facilitating the meetings and dialogues with stakeholders and various communities, with gender studies professor Gertrude Fester. Social Movements activist Lungisile Ntsebeza was director of CAS and co-facilitated community engagement as part of his long tradition of work in social movements around land and democracy in the Eastern Cape. The CAS gallery is traditionally used as a space for regular meetings of trade unions, farm workers, youth, gender activists and women's groups. Other academics who participated regularly in the dialogues included Ana Deumert (professor in Linguistics), Shahid Vawda, (head of the School of Anthropology, Linguistics, Gender and African Studies) and Horman Chitonge (professor and permanent head of African Studies). Other participating scholars were Leslie London (professor and head of Public Health), Loretta Feris (professor of Law and Deputy Vice Chancellor Transformation), Advocate Norman Arendse (chair of the Naming of Buildings Committee), Leslie Green (professor of Environmental Humanities), Medee Rall (director of Extra Mural Studies), and various scholars from Library and Information Sciences, Architecture and Science. The students were represented by the Student Representative Council (SRC) and members of the #RhodesMustFall student movement. Activists came from a broad ideological base comprising workers, civic activists, women's groups and Khoi-San leadership structures from the broader Western Cape region, including the metropole, the Cape Winelands, the West Coast, and South Cape. There was also regular representation from communities who suffered genocide—San communities from the Northern Cape (particularly from the Richtersveld), Namibia (descendants of the Herero and Damara genocides perpetrated by Germany in the early twentieth century) and San communities in Botswana. The Forum established various research

commissions in indigenous languages, the land question, human remains, women's issues, youth issues, ethics and others. One of its first tasks was the renaming of Jameson Hall at the university in collaboration with the DVC Transformation of UCT (Loretta Ferris) and the Naming of Buildings Committee.

The communities insisted on dialogues across the frontiers of the nation state and a critical engagement with the persistent Marxist academic discourse in archaeology on "mode of production" in the simplified language of "hunter gatherers" and "herders"'. They viewed this structural approach to "production" as inherent to the extinction discourse. In other words, if there are no longer visible existent Khoi-San practices as "hunters" or "herders", then these communities must by logical implication be "extinct". This resilient "mode of production" theory persisted far beyond the Marxist revisionist 1980s in archaeological theory as was highlighted by archaeologist Nick Shepherd (2005). Yet, almost ten years later, the 2014 national conference at CAS with archaeologists and historians revealed no significant departure from the Marxist "mode of production" discourse.

Symbolic reparations and humanising knowledge

Boesten and Scanlon (2021: 2–3) contend that symbolic reparations (such as renaming of buildings) are important and that memorial arts often embed critiques of both past and present-day violence and injustice as a critical tool in forging reflection and communicating complex issues to wider audiences. They point out that South Africa is a prime example of unresolved intergenerational trauma, with its 'underlying intersectional inequalities and violence that have largely been ignored in the transitional project' (2021: 5), to 'communicate what is impossible to express either because no one is listening or because authoritarian regimes silence dissident voices'. Bhambra et al. (2018: 218)), in *Decolonising the University* write that we need to promote an ethos of 'caring across the disciplines' because higher education 'weeds' out caring (quoting Precod-Weinstein). This erasure of care and humanising knowledge happens due to the disciplinary Cartesian approaches to the validation of knowledge, theorisation, interpretation of evidence and objectivity. Todorov (2003) contends further that memory connects with the highest human values—justice and love, and quotes French historian Hippolyte Taine to the effect that 'science seeks only the truth but in the end discovers an ethics' (2003: 21). In this sense, the founding of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum in 2018 and its work in transformation at UCT set an important precedent in the higher education transformation landscape (Muthien and Bam 2021: 5, 156) through applying deep and open listening in its many dialogues which dispelled by its very engagement the erroneous White scholarship 'Khoisan extinction discourse'.

Ethics are not just about the research permissions that universities often emphasise, but about

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caring through applying deep listening research methodologies through which we gain insights into more rigorous and "scientific" knowledge important for human survival. Gumede et al. (2021: 49) argue that this knowledge gained through experience of the landscape, over centuries, is of a practical nature in fields, such as agriculture, fisheries, health etcetera. The authors point out that The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development has, therefore, called for inclusion of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development as we face deforestation, desertification, wildlife siege and multinational foreign land grabbing, yet environmental conservation is an ancient practice inherited from taboos about wildlife exploitation (Gumede et al. 2021). One could argue that our global environmental crises is a result of the deficient theorisation of western perspectives and its extractive "fieldwork" practices in place of an organic engagement with diverse knowledges that are tried and tested over millennia. These are also expressed in the recognisable but invisibilised present in "Khoisan" communities at the Cape through the intergenerational *Ausi* (Bam 2021).

Ethics and care, however, get compromised in the neo-liberal university as argued by Giroux in writing about the work of Gramsci (Borg et al. 2002) and the corporatisation of the culture of the university which reduces the university-based intellectual to a technocrat. According to Aronowitz (Borg et al. 2002: 118), it should not be about attaining 'certainties' or to 'observe the rites of passage of institutionalised disciplines in order to get jobs and win promotion and tenure', but to transform scholarship into education, by even engaging the unrecognisable with love and care. Freirean scholar Antonia Darder (2023) points out, for instance, that South Africans must rethink Black Consciousness and Freire for acknowledging 'the particularity of cultures'.

Communities and the co-production of knowledges that count

Gramsci wrote about acknowledging indigenous ancient knowledge and cultures and marginalisation. Knowledge does not only reside in universities. When we stick to dogma as practice as activist scholarship, from which we theorise the world, we could create even more deficient models of knowledge production. And in fact, we are in danger of duplicating and perpetuating structural knowledge systems of unequal power and marginalisation, allowing also for more nuanced exploitation of the knowledge data of communities considered "essentialist" in articulating their archives of knowledge that have always been kept out of, or at the margins of scholarship. In doing this, we capitulate to Eurocentric notions of what counts as knowledge, which archives matter, and which research methodological practices should be taken seriously.

If we rethink Gramsci's theorisation within an African context (in terms of what should count as

"knowledge" and how it is validated or invalidated in cultural hegemonic structures), we might think differently about the relevance of community and working-class rituals, such as water circles and pipe ceremonies, in higher education—because it is these cultural practices that bring us closer to the source (in the Amilcar Cabral sense). If we rethink Mafeje, in taking up the contemporary challenges of the activist scholar in decolonisation, it would help us to untangle coloniality more realistically in practice in the local sense—to see the insufficiencies of our Marxist structuralist theories of the 1970s or 1980s. In a Freirean sense, we are relational, incomplete and constantly becoming through dialogue, reflection and action. Structural, dogmatic leftist thinking originating in nineteenth century Europe—still being expressed as evident in the dialogues at CAS at the January conference of 2020 and notably, mostly by Black leftist male scholars and activists—is clearly not helpful in a contemporary local African context.

Successes, systemic barriers and political challenges (2020-2023)

The challenges and incredible difficulties encountered against White racism at a historically White university notwithstanding, the outcomes of the series of dialogues over two years within the /Xarra Restorative Justice Forum from 2018 to 2019, led to a few transformation milestones at UCT, which included the successful renaming of Jameson Hall, the first university-certification of approximately 200 community members in collaboration with the Extra-Mural Studies (EMS) department, including mothers and unemployed youth, the establishment of community research commissions and admission of community members to join faculty through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Community members felt free and confident to access the African Studies Library and Collections, considered by both them and the students as previously "inaccessible" due to its strict security systems and "exclusionary ambience". Community members were for the first time sitting together with #RMF students in seminars and conferences, critically and candidly engaging on contemporary issues in our country today. The one issue that remained difficult and impenetrable was that of the repatriation of human remains because of the tensions around "source" community and scientific approaches.

One of the major outcomes of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum dialogues at UCT was the historic establishment of the San and Khoi Centre, launched by Vice Chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng in September 2020. The San and Khoi Centre established a strong relationship with several departments (African Feminist Studies, Library and Information Sciences, Music, Archaeology, Linguistics, Medicine and Public Health and Environmental Humanities). RPL. Pathways were opened up through CAS for community fellows for access to higher education on precolonial research, and the SKRC successfully nominated Ouma Katriena, the last fluent speaker of *lNuu*, for an honorary doctorate which was conferred

on her by UCT in March 2023. The early successes of the Centre were made possible, in large measure, by the significant commitment from senior professors at CAS and across faculties, the dean, DVCs and Vice Chancellor Phakeng who actively championed its cause, and lead social and environmental justice activist Tauriq Jenkins and indigenous language activist Bradley van Sitters. The Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC) also provided important seed funding to establish the Centre through the indigenous languages programme.

The work of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum had wider impact in the Western Cape, such as at the historically White Stellenbosch University. These include the renaming of a humanities building in late 2021 in honour of seventeenth century Khoi woman Krotoa (Stellenbosch University n.d.); the university's website offensively showcasing its "coloured" peoples "skeleton collection" (Alblas et al. 2018), has now been renamed simply as '*The Kirsten Collection*'. The university also introduced free *Khoekhoegowab* classes to the community in 2019,[14] though not certificated courses as offered by UCT from 2019 (Stellenbosch University Language Centre 2019) and online during Covid lockdown from 2021 (Swingler 2020).

Despite its early successes, its local impact in higher education, and the strong systemic support and the research commissions established and led by the community (admittedly repeatedly pointed out that these were far too many and therefore, impossible to implement in the short term), the Centre battled to deliver on the four issues (outlined above) which were brought initially to CAS in 2017 and taken up further in the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum. These barriers were largely caused by the impact of the Covid lockdown as a result of which the community could not access the campus and the funding office did not succeed in raising the requested funding for data for the community to allow online community dialogues. The passing of the Traditional Leadership and Khoi-San Leadership Act in January 2020 led to vying for chieftanship and divisions within communities around position, recognition and resources such as land and capital from the state. Some community leaders were also seduced by offers to buy fake degrees from "international" universities. This undermined the rigorous RPL process that was in place for them at CAS. In this regard, Motala and Vally (2022: 12–13) warn against 'false promises' and 'gifting' from the 'us' (academics) to 'them' (communities) in a knowledge co-production partnership. They argue instead for an open, and socially conscious-' engagement that is principled and mutually respectful.

It became increasingly apparent that there were definite forces that desired to break up the Centre

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14 The Stellenbosch University introduced free Khoekhoegowab classes to the community in 2019 as part of its broader initiative to promote Indigenous language revitalisation. This effort aligns with national policies on multilingualism and responds to calls from local Khoi and San communities for greater recognition of their linguistic heritage. Similar programs have been implemented at other South African universities, such as the University of Cape Town's Xhosa language courses.

and to discredit it through public defamation of the activist scholars who supported the campaign against the Amazon development on the floodplain of the local Liesbeeck River. Scholar activists of the Centre (Tauriq Jenkins as lead activist against Amazon, in particular, and the author as his alleged "handler") were receiving death threats (Bartlett 2023), gangster-like intimidation communications (Front Line Defenders n.d.)[15] and subjected (with fellow lead activist scholar Leslie London, professor and head of Public Health, and indigenous language activist Bradley van Sitters) to public defamation on social media as 'fake' professors and scholars who were working against the interests of the community (University of Cape Town Faculty of Humanities 2021). Worse still, the A/Xarra forum community members and CAS scholars watched in devastating horror when high-leaping flames engulfed the much-treasured African Studies Library and Collections on 18 April 2021 (University of Cape Town 2021), shattering the new-found dreams of long-desired access to 'Moscow on the Hill'. This loss was indescribable, though the SKRC had fortunately by then already established its own digital archives on indigenous knowledge.

Later, in October 2021, following the devastating fire of 18 April 2021 which destroyed a large percentage of the African Studies Library and Collections, the Centre faced more significant systemic challenges. This was partly due to the death threats issued to both the interim director (the author) and a key staff member and anti-Amazon activist, Tauriq Jenkins, coupled with the imminent departure of a retiring Lungisile Ntsebeza and the anticipated vacuum in the directorship of CAS after ten years of solid community partnership work. In the same year, the interim director of the San and Khoi Centre was offered a permanent position as Associate Professor in African Feminist Studies and was replaced in 2022 by veteran Khoi-San feminist historian Yvette Abrahams. Due to unexpected challenges experienced in the transition from 2022 to 2023, the Centre ceased to exist in its original form and continues at present as the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance Research and Exhibition Project[16] in CAS. The new knowledge-producing partnership is one with communities in the Cape provinces and more broadly across South Africa. The relationship with Nelson Mandela University and the Centre for Education Rights (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg is being consolidated and include participation by the author and feminist scholars such as Babalwa Magoqwana. Engagement with many international scholars and activists is also ongoing, including with the Musee d'lHomme where Sarah Baartman's remains were displaced for close to 200 years. Funding of this significant feminist national project has been made

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15 A court interdict was issued for five years by the Wynberg Magistrate's Court on 15 December 2022 in favour of the author. See also case 12994/2021 in the High Court of South Africa.

16 Its mandate is to deliver an Exhibition and Museum as part of the large Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance complex in Hankey in the Eastern Cape.

possible through a tender applied for through CAS in 2021 and awarded by the DSAC in 2022. The A/ Xarra Restorative Justice Forum continues to exist as an online dialogue, still facilitated by Jenkins, and as an activist forum in social media in partnership with (notably) genocide community activists in Namibia, Northern Cape and Botswana, and indigenous feminist scholars and a few community researchers who remained committed to the collective vision. Gertrude Fester remains Chair of the Women's Research Commission and the young Black women scholars and activists remain active in the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance Research and Exhibition Project in regular community engagements in the Eastern Cape.

Conclusion

Motala and Vally (2022) point out the value of critical participatory action research (see discussion of the methodology as a collaborative commitment to social justice in Kemmis et al. 2014) as there is little scholarship on how "community engagement", as a complex and contradictory partnership process between academics and working class and marginalised communities, can advance the co-construction of knowledge. What emerges from this case study on activist scholarship are the challenges it presents if it remains at the margins of the system of higher education due to being "soft"-funded, and also when it remains under-theorised (hence invisibilised within contemporary mainstream discourse). From a marginalisation point of view, this creates a precarious fiscal situation and associated reputational risks as the community could be easily divided, seduced and manipulated by competing and corrupt capitalist and political forces (especially in a pre-election period) in an already exacerbated economic crisis of unemployment and poverty. Yet, these interventions on languages, knowledge production and access to higher education pathways are important to assist in attaining the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). For example, the Youth Research Commission of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum never succeeded in taking off, as major funders seemed reluctant to fund "dialogues" on pertinent issues in society. Freire (1974) argues in *Cultural Action for Freedom*, that dialogue dismantles bureaucratic constructions, preventing the entrenchment of vested interests, which subverts the 'culture of silence' (see preface by Coutinho). This, Freire advocated as 'the right to pronounce its word' (1974: 17), which becomes 'the authentic word' and a method of true knowledge (1974: 37), in the way that 'slum dwellers' have 'scientific knowledge of their own situations themselves'. This is not 'inferior mythical knowledge' (1974: 39). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), naming the world becomes a model for changing the world, and in research, we should speak with the people, not to them and not only listening as long as people are responding to the questions the 'specialist' [researcher] asks (1987:

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46). These cultural dialogues are, therefore, essentially theoretical in an organic, authentic sense (1987: 66)—meaning, the theory is arrived at through practice, rather than inserted and validated in scholarship in the dated "armchair intellectual way" of theorising without real engagements in social movements. These forms of scholarship based on community partnerships in social activism should, therefore, be core-funded and be moved to the centre in higher education with the necessary systemic support to sustain community development to reduce economic and social inequalities in South Africa. Moreover, it becomes important to tackle climate change through such knowledge partnerships in scholarship activism as Satgar (2019: 16–17) points out that dialogue has globally emerged between non-Eurocentric Marxism and indigenous movements advancing anti-capitalist alternatives, crucial for attaining climate justice. Engaging indigenous identity social movements should, therefore, not simply be dismissed by dogmatic South African Marxist scholars as "reactionary" or "Verwoerdian". It is worth noting the argument by Vally and Motala (2018: 30) on the imperative to find alternative ways to describe—and for that matter also analyse—oppression and exploitation beyond 'race … phenotype' categorisation in a contemporary post-1994 South Africa where 'racial nomenclature continues to haunt the public consciousness … as ghosts of an unrequited past'.

What is called for is a rethinking and systemic repositioning of scholarship activism in higher education in a democratically young and still deeply fractured South Africa.

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Chapter 11: Intr/Activism:[1] Scholar/Activist - Abilities, Simultaneously Cutting Together/Apart

Petro du Preez

Introduction

As a scholar and activist, will anything I say or write have an influence on the brutality and violence we see in the Palestine-Israel crisis? No. How can I possibly contribute to end the senseless weaponisation of children, of basic needs provision (water, medical care, safety, electricity, etcetera), and of social media, etcetera … ? I don't know. Must I remain silent about injustices and continue sanitising my research and branding it 'scholar-activist attempts to respond to social injustices', as I have done? No.

Being someone for whom writing comes quite naturally, and who has sought various artistic forms of expression over time to make sense of the world, I find myself in a state of writing paralysis … a highly frustrating space of inexpressibility …. My heart, mind and soul feel like erupting; its empty contents dissipating into thin air to experience only a moment of relief … I have a desire to give expression … the ink of my pen is boiling over, but my paper unwilling to receive it, and my hand protesting in a language I don't understand ….

Being a 43-year-old South African professor in such a situation is not only unsettling, but threateningly and violently shakes my existential comfort zone/s as a writer, scholar and activist. Surrounded by the deafening silence of my scholar-activist colleagues in most

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1 The neologism, intr/activism, is developed in this chapter as a verb that joins the ideas of scholar/*activism*, in *intra-action*, and is useful to describe the process of scholar/activists "turning inward"' through enacting various -abilities (radical self-styling). Intr/activism celebrates 'thinking global, and acting local' as Braidotti (2013) states, and requires that the 'arrogant I be turned into a humble, relational I' (Le Grange 2019). In this sense, the transformative potential of intr/activism is always already there, just like possibilities for intra-action always already exist (Barad 2007).

education and human rights networks, I ask: why the lack of engagement on the Palestine-Israel crisis? Why react so quickly to other events (threats of ChatGPT, for example), but say nothing about the humanitarian crisis playing out in Gaza?

{to be continued}

I wrote this as a popular piece on the 19th of October 2023 after a webinar hosted by the Curriculum Studies Special Interest Group of the South African Education Research Association (South African Education Research Association n.d.). Prominent South African scholar-activists—Na'eem Jeena, Steven Friedman and Mohamed Shahid Mathee—were invited to provide critical perspectives on what we then referred to as the Palestine-Israel crisis.

In the days that followed, horrifying television footage of (what turned into) genocide in Gaza, and the international community's neutrality on this highly politically charged and intensifying war, began haunting me as disbelief, frustration and helplessness crept in. The images and brutal re(hell)ity of it, left me numb. With nothing other to hold onto, and my pen too heavy to lift, I picked up a spatula and paint, and a small oil expression was born (15 x 30 cm, oil on canvas). I dedicated this expressionist painting in memory of all the children, women, ill and innocent civilians who have lost their lives in the ongoing violence and genocide in Gaza. I wrote (late in October 2023) 'May those left behind be privileged enough to see a more colourful skyline! And, may the Innocent Souls, Rest In Peace!'

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Fig. 11.1 Expressionist painting in memory of all the children, women, ill and innocent civilians who have lost their lives in the ongoing violence and genocide in Gaza

So much blood has flowed, trauma induced, and lives irrevocably shattered since October 2023 (and long before that) when I picked up that tiny spatula. This experience, and the ongoing, senseless murder and wiping out of precious life across the globe, have not left anyone untouched or unaffected, and continues to de/form becoming/s of all sorts. It turned my inquisitive, outgoing tendency as researcher, inward; and I began to question what it means to be/come a scholar/activist. This realisation sparked an un/learning process, one marked by frank, rigorous and ongoing criticism of myself and others; and a re/configuration of what scholar/activists' sensing, responding to, and expressing could be/come. For me, this meant queering the scholar/activist binary I uncritically endorsed for a long time and that is clearly visible in the way I wrote this popular piece.

My becoming a scholar/activist was re/configured through my ongoing intra-actions with posthumanism.[2] My understanding of activism, was also re/configured in line with Braidotti (2011: 268) who explains: 'In defining activism as the process of becoming-political, Deleuze speaks of the European left of the 1960s and 1970s in terms of a specific sensibility, which he connects to a creative imaginary about possible futures.' Activism understood as the process of becoming-political is creative and critical, and in the light of this I try to illustrate in this chapter a part of my becoming-political through various creative and critical engagements. In this sense, this chapter could be seen as introducing another way of understanding activism as radical self-styling that requires critique and creativity, which is different from dominant understandings of activism as outwardly mobilising social movements and campaigns.

I shall begin with a discussion on the posthuman condition, posthuman theorising and make an argument for methodological renewal in scholar/activism within this condition. Second, agential realism is explained as a posthumanist approach. This includes unpacking what is meant by an "agential cut" and "agency" to queer scholar/activism, as simultaneously cutting together/apart (as the title suggest). Third, I trace[3] scholar/activist entanglements through further engaging with the popular piece, the oil painting, and other snippets of my becoming scholar/activist. This tracing experiment enabled me to cut together/apart scholar/activist—abilities as it relates to response-abilities, sense-abilities, and in/ex/press-ability. Lastly, I introduce and explain a neologism, "intr/activism", which I suggest scholar/activist might want to think along with and through in their becoming. I end with some final remarks.

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2   Posthumanism refers to an ontological re/turn, as a response to the posthuman condition, that draws on an assemblage of thought experiments in the form of new realism/s, new vitalism/s, new feminist materialism/s, matter realism/s, speculative realism/s, object-oriented ontologies, and non-representational theories (Du Preez et al. 2022).

3   'Tracing', which will be discussed in detail later, is a type of agential realist analysis that enables the opening of some of the traces in an entanglement to make sense of a phenomenon, and relations between phenomena (Barad and Gandorfer 2021).

The posthuman condition, posthuman theorising and methodological renewal

As we find ourselves in the ruins of global capitalism and at the dawn of a new world order, Tsing's (2015) calls for alternative ways of thinking, doing and becoming are increasingly important. Creative, alternative ways, methods or approaches are pivotal for the current moment, the Thick Now,[4] as we find ourselves ever more entangled with advanced technologies to an extent that it is difficult to know what human now is, and what it means to be human. These technologies are growing at a rapid rate and is coupled with environmental problems reaching unprecedented levels, to the extent that planet Earth is on the brink of ecological catastrophe. We are indeed, as Braidotti (2019) reminds us, situated between the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the Sixth Extinction; a (spacetimematter) that some refer to as the 'posthuman condition' (Le Grange and Du Preez 2023). In the posthuman condition, theorising in its radical openness is very different from humanist, conceptual definitions of theory because it is used as a verb that enables us to theorise from the inside (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). Theorising is our ethical responsibility, never final and always a work in progress, or a 'working hypothesis about the kind of subjects that we are becoming' (Braidotti 2019: 2).

Posthumanism is theory (verb) that responds to the posthuman condition, as outlined above. Posthumanism is not anti/against humanism, nor does it imply something post/after humanism. Posthumanism suggest a decentering of human/ism, a disidentification with metanarratives of all kinds, and sensitisation toward the multiple realities of our times (which includes the dominance of humanist thinking that has led to unprecedented ecological disasters) and seeks critical and creative alternatives. In pursuing alternatives, activists and critical theorists, according to Braidotti (2011: 267), have all been confronted with the problem of 'how to balance the creative potential of critical thought with the dose of negative criticism and oppositional consciousness that such a stance necessarily entails'. She continues stating: 'Central to this debate is the question of how to resist the present, more specifically the injustice, violence, and vulgarity of the times, while being worthy of our times, so as to engage with them in a productive, albeit it oppositional and affirmative manner.' (Braidotti 2011: 268). This paradox is part of what I grapple with in this chapter that provides a glimpse into my becoming-political.

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4   The concept, 'Thick Now', derives from a combination of Barad (2007) and Haraway's (2016) ideas and denotes the present time and space we inhabit, and that inhabits us; and that consists of multiple connections, entanglements of past, present, and future that are threatening, but at the same time hosts seeds of life, potential and newness (le Grange and Du Preez 2023: 3).

Becoming-political relies on an understanding of political subjectivity[5] in terms of 'the political' (Braidotti 2011: 269). 'The political' (in contrast to "politics"),[6] Braidotti (2011: 269) says, is 'empowering and productive (potentia)'; focuses 'on the transformative experimentation with new arts of existence and ethical relations' and 'is the radical self-styling that requires the circular time of critical praxis'. The political breaks with politics in a Marxist tradition for example (Braidotti 2011), which enables a reconfiguration of activism as a frame of mind. Activism as 'becoming-political ultimately aims at transformations in the very structures of subjectivity' (Braidotti 2011: 269).

In her book, *The Posthuman*, Braidotti (2013) states that theory as ethical responsibility asks of us to think global and act local. She writes: 'I would rather start from the empirical imperative to think global, but act local, to develop an institutional frame that actualized a posthuman practice that is "worthy of our times" … while resisting the violence, the injustice and the vulgarity of the times' (Braidotti 2013: 177–178). 'To think global, but act local' (a kind of activist slogan and/or aspiration for the posthuman condition) is an immanent ethical call for us to re/kindle our (posthuman) sensibilities (the ability to sense and make sense of the current condition) and, taking shared responsibility (enacting our relational ability to respond to the condition) in experimenting with the potential of becoming in the "Thick Now".

Experimentation with the "Thick Now" calls for methodological renewal and new, different and creative modes of inquiry and expression (Thompson and Adams 2020). We learn from Ruth First's activist life and becoming (see Chapter 1) too how important it is to adjust one's approach to be relevant for the condition and changing times one finds oneself in. It, thus, makes sense to ask questions about scholar/activism in the posthuman condition as scholar/activism might benefit from alternative methodologies that necessitate experimenting with different ways of expressing, knowing, becoming and doing. Such methodologies might be qualitatively different from other methodologies that are more geared toward outward social mobilisation. Agential realism, as proposed by Karen Barad (2007), is one alternative approach for theorising the posthuman condition, as I shall show below.

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5   Here she takes the lead from Foucault and Deleuze and explains: 'As eyewitnesses to the immediate events of the cold war in Europe and more specifically the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Czech and the Paris Spring revolt of 1968, Foucault and Deleuze (1972) distance themselves from the nefarious illusion of revolutionary purity, which engenders armed violence and repression. They are therefore critical of the universalist utopian element of Marxism, which inflated intellectuals to the role of representatives of the masses. They were equally suspicious, however, of the universalist humanistic assumptions and the claim to human rights or the self-correcting validity of human reason. They stress instead the need for a change of scale to unveil power relations where they are most effective and invisible: in the specific locations of one's own intellectual and social practice.' (Braidotti, 2011: 268).

6   'The political' is different from 'politics'. Politics is a negative power that is restrictive and coercive (potestas) and 'focuses on the management of civil society and its institutions' and 'is a reactive and majority-bound enterprise that is often made of flat repetitions and predictable reversals that may alter the balance but leave the structure of power basically untouched' (Braidotti, 2011: 269).

Agential realism and agential cuts in scholar/activism

In agential realism, agency is 'cut loose from its traditional human orbit' as it is no longer aligned with human intentionality (as was the case with phenomenology) or with subjectivity (as was the case with poststructuralism) (Barad 2007: 178). For Barad (2007: 178) agency is not something someone or something has, like a possession: 'Agency is "doing" and "being" in its intra-activity'. This is so because agential realism holds that it is impossible to separate ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics as they are deeply intertwined or entangled. It is a relational ontology that starts from the premise that entities arise through relationships and 'that entities, or relata within phenomena, do not precede their relationships' (Bozalek and Fullagar 2021: 30). In other words, nothing pre-exists or is predetermined, but comes into being through intra-action. The neologism "intra-action" was first used by Donna Haraway and further theorised by Karen Barad (2007), as a key component to agential realism. "Intra", derives from Latin, and means "within", "interior", and "during"'. Intra-action *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*' (sic) or phenomena (Barad 2007: 33), and expresses 'an ontological shift from individual to relational existence' (Murris and Bozalek 2021: 70). 'Intra-action' is radically different from 'interaction' because the latter assumes that there are separate entities that precede their interaction. Interaction is thus about acting 'between, towards and among each other as separate entities' (Murris and Bozalek 2021: 70). Intra-action, on the other hand, assumes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through intra-action (Barad 2007).

In a post-humanist sense, one might say that becoming a scholar/activist, or scholar/activism, happens in intra-action and is a relational, profoundly entangled affair (ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and politically). Because one's scholarly becoming, and activist becoming, do not pre-exist their relationships in this intra-action, but arise only through the agential cut, one is not first a scholar and then an activist, or the other way around, but both scholar/activist in an indeterminate, relational becoming. They are co/constituted in entangled relations. Agential realism also queers Cartesian binaries such as nature-culture, subject-object, material-discursive, human-nonhuman, etcetera and asks 'the prior question of what differentially constitutes the human – and for whom' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 18). It is about questioning, theorising and analysing cuts, such as human/non-human, itself (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). In this sense, this chapter is an attempt at queering the cut scholar/activist. Note, that the use of the slash is neither a sign of absolute separation between entities (as the dash might signal), nor indicative of an either-or dichotomous relationship. The slash as used here, reveals the cut; simultaneously cutting-together-apart (Barad and Gandorfer 2021).

Bozalek and Fullagar (2021: 30) explain that '[t]he agential cut enacts a temporary resolution between

subject and object' (in this chapter, scholar and activist) and 'creates a temporary determinacy within a phenomenon that is inherently indeterminate ontologically and semantically'. An agential cut is therefore different from a Cartesian cut, which assumes that distinct boundaries are in place, with entities pre-existing relationships. Because subject and object, or scholar and activist, remain entangled, and because there is no actual cut with distinct boundaries in place, an agential cut, cuts together/apart, simultaneously. Also, agential cuts are not enacted from the outside and is never once and for all. When we, therefore, say there is no ontological or agential separability between us becoming scholars and activists, we also say that being scholars and activists is one move, together and apart simultaneously. However, the scholar/activist agential cut is not merely semiotic or discursive (as it might seem until here), but has material affects. One might say that the agential cut, cuts together/apart scholar/activists' materialdiscursive[7] realities as it relates to the abilities to respond, sense and express (differently).

Through, with and alongside my ongoing experimentations with posthumanism, scholar/activism "became something other" or "different" for me. It transformed my becoming by making me attentive of the ability to respond (scholar/activism as enacting my ability to respond, that is, responsibility) and the ability to sense (scholar/activism as a sensibility, honed when in tune with one's intuition and by looking inward); and bringing these in closer proximity, 'simultaneously cutting together/apart', as Barad's (2007) agential realism holds. In addition to tracing how scholar/activism "became something different" for me, I trouble our tendency (as scholars) to increasingly refrain from enacting our (activist) -abilities to sense, to respond and to express (and deal with inexpressibility) where ecological injustices occur and violence prevails. I speculate that this tracing experiment might also add methodological value to scholar/activists seeking renewal in their thinking, doing and becoming.

Scholar/activist -abilities cut together/apart: A tracing experiment

Tracing is a type of agential realist analysis that enables the opening of some of the traces in an entanglement (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). Entanglements are related and contingent phenomena that are deeply intertwined; ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and politically. The aim is not to trace the endless lines/relata between phenomena, but to trace 'from and with the middle' of entanglements (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). For Barad and Gandorfer (2021), tracing is never complete because of the

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7   For Barad (2007), discursive practices are not mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities which is not static or singular, but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity. She highlights the need for reconceptualising discursive practices to take account of their intrinsically material nature. She refers to this as material-discursive practice.

complex nature of entanglements and its endless re/configurings. Moreover, tracing has material affects and is, therefore, not merely a discursive activity.

To queer the cut scholar/activist that, simultaneously, cuts together/apart; I trace lines of scholar/activist entanglements from the popular piece, the expressionist oil painting and other aspects of my scholar/activist becoming. This popular piece was never published, nor anything of its kind at the time in local South African papers. Week after week I experienced immense disappointment whilst having to read trivial rugby commentary made by a top scholar in opinion sections, but nothing being published or debated as regards the genocide in Gaza …?

{continuing from the question about the lack of scholarly engagement on the Palestine-Israel crisis…}

Some respond by saying it is too traumatic to talk about, while others seem to want to see how the politics play out before commenting. Then there are those who are just too busy with academic work to turn their attention briefly to the thousands of children and innocent civilians who died and continue to die because of violence and brutality beyond my limited capacity to understand.

Reasons differ and seem murky in most instances. I ask, how can this be? How can entire university entities dedicated to human rights (education) and social justice research, and universities in general, keep quiet about such atrocities, such massacres of children and innocent civilians? Masses of South Africans have taken to the streets to protest against war crimes committed in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. But when I look around me at human rights scholar-activists, I am remined of Simon and Garfunkel who sing: 'People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening, people writing songs that voices never share. And no one dared disturb the sound of silence.'

There seems to be a perception, or constructed neoliberal reality, amongst some that one's activism can "be held against you in the future" (when you apply for positions or promotions, etcetera). I believe this argument is used as a smoke screen to justify (violent) silence/s. What matters in all spaces and times is good scholarship. And good scholarship cannot transpire in individualist spaces of unproductive silences. It happens when the artificial boundary between abstract theory (or the discursive) and lived experience of activists (or the material) crumbles.

When one theorises on an abstract level and fails to bring it in conversation with the material realities of the "thick now" (the present; with and without its evils), one ends up standing outside of a discourse. In fact, one could think of it as a form of epistemic violence. The discursive points to how theories, words, mental constructs, meaning, etcetera, is being made, unmade and remade. This is what many scholars devote most of their time to. It also happens to be the kind of work that neoliberal universities (which are for the most part performance driven) value because they can more easily measure impact.

However, when discursive privilege comes into play, matter—nature or the material— often gets ignored or neglected. This makes us lose touch with the material (which in the Palestine-Israel crisis means large-scale death). The potential for change, that the present moment holds, evaporates into thin air when we privilege the discursive. The point is that the material and discursive do not stand outside one another. Theory and practice are one. They co-constitute one another and are mutually co-constituted.

As scholars who also call themselves activists, we cannot be silent and stand at a comfortable distance from what is being observed in the Palestine-Israel crisis because we are part of the world in its continuous unfolding—with or without its evils. Or as Nathan Snaza and John Weaver put it in *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (2014: 3): 'It is impossible to think, criticise, and write about a system except from inside it. One must always inhabit the discourse one wishes to throw into question'.

If I (as a privileged professor with freedom of speech and ample networks to rely on) remain silent on these atrocities, who is going to say something? Being able to respond as scholars and activists (enacting our responsibility) is not (always) a matter of taking sides; it is a matter of determining what it is you know that can help everyone to, together, make sense of the collective traumas we experience and the senseless violence we continue to witness. Activism does not mean taking sides blindly or rashly; it is a relational activity where scholars and/or activists can come together to vigorously campaign and set intents towards reconfiguring social and political change.

One's ability to respond as scholars and activists is a loving, affirmative enterprise and a

"worldly activity" with seismic potential to create, demolish and regenerate new ways of thinking and doing. It is, therefore, strange that we keep on theorising as if the world stands somewhere away from our theories, outside of our lived experience and materiality. The world is theory and if we make any claims to theory, then we cannot keep quiet. Then we should sharpen our scholarship and break the silence (Du Preez 2023)
{to be continued}

Although much of what I wrote and experienced in October 2023 still holds, a lot is also no longer relevant as different intra-actions and entanglements are at play. However, there was value in writing this, and there is value in being open to experience the emotion of in/ex/press-ability and to turn inward, as will become evident below. Turning inward enabled me to begin theorising (differently) and appealed to my desire to express (differently); while I was simultaneously confronted with thinking through scholar/activists' abilities to respond and sense. In what follows, I shall continue tracing my scholar/activist becoming and in so doing, explain what I mean by response-abilities, sense-abilities and in/ex/press-abilities in scholar/activist intra-actions.

Scholar/activist response-abilities

Response-ability is about making-sense and being in touch with practices in the world as they unfold in its immanent materiality by 'attending to, tracing, and taking account of entanglements' of all sorts (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 31). For Barad (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 24), response-ability 'is about being ethically in touch with the other as opposed to pretending to theorize from the outside ... – which is a form of violence – and realizing that observers and theorizers are an integral part of it'. Our ability to respond (response-ability) always happens in intra-action (nothing predetermined precedes our ability to respond). This challenges the traditional view of responsibility that is usually associated with the rational individual and makes of response-ability a collective or shared ability.

A scholar/activist being responsible, became something different to me when I saw it as a shared ability to respond and not a responsibility that weighs down an individual. However, scholar/activism as a shared, ethical response-ability depends on scholarship that does not claim theoretical neutrality or objectivity, as this perpetuates (epistemic) violence. Here I am in full agreement with Edward Said when he writes:

Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual

that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position, which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship. For an intellectual these habits of mind are corrupting par excellence. If anything can denature, neutralize, and finally kill a passionate intellectual life it is the internalization of such habits. Personally, I have encountered them in one of the toughest of all contemporary issues, Palestine, where fear of speaking out about one of the greatest injustices in modern history has hobbled, blinkered, muzzled many who know the truth and are in a position to serve it. For despite the abuse and vilification that any outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and self-determination earns for him or herself, the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual. (Said 1996: 100–101)

Deeply etched in many modern-day academics' genetics seem to be the desire to maintain a reputation for being and doing research that is 'balanced, objective, moderate and neutral'. Such claims, or intellectual habits of mind, align well with neoliberal ideals that thrive on rational individuals, acting on their own self-interest. Claims to neutrality and objectivity have increasingly colonised our desires to think, express and become, differently. This is evident in a lot of shallow research that mushrooms everywhere, but that hardly seem to make a difference. Enacting our abilities to respond without further inducing epistemic violence through neutrality requires of us to "theorise from the inside" (a verb). This means being ethically in touch with the "Thick Now" that we inhabit in this space and time, and that inhabits us; and the multiple connections, entanglements of past, present and future that are threatening, but simultaneously hosts seeds of life, potential and newness (Le Grange and Du Preez 2023).

What I am writing here might at first seem like a further abstract theorisation, however, when understood in line with my own story, the material affects and manifestation of this theorisation (as verb) of scholar/activist response-abilities, could become something different. As a young scholar I was trained in Critical Theory and Poststructuralism. These traditions shaped much of the way that I saw and re-acted to the world around me. However, for more than a decade I was employed at an institution that did not seem to value my "different-ness", nor welcomed or appreciated my critical disposition. Early on I decided to keep on "speaking out" and raise critical questions where needed, despite the warnings

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I received from (mostly senior) colleagues to rather keep quiet to prevent that my different-ness and criticality is "held against me when applying for promotion". I chose not to pay heed to that advice and kept on challenging the colonising effects and affects that the institution had on my (and others') desire/s to think, express and become, differently.

Despite the institutional turmoil, I chose to continue deepening my scholarship, but could not help notice how my colleagues (especially the younger ones) increasingly succumbed to silence in critical spaces during meetings and academic discussions in fear of their own promotion options. The silences around me became so loud (and worrying) that I devoted my professorial inaugural address in 2019 to the topic of: '*Nostalgia, dialogue and silence: On the ethics of curriculum studies*' (Du Preez 2019). I spoke about different ways in which silence is performed and how it shapes our ability to respond ethically in curriculum work, or dis/ables us from doing anything at times. However, the situation did not change, and my intellectual passion began to quickly wane as corrupting, neoliberal habits of mind were promoted and celebrated around me.

I took a major risk three years later when I resigned from that unproductive, uncritical space without having another job to turn to immediately, nor anything to fall back onto for financial support. Taking this step has profoundly transformed me, because I realised what really mattered was not whether I conform to the hegemonic mode of thinking, but whether my scholarship was good enough to carry me through. I had to also think about what constitutes "good scholarship" and through this came to realise that my scholarship was helpful, but that it could benefit even more if I were to bring the material and the discursive dimensions thereof into closer proximity. This also led me to question what it meant when I claimed that I am a scholar/activist. I no longer see being a scholar/activist as an individual responsibility, one that requires my immediate, outward reaction, but as a relational intra-action. This tracing experiment, although only partial, sensitised me to turn inward and become more in touch with how (the relational) I inhabit space and time, and how space and time inhabits (the relational) me. This inward turn (self-styling) is, therefore, not an individualistic, selfish doing; but always happens in relation to, or in intra-actions.

Scholar/activist sense-abilities

Re/configuring my understanding and ability to respond (posthuman responsibility) alerted me to the importance of turning inward and tapping into my senses. For example, I had to ask myself what I sense lurking beneath silence/s that causes violence, and how I can enact my ability to respond when all, including myself, goes quiet. It also cautioned me as to my reactive tendencies. St. Pierre (2021: 6) avers

that when enacting our abilities in line with our senses, it becomes possible to create new posthuman sensibilities and 'structures of intelligibility'. For me, this meant stepping back and slowly sensing my way through what I was thinking, doing and becoming (as scholar/activist) to deepen my work. I had to follow my own earlier advice, that is, to go slow and work deep:[8]

> Engaging in deep scholarly work and imagining a university space free from the shackles of neoliberalism require that we slow down. Slowing down is not a "slow strike", it requires careful planning to set aside time for deep work. Slowing down is an ethical choice to take time for oneself and for the other (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022: 118).

Prolonged exposure to neoliberal accelerationism in higher education contexts has had a devasting and numbing effect on many academics, including myself (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022). It is as if neoliberalism has blocked out peripheral vision for many which has led to some resorting to silence, blocking out violence (through, for example, ignoring certain research topics that necessitates our critical attention and in so doing, committing epistemic violence) and producing nicely packaged research products (articles, book chapters and the like) that can be measured to determine performativity. Some have argued that in this moment in time, we are standing in the ruins of capitalism where we are just as much victims as perpetrators of neoliberalism (Maistry et al. 2021). Constant pressure from universities on academics to perform has led many to adopt a reactionary response to their environment and the demands that come with it (Du Preez and Le Grange 2024). In this reactionary climate, a lot of research is fast-produced, replica and small-scale type of studies. Engaging in such research is for Braidotti (2013: 5) like entering 'a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholy'. To change the direction of such "zombified research" might require slowing down and re/aligning with our senses (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022). A scholar/activist who taps into their ability to sense (posthuman sensibility) might be more easily alerted to injustices through their peripheral vision and reading of the condition, which could put them in a better position to respond to it without "zombifying" it with their research.

My posthuman sensibilities 'kicked in' at a time when I felt the most helpless, as if my scholar/activism would never be enough, because it (literally) opened my senses and allowed me to navigate emotions of in/ex/pressibility (differently). It assisted me in "un/zombifying" my thinking about matters

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8   Deep work refers to '[p]rofessional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate' (Newport 2016: 3). Furthermore, the Deep Work Hypothesis asserts that '[t]he ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive' (Newport 2016: 14).

research. Me paying attention to my posthuman sensibilities was, therefore, yet another intra-action that required turning inward. Again, this was not a selfish inward turn to attend to my own interests, but an acute realisation of my relatedness in intra-actions.

Scholar/activist in/ex/press-ability

The popular piece I wrote, the small oil painting, and the snippets of my becoming, so far bears testimony of the increasing feeling of helplessness I experienced as scholar/activist witnessing a genocide. It also pointed to my relentless desire to express; something I have also recently published about (Du Preez 2023). Barad and Gandorfer (2021: 18) refer to this as 'desiring for expressibility', and for them, desiring to express is an iterative process of sense-making. I struggled to make sense of the helplessness and inability to at least express in writing what I experienced as scholar/activist witnessing the genocide on Gaza. My ability to sense and the desire to express guided the rational, critical me onto quite a different journey, inward. What I experienced made an in/pression on my becoming and my relational, slow becoming alerted my senses to various forms of ex/pression, in this case through an oil painting. The emotions tied to in/ex/press-ability (enacting the ability to in/press and ex/press) was simultaneously

cut together/apart (like my understanding of scholar/activism) through this realisation.

I also like to think of the technique used to create the oil painting as a form of artistically cutting together/apart layers of pigments with a metal spatula. Amidst the background noise of bombs, death cries and sirens on the television as anxious, traumatised journalists report on the horrors of the genocide (the material effects of it), I rhythmically started to cut and slice pigments (together/apart) in an explosion-like fashion on the canvas. Cutting and slicing colours from the inside out on a canvas drenched in black oil pigment, had a material effect on me too. Artistically cutting together and apart in this way did not only capture light, texture and emotion, it captured a moment in my becoming scholar/activist (differently). This was an expression of the entanglement I tried to make sense of and respond to. The mild, organic scent of the linseed oil stayed the same, however, the in/pression left by the temporary inability to express myself (dealing with the loss of words) was profoundly transformative. Whereas before I felt like a helpless writer, scholar and activist, burdened with the loss of words and overwhelmed by my in/ability to express; I now understood my scholar/activist becoming differently. This becoming could be explained using the neologism, "intr/activism", to be discussed next.

Intr/activism

In tracing the entangled nature of my understandings as scholar/activist and trying to make sense of the silences and wars around me, I was able to see how highly frustrating, emotion-filled moments of in/ex/pressibility can be turned into moments loaded with potential for transformation. More specifically, tracing response-abilities, sense-abilities, and express-abilities as it relates to scholar/activism turned me inward. Intr/activism is a verb that joins the ideas of scholar/activism (cut together/apart), in intra-action, and is useful to describe the process of scholar/activists 'turning inward' through enacting various abilities (that is, self-styling). Intr/activism celebrates 'thinking global and acting local' as Braidotti (2013: 177) states, and requires that the arrogant I be turned into a humble, relational I (Le Grange 2019). In this sense, the transformative potential of intr/activism is always already there, just like possibilities for intra-action always already exist (Barad 2007).

Turning inward is not a selfish act of individual resistance, nor is it an activity for people to pursue in their own self-interest. It is also not merely reactionary to the condition of the time, but a manifestation of the need for methodological renewal to enact ecological change. One can think of turning inward, intr/activism, as first putting on your own mask, and then assisting another person to put on theirs, like instructions given for airplane safety. Intr/activism implies a process of un/learning through frank, rigorous and ongoing criticism of the self and others (self-styling); and a re/configuration of what scholar/activists' sensing, responding to, and expressing could be/come. This means also queering binaries such as the scholar/activist one. Doing so shows that one's scholarly becoming, and activist becoming, do not pre-exist their relationships in this intra-action, but arise only through the agential cut, one is not first a scholar and then an activist, or the other way around, but both scholar/activist in an indeterminate, relational becoming. They are co/constituted in entangled relations. The transformative potential of intr/action opens the possibility for unafraid, compassionate intellectuals, to speak the truth about a situation, as Said (1996) encourage us to do.

Final remarks

Again, looking at the questions I asked in the opening paragraph of the popular piece, I might ask and respond quite differently now that I think of my scholar/activism alongside intr/activism. Tuning into my intr/activist becoming, allowed me to sharpen my abilities to sense and respond in many ways. This process of radical self-styling has turned me inward and outward (simultaneously, cutting together/apart) and challenged what I conceived of as the limits of my ability to express. Activism, as outward

social mobilisation, turned into mobilisation from within, for me (a radical self-styling).

Although the silence amongst many scholars on the genocide on Gaza remains, I am proud to be a South African, because on 29 December 2023, South Africa filed an application instituting proceedings against the State of Israel for the violence it has unleashed on the people of the Gaza Strip, arguing that Israel was in breach of its obligations under the Convention. In a televised address by the President of the Republic of South Africa, H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, on the ruling of the International Court of Justice, he reminded us that:

> We are also a people who were the victims of the crime of apartheid. We know what apartheid looks like. We experienced and lived through it. Sadly, many of our people died and were exiled like our beloved leader Oliver Tambo and others, others were jailed like the father of our democracy and others were maimed.

> We, as South Africans, will not be passive bystanders and watch the crimes that were visited upon us being perpetrated elsewhere. We stand on the side of freedom for all. We stand on the side of justice. (The Presidency Republic of South Africa 2024)

I end this exploration into my becoming scholar/activism through intr/activism with the same words that I concluded the popular piece I began with:

> South Africa has had many legendary scholar-activists who we can draw inspiration from and to whom we can turn to learn about becoming authentic scholar-activists. The next generation of scholar-activists (me included) may want to turn to our predecessors to learn about activism as a loving, affirmative enterprise that holds potential for change (Du Preez 2023).

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Chapter 12: The Ruse of Political Neutrality: Critical Research, Value Creation, Graffiti and Political Intervention at an Art Institution in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Ingrid Bamberg

Introduction

In this chapter,[1] I discuss how critical research can contribute to shifting perceptions of institutional value and challenging social hierarchies and power structures in the context of the KwaZulu-Natal Society of the Arts (KZNSA) in Durban, South Africa. As a community-based NGO, the KZNSA aims to promote the visual arts and support the careers of emerging artists in KwaZulu-Natal through educational input, exhibitions and public engagement (KZNSA 2022). This is critical due to the decline of support for the arts within South Africa and the city of Durban specifically (Forbes 2021). While art and educational spaces of the early post-apartheid years espoused narratives of inclusion and transformation, the normalisation of European culture and models for art organisations and educational institutions still imposes knowledge systems that marginalise epistemologies and aesthetics from the Global South (Simbao 2017) and perpetuates legacies of structural inequalities. Despite intensified calls for decolonising institutions by dismantling their 'White' colonial ethos in recent years (Heleta 2018; Mbembe 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni

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2021), frustration with the ways in which "Black"[2] South Africans continue to experience subtle exclusion in historically "White" spaces persists. Here, "Whiteness" does not refer exclusively to a skin colour, but also to a mindset, an ethos and an unconscious discriminatory and oppressive behaviour (Fanon 1952) embedded in coloniality and social positions of unjustified privilege and power (Biko [1978] 2017: 20).

The call for decoloniality implies '[to reconstruct] global narratives on the basis of the empirical connections forged through histories of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation' (Bhambra, as cited in Badat 2022: 77) and to recentre the experiences of those kept at the periphery of the dominant discourse rooted in the coloniality of power, in which the way knowledge is produced and diffused is intertwined with economic and political power (Badat 2022). It serves hegemonic forms of thinking and doing that perpetuate the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of those who do not assimilate (Quijano 2007). Considering the postulate that art is knowledge, it is, therefore, not politically neutral.

There is no clear evidence of the KZNSA interrogating its legacy as a historically White organisation centrally positioned in the historically White suburb of Glenwood. Founded in 1905 as the Natal Society of the Arts (NSA) for the benefit of the White artists' community, the gallery changed its name and its constitution in 1996. While it considers the need for redress in terms of promoting Black artists, it fails to grapple with its history beyond the political correctness of the 1990s. As such, it seems to mistakenly ignore the socio-political significance of its legacy and retain a belief in neutrality. No specific political or ideological positionality appears in its vision, its mission, or its curatorial framing. This results in the frustration of many of its members and impacts the capacity for the organisation to create value in a decisive and socially relevant respect.

As an engaged scholar, I am committed to addressing the epistemic violence caused by persisting colonial hierarchies in knowledge production (Grosfoguel 2007). This struggle for change and social justice implies to dismantle hegemonic forms of geopolitics of knowledge production and diffusion in which critical research can play a role on the ground, to mobilise and guide action, in any space of

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2   In this paper, "race" refers to the social construct and experience of groups based on their physical features typical of the apartheid context of racial, spatial and institutional segregation and still prevailing in the post-apartheid era. By "Black" I mean social groups and individuals who were not classified "White" by the apartheid regime and who were discriminated against by the ruling "White" minority. When I speak about "Whiteness", I am cognisant of the fact that one does not need to be racially categorised as "White" to promote and naturalise "White" values. Similarly, the fact that someone is racially categorised as "White" does not mean that they are ignorant of their privilege and the history behind their racial categorisation. In the rest of the chapter, these categories are capitalised and do not appear in inverted commas for stylistic and editorial purposes.

knowledge production (Mignolo 2015). This chapter illustrates how scholars' critical engagement can permeate 'extra-university institutions' (Badat 2025:41) when they are active in such organisations and committed to scholarly unpacking the complexities of power structures 'to advance the interests and ideas' of those who are marginalised by cultural institutions (Piven 2010: 808). Here, I write as a critical sociologist who is also a member of the KZNSA council.

Considering a study of value creation, I conducted at the KZNSA in June 2023 and reflecting on an incident of political nature that occurred in late October and early November 2023, when the graffiti tags, 'Free Palestine' (Figure 12.2) and 'from the river to the sea' (Figure 12.3) were added to an existing mural on the KZNSA exterior wall, I show the challenges and the dynamics in that space and the issue of political neutrality. I unpack the political intervention that ensued and how it lays the foundations to pursue further activist research with the members and the council members at a later stage. I demonstrate how critical research can lead to processes of meaning-making, destabilising deeply rooted social hierarchies while creating value.

A critique of value at the KZNSA

As a non-profit membership-based organisation typical of the cultural and creative industries (CCI), the KZNSA creates tangible and intangible value by offering an experiential space to its society members, audiences and to local artists and makers (South African Cultural Observatory 2022). As Figure 12.1 shows, its activities, the wide and complex networks of stakeholders, organisations and relationships that contribute to creating value also attest to its central and influential place in Durban, in the KZN province's creative sector, and Glenwood in particular. The KZNSA is a unique institution providing a diversified offering with the gallery, the gift shop with its 100 per cent local artisanal products and the café. Sales account for the monetary value created through these three streams, while intangible value is created through the social interactions made possible in this safe and pleasant space and free art programming in a spirit of community-building. Despite its almost 120-year longevity, the KZNSA struggles in the face of a significant decrease in its membership numbers and its revenue in a challenging local environment. Compounding this, access to public funding is more competitive and scarcer than in the past, and several affluent White people who supported the organisation have left on bad terms due to a change in the rules of the popular annual members award.[3] Other members of this demographic have either left the province or the country or "semigrated" to other parts of KZN (eThekwini Municipality 2023).

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3   In 2020, the annual members' award exhibition changed from being open to all members to a strict selection process, without clear communication to members. Many of them were turned down when they brought their artwork to enter the exhibition.

Figure 12.1: Ingrid Bamberg, 2023, The "rich picture" depicting the context, key activities and the rich variety of stakeholders involved in value creation at the KZNSA

The notion of value is central to critical research as it rejects the idea of political neutrality and "value-free" research processes in which the researcher is an objective agent of knowledge production, disconnected from the socio-political context in which they operate (Badat 2025). Critical research aims at producing knowledge with a cognitive, intellectual and practical value (Badat 2025). To deconstruct social hierarchies and structures of oppression and foster social change, I explore how the KZNSA relates to the notion of value. How does it create value and how do those familiar with the space perceive its value? The study I conducted in June 2023 focused on organisational value creation and explored

these questions through interviews with staff, society members, and members from the leadership team including council and management.[4]

Rooted in a utilitarian and liberal paradigm, simple definitions of value creation imply that value is created when the gains from exchanging goods or service exceed the cost involved in its production (Thakor 2000).

In the context of a cultural and creative organisation, the profit made from artworks sales represents only one aspect of the value created (Carlucci and Schiuma 2018), alongside the aesthetic experience, the social and professional interactions, the various processes of knowledge and meaning-making of the world thus produced. Value also occurs when diverse intellectual discourses and cultural imaginations meet in the context of an art institution. Whether they find consensus or reveal conflicting mental models and sociological tensions, they are indissociable from the culture, ethos, historical and geographical legacy of the art institution as a space that inevitably carries a political identity (Dikeç 2009). How does the KZNSA create value in a South African context of cultural pluralism and social fragmentation?

According to Thakor (2000: 8), the first step to being a great value creator requires 'a clear definition of the meaning of value for a specific organisation'. The question of value had not been previously discussed within the KZNSA, and most interviewees struggled to clearly define it.

While members interviewed were generally positive about what the KZNSA offers in terms of opportunities for artists, there is a definite sense that the gallery is not accessible to everyone. One participant pointed out that the organisation has a 'very specific footprint' and 'visitor base' partly since 'taxis do not run' in the direction of the KZNSA (Member 1 interview, 18/05/23). This aspect keeps afar those who live in the periphery and do not have their own transportation, like students or most Black people. A staff member recognised the need for 'more events which are attractive to the ... Black community' (Staff interview, 7/06/23). Overall, there is a sentiment that the gallery is yet to sufficiently transition from its history of appealing to a primarily White audience. While positive examples related to intangible value creation (such as the social, educational or aesthetic experience of attending an exhibition, a walkabout or simply enjoying a coffee at the restaurant), they referred to what the KZNSA "visibly" produces. Negative comments related to the symbolic violence borne of what is experienced as poor communication, a lack of transparency, and vertical relationships embedded in an ethos of "Whiteness". These are sentiments that do not align with the value that the organisation intends to bring

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4   A sample of 22 interviews conducted mostly face to face and three online (looking at the participants' understanding of value, how the KZNSA brings value and their value to the KZNSA), complemented a desk review of the financial accounts and policy documents, participant observation and visual data. I use "leadership" when I refer to interviews with council members or management.

to its constituents. As one member asserted, 'people feel scared about the gallery, to come in. They feel stupid, not knowledgeable, that they need to know more' (Member 5 interview, 11/06/23). Another stated that when 'you have power ... you need to be very sensitive and mindful of how you use that power' (Member 4 interview, 8/06/23). Interviewees who are emerging artists expressed the desire for 'professional feedback' on artworks that are submitted for exhibitions or competitions to be part of a greater conversation and reflect on their practice, and for opportunities to provide art workshops to the public and show their value as knowledgeable individuals and not only as artwork producers (Member 3 interview, 8/06/23). Interviewees recognise the positive aspect of having ties with prominent artists or curators. However, some express that 'there has been a view that the KZNSA at times is opportunistic. It's able to leverage on the social currency of an individual well and run with that. Somehow, there's a relationship that's been brokered' (Member 6 interview, 8/06/23). Consequently, they regret that '[the KZNSA is] unable to ensure that more people benefit from this relationship with [prominent artists or curators]. So, in this way, [the KZNSA] become[s] a gatekeeper as opposed to a kind of enabler' (Member 6 interview, 8/06/23). The value expected from the relationship with the gallery is broader than an exchange platform for exhibiting, consigning and selling art. While the NGO aims to empower and support the careers of emerging artists, it does not seem to see its value to them beyond the fact that

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'it gives exposure to artists who would not otherwise get a platform to gain credible experience in the industry' (Staff 1 interview, 18/05/23). Some artists are left feeling unwelcome and devalued.

At the KZNSA, value is essentially measured from a financial perspective. The fact that the organisation ignores indicators of members' engagement or satisfaction is an indication of the value attributed to its non-profit identity: besides artworks sales, what is intangibly produced by art is not assessed or questioned by the institution. Comments from members point to the fact that they are not invited to participate collectively in creating value (for example in the programming) and thus, their experience is one of 'what you're paying for is a programme of activities and a space and that's what you get' (Member 2 interview, 6/06/23). This is despite the fact that the leadership recognises that members who 'invest in the institution' need to feel that their 'investment is rewarded' (Leadership 2 interview, 9/06/23). Interestingly, the semantics of members of the leadership team depicts in liberal and commercial terms the KZNSA's value as a meeting point for makers, artists and the market where 'the market is the audience' (Leadership 1 interview, 2/06/23). This is considered the primary way to ensure that members get 'a fair return on their investment' (Leadership 2 interview, 9/06/23). In this approach, the value of the human experience translates into monetised capital, not into what the human has gained cognitively, intellectually and practically. The value created is unidirectional and top-down, whereas members seek to create value for meaning and purpose.

The study captured the relationship between the institutional identity, the business model and the financial situation of the organisation as a system, showing that they are intertwined, and must be considered simultaneously to make meaning and value: it laid the foundations for a strategic workshop I conducted in February 2024 in which steps for transforming the institution were specified, and a special general meeting open to the public in May 2024 (KZNSA 2024). Here, what art produces in terms of personal and collective experiences, of potential for new narratives and knowledge-making is not fully considered a valuable 'asset'. This enables the naturalisation and legitimisation of epistemic violence. It contributes to silencing the voices of those who are relatively new or "outsiders" to the KZNSA. It takes for granted and generalises the experiences of those who have a deep sense of belonging and entitlement, due to their historical relationship with the gallery. This pattern occurs not only with members and the public, but also with council members.[5] Moreover, the organisation does not have an explicit values statement that would allow for an assessment of its espoused values (Kabanoff and Daly 2002). How does the KZNSA align with the desires, hopes and values of its members? Who does the KZNSA consider as part of its community?

Legacies of "Whiteness"

My engagement with the KZNSA reveals that the legacy of the White cultural broker and its related subtle power dynamics continue to prevail in this space. Sylvester Ogbechie (2010: 2) describes the 'role of cultural brokerage in determining which objects gain value and which do not'. Thus, the cultural broker is involved in determining 'how value is created for cultural commodities' (Ogbechie 2010: 2). In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, we are still negotiating the historical legacy of the White cultural broker and the 'paternalistic' role that was played by White South Africans working in the arts (Peffer 2008: 176). By framing Black artists as inferior to White artists and actively excluding them from galleries, museums, art schools and universities, the apartheid administration ensured that the space of Fine Art was a White space (Peffer 2014: 176). The distinction between "Fine Art" (a term used to describe work that aligned with a modernist European discourse) and "craft" (the term used to describe the work of indigenous artists) devalued the work created by Black South African artists. Committed cultural brokers played a role in identifying talented and promising artists and working to promote them and their work

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5   Half of the council was newly appointed in October 2023, bringing generational, racial and gender diversity to the leadership team. It is beyond this chapter to describe the many parameters that intersect (seniority at the council, inhabiting Glenwood, networks and friendships, knowledge and expertise in the art sector, understanding of management and leadership practices...) to give an accurate account of their profile.

during apartheid. However, this required them to represent and speak on behalf of Black artists who were largely considered uneducated and inferior to White artists. While many cultural brokers worked with good intention, problematic power dynamics persisted.

Part of the challenge faced by the KZNSA lies in its ongoing 'blindness' to understanding the impact of 'Whiteness' in historically White institutions (Steyn 2015: 37), a phenomenon not unique to the KZNSA (Southall 2022). The KZNSA is supported by a diverse network of artists and supporters of the arts. It is free of charge and open to the public. However, the sentiment of members demonstrates that the KZNSA is still experienced by Black South Africans as a White cultural organisation. The individuals who do feel a sense of ownership, entitlement and belonging, are predominantly White. Often blind to their privilege, they are the ones who perceive the organisation to be creating value in their communities. This disjuncture in members' perceptions and experiences became evident in a recent response to graffiti on the exterior wall of the KZNSA.

Graffiti and the wall

In October 2023, the KZNSA received three complaints about the addition of graffiti reading 'Free Palestine' to the exterior wall of the building. The original mural (titled *Many lights make hands work*) was created by the street artist and activist Iain EWOK Robinson through an interactive collaborative workshop on street art. The council was informed about three email complaints from individuals who perceived the graffiti as "antisemitic" and "pro-Hamas" and demanded that it be removed. These complaints reveal that this graffiti was a matter of public debate from the onset; discussions inside and outside the organisation naturally infused each other, mirroring a debate taking place beyond the KZNSA's microcosm.

Figure 12.2: Photographic documentation of the exterior wall of the KZNSA depicting the mural painted by street artist EWOK (Iain Robinson) and the Free Palestine graffiti tag that was added (photograph by Rachel Baasch, 2023, Glenwood, Durban)

The council was asked to vote on this issue which resulted in a division of opinion regarding the interpretation of point 2.5 of the KZNSA's constitution which states that 'the society shall not align itself with any political movement' (KZNSA 2018: 1). Members of the council motivating for the removal of the graffiti described it as "vandalism" and evoked this clause in the constitution, arguing that in leaving the call for Palestinian sovereignty on its wall, the KZNSA was aligning with a "political movement". They were also concerned about offending members of "the community". Those defending the graffiti and insisting that it remain argued that calling for the freedom of the Palestinian people was not akin to aligning with a political movement and did not represent support for the actions of Hamas. They also called for institutional coherence given that the gallery was hosting an exhibition titled *Kumnyama Kubomvu: The Land is Ours.*[6] Shortly thereafter, a staff member painted over the graffiti without knowledge of the debate taking place; pictures of the removed graffiti and comments subsequently circulated in the public opinion questioning this erasure and the KZNSA's position. With the degradation of the situation in the West Bank, some council members called for issuing a statement to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemn the war; there were also suggestions to submit this idea to a vote of

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6   This exhibition of work by Clive Sithole focused on the complexity of belonging in relation to land dispossession in South Africa.

the larger membership. Following this, another piece of graffiti reading 'from the river to the sea' was anonymously painted onto the wall (Figure 12.3).
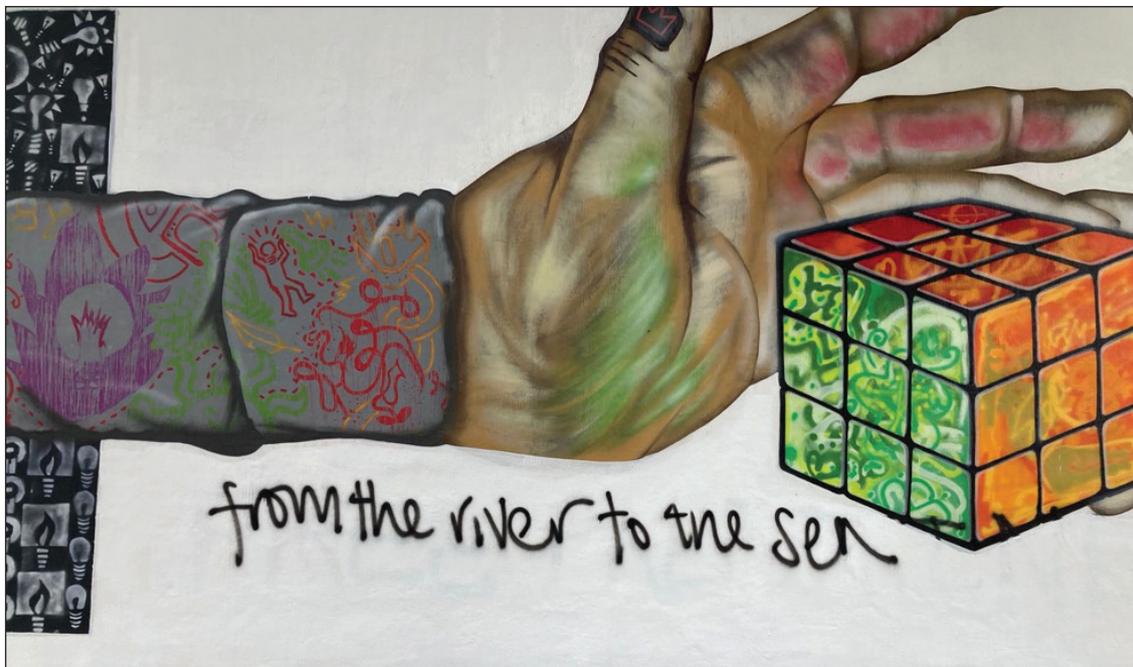
Figure 12.3: Photographic documentation of the mural by EWOK with the addition of a graffiti tag reading '*from the river to the sea*' (photograph by Rachel Baasch, 2023)

While some council members motivated for the KZNSA council to leave this second graffiti on the wall and to respond with a statement, clarifying its collective position and by extension, responding to the emails, others advocated for removing it and expressed substantial fear on taking a position on this matter. Concern around losing business by taking a clear position became a central issue and source for debate and disagreement which caused public opinion to consequently question the origin of the funding received by the gallery. While the KZNSA management and staff seemed to be approached only by individuals hostile to the graffiti, different perspectives circulated around Durban. EWOK reminisced that 'if [he] was hearing anything about the graffiti, it was just like positive reinforcement coming from people. And then that got picked up, you know, some people saying, "Hoh, great, someone's saying something"' (EWOK interview, 5/09/24).

The council was unable to agree on the matter and tensions escalated resulting in a decision to address the issue in a strategic workshop in November 2023 and mobilise knowledge. In this workshop, Rachel Baasch, art historian, and chair of the KZNSA exhibition and education sub-committee, presented her fieldwork and long-term critical research on walls and borders and the way in which artists respond to structures of division and exclusion in the contexts of the Israeli Occupied West Bank Palestinian Territory, the North African border of "Fortress Europe" and the US/Mexico border fence (Baasch 2017). Elaborating on the history of apartheid in Palestine and the significance of visual activism, Baasch explained to council that, in such contexts, the graffiti tags form part of a global 'visual activism' that expresses itself on walls (Chapman 2019: 12). She described the close resemblance between Israel's and South Africa's apartheid system. She also contextualised the statement 'from the river to the sea' and unpacked its meaning. The full slogan reads 'From the river to the sea…Palestine will be free' and refers to the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan river where historic Palestine existed prior to colonisation and apartheid. The slogan forms part of a larger conversation that calls for the decolonisation of Palestine and an end to the Israeli military occupation and apartheid. Baasch explained that while the slogan has been misinterpreted as "antisemitic", and in alignment with Hamas, it has been widely used as a call for peace, "freedom and coexistence" of the Israeli and Palestinian people and not as advocacy for political groups and platforms (Nassar 2023).

EWOK counterbalanced Baasch's presentation by sharing his experience working with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and activists dedicated to Palestinian freedom. He articulated the risks associated with taking a decisive position and releasing a statement, referring to negative experiences of harassment and aggression from members of the Zionist community. As conceptions of the wall and the mural as private property, public space and canvas for art and engagement were conflicting with each other, EWOK also refocused the debate on his mural and the role of street art in society. As he says, reflecting back:

> When you put something on the street, people are allowed to react to it. And that's ultimately why we do it. There's a conversation that needs to happen. And I wanted to be there and say I absolutely agree we should be saying something we should be doing something, even if it means my piece is being 'defaced' if that's what it takes, then that's good because this is that moment. So, I just wanted to be there to reaffirm that the gallery was taking it seriously, that there didn't need to be a position, and that this was the position. (EWOK interview, 5/09/24)

Several dimensions of value resulted from presenting Baasch's critical research on borders and visual activism in the Global South. EWOK explains its impact:

> It recentred the concept of what a wall is and what a barrier is in terms of a physical and also a social sort of construct. And so, it definitely recentred my own principles and values when it came to why I'm involved in the sort of struggle you know for Palestinian liberation, and the broader sort of human rights questions around, yeah, I guess, the wall. It recentred the conversation on how access is controlled and how particular peoples are controlled, in terms of power relations. (EWOK interview, 5/09/24)

Baasch's field research not only depicted the lived experiences and struggles of people on three continents, it also grounded the scholar as a direct engaged witness, reasserting the humanitarian cause behind the graffiti. It brought forward the common empirical experiences of domination and oppression, showing that the situation was neither remote nor peripheral to South Africa's society. The presentation resulted in a dialogical and dialectical relationship embedded within the humanitarian issues raised by the graffiti: it opened a conversation around institutionalised racism, creating a space in which council members could express their own experiences of racism in a post-apartheid context, including the covert racism that continues to characterise the KZNSA. It also manifested in council members reaching consensus over issuing a statement (except for one member who later resigned) and EWOK painting a new mural. As the artist recalls, 'this was a moment of creating a real value, the significance of the gallery as an arts institution taking a very clear stance, which was not happening, that still hasn't really happened, in the arts sector in South Africa' (EWOK interview, 5/09/24). The statement was drafted collectively by council members who took ownership of the research shared and offered valuable insight as producers of knowledge in this context. Another few external complaints, attempts by some in council to organise a vote by members and invite a neutral mediator to explain the situation to stakeholders from a neutral perspective led to further internal tensions around the modalities of the statement release and delayed the process. The statement was finally issued in the name of the council as a collective in December 2023 and received support from members, without any form of retaliation. In February 2024, the KZNSA was approached to support creative initiatives promoting peace and humanitarian aid in Palestine. Interestingly, this occurred at a time when the International Court of Justice issued provisional measures against Israel, after South Africa filed an application before the Court in December 2023, for the protection of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip under the 'Genocide Convention' (International Court of Justice 2024). These initiatives attracted new audiences to the KZNSA who also

registered as members. Beside the monetary value of memberships, this attunement to social issues and different perspectives of the world increased the KZNSA's social relevance.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail how Baasch's research impacted EWOK's semiotic and aesthetic process that resulted in a new mural in June 2024. However, the presentation 'helped [him] focus on what a wall actually is and how we're trying to kind of attack the wall as a physical structure and as a social structure' (EWOK interview, 5/09/24). EWOK painted a new mural with slogans relating to social justice and activism (Figure 12.4) offering a dialectic between the initial graffiti and activism through a firm, but pacific and poetic approach of the mural (Figure 12.5). Later that month, the artist Robin Moodley collaborated with him and added his sculpture to the wall to bring life to the realities of displacement and death, and to honour the Palestinian people (Figure 12.6).
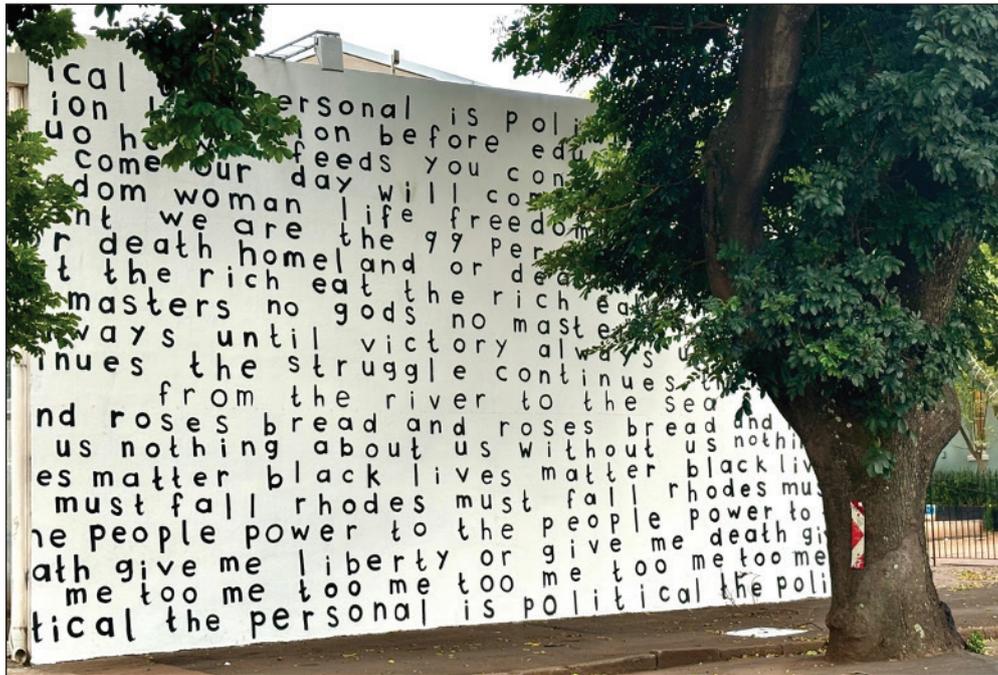
Figure 12.4: Photographic documentation of the new mural by EWOK showing slogans advocating for social justice, including *'from the river to the sea'* (work in progress) (photograph by Rachel Baasch, 2024)
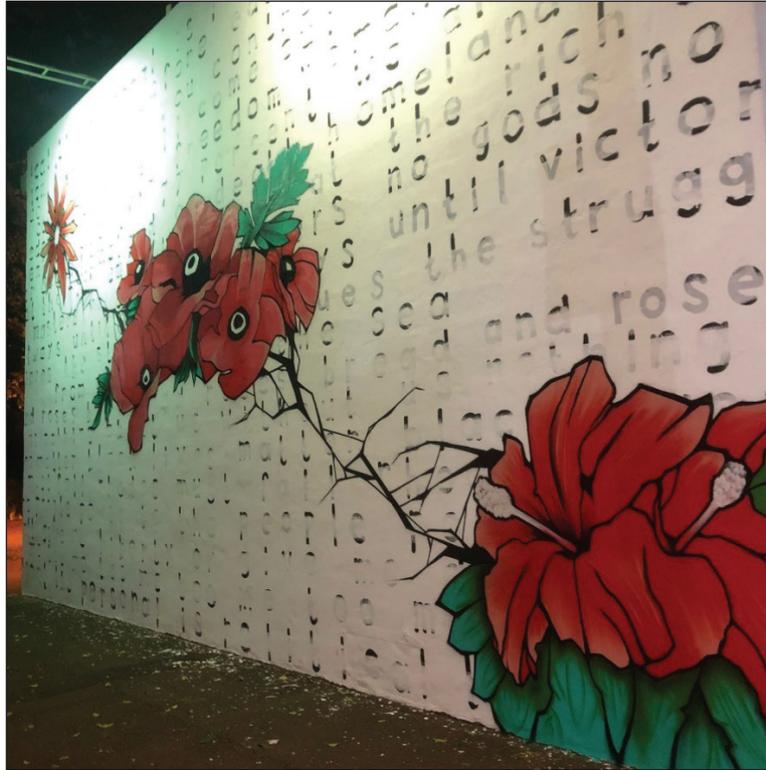
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Figure 12.5: Photographic documentation of the new mural "The cracks are showing" by EWOK.
Photograph by EWOK, 2024

**Figure 12.6: Photographic documentation of the new mural by EWOK, and the installation of
concrete sculptures by Robin Moodley addressing displacement and death, in honour of the
Palestinian people (photograph by Rachel Baasch, 2024)**

Art, fear and political neutrality

In this process, it became clear that those opposing the graffiti and resisting the statement and its
release were afraid to engage with political concerns. In effect, invoking the organisation's constitution
and a potential alignment with a political party or movement (namely Hamas) revealed the narrow
understanding of the notion of "political". While some were looking at it from the perspective of
"politics", merely in terms of power and conflict between factions and political actors, others were
looking at "polity" and at apprehending the graffiti as a language and symbol of struggle to exercise the
KZNSA's citizenship as an artistic and cultural organisation (Cotta 2023). Instead, the political realm was

contained within and limited to organising a general meeting with members and asking them to vote for or against the release of a statement. In other words, the value of political action was embedded in vetting, an idea of power subtly disguised behind the invocation of democracy and economic pragmatism. As the KZNSA's financial situation and the conversation on the graffiti and the statement conflated, the latter were seen by those opposed to them as potential obstacles to funding and revenue if donors and patrons were to take offence to it, although there was no evidence of this.

This posture showed the difficult equilibrium the organisation wants to maintain: being purportedly neutral while being relevant in contemporary South Africa. This positionality is emblematic of two paradigms in which South African "Whiteness" is embedded: threat and neutrality. In fact, the rhetoric of "*gevaar*" (danger) was instrumental to the apartheid regime (Baasch 2017: 77). The idea that Black people represented a threat to the White minority was used by the apartheid government to justify its oppressive and segregationist policies. This indoctrination has had long-term effects on social perceptions, biases and relations in South Africa (Southall 2022).

In the context of the KZNSA, this discourse of a potential threat serves to eliminate initiatives and engagement originating from those who are not representative of traditional power figures. These "outsiders"—novices (new council members), women, new generations, Black people—disturb the established order by not paying allegiance to structures of power and not fulfilling the roles assigned to them by the principles of the coloniality of power: submission and internalised oppression.

The discussions and arguments relating to the graffiti were based on three messages emanating from individuals who are not members of the KZNSA, but who were, however, considered representative of the "KZNSA community".[7] This way of apprehending this imagined community showed a sense of ownership and entitlement referring to Whiteness and to the gallery merely accommodating audiences who are not White, rather than considering them and their experience as an integral part of the gallery's social identity. Moreover, the fact that no other members of the society or of the so-called community engaged with the issue of the graffiti on the wall was not an element taken into consideration by those opposing the graffiti and resisting the ensuing process. The "KZNSA community" is still perceived through a socio-spatial and racial lens that is normative and functions as a mental border contributing to mechanisms of othering. Beyond this community's worldview, there is little consideration for those whose aspirations and values challenge coloniality in its social and institutional forms.

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7   Despite the complexity of the notion of community, the term is used in daily language in South Africa to refer to members of a constituency, be it a neighbourhood, an organisation or a group sharing interests. Instrumentalised by the apartheid discourse, it has a strong racial connotation and illustrates social hierarchies as it refers to racial groups and socio-spatial entities (such as neighbourhood, township, squatter camp) emblematic of the segregation laws passed in 1950. It is considered by some as "the political term" of the apartheid discourse (Bamberg 2016; Thornton and Ramphele 1989).

Additionally, the argument about the community ignored the large section of supporters in the city calling for ceasing the war in Gaza. Despite the financial distress in which the KZNSA finds itself, the potential to secure business from this sector of the community did not occur to those opposing the graffiti. This reveals the persistent coloniality of the social structure in Durban as well as the social hierarchies at the KZNSA that operate as a subtle form of oppressive institutional power.

Invoking the apolitical nature of the organisation to solve the graffiti issue and advocating for the intervention of a neutral mediator to share neutral views of the situation exacerbated tensions amongst council members. The posture of neutrality enables 'wilful blindness' and goes against the impetus of critical research (Bovensiepen and Pelkmans 2020: 389). Neutrality illustrates the choice to disengage and is, therefore, not politically neutral. In this case, neutrality equates to a symbolic violence that mirrors epistemic violence: not engaging with polity is a way to silence people who have a worldview that differs from the dominant one, or the one advocating for status quo, as a political comfort zone and normative framework. This indicated an unrealistic desire to bring to neutrality an issue that is recognised as contentious amongst nation-states and individuals globally. Fear led to the desire to take a neutral approach as a form of protection. The fear was primarily the fear of losing money, instead of grasping that the more in tune the organisation is with its context and the more sensitive it is to what matters to its broad audience, the better positioned it would be to simultaneously ensure financial sustainability and relevance. There was no engagement about the graffiti with emerging artists and this was a missed opportunity for the KZNSA to show its multifaceted value. The KZNSA could have brought the value of political education to the community through art. This attitude towards the political realm is not surprising. Their fear is to lose the privileges to which they firmly hang, whether material or symbolic, like status and power, in the contemporary art arena and in Durban. This fear politics and fear of polity are ultimately foreign to critical research (Shayne 2014).

Conclusion

The covert forms of symbolic violence experienced by members and public of the KZNSA who do not originate from or assimilate to its historical community is rooted in subtle mechanisms of coloniality of power typical of the post-apartheid South African context. The reality of the collective experience of oppression is still present in the identity of spaces, in social hierarchies, and still racialised and embedded in behaviours, body language and interpersonal interactions often tainted by microaggressions (Zerai 2023).

This acknowledgement brings discomfort and resistance from those who are used to setting the tone of the institutional narrative, a form of defensiveness typical of Whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa (Southall 2022). This resistance and desire for neutrality perpetuate the epistemic violence entrenched in the institutional identity of the KZNSA, in its wilful blindness and discourse rooted in the political correctness of universalism, 'prominently associated with the modern world-system' and Eurocentrism (Wallerstein 2007: 38). Translating research to guide action on the ground (Choudry 2022) at an extra-university institution forms an act of 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo 2015) to recentre knowledge, "peripheral" lived experiences and include narratives that are not dominant in the institution. Yet, the critical research and intervention at the KZNSA described in this chapter are but one step towards fostering a mindful, relevant and politically aware institutional identity and praxis at the KZNSA. By constantly practising 'knowing with' (Baasch et al. 2020), fully engaging with its social realities and in collaborative processes of knowledge production, the KZNSA would advance its institutional transformation and create value for the larger community.

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RESEARCH & ACTIVISM:
Ruth First & Activist Research

A book that interrogates, celebrates, performs and opens up a projective scholarship on Ruth First's extraordinary body of knowledge that also recuperates, recovers and rediscovers her. This book convincingly argues for forging *activist research* that speaks to contemporary challenges and builds on First's rich legacy.

In this stunning and timely volume, leading activist-scholars engage the extraordinary and courageous life, work and legacy of Ruth First to explore the productive relationship between research and activism. The authors show that knowledge production is not neutral and plays a vital role in co-creating a world in which justice, care, and collective knowledge—as opposed to powerful elite class interests—define the body politic. *Research and Activism: Ruth First and Activist Research* takes us on a journey that is both historical and contemporary, and reminds us that activist research is essential to navigate our turbulent times.

– **Michelle Williams, University of the Witwatersrand**