# Can a Methodology Subvert the Logics of its Principal? Decolonial Meditations

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*This paper raises a question that is fundamental in the relationship between Euro-Western knowledge as a system of knowing, spawned and refined under particular historical circumstances, and the methodologies that are attached to it. I argue that Euro-Western knowledge gains its hegemonic status precisely because it is a political tool with political implications. As such, it is argued that the methodologies attached to it cannot be modified to subvert the very foundational motivations and spirit that inform Euro-modern knowledge. The paper shows the politics of such knowledge and of the knowledge resulting from its methodologies. In this vein, then, I argue that chances for those placed on opposite sides of the "colonial difference" to engage in scholarly conversations that give equal respect to their ontological and epistemological concerns are non-existent. Heretofore marginalized ways of knowing and, thus, of being, need to be restored to an equal plane of recognition and affirmation for such conversations to be realized. The pervasive understanding of what came to be known as "African AIDS" is used as a case to substantiate the main argument.*

I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, and thus holding conversation only with myself and considering my own nature. I shall try, little, by little, to reach a better knowledge of and a more familiar acquaintanceship with myself. (Tuana 1992, p. 36; quoting Descartes)

## 1. Introduction

It is almost regarded as common cause that the involvement of scholars from the Global South[1] in global scholarly conversations has the potential

1. This term, while far from precise, is used widely to denote a particular relationship with the Global North. This is a historical relationship characterized by conquest whose

to color such conversations with views and aspirations uniquely their own. This is a dangerous common-sense assumption that gives a false sense of ownership of and representation in conversations that are wholly informed by a Euro-Western genealogy whose key assumptions have become common-sensical (Grosfoguel 2013) and have assumed an almost automatic right to be so (Mignolo 2009). Meaningful involvement by scholars from the so-called Global South is precluded by a number of factors that are the subject of this paper. Taking the cue from the above quote by René Descartes, chief architect of the principles that govern dominant knowledge systems, I argue that such knowledge systems are essentially inward-looking and self-involved. The quote explicitly shows an obsession with the self and the place for the self in the world to the exclusion of others. As such, this monologue leaves no authentic space for a meaningful dialogue. Rather, it shows a will to ignorance that forecloses any possibility of mutual recognition and acknowledgement.[2]

The idea of meaningful conversation entails conversations that, upon hearing, are understood and their implications considered and engaged with seriously. A meaningful conversation assumes equals partaking in good faith toward an idealized end, which in this case would be to put equal value on knowledge systems of all the peoples of the world. This paper, with centuries-long epistemicide in the quest for Euro-American supremacy (Grosfoguel 2013), complicates this apparently simple transaction of hearing and understanding in order to facilitate ground breaking engagement. Scholars from the Global South who straddle the great divide between the world they were born into and were raised in and the new world of academia that they are being inducted into raise questions that arise from this liminal space—the border space (Anzaldua 1987; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006; Mignolo 2015, p. 117). This border space is a place of disjuncture between the stories learned on the laps of their foremothers and in the drumming of their forefathers in their communities of origin and the Eurocentric knowledge systems espoused and taught in the university (Nyamnjoh 2017). The university is by definition an institution of

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ramifications remain to date albeit on an unequal scale. The term is used here to underscore this relationship, which, while shifting, is historically configured. So while many of the assertions made here encompass this shifting expanse of regions, emphasis is put on Africa the continent of my origin.

2. Robin Kelley (2016) invokes the notion of "politics of recognition" in a way different from how it is raised here. Whereas Kelley laments the politics embedded in neoliberal notions that are currently in vogue in the university such as multiculturalism and argues that they foreclose the critique of power and reduce Black struggles in such spaces to "politics of recognition," the sense with which I invoke the same phrase is to argue the importance of history in a meaningful dialogue between the erstwhile colonizers and the colonized.

specialized knowledge that is removed from everyday community life. This knowledge is only accessible to a few with the exclusion of the many. At the point of encounter, any other ways of knowing have to die to make way for the hegemonic Euro-American knowledge of the university. For instance, Winona LaDuke argues that for indigenous people the first source of knowledge is spiritual practice encompassing prayer, fasting, vision, quest, ceremony, or dreams (LaDuke 1997, p. 2). Such knowledge does not fall into what is regarded as credible knowledge in the university. It is knowledge held by many people who do not follow the "intellectual" posture of Descartes as shown by the opening quote. As such, "[T]he enclosing of the academy dispossessed the vast majority of knowledge keepers, forever relegating their knowledge to witchcraft, tradition, superstition, folkways or, at best, some form of common sense—separation of university and community as a commodity to be bought and sold" (Hall and Tandon 2017, p. 8). If then the vast majority of knowledge keepers do not follow the ways accepted and elevated in hegemonic Euro-Western scholarship, can these ways ever deliver epistemic justice to them?

This paper is concerned with such separations which follow Cartesian rationalism thereby sacrificing what Frances Nyamnjoh calls the conviviality of knowledges that celebrates incompleteness and fluidity against over-prescription, over-standardization, over-routinization (Nyamnjoh 2017, p. 5). Importantly, convivial knowledge collapses dichotomies to build bridges between ostensibly disconnected entities. Such conviviality emphasizes radical reconciliation against the logic of "method" that categorizes and separates. Issuing from this liminal space, scholars from the Global South are prompted to ask questions that essentially go to the core of what colonialism means and seek to undo what over time has largely ceased to be a question. So, while westernized universities in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) have largely included African personnel, this was not complemented with an effort to domesticate the institution such that it is informed by local languages, cosmologies, and worldviews (Nyamnjoh 2012, 2017). Therefore, what possibilities exist for meaningful conversations that give equal weight to all knowledge systems given the very foundations on which the knowledge around which scholarly conversations revolve? It is one of the arguments of this paper that the politics of knowledge and knowledge-making, ostensibly the sole preserve of the university, have closed such a possibility with almost everyone agreeing, even if not in principle, to move on the basis of this foundation. Commenting on philosophy in particular, Dladla (2017) argues that theories espoused by this discipline take colonial conquest for granted thereby effectively erasing ways of knowing and relating prior to conquest. Very few scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o remind the dis-membered colonial subjects to re-member in a quest

to re-humanize themselves in the aftermath of the dehumanization suffered in the unjust wars of conquest. In the same vein, Walter Mignolo (2009) advocates that we not only change the conversation but also change the terms of the conversation if we are ever to achieve a plurality of voices to color scholarly conversations. This entails acknowledging that the dominance of Euro-American knowledge systems is born out of conquest that silenced other ways of knowing and of being-in-the-world. Changing the terms of the conversation also requires interrogating the role played by the university in furthering the imperial designs of colonial super powers. By doing this, marginalized people such as scholars from the Global South who bear the brunt of the negative implications of this knowledge and are disenchanted by it, advocate for an ecology of knowledges where all knowledges will be afforded equal space to reflect the different experiences, worldviews, and aspirations (Santos et al 2007). This is a call to self-define outside the Eurocentric, Westerncentric, heterosexist, capitalistic, militaristic, and Christian-centric matrix of power that has sought, throughout history, ascendance over other knowledge systems in a quest for dominance. It is a call to de-authorize White supremacist ideas that are tightly woven into Eurocentric knowledge.

## 2. Whose Knowledge? To What End?

Much has been said about how the knowledge (systems) that animate(s) the university space is (are) Eurocentric. In other words, how such knowledge issues from and is primarily reflective of Euro-American worldviews. Following Shiner a point is made that wherever there is knowledge there is power that produces and sustains it (Shiner 1982, p. 386). I go further to explore and question the relationship between university-based knowledge (systems) and the attendant methods, bearing in mind the close, mutually-constitutive relationship that exists between the two. It follows that the methods derived from a particular conception of knowledge will always be true to it and, as such, serve agendas similar to the knowledge system that conceived it in the first place. Gillian Rose argues that science ought not be reified, given a thing-like status, an identity of its own. Rather, it should be attributed to the minds, hearts, and hands of those whose labor it is (cited in Farganis 1989). Therefore, both the ideology and uses of science are the expressions of the interests of the dominant groups in society whose labor they are. To this extent then, scholars from the Global South versed and invested in attendant theories are like "potted plants in greenhouses" (Nyamnjoh 2012) actively participating in a knowledge system that has "sacrificed morality, humanity and the social on the altar of a conscious or implied objectivity that is at best phoney [and at worst colonizing]" (Nyamnjoh 2012, p. 3). Arguing against the idea that Africa

is a "field" from which "raw data" is collected for "processing" through Eurocentric filters, Nhemachena, Mlambo, and Kaundjua (2016) posit that scholars from Africa who have mastered the mimicry of the bank system of education characteristic of the university without critical engagement are complicit in perpetuating its colonial tendencies. For this reason, such scholars are part of the apparatus that neutralizes a "politics of truth" (Shiner 1982, p. 384) into an apolitical question.

Suarez-Krabbe (2013) argues that the genocidal common sense of European imperialism was not questioned by Cartesian doubt and has not been questioned in subsequent thought. We need to consider carefully why it is that neo-positivists of our time skirt around the fundamental issues relating to methodological imperialism; "what knowledge; whose knowledge, and to what end?" What is at stake for them? And what is at stake for those who want to be included in the conversation? It is my contention that the stakes go back to the very question of who is human and by virtue of this understanding then assert that "to have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act" (Gilligan quoted in Wasserman 2013, p. 78). Listening and being heard at the level of knowledge generation is precluded by the very understanding that "biases" in the practice of science cannot be undone without simultaneously undoing its origins. The spirit and letter integral to the idea of "method," it is argued, carry with them a set of historically specific Euro-American assumptions (Chilisa 2012, p. 51), chief of which are ideas about the nature of the human which are informed by Western enlightenment. Guided by reason and based on measurable or empirical evidence, these assumptions reflect a particular worldview. By claiming universality, objectivity, and neutrality, such knowledge effectively claims God's own view (Grosfoguel 2013) that is omniscient and is intent on "talking without listening" (Nyamnjoh 2012, p. 6), thereby enacting an "imperial attitude" that "seeks to erase *the other* through exploitation and violence" (Suarez-Krabbe 2013, pp. 83–4; emphasis in original). Here, the West is not regarded as a place as such, but as a project that claims neutrality, objectivity, universality, and God's own view when it is, in fact, provincial and subjective to Euro-America. The West is analogous to Wynter's (2003) "Man" who pretends to represent all humanity following his annihilation of other ways of being human that do not follow his script. The imperial "I" is presented as the standard against which all humanity should fashion itself, anything else is viewed with disdain and suspicion.

Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) argues that the epistemological foundations of what is generally regarded as canonical knowledge in the university and related spaces has been laid down by white men from five countries, namely

England, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and United States of America. The rest of the world is left with "applying" this knowledge. This is problematic on many levels; chief among them is implied in the question raised by Audre Lorde (1984):

> *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (Lorde 1984, p. 112; emphasis in original)

As things stand, scholarly conversations do not interrogate the violent, exploitative, and colonizing penchant of such canonical knowledge. The choice for scholars in the Global South is to assimilate and surrender with the humility of the humiliated (Mignolo 2009), effectively articulating Prospero's reason through Caliban's voice (Masemola 2015) attesting that "Theft is holy!" (Wa Thiong'o 1986, p. 3) thereby succumbing to the soft means of colonization hidden in the curriculum of the university. This properly closes thinking, with gestures towards thinking amounting to mastering the rules of the game and thus being complicit in the prejudices that such knowledge espouses. Wa Thiong'o (1986), Smith (1999); Nhemachena et al (2016), and Nyamnjoh (2012, 2017) among others show how this knowledge—its theories and methods—is deployed to work against those on the underside of modernity (Mignolo 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2008).

There is a need for conversations that do not skirt around these issues but go to their core by unearthing the foundational spirit and motives that begot this knowledge. Such conversations will wrestle with the question of whether research as an institution of colonial power (Smith 1999) can construct knowledges that legitimate worlds other than those that are Euro-Western. In an insightful piece, Nhemachena et al (2016) remind us of the tally of damage wrought by research in Africa including but not limited to experimenting with drugs, cultivating the body parts of the African poor to save the lives of the Euro-American rich, and the collection of human skulls to be displayed as trophies. Primarily, Nhemachena et al remind us that associating Africa with "the field" from which raw data is collected to be cultivated into "knowledge" according to the norms of the West is a basic tenet in research (2016, p. 22). They argue that research is fundamentally about erasure, distortion, de-territorialization, and jettisoning of the epistemologies of the Indigenous researched people. So, the twin activities that characterize the enterprise of re-search—discovery, and collection—viewed from the above perspective, spell a disastrous relationship

with Africa and other colonized people. So, re-search as a body of techniques conceptualized on the basis of Enlightenment is about power, willful ignorance of other ways of being-in-the-world that do not lend themselves to empirical measures, and is ultimately about reconciling settler guilt and complicity (Tuck and Yong 2012, p. 3). These are conversations that have become displaced in the bank system of education characterizing the university that focuses on mastering the tools of the academy, taking them at face value and therefore discounting their sordid history. Thus understood, it becomes imperative to always foreground the provinciality and political nature of Western epistemologies. This then places responsibility to begin to find ways to de-universalize Western epistemologies and begin to re-center other knowledges as *bona fide* knowledges that make up the university curriculum. In this way, all human aspirations, experiences, and histories will be part of how the world is organized.

Far from being merely theoretical, a science of a society profoundly affects the lived experiences of those it touches.

> The very action of knowing…is an intervention in the world, which places us within it as active contributors to its making. Different modes of knowing, being irremediably partial and situated, will have different consequences and effects on the world. (Santos et al 2007, p. xxxi)

While not explicitly stated (it becomes the role of scholars to unearth), the "use value" (Farganis 1989, p. 210) of a science is key to understanding not only its philosophy but also its history. A move away from thinking of science as "neutral" affords us an opportunity to deconstruct its "use value" principal, which is that it reflects and perpetuates the interests of the ruling elite. The "use value" of science in Africa has been to mask colonial exploitation and the plunder of its resources while stigmatizing it as a dark continent (Nhemachena et al 2016). On a global scale, the interests of the ruling elite are encapsulated in the politics that designate human status or lack thereof, inextricably tied to colonial expansion and exploitation. To "…close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, and thus holding conversation only with myself and considering my own nature" implies an imperial attitude with which Descartes willfully conjured up the "zones of being" and "non-being" (Fanon 1967) that begot the anti-Black world.[3] By imposing a provincial worldview and pretending that

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3. I use the term "Black" to foreground the experience of blackness among all the peoples who experienced the "underside of modernity" (Mignolo 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2008), the impact of which at once converges and diverges.

it is the human view, superior and all-knowing, Eurocentric knowledge has stayed true to the quest for domination and conquest that informed it in the first place. The question of how we perceive the world and of how we act on that perception is at issue for both the natural and social sciences. Bagele Chilisa asks whether the disciplines embedded in research tell researchers how they must see and what they must do when they investigate, and if this constitutes a micro-technique of power (Chilisa 2012, p. 51). If this is the case, then how much maneuvering is possible within this straight-jacket and what do these maneuverings amount to in relation to authentic and unbridled dialogue between differently positioned knowledge systems? Can research, a Euro-Western preoccupation that has been able to side-line other ways of seeking knowledge, embodying and entrenching a power dynamic, ever be a tool for undoing the imperial agendas of its founding mission? Research organized such that there is the knower and the known, the subject and the object, the rational and the irrational, raw data and theory, reflects a worldview that signals a relationship with the world that is based on fragmentation, opposition, and domination. If the first impulse and motive of the founding fathers of the knowledge making up the university system was to willful ignorance, how much can a deliberate opening of eyes by those who have travelled to the empire and come back enable them to see when, in fact, and fundamentally, philosophies and "[p]hilosophers like other theori[es]sts privilege some experiences and ways of seeing over others" (Tuana 1992, p. 5)? Is it possible to turn willful, strategic blindness relayed by Descartes into full sight or is the best that we can hope for upon our return from the empire, partial sight? This is to say that if obliteration and epistemicide were the motives that drove the West's interaction with the world, how much of the world can we see using their frameworks?

The combination of the above factors is to preclude the actualization of meaningful conversations between hegemonic and marginalized knowledges; they entrench a power dynamic that perpetuates the status quo. On the contrary, meaningful conversations take conquest as the primary unit of analysis. They begin with acknowledging that humanity and how to be human should not take its cue from Euro-American ideas of progress espoused by the university. I argue that it is important to ask fundamental questions pertaining to methodology precisely because methodologies issue from and adhere to a particular knowledge system despite the best intentions of the individual researchers. The very idea of research invokes a battle ground for competing knowledge systems with participants already variously positioned and ideas about what comprises credible knowledge and how to get (to) it already established. It is thus my argument in this paper that it is precisely because of this genealogy

that methodologies cannot hope to escape the very imperial attitude that informed the human and social sciences and virtually every other discipline that is part of the university apparatus. In this regard, the best that can be hoped for from this neo-colonial arsenal is transformation whose end goal is legitimating an illusion (Nyamnjoh 2012, p. 130). Therefore, the nature of the questions we ask influence the answers we come to. If the questions asked do no more than interrogate surface issues whose objective is to tweak on the margins, then the answers will yield no more than this set objective. For example, for Indigenous dispossessed people, knowledge is tied to the land. LaDuke says that such knowledge is tied to spiritual practice comprising of prayer, fasting, vision quest, and ceremony and makes cosmic sense when understood in relationship to the land (LaDuke 1997, p. 2). Dispossessed of any claims to the land, such knowledge is summarily discounted. As floating beings, without claim to any knowledge system, they are apprehended through the master's tool for, after all, are they not a figment of the master's imagination? Research as a way of knowing and of relating, with fixed assumptions, cannot help but be caught up in these power dynamics. This explains Linda Smith's indictment that research is a dirty word for those who suffer under its gaze despite the best efforts of individual researchers (Smith 1999, p. 2). Therefore, research and attendant methods cannot be taken at face value. They necessarily have to be subjected to critical scrutiny beyond the surface level that generally characterizes any such criticism.

## 3. Science and Slavery

Lewis Gordon argues that through various constellations Europe sought to become ontological, what dialectitians call absolute being or a human way of being (Gordon 2005, p. 1). In so doing, it became the sole voice on what it means to be human. So, it is a-historical and not a logical process that has delineated the norms of science as we know them. In other words, there is no logical reason why science developed as it did, embracing the notions and premises that it has, except as a force of history. Therefore, as with all knowledge, science should be understood in the context which spawned it. Berman (1989) argues that the rise of capitalism coincided with the increase in slavery. Importantly, she argues that the historical origins of present-day science find their genesis in early slavery. Ignoring this history distorts our conception of modern-day science. From their inception, the human and social sciences have invoked evolutionary ideas that at their core hold to the natural inequality of species. This is the genesis of the philosophies reflecting these emerging social and productive power relations underlying the dualist thinking integral to the Eurocentric

worldview (Berman 1989, p. 235). In fact, Spencer's notions of competition and selection in the social realm were a major influence on Darwin's biological thesis of the survival of the species. The rise of the idiom of the body as a machine, adopted by science, following from the Cartesian separation of the body from the mind, should be understood in relation to the context of the time. The machine-like bodies invoked here are those of the enslaved. Abstracted from their humanity, their individuality erased in the service of the master class they were subjected to, serving in a monotonous and predictable fashion, the bodies of the enslaved were the prime commodity that was to drive capitalism.[4] Therefore, the relationship between the extractivist, exploitative, capitalist system and slavish surrender in aid of its logic is key to understanding the "use value" of the human and social sciences in the politics of the day.

The idea that immutable laws of nature also govern human relations was to form the core of evolutionary thinking. "This freezes living systems into static models of themselves denying the uniqueness of their development in time and space. Phenomena lose their specific, idiosyncratic responses and interactions as they are seen as better or worse approximations of some ideal system" (Berman 1989, p. 240). Approximating the bodies of the enslaved to machines justified the denial of their very humanity and could thus be exploited for maximum profit. This marking of some as dispensable (machines) has a close relationship with Descartes' will to ignorance typified by the opening quote and is informed by what Maldonado-Torres calls Manichean misanthropic skepticism:

> Misanthropic skepticism provides the basis for the *preferential option for the ego conquiro,* which explains why security for some can conceivably be obtained at the expense of the lives of others. The *imperial attitude* promotes a fundamentally genocidal attitude in respect to colonized and racialized people. Through it, colonial and racial subjects are marked as dispensable (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 246; emphasis in original).

The imagery of a machine is in direct contradiction to the human whose existence is primarily ascertained by possession of an intelligent soul that shows the idiosyncratic properties of the humans whose possession it is. Denying this, denies the humanity of those reduced to machines. True to

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4. It behoves underscoring that while this was the intention of the colonizers, this was met with fierce resistance; enslavement in form was not always enslavement in deed, as Kelley (2016) so eloquently argues. It is the same spirit of resistance, I argue, that precludes the wholesale uptake of "findings" about Africa using Westerncentric tools. This is the gist of this article.

the Manichean attitude that bestows on some the humanity it denies others, "Descartes asserts that he has considered only the figure, motion, and magnitude of each body, and what must follow from their collisions according to the laws of mechanics, as they are confirmed by certain daily experiences" (Waugh and Ariew 2008, p. 28). In an interesting article on the coloniality of Western education in Africa, Nyamnjoh (2012) recounts how the teachers imported into Malawi to teach in an elitist school did not view education in itself as a vehicle for change. Rather, they viewed themselves as the change. In other words, contrary to viewing European education in Malawi as bringing (positive) change, their very presence in the country was viewed as a civilizing input. In this way, Malawian culture lost its specific, idiosyncratic sense against the approximation of civilization the teachers espoused.

The "laws of mechanics" alluded to engendered the violent, unjust, and exploitative dispensation that was to characterize Western modernity for centuries and which undergirds the reigning colonial matrix of power. As such, Maldonado-Torres (2007) calls Western modernity a civilization of death that radicalizes and naturalizes a "non-ethics of war" characterized by logocentric, omniscient, and omnipotent God-like qualities that render every Other absent and thus not human. Therefore, the methodologies spawned by this worldview dehumanize the West's Other by rendering her unintelligible and mute; reducing her to an image of herself that is distorted and deformed. Writing about what she characterizes as damage-centered research carried out on Indigenous people, Tuck (2009) asserts that such research is by the same token damaging as its ultimate impact is to leave them thinking of themselves as broken and thus in need of rescuing. She writes that while the damage that is the subject of research is a by-product of racism and colonization, these are usually underplayed with the subsequent result that damage "is relegated to our own bodies, our own families, our own social networks, our own leadership. After the research team leaves, after the town meeting, after the news cameras have gone away, all we are left with is the damage" (Tuck 2009, p. 7). Such methodologies flowing from the Cartesian will to ignorance are instrumental in perpetuating the misrecognition of the colonized. "Look a Negro... Mama, see a Negro!, look, a Negro!" (Fanon [1952] 1967, p. 93) is an all-devastating summation of the mirage of Blackness conjured up by imperial Whiteness (Fanon 1967; Sithole 2016) that renders the Other objects in a European frame of reference (Nhemachena et al 2016). Scientific methodologies that are essentially Eurocentric filters of understanding reality informed by the solipsism demonstrated by Descartes negate the possibility for understanding the spectrum of ways of being human that do not "call away senses" but seek to achieve a balance between thinking and feeling.

So, while "[w]e recognize that the social sciences have deeply European genealogies, somehow we hope that with occasional adjustments and amendments they will serve to understand the non-West, because we presume that despite this Western genealogy, these categories are universal" (Seth 2013, p. 144). The bottom line of all this is that "[Blacks] want to be human in the face of a structure that denies their humanity" (Gordon 2005, p. 3). Collision according to the laws of mechanics perpetuates the erasure of the so-called non-West. In this vein, Seth (2013) argues that the validity of the concepts central to Euro-Western knowledge systems depend on the denial of "their concepts" that recognize that one thing cannot be something without also being another thing (Nyamnjoh 2012, p. 131; 2017, p. 39). Such concepts rally against the Eurocentric worldview that separates and fragments—the master race from the slave and humanity from the human be-ing.

According to Jaggar (1989) science of whatever type raises both epistemological concerns of a theoretical kind and political concerns of a practical order. As such, the confluence of both the philosophical and methodological questions relating to western science is at issue here. This posture helps us to understand the current global politics of belonging: "zone of being," and exclusion: "zone of non-being"; the former Euro-American, white, male, and "rational," and the latter Negroid, effeminized, and a body without a soul. This foundational basis explains my use of the term Global South that, while not precise, conveys a shared colonial wound that encompasses dispossession of land, lifeways, and be-ing. Given this foundational base, the question arises: Does Western science, including its machinations, have the ability to partake in a meaningful conversation that gives expression to an-other world that upholds and affirms the humanity of all people—the Indigenous conquered people and their vanquisher, the enslaved and the enslaver. In other words, can a science whose foundational basis was to deny the humanity of the Other ever be freed from this influence? Can meaning derived from such a science ever afford the Other subject status?

The history that is central to the above assertions is one of conquest whose legacies have become commonplace (Suarez-Krabbe 2013). For instance, the idea of the scientist who is above and detached is one such legacy as are the tools that he employs to understand reality. This is part of the arsenal that aids and abets imperial denials, what Tuck and Eve call settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yong 2012, p. 3). What follows is a brief exposition of some of the criticisms that have been levelled against conventional and prevailing notions of science and have not been dealt with adequately by neo-positivists. These are implied in the attendant methodologies. I use the example of HIV/AIDS in Africa to show

how notions of science, its philosophies, and tools come together in a cocktail of Othering by engendering an "African AIDS." I argue that the tools through which the HIV/AIDS epidemic was filtered reflect the imperialism and racism of the societies that created them. Political meaning is read into the caricatured, literal, and hyperbolic nature in which the epidemic was interpreted.

## 4. Epistemic Closure: Methodologies of Equilibrium

Science is a discourse. It is a way of speaking about the world and if we look at science in this way, it becomes logical to deconstruct the relationship between science and power that stipulates what is credible knowledge and who counts for authority. These standards were arrived at without consulting those who were to bear the brunt of the "white eyes, the only real eyes" (Fanon 1967, p. 87). Therefore, the view of science as acquiring knowledge that is grounded in the objective reading of "data" through the use of empirical evidence does not tell the whole story. Both the mode of investigation and the person of the investigator in the social sciences belie this ideal. The ideal of a value-free social science is thus a myth. In the same vein, issues of methodology necessarily include a strategy to build a collection of methods, techniques, and rules—it delineates a research process to follow, that in turn takes its cue from a particular research paradigm. Values are implicated in the conditions under which one set of rules rather than another prevails. It remains an open question whether the ideal of a value-free science is completely realized in the natural sciences where objects of study can be subjected to the mathematical model with rigorous laws of regulation that are communicated in stringent terms. This model cannot be attributed to the knowledge of the less technical social sciences. Subjects with more fluid properties and behaviors cannot be reduced to inanimate objects. The kinds of interests embedded in these distinctive knowledge systems are not the same, hence Fanon's ([1952] 1967, p. 12) famous quip "I will leave the methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point in which methods devour themselves." Even more than this, our categories are a fabrication in place and time and therefore do not serve well in understanding worlds that have been fabricated differently (Seth 2013, p. 146). Shiner's (1982) reading of Foucault's work as essentially anti-method point to the possibility of understanding "method" as yet another micro-technique in the arsenal of discharging power. Therefore, any attempt to tweak methods at their seams is an exercise in equilibrium that does not fundamentally change its fundamentals. The very idea of "methods" follows the imperial need for certainty and stability. It is antithetical to ambiguity and flux, the basis of how some worlds are fabricated.

The social sciences are involved in studying (and in the process constructing) value-laden phenomena that have social import among which, I argue, is inequality. Such inequality is embedded in the instrumental rationality of Descartes characterized by hierarchical dualism and with a prejudice for the mind (i.e., male, European and white) and bias against the body (female and Other) and is thus at the heart of western epistemology and moral thought (Suarez-Krabbe 2013). Westerncentric epistemologies are grounded in binary hierarchies that sharply separate the body/mind, master/slave, universal/particular, here/there, reason/emotion, master/science/fiction, knowledge/superstition, attachment/detachment, economy/society, men/women, nature/culture among others. These epistemological and ontological assumptions come together to constitute a matrix of power that privileges the white, marauding, and conquering male.

> The Cartesian point of view, therefore, conceptualizes phenomena as composed of discrete, individual elemental units, the whole consisting of an assemblage of the separate elements. It embraces masculine values, the destructive dimensions of that world through scientization, rationalization and bureaucratization. Here, science as practiced is seen as a juggernaut, embracing capitalist and militaristic values. (Berman 1989, p. 240)

The strict separation of phenomena imagined by the Cartesian divide ignores the dialectical relationship of each pair. Therefore, the power dynamic integral to Western science should not be subsidiary in our analysis. This power dynamic is a fundamental that should inform any and every question we ask when interrogating the enterprise. In particular, and as is the subject of this paper, we should ask how much room does this power dynamic allow other ways of be-ing and knowing such that an authentic conversation that fundamentally questions the prevailing status quo is possible.

The notion of "data" is central to the human and social sciences. Methods are deployed in particular well-established and agreed upon ways to "collect data." The question of what are viewed as data, in the first place, remains elusive (Nhemachena 2016). In particular, "the idea that data is 'there' to be read by observers who use a method embodying a form of reason that incorporates detachment and distancing and that brackets emotion, passion, and commitment" has been found wanting (Farganis 1989, p. 211). Data as a collection of what is believed to be fact arrived at through scientific methods of analysis follows the same logic that informs scientific reason. The conclusions thereof also fall into the same trap. Such data depend on a speaking individual with unbridled agency who is able to abstract himself from the webs of significance in which he is caught. This image conjures that of Descartes who "birthed himself out of himself" by ignoring

sociality and historicity (Wilshire 1989, p. 94). This individualism is a singularly Western trait and ideal. "It also suggests the kind of adult who is responsible for himself and no one else. It is associated with the universal and the transcendental, with creation and achievement, with abstract rationality, and with tangible and enduring products. The self as individual glows with the glamour of heroic, solitary, self-discovering travelers" (Dimen 1989, p. 39). The solitary, self-discovering traveler is a metaphor for a marauding white male on his way to conquering and subjugating the world for his own gain. It is instrumental reason through which "raw data" collected in the "non-West" is filtered. The same attitude that informed Descartes' quest for certainty, order, and clarity that led to him abstracting himself from his location, and through his mind (and the tools that this gave rise to) became a knower of all things; this knowledge being relevant in all situations and settings informs the methods used in the university today.

> Descartes emphasized the general applicability of his ideas to all phenomena. But both are now expressed as mechanics—they seek only mechanical, reproducible, no-evolutionary change—the kind that can indeed be described by immutable laws, derived by abstracting selected data points at fixed times at fixed conditions… (Berman 1989, p. 240).

So, while the idea of "data" as the basis for research is invoked willy-nilly at the best of times and by well-meaning scholars, it is one that needs to be re-thought and attributed to its foundations. The idea that "data" could be abstracted at fixed data points, at a fixed time, and under fixed conditions is contrary to African ways of knowing that do not always appeal to cognitive reason but are comfortable with fluidity and indeterminacy (Nyamnjoh 2017). Another related and highly problematic myth of Eurocentric knowledge is that of a dispassionate investigator. This myth is associated with the view that like other sciences, the social sciences should be value-free. Supposedly carried out by a non-located, dispassionate investigator, using non-located tools, to understand objective reality, the myth of a value-free science is perpetuated. The dispassionate investigator does not exist as "[t]hought bears the marks of a thinker's social characteristics" (Farganis 1989, p. 208) and as such, how one experiences the world bears on how one perceives and acts on the world. In other words, "[t]he form and content of thought or the ideas and the processes through which those ideas are generated and understood, are affected by concrete social factors." Therefore, the reading and interpretation of reality are always caught up in both the thinker's social characteristics and the social factors that prevail. Therefore, Queeneth Mkabela's (2005) assertion that qualitative research methods are more amenable to Afrocentric

sensibilities is short-sighted in that these methods still flow from a framework that gives primacy to the idea that "data" are out there and can be gathered and harnessed to reflect a particular conception of reality. This view is still caught in the need to discipline reality with the goal of fitting it into a Eurocentric worldview with its concomitant emphasis on "order." This effectively reduces the plane of knowledge to Eurocentric conceptions of what is real (Nyamnjoh 2017).

Therefore, the ideas of a value-free science, an unembedded scientist, and objective data are all informed by the "point zero" view of society (Grosfoguel 2011, p. 5). They assume equality of representation and harmony in social relationships resulting in the neutralization and/or refusal of responsibility because they fail to account for inequalities and asymmetrical relations of power, status, and privilege that exist in society (Tagore and Herising 2007, p. 280). They, together, form the strategy that is calculated to promote and profit Euro-Western agendas of civilized oppression (Smith 1999; Tuck and Yong 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nhemachena 2016). Mignolo suggests that these strategies calcify a commitment to an epistemological tract that profits from replicating itself (Mignolo 2015, p. 108). This strategy is at once backward- and forward-looking; working to entrench itself so that it sustains its relevance in the future. This litany of critiques shows how then the logic of science is not rational but political. That is why tampering with aspects of the whole cannot fundamentally change the establishment of science. Tampering on the fringes results in epistemologies of equilibrium (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) that take the premises of Western science as a given, and thus have limited possibility to change anything. The assumptions of Western science properly close off all efforts at further enquiry, effectively amounting to epistemic closure (Gordon 2014). As such, constructive communication between differently-positioned groups whose idea of what constitutes existential reality who, following Sylvia Wynter (2003), can be characterized as Man—rational, enlightened, subject and Human vs. the human—irrational, subhuman, object, is impossible. I have argued that knowledge is a site of political struggle and as such knowledge claims are part of a political strategy—a system of truth (Shiner, 1982). While it is true that methods, through one form of critique or another, have evolved, such an evolution has not shifted the fundamentals from which the methodology originated. The role of the university as bearers of theories of equilibrium that maintain the status quo is the subject of the following section (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

## 5. The University as a Colonial Space
The growing calls to "decolonize the university" signal a restlessness with the prevailing organization and ethos that animate the university

space.[5] Grosfoguel (2013) characterizes the university as a westernized space in that it follows the same template wherever it is situated in the world. In other words, the university, beyond it being a westernized space is similarly organized and espouses the same canons wherever it is situated geographically. It is characterized as a satellite of Western ideals, a hand-maiden of such ideals despite the best intentions of the individual scholars (see Nyamnjoh 2012; 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Nhemachena et al 2016; Nhemachena 2016). The quote below underscores the pivotal role that university (and thus Euro-modern) knowledge plays in masking and thus perpetuating its colonial nature.

> Modernity will never again, up to the present, ask existentially or philosophically for the right to dominate the periphery. Rather, the right to domination will be imposed as the *nature of things* and will *underpin* all modern philosophy. (Dussel 2014, pp. 32–3; emphasis in the original)

The precepts of Western modernity are not natural; they have, through many processes and systems, been made universal and normative. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) singles out the university as a vehicle of and conduit for coloniality and as such has facilitated the above. In defining coloniality, Maldonado-Torres argues that:

> It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 243)

The university is thus the citadel and life blood of coloniality—it is a singular space in which coloniality is purported as the natural order of things. As a result, Grosfoguel argues that "… our job in the Westernized university is basically reduced to that of learning these theories born from the experience and problems of a particular region of the world (five countries in Western Europe) with its own particular time/space dimensions and 'applying' them to other geographical locations even if the experience

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5. A cynical question that could be asked of those making this call, who might fall into what Kelley characterizes as "… *in* the university but are not *of* the university" is why they then remain in this space when they are clearly disenchanted with it (Kelley 2016, p. 13). Kelley concedes that the university, by its very character and entanglements, cannot be a revolutionary space. However, it remains a site for critical thinking and a space for collective work.

and time/space of the former are quite different from the latter" (Grosfoguel 2013, p. 74). Nhemachena et al (2016) argue that even in collaborative projects, Western epistemologies are foregrounded at the expense of African ways of knowing. In a similar vein, Tuck (2009) argues that while Indigenous communities are over-researched, they are made invisible in the process. It, therefore, follows that the need to decolonize the university may be shared by all those who do not find their histories, philosophies, cosmologies, and future aspirations represented by the prevailing theories that are generated using the Western canon. This raises some important points and calls us to ask the question: what is it fundamentally that is colonial about the university? As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argues the effect of coloniality is:

> to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubt about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams… Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of neo-colonial bourgeoisie in many "independent" African states. (Wa Thiong'o 1986, p. 3)

By espousing the Western canon and privileging the knowledge, the university is the singular space that is the breeding ground for the above. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) reacting to the notion that there exists African universities that espouse African values and worldviews, for instance, argues rather that there exist Westernized universities on African soil. The idea of the (uni)versity readily declares this space as a space that privileges one tradition of knowledge to the systematic exclusion of others. In Grosfoguel's (2013) words, it is a space where the few define for the many. This in itself signals that the university is a violent space that systematically undermines other ways of knowing and thus different ways of being human. This is a political matter that effectively touches on a people's ability to leave a mark in the world that is peculiar to them. It is about the politics of existence as: "… politics [is] also a condition of appearance. To be political is to emerge, to appear to exist" (Gordon 2014, p. 88). Colonization, informed by the imperial attitude that some

beings are superior, their knowledge just as superior, militates against the right of the colonized to "appear" in their own terms. In this way, colonization eliminates the possibility of speech by the colonized precisely by imposing the conditions of its possibility (Gordon 2014).

"Method" is a colonial imposition that dictates the terms for the emergence of subjectivity. The very idea of "method" thwarts other ways of being a knowing subject with the right to engage on one's own terms. As a colonial imposition, method foments the erasure of the colonized as political subjects with a will to chart the contours of their own existence. "Method" has the effect of hollowing out a way-of-being-in-the world that does not conform to these terms. Filtered through the colonial prisms that distort and alienate such as "method," the colonized are overrun by what Boaventura Santos, Arrisando Nunes, and Maria Meneses call the "sociology of absences" (Santos et al 2007, pp. xxvi). The Westernized university is a space where the Other is empirically institutionalized and is discursively constituted through these absences (Wynter 2003, p. 5). Originating from the Cartesian credo "I think, therefore I am"—reflecting a particular positionality and disposition, the university, by assuming the authority to speak on behalf of mute others who are imagined through particular prisms, perpetuates this creed. As Maldonado-Torres (2008; in Grosfoguel 2013) affirms, the other side of "I think, therefore I am" is the racist/sexist structure of "I do not think, therefore I do not exist" that applies to all of the world's marginalized whose knowledge systems have been vilified as irrational and thus inferior and destined for erasure. The logic of "I am, therefore I exist" that animates the university as a colonial institution relegates the many into the Fanonian "zone of non-being." In this vein, Gordon argues that:

> it is not that colonized groups fail to speak. It is that their speaking lacks appearance or mediating it is not transformed into speech. The erasure of speech calls for the elimination of such conditions of its appearance such as gestural sites and the constellation of muscles that facilitate speech—the face. As faceless problem people are derailed from the dialectics of recognition of self and other, with the consequence of neither self nor of self and other. (Gordon 2014, p. 88)

It is this foundational "colonial difference" on which the world of modernity was to institute itself (Wynter 2003). It is this colonial difference that makes it possible for institutions of higher learning the world over to espouse uni-knowledge and present it as universal. As such, Wynter posits that the most important struggle for the Western bourgeois in this millennium is to disabuse itself of the conception of the human, in the persona of

the Western man, that over-represents itself as if it were the human itself (Wynter 2003, p. 3). Adopting the tenets of modern science uncritically, at worst, or tampering on their fringes, at best, will not give full recognition to the colonized. Maldonado-Torres' (2007) exposition of coloniality as an ongoing, all pervasive relationship between the erstwhile colonized and colonizers disabuses us of the notion of a "post" in colonial relations. Hence the need to consider the many and varied ways in which knowledge and its production perpetuate this relationship. As scholars, ours is to unmask the politics that continue this colonial relationship.

Knowledge was and is the main engine through which the Other is imagined, produced and reproduced. Tuck (2009) recounts how the Indigenous researched people are "thematized" according to the fantasies of researchers. In a similar vein, Santos et al (2007) argue that colonial alterity is a space of inferiority that mutates but is always based on sex, race, and tradition—with women, the savage, and nature produced and reproduced through various discursive tools. Filtered through Western prisms and sensibilities that are essentially Eurocentric and androcentric, these subalternized groups have been misrecognized, stripped, and humiliated in the name of modern science (Dussel 2014, p. 49–50). These were to be the processes made possible only on the basis of dynamics of a colonizer/colonized relation (Wynter 2003, p. 5). The university is still the singular space within which "we, as Western and Westernized intellectuals, continue to articulate, in however radically oppositional a manner, the rules of the social order and its sanctioned theories" (Wynter 2003, p. 171). When we take the university as an unqualified good, we slavishly perpetuate the agendas of empire despite our best intentions.

Science, while conveying "knowledge" also carries connotations "to split, to cleave" and fragment (Gordon 2014). As such, science represents a particular conceptual tradition associated with particular idioms of instruction all of which aid this mission of splitting (Seth 2013). Instructively, Seth (2013) isolates the idea of society—separated from the "supernatural"—and argues that in scientific terms, society is at once the cause and the locale of explanation, both first mover and substance. Issuing from and thus married to this tradition of conceiving reality as split between the "natural" and the "supernatural," scientific knowledge espoused in the university is a space for and by the rational man. In a similar vein, Nyamnjoh attributes the South African student movement against colonized education taught at universities to the dissonance that arises from the objective world governed by Cartesian rationalism "where the subjectivities of their childhood fantasies are purportedly shackled and controlled," the possibilities of creativity frustrated (Nyamnjoh 2017, p. 115). The question is whether the university, as the bulwark of knowledge

production from which society takes its cue, can defend the dignity of humanity with all its quirks and fantasies and in this way free knowledge from the stranglehold of modern rationality.[6] This is directly linked to ways of knowing, how we come to knowledge and what we think of as knowledge (Santos et al 2007). This is to say that the university faces the challenge to free knowledge from one culture with a deep imprint of particular conventions, boundary work procedures, and values all of which flow from Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," the precedent of which is "I think, therefore I conquer," the precedent of which, in turn, is "I think, therefore I exterminate" (Grosfoguel 2013, pp. 73–4). This egoistic, conquering, fragmenting spirit has informed the extermination of people, their ways of life, and knowledge systems since what Emmanuel Wallestein calls the "long sixteenth century" (Wallestein 2011). It is from this basic understanding that this article will proceed to interrogate the poetics and politics of the methodologies that ultimately result in theories of equilibrium that not only fundamentally question but also perpetuate the status quo. Science, then, becomes a vehicle of oppression and silencing. Decolonizing the university will mean first and foremost that lifeways that have heretofore been silenced and erased are restored back into the canon such that pluri-verses are regarded on the same plane of importance. These lifeways and ways of knowing are intimately connected to the land and the relationship that Indigenous, dispossessed people had with it. It is on this basis that Eve Tuck and Wayne Yong (2012) caution that decolonization is not a metaphor, that is, it does not stand for the many ways in which the university has sought to transform itself with the ultimate effect of preserving the dispossession begun in the long sixteenth century. This necessarily means that questions about colonial knowledge systems and their uses/impacts are asked about the very fundamentals that inform the university—its ethos, practices, assumptions and reasons for being.

## 6. "I Think Therefore I Am": The Cynical Genius of a Non-Situated Enunciator/Knowledge

When René Descartes declared, in the seventeenth century, "I think, therefore I am," he was thinking as a white man in imperial Europe (Dussel 2014). He was clearly and firmly positioned thus, and as such, embodies a history that carries particular anxieties and aspirations. Enrique Dussel (2014) further argues that in uttering this philosophical stance,

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6. Kelley (2016) sums up this notion eloquently thus: "We [at university spaces] talk about breaking glass ceilings in corporate America while building more jail cells for the rest." The jail cells need not be literal.

Descartes was willfully and strategically blinding himself from reckoning with slavery and was thus side-stepping accountability for the suffering it wrought. By purporting a thinking head that is dismembered from a feeling and situated body, Descartes was effectively justifying imperialism/colonization and slavery which were calamities visited on ostensibly lesser beings amounting to bodies without a soul. The Rational Man whose knowledge issues from the mind and is thus instrumentalist, is engineered such that it precludes historical conversations about colonization and slavery. This knowledge takes conquest and the resultant alienation for granted (Tuck 2009; Dladla 2017). The tools bequeathed to us through this knowledge system privilege *in situ* conversations that are severed from the imperial impulse from which it originates. Instead, any historical conversations these tools allow do not go far and deep enough, leading to the systematic misrecognition and (re)production of the colonized and enslaved as "problem people."

As "problems" they are a function of a world in which they are posited as illegitimate although they could exist nowhere. Such people are treated by dominant organizations of knowledge especially those falling under the human and social sciences as problems instead of people who face problems. Their problem status is a function of the pre-supposed legitimacy of the systems (Gordon 2014, p. 83).

Such "problem people" are increasing as the majority of the world's people suffocate under the colonial matrix of power whose sole purpose is to perpetuate the *cogito ergo sum* (and its precedents of conquering and exterminating), of which Western epistemology is a central cog. The tools that separate the thinking head from the feeling and situated body and the epochal effects of the "I conquer, therefore I am" imperial attitude on the wretched of the earth (Fanon [1961] 2004) hide the cumulative effects of colonization. And in so doing produce problem people—victims blamed for their plight. This furthers their misrecognition as they are relegated to exteriority/object status/zone of non-being, without a soul, a history, or knowledge. Such tools normalize settler colonialism.

## 7.  Anthropology as a Convenient Test Case

Anthropology is usually singled out as the most colonial and colonizing discipline. For instance, anthropology is the only science whose *raison d'etre* is to study the Other. As Gordon argues, the search to understand "man" was also producing him (Gordon 2014, p. 83). Anthropology is thus complicit in introducing and cementing the notion of an Other who is fundamentally different from the West (Pierre 2006). "…it is now glaringly evident that contempt for (and perhaps fear of) people of color is implicit in the nineteenth century anthropology's interpretation and even construction

of anthropological facts" (Jaggar 1989, p. 156). Anthropology, is not only involved in responding to the questions: who are you (you being Europe's Other) and who are you in relation to me (me being the Imperial Man), it also engages in the justification of the "us" vs. "them" dichotomy. Anthropology as a discipline has been instrumental in producing the savage and proving his inferiority. This is done through tools, concepts, and theories that systematically distance the self from the other, that together constitute the "anthropologizing" of anthropological subjects-made-objects. The anthropological tools that flow from the "two cultures" thesis lead to misrecognition, misrepresentation, muting, and production of an Other, effectively cementing the imperial premise "I think, therefore I exist" that by implication means that Others do not think and therefore do not exist (or are childlike against purported adults) (Maldonado-Torres 2007). So, while anthropology can be said to be one of the least positivist of disciplines, it remains burdened with a number of historical legacies that go back to its foundations, principal of which was the premise of cultural evolution that led to gross ethnocentric biases.

For instance, treating the ethnographic encounter as a meeting of strangers who are not entangled with each other is a muting mechanism. How is "immersing oneself in a culture in order to understand its internal workings" not different from "I shall try, little, by little, to reach a better knowledge of and a more familiar acquaintanceship with myself [them]" (Tuana 1992, p. 36)? The tendency to shut out important relations and factors from analysis and focus on the immediate context leads to a manufacturing of a people and their misrecognition as players in the long range of global politics. Moving from a premise that one is civilized and the Other savage, anthropology is trapped in the schemas of rational modernity that are then deployed to prove the existence of "the savage slot" (Trouillot 2003). Writing as recently as 2017, anthropology professor Nyamnjoh argues that the discipline, as is the case with other disciplines, is still caught up in Western intellectual modes that do not show much sympathy with African beliefs and African endogenous systems of thought in the framework of their own rationality or epistemological locus. The result is gross misrepresentation. The muting process is also evident in insisting on taking those studied at face value as if the ethnographic encounter is not mediated by events and histories not captured in conversation with them—the "present absences" (Nhemachena 2016). What do these conversations—interviews, participatory action research, and their variations—disallow and thus distort? Further, what by-products result from tools and methods that together can be conceptualized as fundamentally stemming from the misrecognition informed by the dictum "I think therefore, I am," thereby discounting other ways of knowing?

This fundamental misrecognition (Savransky 2012; Seth 2013) is not radically undermined by the safeguards such as reflexivity and cultural relativism.

Pierre (2006), for instance, argues that the concept of racial difference was replaced with cultural relativism without any radical shift. The difference is that the former is overtly racist whereas the latter carries connotations of "difference without being overtly racist." So, its founding ambition to define what it means to be human based on Eurocentric notions of humanity and the concomitant discursive legitimization of difference as inequality is not one that is easy for the discipline to shed. Endogenous systems of thought continue to be severed from their epistemological locus and subjected to the Western epistemological order in which the discipline is steeped, like fish swimming in water. Radical reflexivity would entail highlighting the pivotal role played by the discipline in the colonial matrix of power, questioning the very existence of the discipline as an entrapment of a Westernized university that conceals by proscribing analysis into artificial boxes. Further, how the discipline is complicit in justifying the overrepresentation of Man, promoting beliefs and values congenial to [its dominance], and naturalizing and universalizing them so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable needs to be interrogated (Wynter 2003, p. 67).

"Anthropological culturalism," the idea that cultures are bounded organic wholes that have a determining influence on those within them and thus serve to essentialize difference, produces a de-historicizing and dehumanizing effect. In this vein, Fassin (2007) argues that objectification is both pain-inflicting and renders such pain inadmissible to public discourse. As such, behavioral and culturalist interpretations that have been used to explain the dramatic spread of general ill-being that besets Indigenous conquered people the world-over are as ineffective as they are unjust. Kelley (2016) argues that personalizing and culturalizing group struggles are two vectors of depoliticizing what are essentially political issues. Commenting specifically on the injustices of HIV/AIDS research in South Africa, Fassin (2007) goes on to say that causing suffering and ignoring the effects of that suffering are a contemporary reality. He asks a moral question: What is a just society? He responds that it is one that remembers because ignoring the past not only harms understanding of the present, but also compromises present action (cf. Tuck 2009). In this paper, I posit that remembering goes beyond accounting for past injustices but also entails restoring lifeways and knowledge systems heretofore dismissed as primitive and thus without merit.

## 8. HIV/AIDS as the Site of Hyper Othering

The advent of HIV/AIDS, drawing from colonial views of Africa, resurrected notions of the Other, who is not only different, but also inferior; "the problem people" (Gordon 2014) with deficits (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015) and who are "damaged" (Tuck 2009). Sexuality, while a site of soft oppression, is very much at the center of questions about one's humanity. Africa is a continent that has borne the brunt and suffered the consequences of the colonial gaze that sought to paint Africans as incomplete humans, if not outright non-humans. Therefore, the idea of "African AIDS" is not a new one. It is integral to the narrative that forms the "white man's burden to civilize for salvation." The high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Africa was attributed to "African sexuality" that is characterized by exotic practices such as polygyny, dry sex, wife inheritance, promiscuity, the virgin cleansing myth, and intergenerational sexual relations. In turn, African sexuality is informed by "African culture" that is yet to evolve—unbridled sexuality that is animal-like and does not show a higher consciousness. It is the same rationale that engendered the narrative about the 4 H's—Haiti, homosexuals, heroin users, and hemophiliacs—,so-called risk groups exhibiting risk behaviors (see Treichler 1991). This section will focus on how this was the case and as such is a prime example of how meaningful conversations between the colonizer and the colonized is thwarted by the fundamentals of Cartesian thinking ably expressed through colonial methodologies.

The question of AIDS in Africa cannot be fully understood unless issues of racial exploitation, subjugation, and discrimination are simultaneously considered. To do so would be to abstract the issue from the webs of significance from which it issues. In the first instance, "African AIDS" perforce invites understanding Blackness as a construction of Whiteness. Significantly though, I want to underscore the assertion that it is a particular worldview that "needs" the White against the Black. It is one that takes us back to Descartes' involvement with the self, for the self. In this worldview, binary hierarchies are a central organizing principle. Below, I make two related points. Firstly, I make the assertion that "African AIDS," supposedly engendered by sexual excess and a general lack of "good" sexual mores, is a prime and contemporary site of Othering aided by the weight of The Gaze that has the power to survey, define, and displace. Secondly, I use the unjust practice of abstraction to show how the former was enabled by this latter point. The advent of HIV/AIDS invited the White gaze with its historical power in which Blackness has been woven into "a thousand of details, anecdotes, stories" (Fanon in Sithole 2016, p. 32). The power lies in its ability to conjure and create, to name, dominate, and erase through over-determination and abstraction. It also has the ability to designate and fix. It precludes the process of subject formation, rendering Blackness a

thing, overdetermined from without. The white gaze is not just "a look"; it is a crushing weight unto Blackness. It is power; the look places and displaces, it designates, confers the status of human/non-human. It is thus a master signifier with controlling power that has life and death implications over the Black body (Sithole 2016). It is the same power that informed the marauding "discoverer" of "virgin lands"; the master of all that he surveyed, the God-eye (Grosfoguel 2013) who, through instrumental reason, sought to conquer and subjugate, to "discipline" the land, its people and their "wild" ways by subjecting them to "civilization" with particular contours much like what "method" accomplishes.

Therefore, the gaze not only informs, it performs a function of scripting and fixing the Black in the zone of non-being. It performs a political role. It takes its meaning from Cartesian rationalism that renders every other absent (Maldonado-Torres 2007). By espousing the "I think therefore I am" ethos, the gaze silences and denigrates the Black to a non-thinking body. Maldonado-Torres turns this adage on its head and reveals its implication for those whose "I" has been denigrated and demeaned in the construction of Blackness (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 252). He argues that the flip-side of the "I think, therefore, I am" is "I do not think, therefore, I do not exist." The Negro is, therefore, an object among other objects, to be named and dominated. Like the land that he was disposed of, he is without and is devoid, he is virgin territory that can be appropriated and misappropriated at a whim. Fanon's classical ([1952] 1967, p. 93) "Look the Negro!" sums it all up: "Condemned to the life of the body, there is no memory and history. The Black is body and body's death is death. The Black is a penis—the Black subject is reduced to the level of genitalia, it then means that it symbolizes biological danger" (Gibson 2003 in Sithole 2016, p. 38). As such, Blackness connotes deficiency of the very attributes that Whiteness is teeming with, such as rational thought, appearance, superior consciousness, and the ability to name and designate. Kobena Mercer's (1994) edited volume discusses the politics of race and sexuality and asserts this defining gaze of Whiteness on black masculinity. HIV/AIDS is a contemporary site of emptying the Black subject of his humanity much like the enslaved—over-determined as a penis, a beast of burden, mindless, and needing salvation. In South Africa, Leclerc-Madlala's (1997) "infect one, infect all" slogan parading as theory was to set the cue for similarly racist short-hand explanations, such as the virgin cleansing myth (2002), as characteristic of unbridled African sexuality. It is worth noting that Leclerc-Madlala was writing at a time when the academy was trying to make sense of the AIDS epidemic. As such, she was borrowing from a tried and tested cultural narrative of Africa espoused by anthropology. She was not writing in a vacuum.

Therefore, the advent of HIV/AIDS became the site for rationalizing the study of the exotic Other, a curiosity that invited the unidirectional Western gaze that ultimately makes objects of subjects in the same manner as Descartes' refusal to acknowledge the objectification of the enslaved bodies in Europe and in the Americas. I argue that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been a site that has strengthened abyssal thinking, re-centering the West and its knowledge systems while excluding and silencing others, effectively relegating them to the zone of non-being where they are spoken at, spoken about, and spoken for. This was done through, among other strategies, abstraction. Proma Tagore and Fairn Herising argue that abstraction takes place predominantly within the supremacy and expansion of professionalism and standardization, consolidating its power through expert knowledge, exclusions, universal skills-based interventions, and positivist interpretations and definitions of "problems" and "solutions" (Tagore and Herising 2007, p. 277). The standardized, technical, and detached methods and tools that were used to understand HIV/AIDS in Africa were woefully and willfully ahistorical, ensuring what Tagore and Herising (2007) argue: an a-historicized Black ends up being objectified. The assumptions that underlie these tools were informed by the fundamentals of Western science that are essentially: "I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, and thus holding conversation only with myself and considering my own nature" (Tuana 1992, p. 36). The spirit of this posture is both erasure and silencing, what Nyamnjoh characterizes as "talking without listening" (Nyamnjoh 2012, p. 134). The question then arises: what kind of subject is manufactured through these tools and to what end?

It is my contention that over-reliance on these standardized technical tools to diagnose problems and propose solutions gives rise to a being devoid of history and absolves Whiteness of the part it plays in creating the experiences of Blackness in a world where race is an organizing principle. Therefore, abstraction follows the logic of Man vs. humanity in that it does not question the anti-Black world that makes the Black more vulnerable to social ills such as HIV/AIDS. Man gravitates towards Whiteness and is the anti-thesis of humanity. Western science, conceived after Man, accomplishes the political feat of depoliticizing what are essentially issues about structural oppression and reduces them to individual culpability—racial inequalities are perpetuated and justified by this complex matrix. Abstraction empties as it over-determines and displaces.

> The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created; imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: "Theft is holy." (Wa Thiong'o 1986, p. 3)

The wasteland that imperialism engenders reinforces the notion of "us" and "them," "here" and "there," "superior" and "inferior," "civilized" and "savage." Abstraction plays into this ostensible bifurcation, it masks histories of entanglement characterized by racism, violence, and exploitation. It has the ability to empty Blackness into a thing through its extractive tendencies. Conversely, it gives rise to the neurotic efforts of Blacks who then seek recognition in a schema that seeks to erase them and with their consent sing the hymn that "Theft is holy!" When social and cultural continuities are fractured and individuals are wrenched from their human and spiritual contexts, possibilities exist that they can no longer recognize or realize themselves. The eventual consequence of this lack of self-recognition and self-realization is that it cements white supremacist ideas as argued by the quote below:

> And the nation echoed and enforced this criticism, saying:
> Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need for
> higher culture for half-men?… and behold the suicide of a
> race! (Du Bois [1903] 2007, pp. 14–15)

I reiterate the identity-making potential of sexuality—herein is said to be found the ultimate meaning of humanness (Vaughan 1991). I, therefore, assert that the discursive frame in which sexuality is embedded is a strategic lever of symbolic power. Sexuality is fraught with symbolism; HIV/AIDS is an epidemic of signification (Treichler 1991). Therefore, theories on sexuality more than inform, they perform a political role of dehumanizing. As such, the gaze gives expression to the fantasies of Whiteness, it disciplines and fixes the Black as the inferior Other. Filtered through Eurocentric prisms, the black subject is always under question, it must always justify its existence. The abstracting gaze gives sway to racialized people as dispensable people. "I am given no chance. I am over-determined without…" (Fanon [1952] 1967, p. 87). It is instrumental in the politics of life unto death. Death is the closing off of human possibilities such as those visited upon humanity in the advent of colonization that I argue snuffed out lifeways contrary to its own logic and by the same token produced the calamities experienced by "problem people" the world over. Self-realization for Indigenous colonized people is frustrated at both the level of their lived experiences and at the level in which such experiences are made sense of. The gaze is cut from the same cloth as "method": both prescribe and dominate. They snuff out life and the possibility to re-generate and leave a wasteland that it ironically presents itself as the cure as Wa Thiong'o argues above.

## 9. Decolonial Meditations

Decolonial meditations are essentially the antithesis of Eurocentric, patri-archal, capitalist, and imperial norms whose knowledge system treat Others as sub-human; raw material to be analyzed through prisms that essentially question their humanity. While colonial methodologies are about "shutting my eyes…," decolonial meditations are about seeing in relation to others, using all faculties instead of shutting them away, and being in conversation not in order to understand and assert one's own na-ture but rather "for-giving"—that is, forgiving and giving for the sake of all humanity (Maldonado-Torres 2016, p. 187), signaling an outward-looking rather than an inward-looking posture and attitude. Decolonial meditations are about radical openness to all possibilities that ultimately connect rather than disconnect humans and "other beings" as Nyamnjoh (2017) asserts. Maldonado-Torres (2008) summarizes such meditations as "against war" as they seek to work against the imperial impulse and thus restore humanity upon those whose humanity is subsumed by Man. As such, decolonial meditations seek to restore relations by not only high-lighting the historical processes that gave rise to the "underside of moder-nity" (Mignolo 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2008) and the attendant Black experience the world over, but also forgive in pursuit of the humanity that was lost in the pursuit of Man. Therefore, both the Black and the White are challenged to take flight from the complexes arising from the Man vs. human complex that engenders a wasteland, and acknowledge their re-spective humanity which is inter-connected and inter-dependent. This comprises the third humanist revolution that seeks to go beyond the grid of knowledge, power, and being that locks the Black in a zone of non-being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015) by, among other things, relegating his ways of knowing to the fringes of what is considered to be credible knowl-edge. By freeing knowledge, power, and what it means to be human from the colonial impulse the humanity of all will prevail. This also entails free-ing understandings of AIDS causation from methodological abstraction while, at the same time, recognizing local ways of understanding HIV/AIDS that borrow from African worldviews that do not shy away from rec-ognizing that one thing cannot be something without also being another (Nyamnjoh 2017). In other words, freeing knowledge, power, and what it means to be human from Euro-American imperialism will allow the con-viviality of knowledges that allow for leakage to be reconciled into the incom-plete whole that accommodates all ways of knowing and all ways of being human. This is against the idea of "method," that is power-laden, and has the net-effect of foreclosing this possibility through its insistence on over-determination, over-prescription, and over-standardization (Nyamnjoh

2017, p. 5). Method goes against the grain of "… presence in simultaneous multiplicit[ies] …" in order to re-generate and re-imagine oneself outside the constricting effects of the colonial apparatus of power (Nyamnjoh, 2017, p. 6). Method is the cage through which Man fabricates and imprisons the human. Method comes from the very spirit that informed Descartes' solipsism that had the ultimate effect of not seeing and thus reckoning with the enslaved. It is against this backdrop that Smith argues that "ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" including that:

> [M]any indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill-health and poor educational opportunities; they may live in destructive relationships which are formed and shaped by their impoverished material conditions and structured by politically oppressive regimes. While they live like this, they are constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence, and lack of "higher" order human qualities. (Smith 1999, p. 2)

Treichler (1991), among others, argues that the AIDS epidemic was the site in which power relations of domination already in place were reproduced. In this sense, both Smith (1999) and Treichler (1991) argue that narratives perform a function of domination and subjugation as well as: "Information does not simply exist; it issues from and, in turn, sustains a way of looking and behaving towards the world" (Treichler 1991, p. 124). As such, issues of power and representation loom large in the perpetuation of a socio-political order. Treichler (1991) further asserts that far from being objective, the language of science that constructs the very nature of AIDS borrows from a powerful cultural narrative that "demonstrates the persistent bias in binary constructions of social reality that have been "articulated" or linked to the epidemic since it first became a subject of scientific and lay interpretation." These factors, more than the purported different and thus regressive cultural and sexual mores, go a long way in accounting for the disproportionate HIV/AIDS vulnerability among individuals, groups, and nations. Colonial, imperial methodologies can thus be trusted to maintain and justify Eurocentric knowledge systems whose fundamental point of departure is to doubt the humanity of an Other. It follows then that a methodology cannot be relied upon to subvert the logics of its principle. It must, as of necessity, flow from the root of the tree of which it is a branch and thus bear the fruit it was always intended to bear in the first place—strategic and willful ignorance.

## 10. Conclusion

Calls to decolonize the university carry multiple meanings. The call at once signals restlessness in and alienation from the university space, asserting that another way of conceptualizing knowledge and knowledge-making is possible. The calls herald a need for space for meaningful conversations about how the world is structured apropos differently-positioned people across the line of the human. The call is political in that it seeks to foreground heretofore marginalized voices and experiences. Many of the newly-inducted in the university inhabit the world of the dispossessed and want to be listened to and heard beyond the frames of Eurocentricity, including voices ably articulated by Smith (1999); Nyamnjoh (2012, 2017); Savransky (2012); Seth (2013) and others. The call to decolonize the university is about questioning the conditions put forth for what constitutes credible and legitimate knowledge. This is intricately related to the methods that are part of the knowledge system. To this extent then, this essay argues that if Eurocentric knowledge lacks the conviviality that allows multiplicity of being-in-the-world and of knowing, the "method" cannot subvert this logic. I argue that it is possible that the idea that meaningful conversations between those who are deeply invested in the knowledge systems that animate the university fabric because they reflect their worldviews and work to attain their agendas, and those who are newly-inducted into the philosophical basis on which this knowledge system issues, to miss the point altogether. This is especially the case if those who, having been newly-inducted, refuse to be disciplined into an entrenched way of thinking, effectively making sure that it is reproduced, entrenching the social order its theories sanctions (Wynter 2003, p. 171). I have argued in this paper that meaningful conversation is thwarted when the view that there is a superior way of knowing that lesser knowledges should emulate is taken for granted.

It is true that prevailing methods have been critiqued in one way or other. Fundamentally, these critiques have sought to tweak the edges of these methods. In contrast, decolonial meditations question the very core of Cartesian rationalism that is the foundation of all knowledge systems in the university. By turning the adage "I think, therefore I am" on its head to "I am, therefore I think" foregrounding the situatedness of knowledge and the knower, decolonial epistemic perspectives introduce issues of power and justice in knowledge production. This perspective puts history at the center of knowledge production. It emphasizes the need to both remember the historical circumstances and motivations that begot Cartesian rationalism and re-member the dismembered knowledge systems that reconcile disparate entities and seek complex nuance against the all-encompassing brushstrokes of Eurocentric knowledge that has pretensions of universalism. From this point of view, colonial and colonizing epistemologies that move

from the principles of ground zero and a locus of enunciation that is obscure essentially conceal a whole history of genocide and epistemicide. The problems that are wrought by colonialism and racial capitalism are projected elsewhere and presented as emanating in the observable, the articulated, the ethnographic present, and thus the measurable. Objective and thus ahistorical methodologies, bereft of re-collection through commitment to shutting one's eyes and calling away one's senses disqualify "non-scientific," more inclusive epistemologies that view reality as not limited to the observable. At stake, of course, is the assertion that a knowledge system is not abstract, it has real effects on the world. Eurocentric, sexist, capitalist, and imperial epistemologies continue to bring violence to those who are seen as Other. These epistemologies lack the moral imperatives that ought to govern human lives. They follow Man at the expense of humanity. They further the coloniality/modernity imperative that seeks to erase the other through exploitation and violence. They entrench an ethics of war reminiscent of the invasion of land and life to further imperial designs.

The transition from a monoculture of scientific knowledge to an ecology of knowledge will make possible the replacement of knowledge-as-regulation with knowledge-as-emancipation (Santos et al 2007) that emphasizes wholeness, holism, togetherness, inclusiveness, cooperation, compromise, accommodation, value-laden and creative diversity (Nyamnjoh 2017). Such knowledge is not logocentric, it is spiritual. It attends to the whole human being, subverting the Eurocentric hierarchy between the body, the mind, and the spirit and is arrived at in community. It affirms a decolonial aspiration to have the true (science), the good (ethics) and the beautiful (divine) in conversation and mutual recognition and acknowledgement, fleeing from disciplinary decadence. Such knowledge systems have more explanatory power (Nyamnjoh 2017) and give a better chance for the whole of humanity against racist epistemologies that militate against a large population of the world. They will de-authorize the matrix of power that enslaves humanity in a quest to buttress Man of the Euro-American imagination as they give expression to the aspirations and lived experience of many towards post-capitalist horizons. As such, it will only be possible for non-discriminatory, non-exploitative relations to exist within science when egalitarian relations characterize society itself. The two are inextricably linked.

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