

**Jacob Mapara: Decolonizing Spaces of Inquiry: Indigenous Research and Engagement without the colonial matrix of power**

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# Decolonising Spaces of Inquiry: Indigenous Research and Engagement without the Colonial Matrix of Power

*Jacob Mapara*

### **Abstract**

This chapter argues that research, as any other academic endeavour, is a highly charged and contested space. It posits that research as it currently stands, is a dictated process that is given direction and life through acceptance and acknowledgement by western scholarship that has bothered not just the indigenous and formerly colonized, but has also dictated what research is and how it is supposed to be carried out. The chapter points out that research is not new to indigenous communities as they have through observations and experiments, carried out research prior to the onslaught of colonialism and its research approaches. It posits that research that is devoid of putting place as part of the research methods risks coming up with inadequate data. It further observes that while there are similarities that may exist between indigenous and western research methods, especially when looked at from a qualitative paradigm, there are also substantial differences. The chapter notes that the starting point of any indigenous research methods is the place of the self, the researcher in the whole research matrix because indigenous inquiry is relational. It argues that relationship is important especially with the person telling the research story or providing the data. This, the chapter argues, does not exclude others who may be listening in to the discussion. The chapter, informed by the author's experiences in the field, additionally advances the idea that the researcher who is supposed to be indigenous is part of the story and his/her being part of the story contributes to how data are interpreted, which is quite contrary to the western research system where the researcher is an outsider who does not belong to the group.

**Keywords:** Indigenous research, decolonial spaces, power

## Introduction

The issue of research is one that on the surface is very innocent and academic inquiry is largely considered as neutral. It is for this reason that it is generally characterized as the methodical and orderly study and investigation of materials and sources for purposes of establishing and/or confirming facts and at times reach new conclusions. This definition makes the assumption that research *per se* is neutral. This unfortunately is very far from the truth. In fact, according to Smith, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (2012, p. 1). These words are quite revealing in that while research or inquiry is supposed to be about logical and methodical ways of the search for truth and knowledge, it has been used as a tool for the othering, especially of the indigenous who share the common tragic fate of being colonized, dispossessed and in some cases exterminated (Wolfe, 2006). As Porsanger notes, research has been used to misrepresent reality and has in the process been used as a tool for the colonization of indigenous peoples and the sequestration of their territories (Porsanger, 2004). It is through these acts of colonization that research has been used to prove that the indigenous and colonized are sub-human who fall at the lowest rungs of the evolutionary ladder. The methods of inquiry that have been developed have been to meet the needs and expectations of the Westerners who have come to perceive themselves as the only originators of genuine and original knowledge that they have imposed on the world as universal. The issue of othering and how so-called scientific research findings were applied is a pointer to how race has played a significant role in research. For instance, in the United States, many Black women were sterilized for dubious reasons such as being with a low IQ and feeble minded (Oleson, 2016), all informed by an equally spurious science of eugenics. Because of such a science, most Black women were considered as unfit to be, for instance, mothers because it was wrongly stated that they could produce children who were not better beings (English, 2016). Such research has had far reaching consequences as is realized even in the way more Blacks are incarcerated in US prisons when compared to Whites (Oleson, 2016).

The example of eugenics that is referenced above is an indicator of how research has been manipulated to meet and fertilize the

bizarre science of racial superiority. This practice of using research findings to label and profile others who are not white is quite widespread and this explains why Smith (2012), describes the word *research* as a dirt one. It is also for the same dirtiness that the word research carries that it becomes imperative that the indigenous communities not just engage in epistemological issues relating to knowledge generation in general but also in matters relating to research. It is for this reason that there is need to emphasize the importance of coming up with an indigenous research paradigm that speaks to how inquiry or academic investigations should be carried out not just among indigenous communities, but also by indigenous researchers as well as those who may want to follow and adopt these ways even though they may not be indigenous. This chapter proceeds by a discussion of indigenous pathways that are essential for one to successfully carry out research with a focus on qualitative inquiry. While its thrust is on indigenous research methods, it does not in any way suggest that western ways have to be jettisoned. What is important is that the researcher picks and identifies methods from both the indigenous paradigm and western one that would lead to the accession of the best research data. These are of course informed by the decolonial theory which the next section turns to.

## **Theoretical framework**

This chapter is grounded within the decolonial theory, also known as decoloniality, which is a theoretical framework that analyses the relationship, especially in academia and cultural spaces, between the Global North and South, perceiving the north as a purveyor and sustainer of oppressive policies and practices that marginalize the formerly colonized. Among its major proponents are the Latin American scholars such as Grosfoguel (2003; 2006; 2007), Mignolo (2007), Wynter (2003), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Castro-Gómez (2007), Walsh (2007), and Hernández (2018). In Africa, the main voices are Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013; 2019) and Kessi, Marks and Ramugondo (2020). In North America, the decolonial movement is growing with the movement of Latin American scholars and others like Mavhunga to the continent. Mavhunga (2021), in fact calls for what he terms an epistemic dialogue, a situation where no knowledge is privileged over others. The idea of decoloniality is however not new, because it has largely existed in a narrower sense within the Africana Studies field where the major voices include Asante (1998;

2006). Those in this area do not necessarily call it decoloniality, but Afrocentricity, because their main focus is on promoting Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora on matters relating to their achievements in science, culture and technology, something that Mavhunga also speaks to. For the Afrocentric scholars there is need to decolonise the myths around civilization and religion especially as regards the Christian faith (Ramantswana, 2016; Mavhunga, 2021).

One of its outstanding features is that it questions western knowledge and points out that this consciousness which is universalized as the only and true knowledge, is the basis of western imperialism. The theory further argues that despite the formerly colonized's attainment of political independence, they are still very much in the grips of colonial hegemony as is reflected in the curriculum that they continue to follow, something that decolonial scholars call the colonial matrix of power or coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000; 2007), that:

allows us to think through how the colonized were subjected not simply to a rapacious exploitation of all their resources but also to a hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems. It allows us to understand the constitutive relationship between the historical *a priori* of European thought and its off-shore adventures. It also allows us to think through the Anglo- and Eurocentric structure of thought and representation that continues to dominate much of the world today (Alcoff, 2007, pp. 83-84).

In the words quoted above, Alcoff sustains the idea that the formerly colonized are still under the yoke of colonialism, because they are still very much embedded in the thought systems of the former colonies and their colonial masters. This observation is critical and it thus calls for an epistemic shift or epistemic disobedience also called epistemic de-linking (Mignolo, 2007; 2010), or an epistemic break which really is “a thorough re-conceptualization and a thorough re-organization of knowledge systems” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 14). What it therefore means when analysed from a curriculum perspective is that there are some countries like Zimbabwe that still adhere to the British system, even when the British themselves have moved on. There is consequently the need to develop a new curriculum approach which is an epistemic disobedience, not just in terms of what is taught but also how research is carried out venturing into what Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) call critical indigenous research methods, an important

aspect of research or academic inquiry that is discussed in the segment that comes below.

### **Why indigenous research methods are important**

Indigenous research methods are worth pursuing and developing because, “Indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the centre of research methodologies and construction of knowledge about indigenous peoples” (Lester-Irabinna Rigney, 1999, p. 119 cited in Porsanger, 2004, p. 105). They are intrinsic to the whole research activities because in most cases the focus of western researcher-scholars is on indigenous communities, minorities or others that are profiled as beings on the fringe such as drug addicts, but hardly on those of that are considered and accepted as main-stream people. The result is that the subjects of this study, especially the indigenous are subjected at times to dehumanizing experiences or are misinterpreted and thus misrepresented when data are finally analysed. Put differently:

research becomes synonymous with power and control: power over what ideas and findings matter and from whose perspective. Research is seldom the idea of those being researched, and rarely directly benefits them (Snow et al., 2016, p. 358).

It thus becomes clear from the foregoing quotation that all inquiry that those from the West carry out is part of the colonial enterprise and the knowledge hegemony where western epistemologies are viewed, peddled and accepted as the real knowledge. These words as well underscore why indigenous research methods are necessary and have to be developed and deployed. The major problem is that the current or western research methods as they are currently tailored is that they are packaged as rules and guidelines that give direction to researchers to be ‘objective’ and be detached from the subjects/objects being studied (Snow, Hays, Caliwagan, et al., 2016). The research environment becomes even more detached when it is taken into consideration that the voices that are heard and listened to as well as the voices that speak are not those of the subjects/objects of the inquiry. This situation is further aggravated by the desire and compulsive situation in most African universities that pushes them to publish in journals that are owned by the same western institutions and systems. The solution lies in African and other indigenous universities publishing their own journals that speak to their people

and give the peripherised voices space. There is a tendency in such so-called conventional research practices to privilege Eurocentric perspectives and in the process most likely exclude “indigenous ways of knowing and equitable participation in research processes in general” (Snow, Hays, Caliwagan, et al., 2016, p. 358).

### **Some indigenous approaches to research**

This chapter argues for the importance of the need to decolonize the research space (Datta, 2017; Zavala, 2013). The idea, however, is not to throw away all that is Western but to have the native methods of inquiry as the prime ones which could possibly be complemented by the Western ones at best or create a situation where research really becomes mixed methods in the true sense of the word, where both epistemologies inform each other and in turn research. In this section, I discuss at length ways and means that a researcher can deploy when s/he goes out on a research mission. These ways are based on my own experiences in the research field.

It is always important in indigenous research approaches to be a learner and not a condemner. The problem with Western-centric research approaches is that they have largely been based on the North’s perceptions of the other who is to be understood as inferior and thus need to be decolonized (Datta, 2017). The result has been that they have failed to understand that research is not something new among indigenous communities. For example, it is common practice among the Shona of Zimbabwe and other Bantu groups in general to exchange cocks for their chicken broods so that they have the best breeds. The same is done even when it comes to beasts. The most important case is the avoidance of incestuous relationships through taboos and the warning that if relatives get married to one another all their children will be affected by *muterere* (an illness that leads to different diseases like stunted growth and even death) (Little & Malina, 2005). All these decisions that they came up with were informed by observations and it is these that made them to come to the conclusions that they reached. The indigenous communities also developed seed banks from which they had seed for the next season. They also shared different seeds for different crops. All these activities are indicators that show that research did not come to Africa with the advent of Europeans.

Africans made informed decisions after careful study of phenomena. That is the first thing that western scholars and

researchers need to understand and appreciate. What they today call research and research guidelines are but methods that are meant to ensure that western approaches are universalized and accepted as the only ones that contribute to meaningful research. The situation is unfortunately made worse by the fact that scientific inquiry as is currently the practice, is not meant to inform policy makers for the benefit of the researched communities but of those who fund the inquiries, for instance those in business looking for markets or pharmaceutical companies looking for indigenous flora and fauna that they intend to exploit for their benefit (Snow, Hays, Caliwagan, et al., 2016, p. 359). It also seeks to create a formerly colonized person who can ape the former colonizer's ways of doing research, something that is also largely a result of indigenous governments of the Global South for example, those in some Africa countries that do not fund research and thus leave academics at the mercy of western institutions and funders. It is therefore essential to approach research issues when dealing with indigenous communities bearing in mind that these native societies are not being exposed to research for the first time through higher education or NGOs.

Another aspect that relates to indigenous research approaches has to do with the researcher and the researched or focus of the research being intertwined. Indigenous research does not accommodate a 'them' and 'I/us' approach that has been characterized by Lincoln (cited in Datta, 2017) as a rape approach where, "the researcher comes in, takes what he [sic] wants, and leaves when he feels like it" (Lincoln, in Datta, 2017, p. 3). In fact, it has to be borne in mind that when it comes to indigenous research methods, the researcher always has to bear in mind that there is a strong relationship that exists between the researcher and the story or object of the study. This ties in with, "how it is told and how the informants or collaborators and the researcher interpret the story" (Lambert, 2011, p. 3), and thus means that the researcher cannot be divorced from the study that s/he is undertaking. This, of course, is contrary to Western research models, whereby their conventions, the research task that one undertakes as well as the data are all separated from the researcher. This model has the effect of turning the researcher into an onlooker (Lambert, 2011) whereas in indigenous approaches, the researcher is included in the investigation process, not as onlooker or outsider. It becomes a course of action where the researcher's and the voices and stories of participants to the research process are heard unlike in the Western systems (Lambert, 2011). More importantly is also the fact



that indigenous research has to reflect the reality that academic inquiry is inevitably value-based, and that it is a convergence of the researcher, participant, socio-political, and environmental values on research process and outcome as Kovach (2009) notes.

Smith (2012) also points out that those engaging in indigenous research have to reflect on who owns, designs, interprets, reports, and ultimately benefits from the research process and products. These insights are critical when indigenous research is carried out. What they make clear is the reality that the indigenous researcher, or one who chooses to carry out scientific inquiry riding on the back of indigenous research methods needs to also acknowledge the distortions that are products of colonial research. Through acknowledging colonial research distortions and lies as well as fabrications, indigenous research thus becomes a process of rewriting history. Smith asks the following questions as regards research with a need to emphasize the importance of indigenous research as a history rewriting exercise:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated? (2012, p. 10).

These questions are critical because they point out to the fact that research is not neutral but is there to drive the agenda of the researcher, and not the researched. It is in light of this that she makes clear that research is not neutral. This observation has to be borne in mind when it comes to history and research as well as the history of research by outsiders among indigenous communities. Smith points out the fact that the way history, especially colonial history has been written, reflects that the powerful are the writers of what is passed down as history. She states:

We believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. *Wrong*. History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and 'Othered' (Smith, p. 35).

As Smith sees it, history has been weaponized to serve the interests of the powerful and these are the former colonizers. Their influence is not just embedded in the act of colonization but also through academic activities that among them include research. It is through research that indigenous people have been marginalized even from themselves. It is thus through research that indigenous people also need to rewrite history and correct colonial distortions and outright lies. It thus means that research by indigenous people, for example in Zimbabwe, also needs to interrogate colonial sites of memory and come up with proper national histories that speak to the history of the nation and not of a single political party or a given race and ethnic group.

Another contentious approach to research that is frowned upon by Western-centric scholars and researchers relates to the giving of presents to participants in given communities. This is perceived as some way of incentivizing the research participants and it is viewed as thus becoming some type of bribe to entice people to participate. Resnik (2015) acknowledges that it is common practice to offer research subjects financial incentives for their participation in a survey because it has the effect of boosting the numbers of participants. He, however, laments the fact that this also “raises ethical concerns, such as undue inducement, exploitation, and biased enrolment” (Resnik, 2015, p. 35). Zutlevics (2016, p. 137) argues both for and against the use of incentives or compensation. She brings forth the argument that compensation only has to be paid to participants in situations where there is potential of physical harm. The same writer, however, is against incentives in the absence of potential injury and asserts, “providing monetary incentives to people can backfire by overall reducing intrinsic motivation, in this instance intrinsic motivation to behave altruistically or undertake civic duties” (2016, p. 137).

Zutlevics’ (2016) argument for non-incentivization is based on what she calls intrinsic motivation or inner drive. This argument is important if the people see the benefits accruing from the research coming their way. If they are for the researcher and her/his funders, it may be necessary to pay compensation especially if participants have to leave their chores to participate in surveys. Additionally, researchers also need to perceive all inquiry activities in cultural contexts. A good example of the value of culture is the case of the breaking of the kola nut among the Igbo in Nigeria’s south east. It is generally males who break it although some women who have

attained a certain status can also break it (Amadiume, 2015). The same is true of partaking in its consumption. If a stranger or outsider is welcome, then the kola nut can be broken. The same can be said of other communities. For instance, among the Bantu, if one brings a present to a chief or a person s/he wants to interact with, that present is not read as a bribe by the recipient, but as a form of respect. It therefore becomes important that incentives be given to participants because the Shona even say *Ukama igasva, hunozadziswa nekudya* (A relationship is half-full, it can only be filled up by sharing a meal). When carrying out research among indigenous communities in Zimbabwe, it therefore becomes important to carry presents or some money that can be given out as a token of appreciation. It does not mean that the researcher is buying the participants. In fact, some participants even after receiving the 'token' of appreciation actually give presents of a higher value to the researcher. To them what is important is the story that would have been shared. It thus means that research becomes relational.

Linked to the issue of incentives that has been discussed above, and that of sharing of the kola nut that has as well been discussed in the foregoing paragraph, it is significant to highlight that research can be successfully undertaken with the participation of indigenous people and in their communities in Zimbabwe if the researcher(s) partakes in the sharing of food and beverages with members of the target societies. Essential to note is the fact that eating or drinking together among Bantu communities is considered an important part that is reflective of the community's unity (Tuomainen, 2014). To therefore refuse to participate can be interpreted to mean refusal which in most contexts is perceived as meaning that the researcher(s) views the host and participant community as inferior. It is therefore imperative that if one has to successfully carry out research activities in an indigenous Bantu community, one also has to be prepared to share in communal meals and beverage consumption with them. That is a way of ensuring acceptance. Failure to do that may result in poor participant turn out or even provision of inadequate data.

Sharing food has other spinoffs that accrue from it. For instance, during a meal, ideas that may have been forgotten during interviews or during other discussions may come up and will add on to the corpus of already collected material. It also provides a platform where other 'hanging' and hazy points may be clarified or further explored, a practice that is almost akin to the western concept of discussing some things over for instance tea or coffee, but which only involves

the powerful. What becomes clear is that if one refuses to share a meal or partake even in beverage consumption, the community members may consider her/him a misfit and as lacking *unbu/ubuntu* (qualities of being human/humanness).

One more way of decolonizing the research process in addition to sharing a meal with communities relates to overnight accommodation (Alsugair, 2018). Among the Shona, there is a proverb that says *muenzi haapedzi dura* (a visitor does not empty your granary). This proverb is anchored in the value that the Shona, like other Bantu groups, place on hospitality. It emphasizes the importance of taking care of visitors. It is also a call to researchers to be prepared to put up with research participants in the event that they are invited to take lodgings with members of a host community. Refusal to accept such hospitality that would have been extended to the researchers is like in the case of turning down an offer to share a meal perceived as meaning that the researchers feel that they cannot stoop so low that they have to put up in the accommodation of their research participants whom they may perceive as the 'others'. It is therefore important that researchers be prepared to stay in communities and not hotels or camping sites. Communities need to feel that researchers are part of the community and that the story they will be researching on belongs to all of them and the researcher has only become an avenue through which it is getting out to the wider world (Lambert, 2011). As in the case of sharing meals, it has to be noted that it is usually after public engagements that at times new and additional information comes from hosts and their neighbours. Such information may be something that the community may have later discussed on their own and felt that the researcher would benefit from it. From an indigenous research perspective, it is therefore clear that sharing in meals as well as taking up accommodation as a guest to one of the host community's families, has benefits to the entire research project.

Indigenous communities believe in the interconnectedness of things. To them, people cannot be divorced from the bio-physical environment neither can they be removed from the extra-terrestrial world. This relational observation that makes up the indigenous worldview has to be embraced and acknowledged when one is carrying out research among indigenous communities (Cooper, Ball, Boyer-Kelly et al, 2019). This partly explains why at times there is the bringing in of issues like totems as ways of establishing relationships/kinship since no one is ever considered as an outsider

among the Shona. Totems are important because they give members of the participating community room and scope on how they can relate to the researchers. My experience in south eastern Zimbabwe in Chiredzi, as well as in Lupane in Matabeleland shows the value of totems. The use of totems is significant in that it gives room for the placement of the researcher on a family plane; coming in for example as a daughter or a son-in-law. One thus gets more information as a family member than as an outsider. It is therefore important when carrying out research to always go beyond institutional and/organizational identity and identify oneself through a totem. One will then be accepted for example as a son, daughter or son-in-law. Such acceptance opens more avenues for information gathering as well as potential of more participants taking part. This has the potential of ensuring that one gets genuine data and not information that is just provided by those who would have passed by to just get some financial benefits from some incentives that may be provided by the researcher(s).

Another important aspect that is tied up with the relational approach to indigenous research methods is that of sharing common stories and heritage. Most indigenous communities share common practices and ancestry. The fact that these stories persist means that their owners are related. When a researcher comes to their area in search of data for a certain project, it is easier to access information if one has some knowledge of part of the story. This knowledge is further strengthened if the researcher speaks the same language with members of the community from which data are being sourced. If there is an outsider, for instance a European or one of European extract, the chances of getting genuine and adequate information are more diminished when compared to one of their own. This has to do with the belief and acceptance that one of their own will want to tell their story. It is therefore important that an outsider have the assistance of a highly proficient speaker of the language of the host community. The outsider should also be prepared to accept the hospitality of the host community. This should not be difficult if the researcher is genuine given the fact that the same westerners embrace Arab culture and even partake in communal meals when they are negotiating business matters (Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Constantini, Sforza, & Zoli, 2016). To therefore refuse indigenous hospitality elsewhere is nothing short of arrogance which results in inadequate or even falsified information from informants. What in short, a relational approach to indigenous research methods really means is

that the researcher has to place indigenous values and practices at the core of his/her inquiry, especially given the fact that research and its findings have to be centred around the indigenous communities, and in the case of Africa, around the African (Asante, 1998). If this does not happen, then the indigenous participants may not give adequate information that is sought after since they may consider the researcher as one who does not understand and appreciate them.

A relational approach to indigenous research also demands that the researcher embraces myths and legends that are told by informants. A careful digging into these would usually yield positive information that can feed into the research agenda. A good example of such myths includes those linked with taboos. For a long time, taboos have been perceived as coming from people who are unschooled and are barbaric as well as heathens or non-believers when it comes to the Christian faith. However, Chemhuru and Masaka comment on the value of taboos when they state:

Among Shona people, environmental taboos have a pivotal moral role toward the ontological wellbeing of both the individual person and the environment at large. Prohibitions and restrictions through taboos on unsustainable use of certain plant species, forests, mountains, rivers, pools and nonhuman animals, among other ecological species in the ecosystem, is not a new epistemology among the Shona people, but reflects a long tradition (Chemhuru & Masaka, 2010, p. 121).

While Chemhuru and Masaka focus on what they refer to as environmental taboos, what is essential to note is that a genuine researcher should not be dismissive of certain belief systems and practices because inherent in these are real issues that are of great importance to a given society. The example of taboos shows why it becomes important that the researcher be a member of the community or another indigenous person who is not only sympathetic to the host community but one whose own belief systems and practices are in common with those of the researched group. What also becomes clear from this observation is that western systems and methods of research cannot be relied on when it comes to researching among indigenous communities. It highlights why it is important that researchers abandon the so-called immersion approach and just leave matters relating to research of and among the indigenous communities to the indigenous people themselves. Immersion can possibly yield positive results if the immersee has a

positive attitude and perceives as well as accepts the host and researched community as equals and not as the insignificant Other.

When it comes to approaches that relate to indigenous research pathways, one that is tied with the relational one is that of storytelling. Storytelling as used in the context of research should not be confused with that which relates to folktales although there is a link in that both relate to people's lives although in the case of folktales there is creativity and fictional elements although they are also embedded with themes that are true to life and engage with for instance environmental matters (Mutasa, Nyota & Mapara, 2008). In the context of academic inquiry, storytelling can be defined as the aptitude that the narrator has to shape life events into knowledge and understanding in a "web of stories rather than a monological narrative" (Boje & Rosile, 2010, p. 898). What has to be borne in mind when it comes to this research method is that it has to be noted that it does not take the given narratives as true and accurate representations (or reflections) of one's life experience (Boje & Rosile, 2010, p. 898) and yet in the act of telling, the different layers manifest other strands of information that may be lost if people are only to rely on that which is recorded, or that which is perceived to come from the horse's mouth, yet the donkey may have a more compelling and genuine story. This thus becomes another persuasive method that can be used as an indigenous research method and when undertaking research especially among indigenous communities. Ober underscores the importance of storytelling when she states:

Storytelling or 'yarning' is embedded within the processes and structure of Aboriginal society. Stories are empowering and uplifting, giving access to layers of deep cultural and historical knowledge that make up the social and cultural identity of Aboriginal people (Ober, 2017, p. 8).

Although Ober is referring to the Aboriginal society, of which she is a member, and which is also an Australian indigenous group, her words are applicable when it comes to matters relating to research in other indigenous communities. What comes clearly out of her words is that storytelling, which she also calls yarning, is part of the fabric of Aboriginal society and this means that it is through storytelling that narratives relating to communities and life histories are passed down. She further underscores the fact that stories do not only uplift and empower communities, but they are also access points to matters relating to culture and the communities' histories.

Ober's insights, in fact, reveal that the use and deployment of western or Euro-American research methods to explore indigenous points of view has over and over again been felt and perceived by the majority of indigenous people to be inappropriate and ineffective in gathering information and promoting discussion with the researcher and among community members. The situation is not helped given the fact that there is never feedback from the researcher, and the researcher largely and in most cases is not only an outsider, but in the majority of cases chooses to remain an outsider and does not speak their language, and neither does s/he understand and practice their culture. However, on a comparative basis, the use of an indigenous storytelling approach as a research tool helps to create catenae of indigenous worldviews, thus "shaping the approach of the research; the theoretical and conceptual frameworks; and the epistemology, methodology, and ethics" (Datta, 2017, p. 35).

I have benefitted from the value of storytelling and has observed that it gives insights that are informed by local histories and traditions. By local histories here is meant what the I would like to call histories from below because these stories give other versions of history that do not necessarily echo what is said to be official or recorded accounts. For instance, on a research visit to Malunku in Lupane, in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North Province, I noted that the local people have their own version of history that debunks the notion of memorializing Alan Wilson and his troop. The story is not just a celebration of Lobengula's last stand against British imperialism (Kenrick, 2019). Its significance furthermore lies in the fact that it makes manifest the point that memory is not necessarily physically represented by obelisks and statues but can reside within the people and is passed down intergenerationally. In addition, through storytelling and song, the researcher and colleagues learnt that the idea that the Ndebele were predatory on the Shona as captured in the words, "on the pretext of protecting the 'Mashona' (Shona) people from the predations of the 'Matabele' (Ndebele)" (Kenrick, 2019, p. 9) was but one of the myths that were crafted to have a successful divide and rule venture in the colony because some the Bantu people practiced raiding as part of their political economy in the pre-colonial era (King, 2017). The reality is that kingdoms were rising and falling and this fact is backed by the reality that there is a Ndebele traditional song that celebrates the fact that the people who were once Mambo's have become Mzilikazi's. This song as well dispels the idea that the Ndebele defeated the Shona under Mambo because the fall of the



Rozvi State was at the hands of Nyamazana, a Swati female military leader (Mutasa, 1990). Storytelling thus becomes important as the case of the Malunku community's stories falls in tandem with Smith (2012) who proposes that indigenous research methods should as well contribute to the re-writing of history given the fact that those who write history are the wielders of political and economic power.

Storytelling as a means of data collection as observed in the Malunku community has revealed that cultural and economic dynamics are important if one has to collect the correct and appropriate data. My colleagues and I observed that stories in this community are told by female seniors and not by men. The only plausible reason that I could see as having contributed to the women being storytellers has to do with Bantu culture where women are the main teachers and tellers even of folktales. This position may have been buttressed by the colonial economy that proletarianized the colonized Ndebele and Shona through the creation of a migrant labour system that caused the males to work in towns, mines and on white owned commercial farms, as well as the unfortunate ones who were made to work under *chibharo* (forced labour) (Madimu, 2017; van Onselen, 1976).

The importance of storytelling is also realized when it is observed that there are toponyms or place names that come up in narratives. It is essential that researchers pay attention to the names that come up because in those names may be other story strands. There are names like Pupu that for example come out of the Malunku community's narrative. Further probing revealed that the name is derived from the sound of gunfire exchanges as the Ndebele forces tried to repulse the Alan Wilson patrol and they succeeded in killing all members of that troop.

One of the popular data collection methods that westerners use is focus group discussions (FGDs). It is one of the ways used in qualitative research to gather information. FGD involves the bringing together of people from similar backgrounds or related experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest to the researcher. This method ensures that there will be a guide or moderator whose purpose is to introduce discussion topics and chairs ensuring that members stick to the objective(s) of the discussion. While this method is a good one, one advantage it has is that it approximates the indigenous Shona and Nguni *dare/inkundla*. The *dare* system is generally understood to be a court or judicial system where matters are resolved (Gwaravanda, 2011). This however is a narrow

understanding. Outside hearing cases and deciding on them, the system is also a platform for the discussion of general issues relating to any subject of interest such as hunting practices. It was also a space where skills like the making of bows were imparted to the interested ones. It was and still is largely a male space with women only attending when there is a trial. Each family has its own *dare*. More mature women may be invited to the *dare* if there are matters to be clarified, because this was a place where the importance of community and family as captured in *Ubuntu* was nurtured and was given room to thrive. The demise of the *dare* and the movement to urban areas as well as into the Diaspora has led to individualism with each family enclosed in very high perimeter walls (real and psychological), that are also another form of coloniality.

The importance of the *dare* lies in the fact that it is a platform where even visitors are welcome. It is as well a space that a researcher, through an intermediary can introduce his/her topic of research and have it attended to. The advantage of presenting one's research topic to the *dare*'s 'pot' is that it is open to analysis from different angles and by people with different experiences. No matter how difficult the topic may be, the Shona believe that *iri mudare iri murwenga, ichaibva* (the one that is in the court is in the roasting pan, it will get roasted). They mean that answers and solutions to a case presented will be found. What the *dare* as a research platform demands of the researcher is that s/he stays for longer than a day because a case may spill over such a period. It also means that there is need for preparation for a research tour that will accommodate such cultural set-ups. One thing worth noting is that while the *dare* has largely been a male space, it has of late been opened up to females because communities now accept that there are females who carry out studies, and also that there are females who may have more insights into certain matters when compared to their male counterparts.

One other advantage of the *dare* is that it allows the research to tap into the so-called uneducated (labelled 'informal' schooling in the West), – both old and young who are usually left outside the scope of most western research systems unless the inquiries being undertaken are anthropological and are aimed at 'confirming' some racial stereotypes about a given group of people. They have certain experiences and knowledge that the others may not have. The good that comes from interacting with those labelled as uneducated is that in such a set-up they are at home and they are free to speak their mind because the value of their words is embedded in their own

experiences and research. They also have an opportunity to point out where for instance some practices are going wrong.

## Conclusion

This chapter cannot be said to be conclusive in matters relating to indigenous research methods. What it has, however, done is to point out that the world of academic inquiry is in serious need of decontamination and this can only be through decolonizing the research space through engaging with methods that are used. It has brought forward several approaches that are pertinent if one is to successfully carry out research in an indigenous community. The chapter has pointed out that it is important that a researcher be one who is prepared to learn and not one who is there to find faults with communities and their ways of life. Additionally, it highlighted the value that is obtained when one becomes part of the community and thus avoids a ‘them’ and ‘us/I’ approach. Indigenous research approaches also call upon the researcher to share findings and involve communities in data interpretation so that there is co-ownership of the findings. The chapter has also underscored the need to avoid the weaponization of research, for instance, where entities fund research as a tool to further global capital’s interests and not community well-being. Such lecherous behaviour is evidenced in cases where other people’s indigenous knowledge is stolen and used for commercial purposes. Besides always bearing in mind that indigenous academic inquiry is relational, it has also brought to the fore the need to incentivise research participants as well as partaking in meals and other social activities so as to be part of the community. This includes accepting offers of overnight accommodation in their homes if such offers are extended. Other highlighted aspects include the relational characteristic of research and the value of storytelling as an important cog in the whole indigenous research agenda and as a means of decolonizing the research space. The chapter, in addition, noted that some spaces like the *dare* are critical in indigenous research as is equally true when it comes to toponyms. What the chapter has, thus, come up with is the emphasis on the importance of ceremony as part of the research which in itself is anchored in the language of the host communities. This is so because through language, one has an avenue through which s/he has of engaging with the heart of the story and of the community’s song and drum.

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