

Projektseminar: “Fieldwork Under Fire: Volatility, Hegemony, Neo-Colonialism and Knowledge Production in the Global South through the context of Gender, Displacement and Activism”

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Podcast Project: “Passing the Microphone – Critical Alternative Research Methods”

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Passing the Microphone - Critical Alternative Research Methods Executive Summary of the Podcast’s Content

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Abstract: We created this podcast as a potential guide for fellow students and scholars to engage with the processes of alternative and critical research methods. It is meant to spark reflection for all fields of knowledge, but especially to focus on interview or fieldwork contexts involving people from the Global North and South. We wanted to raise and encourage awareness about one’s own socialization, prejudices, and colonial thought patterns and narratives that consciously and subconsciously influence one’s minds and actions. Through continuously becoming aware of these patterns and reflecting on one’s own positionality, we can aim to approach research in a decolonial manner that counteracts the reproduction of colonial and hegemonic discourses both in academia and in NGO work. This podcast should serve as an introduction to prompt decolonial thinking patterns for fellow students to reflect upon their own projects. Below we have summarized the key points and content of the discussions in our podcast. This document can be used as additional guiding material for those who want to engage with the topics and literature while working through a project idea. To listen to the whole podcast, click the link above and enjoy the reflection.

I. Introduction

We are all students at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany and took part in the class “Fieldwork Under Fire: Volatility, Hegemony, Neo-Colonialism and Knowledge Production in the Global South through the context of Gender, Displacement and Activism”. In this podcast we are focussing on the topic of knowledge production and research methods, specifically aimed at fellow students who might be working on their Bachelor’s and Master’s theses. Others of you might be interested to go into NGO work or so called development work around the world. The three of us all had a certain amount of critical theory in our classes, or perhaps developed our own critical reflections through our personal experiences growing up or through work experiences.

In any case we wanted to sum up the most important critical reflections and questions to ask ourselves when we are engaging in any kind of research, interview, or fieldwork project. We will summarize several important research methods which are all from an indigenous, decolonial, feminist and global southern based methods perspective to aim to prevent these hegemonic colonial-minded power relations. Our goal is to move away from seeing yourself as different than your interviewees, or even subconsciously thinking you are more knowledgeable or more experienced because you are in the ‘researcher role’.

These methods are largely based on the 2012 book, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* by Bagele Chilisa. Chilisa is a Botswanan post-colonial scholar and professor at the University of Botswana. To dive into the topic, we’ll start off with the following quotes:

- Bagele Chilisa:

“[...] as producers of knowledge, researchers make assumptions about the power relations between themselves and the researched, and they are consciously or unconsciously guided by the assumptions... which inform the researcher’s interactions with the researched, the kind of knowledge that can be produced, and the way it can be produced” (*Indigenous Research Methods*, 190).

- Paolo Freire, Brazilian critical educator:

"The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world [...]” (Freire, 1982).

So our aim is to share these research methods in order to develop collaborative projects together at eye level, so you are not researching people, but you are developing a project together that can result in some kind of impact, not just a thesis that will sit on your laptop. If we reflect upon these methods we can prevent the I / them relationship and create a project together based on a we-relationship.

Research methodologies explored

II. Positivist Western Paradigm vs. Decolonial – Indigenous Paradigm

Traditional Western Positivist Research Paradigm:

Reasons for doing the research:

- to explore and create rules and laws that govern the researched subjects, phenomena, situation, which are to be generalizable and universally applicable and valid

Philosophical Base + Ontological Assumption:

- Methods and processes are informed by Realism, Idealism and critical Idealism
- One Reality, which is knowable and researchable within probability

Place of Values in Research Process + Nature of knowledge:

- Research and Science is value free and objective, there is no place for value led research except in the process of finding a topic, intentions and motivation
- Objective

What counts as truth?

- Data and Developments, Phenomena, that are based on precise observation and measurement that are verifiable and documentable

Methodology + Techniques of data gathering:

- Research Designs include: quantitative, correlational, quasi-experimental, experimental, causal, comprehensive, survey
- Traditional questionnaires, observations, tests and experiments, only documentable data

Decolonial-Indigenous Research Paradigm:

Reasons for doing the research:

- To challenge deficit thinking and pathological descriptions of the formerly colonized and reconstruct an inclusive body of knowledge that promotes transformation and social change among the historically oppressed

Philosophical Base + Ontological Assumption

- Informed by indigenous knowledge systems, critical theory, postcolonial discourses, feminist theory. Critical race specific theories & neo-marxist theories
- Socially constructed multiple realities are to be reflected as base of the research approaches, these can be shaped by multiple connections between humans with their contexts, surroundings, socialization, the environment, the cosmos, the living and the non-living

Place of Values in Research Process + Nature of knowledge:

- All research must be guided by a relational accountability that promotes respectful representation, reciprocity and rights of the researched, counteracting hegemonic representation tendencies though constant reflecting if and how to act according to these standards
- Knowledge is relational, as is all indigenous knowledge systems built on relations. No Knowledge is to be universalized but always to be contextualized and valued equally

What counts as truth?

- Truth is informed by the set of multiple, individual, contextual relations one has with the universe

Methodology:

- Research Designs include: participatory, liberating and transformative research and methodologies, that draw from different knowledge systems, including indigenous

Techniques of data gathering:

- Techniques are based on philosophical sagacity, ethnophilosophy, language frameworks, indigenous knowledge systems, talk stories and talk circles, adapted techniques from Positivist, Transformative & Interpretive Research Paradigms (Intermediate Paradigms between the two analysed paradigms)

III. Practical Applications: Decolonial Research Methodologies

Summary of Bagele Chilisa:

- continuously disrupt western and European colonial narratives
- achieve an I We relationship, to avoid the colonial researcher/researched narrative

Decolonial projects are:

- inclusive, solidarity minded, community based and participatory

Where to start:

- Personal reflection about motives, make sure your project is appropriate to your goal
- Long term committed relationship with a community- involve yourself is appropriate
- Focus on what literature you're reading – read a variety making sure to include Global southern authors and studies and NGOs. Most weight is given to western university and NGO publications
- Bring in local knowledge systems:
 - o Oral histories, family knowledge, family documents,
 - o Focus on indigenous knowledge systems- not just data or written texts
- Always question yourself and your motives
 - o Make sure you are not working on your own agenda- it is a solidarity minded community project for social or political change

IV. Women's Regional Network – Example of Decolonial Research in Action

Following the exploration of specific methods used to approaching and conducting decolonial indigenous research. We are illustrating one example that has led us through the seminar and our getting to know eye to eye ways of research. “Women's Regional Network” (WRN) are a network working in partnership with women civil society leaders on

community-based projects to advance women's rights movements in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. They are developing comprehensive peace research through our innovative research method called Community Conversations, which we have been exploring in the frame of this podcasts' purpose.

We looked at a report published by WRN in 2013 with the title "*Surviving War and Transition: Perspectives from Afghan Women- Perspectives from afghan women*". We linked this report to our podcast, because the paper highlights that Afghan women have made significant measurable gains. Women developed their influence by working with various government agencies, including the judiciary and executive branches of the government. Women are also working as journalists, civil society and human rights activists, lawyers and entrepreneurs throughout the country. The report gives us an overview of the ways in which the research methods explained in our podcast, are being realized in practice in order to generate a holistic, authentic representation. In this case of WRNs work in Afghanistan, did research with women on their perspectives on security, militarization, corruption and effectiveness of aid and highlight the ways in which these issues effect women's individual lives. The work was focused on women that are the least likely to be heard or reached in research projects or any way to representation of their voices. In this passage of the podcast we explain how community conversations can look like and which factors play a role in this particular case, such as language frameworks, variety of participants from different backgrounds and marginalized contexts.

V. Summarized Conclusion - (Results of the Podcast & Recommendations to Listeners)

By the end of the podcasts first episode we hope to have coherently painted a clear picture of how urgently necessary a transformation in common research practices is in the process of decolonizing academia and create equal ability and opportunity for representation of people's voices. It is up to every single researcher, aspired researcher and scholar to make a choice which paradigm or approach that will inform your research. Always taking into consideration the nature of the problem you are investigating, your background, socialisation and worldview and continuously reflecting these throughout the research. It is our responsibility to critically assess our research process in order to fuel the process towards equal ability of voices to be heard and validated in the discourse of knowledge, knowledge production and truth.

Literature and Sources

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