Indigenous African Elders Critical Teachings (ElderCrits) As A Methodology

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Abstract. Research remains a problematic term among Indigenous peoples, and when mentioned, it evokes memory of pain, distrust, mistrust, and anger among Indigenous peoples. It can be argued that racist and colonizing research carried out in Indigenous communities, on Indigenous peoples, and on Indigenous Lands are partly responsible for the (mis)appropriation, (mis)presentation, (mis)education, distortion, falsification, downgrading, devaluation, and the destruction of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems (TCPS2, 2022). As rightly pointed out by many scholars, Eurocentrism has engendered theories and practices that justify without explanations almost everything from colonialism, racism, imperialism, to ongoing White logics in research. Within this context, many critical researchers have cautioned researchers who do research among Indigenous peoples to modify their research methodologies to suit Indigenous communities because the current Western social sciences research methodologies are racially and Indigenously biased.

Keywords: ElderCrits, Indigenous, Colonialism, Racism, Imperialism.

Introduction

In this article, we draw on African Elders' Critical Teachings (*ElderCrits*) as a discursive framework to formulate research methodology appropriate for Indigenous based research. Based on the article Nine of Tri-agency's Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (TCSP2), Indigenous research refers to any research conducted on First Nations, Inuit or Métis lands in Canada — and to extent TCSP2 to other jurisdiction— and on other Indigenous communities of all continents, from the Arctic to the Pacific, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas (United Nations Human Rights, 2013, p.2). Indigenous research includes research in which the recruitment criteria include Indigenous identity as a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup in the study or/and research that seeks input from participants regarding an Indigenous community's cultural heritage, artifacts, traditional knowledges or unique characteristics. Indigenous research includes research in which Indigenous identity or membership in an Indigenous community is used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data or in the creation of survey tools and the interpretation of research results that will refer to Indigenous communities, peoples, languages, histories or/and cultures (for details, see TCPS2, 2022).

We conceptualize *ElderCrits* as a body of knowledge emerging from the accumulated voices, experiences, history, cultures, and viewpoints of Indigenous Elders over generations because of sustained attachments to and relationship with the Land, Culture, and Nature (Dei and Adjei, 2024). They are knowledges rooted in past, present, and yet to be learned experiences as related to the Land, Nature, and Culture (Dei and Adjei, 2024). *ElderCrits* do not sit in 'pristine fashion' outside contact with other knowledge systems, nor are they knowledge to be archived or stored in the laboratories; rather, they are alive on Land, in Culture, Nature, and in the collective minds, souls, and spirits of the peoples. They cannot be separated from the political and everyday life of the people, and Elders, as key actors, ensure that such knowledges of the Land, Culture, and Nature are constructed, first, in the local languages because language is the epistemic lens through which Indigenous peoples see their world and makes meaning out of it (Kirkness (1997). Second, they are transmitted through daily folklores, proverbs, symbols, parables, artefacts, poetry, ritual drama, ceremonies, sculptures, artistic expressions, storytelling, legends, music, fables, mythologies, and riddles from generation to generation with modifications (see Adjei, 2018; Dei 2020). African literary scholars such as Achebe (2021), Ayi Kwei Armah (1969), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1965, 1986), Abdi (2008), Eze (1998), Gyekye (1995), Mudimbe (1998), Wiredu (1996), and more recently, Dei (2020), Dei, Karanja, and Erger (2022), Adjei (2018), Adjei and Darko (2021), and Asimeng-Boahene and Baffoe (2018) have demonstrated that *ElderCrits* expressed in diverse range of thoughts constitute collective Indigenous philosophies that cannot be conveniently dismissed. Next, we discuss some core tenets of *ElderCrits*.

Tenets of *ElderCrits*

Elders or Eldership is a bestowed venerated status earned in the community for exemplary life worthy of emulations by others and not simply ascribed by age (as in elderly) or socio-economic class. It is an identity acknowledged a step closer to ancestors; therefore, holders of such status are deemed spiritual and an embodiment of wisdom, cultural knowledge, and the history of the African communities (Dei 2020; Dei, Karanja and Erger 2022; Metis Centre, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008). As denoted already, *ElderCrits* are treasured and held in highest esteem by community members, and they often inform, shape, guide, organize, and regulate how community members uphold to the promise of a better future (see Campt, 2017; Lattas, 2013). *ElderCrits* are built on five core tenets.

First, they are founded on *Indigenous people's understanding of rationality, reciprocity, relationality, communality, and mutual interdependence* as opposed to hierarchies, dominations, and zero-sum games. Positivist and behavioural scientific knowledge system operationalize rationality as something rooted in logical deductions and reasoning power devoid of personal and emotional sentiments to arrive at the "truth" that is universally applicable and time-tested (Du Toit 2005; Higgs, 2007). However, the scientific claims that rationality is devoid of personal and emotional sentiments have been challenged and debunked (Du Plessis, 2012; Higgs, 2001). These scholars and many others not named, have argued that what constitutes rationality is equally informed and shaped by prejudice, intuitions, emotions, and subjectivity. Within African *ElderCrits*, the concept of rationality is rooted in collective reasoning through plural conversations where people have rights to ask questions, agree or/and disagree to an idea, and in some cases offer explainable to help reach consensual outcomes. Such approach to rationality is informed by what Rorty (1991, p.37) refers to as a set of moral virtues rooted on tolerance, respect for diverge opinions, openness to listening to others, and reliance on persuasion rather than force. The ultimate quest is to literally gain an understanding of the world through plural engagement, one in which thoughts, feelings, motivations, intuitions, visions, dreams, and aspirations function through a symbiotic relationship among the dead, the living, the unborn, and the natural environment in the search for truths.

ElderCrits speak of a world in transitions, a world where equitable collaboration and healthy relationship rather than destructive competitions and individualism is possible (see Escobar, 2018). In such a world of 'could be,' human relations and existence are connected to all things. *ElderCrits* offer a path of developing our humanness, and spiritual connections and communions with the living, the dead, the unborn, and the cosmo world (see Garlow, 2022).

Second, *ElderCrits are rooted in the knowledge and teachings of the Land* particularly knowledge about what it means to live on the Land; to create wealth, health and wellness; to uphold family and households'

responsibilities; to value languages and cultures of the Land, and to validate experiential knowledge that comes with long-time attachment to and relationship with the Land (Fals-Borda, 2000). Styres (2017) argues that Land (note the capitalization of L) is beyond the physical geographical space to include the philosophies, worldviews, ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and etiologies of a place. For *ElderCrits*, Land carries the relational, experiential, emotional, spiritual, and embodied knowledge and history of the people. Such understanding of the Land is part of the spiritual view of human existence. *ElderCrits are* about researching and teaching the struggles of the Land as related to self-determination, cultural survival, and Land rights of Indigenous people (see Datta, 2018, Dei 2020; Dei, Wambui and Erger, 2022; Dei, Darko, Demi, Sanchez and Akanmori, 2018).

Third, *ElderCrits are about ethicality and the ethics of caring for the Land, Nature, environment, and humanity*. Escobar (2018) asks, "How, then, can one design a world that brings forth flourishing in everyday activities" (123)? *ElderCrits* speaks of care ethics that is grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledge associated with appropriate caring and caretaking of human and nonhuman beings. In such environment of care, the Land (including those who live on it) is not deemed as resources to be exploited and extracted but rather the source of all lives to be preserved, protected, and care for the survival and preservation of lives as broadly defined. For Indigenous people, there is an inseparable relationship with the Land, the environment, and all those who inhabit it. This is the normative philosophy of *ElderCrits* and is fully captured in the *Kari-Oca2 Declaration* to the RIO+20 Earth Summit: "Our lands and territories are at the core of our existence — we are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories and they are inextricably linked to our survival and to the preservation and further development of our knowledge systems and cultures, … Caring and sharing, among other values, are crucial to bringing about a more just, equitable, and sustainable world" (Kari-Oca, 2012, para-17 and21).

Fourth, *ElderCrits acknowledge the power of 'not knowing' and the unknown* (Dei 2012). Contrary to Cartesian scientific epistemology that espouses the certainty of knowing, *ElderCrits* acknowledge that certain knowledges are beyond human comprehension, and they exist outside the human frame of meaning and explanation of the world (Battise, 2002; Marker, 2004). Ahenakew (2016) notes Indigenous worldviews acknowledge human limitations to fully explain in words the mutual interdependence between spiritual and material worlds and the reciprocal obligations that come with human and non-human existence. Within the context, *ElderCrits* argue that our human limitations to grasp and understand the complex world around us should inspire humility of knowing and the humility of not knowing.

Fifth, *ElderCrits espouse Omnicentricism*; that is, all knowledges are wholistic and attuned to relational spheres with more than humans inter-knowing and intra-knowing, and while challenging anthropocentric

ideologies and colonial architectures of Western science knowledge (see also Ahenakew, Andreotti, Cooper and Hireme, 2014). *ElderCrits* call for a breakaway from false binaries and dichotomies in the understanding and interpretation of the universe. *ElderCrits* are wholistic and do not have divisions such as we have Religion, Law, Economics, Arts, Science, Engineering and others in the Western knowledge system. *ElderCrits* are expressed through oral and written tradition especially through Indigenous peoples' mythical narrations and symbolic works. Such exposition presents local people as theorists of their lived experience. Unlike Western knowledge system, where theorizing of lived experience remains the privilege of those in the academia, *ElderCrits* are rooted and grounded in the local people's everyday practices. The local people theorize through their daily interaction with the Land, the Dead, the unborn, the environment, and the world beyond. This is why *ElderCrits* are experientially based and rooted on the collective history of the Land, the living, and the world beyond what is humanly accessible. Hence, *ElderCrits* are holistic and relational. Critical researchers should be guided by these tenets to guide their recruitments, data collection, data analyses, the interpretations of research data, the reporting and distribution of research outcomes.

ElderCrits as a Research Methodology

Methodology is simply an approach to research to secure, collect, and marshal evidence and test propositions in the field of research. It also integrally links theory and method in research by using concepts, variables, labels, and definitions (Kothari, 2004). Methodology is about the what, the why, and the how in research. It describes elaborately the research questions, and the process involved in the researcher seeking answers to the core research questions. This involves explaining how the researcher selects research sites, research participants (recruitments), strategies used to select the research participants (sampling), how the research information is collected (data collection), the procedure and plans involved in handling and making meanings out of the information collected (Data analysis), how collected research information is handled and stored (Data management) and how the research findings are shared (Data reporting). Such discussions are usually informed by certain material, academic and political interests, including theoretical prisms. Gary Anderson (1998) associated methodology to the art of cooking. Just as a cook selects ingredients for a food base on the cook's personal taste, and particularly the recipes of the food, the same way researchers decide on a particular methodology base on their own preferences and the nature of the research. While the proposition of Gary Anderson is very true, it is also a fact that there are certain ingredients that go with recipes. Thus, a cook cannot prepare a recipe without using the right ingredients that come with the recipe. For instance, regardless of who the cook is, omelet cannot be prepared without an egg. Similarly, there are certain components of research that all methodologies cannot ignore. For instance, every research need data, although the nature

of the data may differ from methodology to methodology. Regardless of the type of research, the methodology chosen is dictated by the question the research addresses and the approaches the researcher takes (Jamal 2005, p.230). Although the decision to adopt a particular research methodology rest with the research area and the central research question, some methodologies may be more suitable and effective for a particular kind of research than others (Jamal, 2005). Regardless, methodology is too important to be left alone in the hands of researchers (Becker, 1970). Howard Becker raised this legitimate point because the methodology of any research largely determines the outcomes of the research.

ElderCrits demand research methodology to be responsive to Indigenous peoples and their social, cultural and political issues. This request is important because as already argued, methodologies, theories, and ethos guiding research in the academy are rooted in Eurocentric hegemonic worldviews, values, and cultures (Dei 2005; Gordon et al; Stanfied II 1994; Scheurich and Young 1997). As Scheurich and Young (1997) argue:

> [T]he major influential philosophers, writers, politicians, corporate leaders, social scientists, educational leaders (e.g Kant, Flaubert, Churchill, Henry, Ford, Weber, and Dewey) have virtually all been White. And it is they who have constructed the world we live in — named it, discussed it, explained it. It is they who have developed the ontological and axiological categories or concepts like individuality, truth, education, free enterprise, good conduct, social welfare, etc. that we use to think (that thinks us?) and that we use to socialize and educate children. This racially exclusive group has also developed the epistemologies, the legitimated ways of knowing … that we use. And it is these epistemologies and their allied ontologies and axiologies taken together as a lived web or fabric of social construction that make or construct "the world" like that of [Indigenous people in the world] to the "margins" of our social life and to the margins in terms of legitimated research epistemologies. (p.8).

Scheurich and Young (1997) further cautioned that the current epistemology guiding research is racially biased to extent that even if a researcher is a strong anti-racist and anti-colonialist and relies on this epistemology, the outcomes of their research would unintentionally be racially and Indigenously biased:

> The error here is that racial critiques of epistemology of knowledge production have virtually nothing to do with whether an individual researcher is overtly or covertly racist. A researcher could be adamantly anti-racist in thought and deed

and still be using an epistemology that.... could be judged to be racially biased (1997, p.5).

While Scheurich and Young (1997) may not be accusing early Western intellectuals of committing any racial conspiracy or acting in moral bad faith; they, nevertheless, are raising an important issue that Western intellectuals define the world from their cultural and historical context, and for that matter, their worldviews cannot be universalized. The current Western ontology, epistemology and axiology could be said to fit better to research within European communities. However, for research in other civilizations such as Indigenous communities, the research must be guided by the existing Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Within the context, *ElderCrits* call for researchers to be guided by the knowledge system of the research community when doing research among Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' use of their cultural knowledge system is derived from living in close relations and appreciation of nature and society. Hence the Indigenous knowledge system would usually comprise successful ways by which a people deal with their environments and surroundings.

The advancement of one cultural perspective cannot be universally applied and/or seen as superior to other perspectives. This is the basis of the critique lodged by Indigenous peoples regarding the ways in which hegemonic knowledges of Eurocentrism masquerading as universal knowledge. *ElderCrits* affirm cultural continuities and discontinuities in Indigenous peoples' experiences. Elders' critical teachings do not necessarily leave the body with a re-location but can lodge within cultural memory and intergeneration blood contacts and can always be called upon or recollected to deal with contemporary pressing problems in different contexts. Therefore, a culturally grounded perspective helps centre Indigenous voices, values, worldviews and knowledges.

Within Indigenous African knowledge systems, there is an ontological viewpoint that all elements of the universe are derived from similar substance and in essence spiritual. Thus, to understand reality is to have a complete and holistic view of the world. This implies, emotions, dreams, intuitions, and visions are deemed authentic ways of knowing and understanding the reality (Dei 2002). On the epistemological level, Indigenous Africans believe there can never be one way of knowing reality. Therefore, practices and experiences are the contextual bases of knowing the reality. The more reasons Elders' knowledges and wisdoms are important guidance to understand realities (Dei 2002). Axiologically speaking, Indigenous Africans speak of certain core values that need to be encouraged and rewarded in society. For instance, actions based on responsibilities and accountabilities should be rewarded over actions based on individual's rights. When an action is stimulated by a high sense of communitarianism and collective commitments to protect and preserve the Land, the culture, the people, the communal wellbeing, such action deserves

communal approval and praises. African axiology recognizes that all lives (animate and inanimate) derive from the same substance; therefore, humans are supposed to live a peaceful coexistence with, and not absolute control over, nature (Dei 2002).

Applicability of ElderCrits to Research

There are implications in developing research methodologies based on Indigenous African ontology, epistemology, and axiology. What do we do as researchers when our personal interest crashes with the interest of our research community? Nor the research interest of individuals in the community is in conflict of the interest of the collective community? Do researchers have rights to seek knowledge or report research outcomes, no matter the cost to Indigenous communities, all in the name of "people" have rights to know? Do researchers allow the knowledge of their research community to shape the outcome of the research, or do they simply shape research outcomes to prove or/and disprove existing claims? Who gets assigned the discursive rights or authorial control over the knowledge gained from Indigenous communities? Do researchers hide behind the academic procedure, freedom, and intellectual property to claim rights and ownership to knowledges they sincerely know belong to Indigenous peoples? What do researchers report as findings and who benefits from the reporting? When researchers published with Indigenous peoples about research outcomes in which Indigenous authors have embodied connections, how are the authorship listed? Do Indigenous authors get first authorship, or they are added in the last authorship to give legitimacy to the publication or simply assigned at the section on "acknowledgement"? When researchers claim to be neutral, objective, and apolitical in their analysis, are they being honest in their claims, or do they use these concepts to hide their responsibilities and obligations to Indigenous communities? Is the University ethical protocol enough to guarantee that research will be free from harm and sufferings for Indigenous people? How does research become mutually beneficial to Indigenous communities? *EldersCrits* require that researchers answer these questions even as they prepare to do research in Indigenous communities.

As a critical framework, *ElderCrits* show how research could be an avenue through which colonial and racist remnants could be challenged or reproduced in society. Research that denies people's histories cannot be considered critical research. ElderCrits therefore emphasize the importance of using voices emanating from Indigenous peoples to create understanding and reimagination of social issues. The discursive framework rejects the culture of research that treats Indigenous people's voices in research as a mere data to be theorized by the all-knowing researchers (Dei 2005). Instead, the discursive framework sees Indigenous peoples as creators of their own knowledge and not simply actors of a dominant knowledge. The framework calls for a methodological interest in how Indigenous peoples are simultaneously responding to internal and external aggression of

research. Thus, in research involving Indigenous peoples, researchers should not be satisfied with the question of "what is being said?" but also, "who is saying it and why it is being said?" The only way research could be transformative and liberatory for Indigenous peoples is when research methods are designed to challenge the existing colonial and racist structures and institutional practices that protect the dominant interest in matters related to Indigenous peoples and their wellbeing. As a critical discourse, *ElderCrits* problematize White power and privilege, and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples' voices and experiences in research. Dei (1996) argues that to speak about power is to speak about social construction of knowledge and what comes to be defined as valid knowledge and how such knowledge and the power that comes with it is used to exclude or/and devalue the experiences of Indigenous peoples (p 30).

ElderCrits support multiple ways of knowing in our world to advance the course of social knowledge. They call on researchers to shape their research methodologies and epistemologies to bring into forefront the experiences of Indigenous peoples that have been sidelined in the dominant discourse (Dei 2020; Dei, Wambui and Erger, 2022; Dei, Darko, Demi, Sanchez and Akanmori, 2018). ElderCrits expect researchers to work with bodies of knowledge that are empathetic to the struggles of Indigenous peoples. The discursive framework sees critical research as a political action and not an exercise of neutrality as projected by the positivist social sciences (Du Toit 2005; Higgs, 2007; Rorty, 1991). In this context, researchers are expected to place the resistance, agencies, struggles, and survival stories of Indigenous peoples at the centre of their analyses. *ElderCrits* pay particular attention to how research continue to serve the interest of European knowledge system. Karen Martin and Booran Mirraboopa, drawing on earlier works of Lester Irabinna Rigney and Errol West, outline four Indigenous principles for proactive, progressive, and visionary Indigenous research. These are:

First, there is a recognition that Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and realities are distinct and vital to Indigenous peoples' existence and survival. Second, research must honour Indigenous social mores as essential processes through which Indigenous peoples live, learn, and situate themselves on their Land and when they are on the Land of others. Third, research emphasizes that social, historical and political contexts shape Indigenous peoples' experiences, lives, positions and futures. Four, research privileges the voices, experiences and lives of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Land (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003, p.205- emphasis mine).

All knowledges are epistemic because they are based on people's understanding of realities. Frantz Fanon refers to knowledge based on people's realities as "embodied knowledge" (Fanon, 1967; 1965) and some feminists call it "partiality of knowing" (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; 1984; Smith and Smith, 1980). Karen Potts and Leslie Brown (2005) ask: how do

we know what we know? Although this question is epistemological, it can also be answered ontologically and axiologically. Stanfied (1985) argues that since many researches are responsible for informing, shaping, and sustaining policies and practices that have disadvantaged gendered, racialized, classed, disabled, and Indigenous peoples, it should be a concern when research is treated as a neutral endeavour. The concept of rigour is a set of rigid protocols— what Janesick (1994) defines as, "a slavish attachment and devotion to method" (p. 215) — researchers must adhere to before the dominant positivist thinkers and behavioral scientists will be convinced about the merit of research outcomes (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Standards such as validity (truthfulness of findings), generalizability (Are the findings universally applicable), and objectivity (does the researcher hold neutrality in conducting the research) are celebrated as unnegotiable qualities that must be present in research before it can have some legitimacy among positivists. Sandelowski (2001) warns that an inflexible and rigidity application of rigour in qualitative research can threaten the artfulness and meaning creations that are essential to qualitative research.

We argue that rigour exists in research only when researchers recognize politics, if they are in operation, and admit biases when they are in operation. Rigour in Indigenous research is attainable only when researchers duly recognize the multiple, contradictory, and the disturbing voices of Indigenous peoples as they challenge the hegemonic knowledge system in research. George Dei (2005) calls on anticolonial researchers to report research outcomes from the perspectives of marginalized communities especially if the research involves issues relating to social justice and oppression. For Dei, the power of a researcher must be exercised in a way that will challenge and not reproduce the pathologization, victimization, criminalization, labeling, and stereotyping of marginalized bodies within dominant discourses. ElderCrits hold similar position and further argue that researchers must exercise their power in ways that will not disseminate knowledge that could cause injury or undue harm to Indigenous communities and social groups. There are limits to academic freedom when reporting research outcomes. Researchers' rights to free speech must be matched with appropriate responsibilities and commitments to Indigenous communities and their struggles. If research bestows so much power on a researcher, then rather than denying and ignoring this power, ethical obligation requires that this power be utilized responsibly to push the agenda and interest of the research community. Research must shift from authoritarian, parasitic relations to reciprocal and prioritizing Indigenous peoples' interests.

ElderCrits as a Method

There are many paths to Indigenous research, and it is particularly important for research to ground Indigenous research methods as a subversive act to European colonization and racism. Long ago, Marie Battiste asked us to acknowledge the reach of cognitive imperialism into the

heads of all learners (Battiste 2011). Ngugi wa Thiong'o also notes the severity of colonization, particularly for 'the mental universe' of colonized peoples (wa Thiong'o, 1986, p.16). These authors show the epistemic limitation of Eurocentric knowledge system especially its limited application to inform and shape the worlds of Indigenous peoples. In view of that, Linda Smith (2012) and Mignolo (2012) call for research inquiries that offer a language of possibility and creative imaginations about a world beyond Euro-Western ontologies and epistemologies. This draws on Elders critical teachings to nurture and re-imagine de/anti-colonial approaches for Indigenous research.

(a) Accessing research community: Getting in

One of the central challenges facing all field researchers is the problem of "getting in"to communities. Usually, the challenge of accessing a research community starts at the conception stage of the research topic. Deciding on what to research must consider where the research will be conducted. Research becomes colonizing when researchers think of their research communities as addenda instead of the central component of the research project. Researchers often decide ahead their research topics without community involvement, then proceed to secure funding before approaching Indigenous communities to be research partners. This practice treats Indigenous communities as afterthoughts and not the true sense of research partners. African Elders Critical teachings tell us that "one does not pluck off feathers from a bird before asking Elders to identify it." Such behavior is not only disrespectful but also impossible to get the right answers from Elders. The current research practice where Indigenous communities are only contacted at the recruitment stage of the research is not only disrespectful but also akin to plucking off feathers from a bird and expecting Elders to identify it. The true definition of community involvement must start with Indigenous stakeholders having a say in (1) the research idea, (2) research proposal, (3) where to seek for research funding, (4) when and how research data will be collected, (5) where they will be stored, (6) how they will be protected, (7) who will have access to the data, and (8) how the data will be used.

Researchers should ensure they have engaged the appropriate Indigenous authorities on these issues before getting into Indigenous communities for research recruitment. Researchers must also respect the Indigenous communities' rights to refusal of consent to a research idea or to simply acknowledge a research idea but not to commit to supporting it. Further, researchers must accept the rights of Indigenous communities to deny researchers' access to certain sacred places in the communities or certain members of the research community. Communities also have rights to reject research topics they may be deemed threatening to the culture, values, and wellbeing of the community. Researchers should move away from this false sense of entitlements and the rights to know as Indigenous communities reserve the rights to protect their interests and knowledges.

Researchers must address the question whether they have the right to seek research information no matter the cost and consequences of the research outcomes to Indigenous communities.

Researchers entering Indigenous community must first introduce themselves to the appropriate Elders or/and authorities of the community. Even where researchers already have a contact person in the community, they still need to meet with the appropriate community Elders or/and community authority to introduce themselves. This is important because there is an adage among Asantes of Ghana that "strangers may have big eyes, yet they may not see clearly." Metaphorically speaking, this adage implies that strangers are always ignorant of the cores, values, cultures, and worldviews of a host community. Therefore, they are likelier to make mistakes. Besides, strangers deserve to be protected from anybody who may want to take advantage of them. In view of that, it is reasonable that researchers announce their presence to Elders of the community so that they can receive guidance on how to go about their research activities. Another reason why researchers need to announce their presence in the community is because should anything goes wrong, researchers will need the protection of the Elders or/and appropriate community authorities. On the contrary, if researchers sneak into a research community without announcing their presence, they could be treated with less lenience should they make mistake in the community. Besides, researchers who sneak into Indigenous community to do research are less likely to receive the needed cooperation from the community members. Finally, researchers must be aware of the Indigenous traditions of carrying gifts when meeting Elders. Carrying gift does not guarantee access to communities but at least, it demonstrates researchers' respect for Indigenous protocol of engagements.

ElderCrits and research recruitment

The idea of representation cannot be taken for granted when researchers are recruiting research participations. We come to know through who we are. Who is speaking to an issue equally matters when it comes to research. There is a powerful connection between racial identity and knowledge production. The way we come to know, understand and interpret our world and knowledge produce within it, is informed by our subjective locations within the sites of oppression and sometimes association to power and privileges. In an interview George Dei granted to Jennifer Kelly at Edmonton in February 1999, he drew a line between "racial identity" and "racialized identity." Dei (1999) argues that "racial identity" is simply sharing a skin colour pigmentation with a group which is different from "racialized identity" that speaks to the politicized understanding of belonging to or choosing to associate with a particular racial group. Having racial identity does not automatically generate one's critical consciousness about racism targeting one's own group (Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1965). Therefore, bodies and voices researchers choose to represent Indigenous group are as important as what they speak up for or against in the research

agenda. Researchers need to know that certain Indigenous bodies sometimes work with the tropes of the dominant and courting such individuals to speak on matters affecting Indigenous communities could reproduce White hegemonic thoughts. This is not to say dissenting voices in Indigenous communities are not welcome in research. However, it is important for researchers to build a reciprocal process of affirming or counter-checking perspectives that reify dominant views before presenting them as the stance of Indigenous communities. Credibility in research is about the transparency and honesty of who is called upon as research participants to speak for matters affecting Indigenous communities.

Further, researchers must ensure that those they call on to be research participants are reflections of the diversity that exists in the research community. Researchers have an obligation to ensure that research participants are fairly and accurately drawn from multiple representing voices in the community. What are the criteria for including people and excluding people in the data? Whose voices are being used in reporting and whose voices are being left out? These are political questions to reaffirm representation in research. For research topics that are Indigenous related, researchers must ensure that Elders' voices are honoured and respected in the recruitment process. The Asante community of Ghana have two sayings: "one does not bypass grandparents to seek traditional education from parents." *"Yensan kokoromoti ho mbo epo"* meaning "one cannot tie a knot without the thumb." These two proverbs allude to the same thing: When it comes to matters relating to Indigenous knowledges, researchers cannot recruit anybody in the community to speak on behalf of Indigenous communities. They must go to the source — Elders and Knowledge Holders — who have permission from the community to speak on such matters.

Data Collection

The methods of collecting data from Indigenous peoples equally influence the research outcomes. Research data exist in many forms— some in texts and documents, narrations of experiences, and some recalling from memories. How researchers go about their business of collecting the data is very important in Indigenous research. For instance, communities' struggles and Elders' wisdoms cannot be fully captured if researchers rely on methods that pay more attention to numbers (quantitative – surveys) than the detailed stories (qualitative, interviews, conversations and stories). Research data should not only be what the research participants say, but also what they left unsaid. Given that individuals' subjective experiences inform how they come to know, understand, and define their realities, researchers cannot analyze and interpret research data outside the research context. Research participants' body postures, emotional expressions, body languages, and the environment within which they answer interview questions, should be included in the analysis and interpretations of research data.

Further, all voices in Indigenous research cannot be treated in the same way. Elders' voices cannot be buried amid other multiple voices in

research. This is not about promoting a hierarchical relationship in research. It is about recognizing the important and respectful roles Elders and Knowledge Holders play in communities. In fact, Elders are deemed closer to Ancestors and therefore, their voices carry weight in the community. This is the ontological, epistemological and axiological realities of Indigenous communities. Researchers therefore cannot treat Elders' knowledge and voices as any other voice in research. ElderCrits make clear distinctions between individuals' rights and communal rights. Elders speak for the community and therefore their voices should be honoured and treated with the utmost respect in research. Researchers must also note the Indigenous protocol on the gift of reciprocity. When Elders and Knowledge Holders share their knowledges freely, researchers must honour such generosity with gifts to Elders. This is not deemed compensation, as researchers cannot pay for the value of such knowledge. However, Elders' time and wisdom must be honoured and appreciated by researchers. In the traditional Asante communities, one cannot approach Nananom (Elders) without a drink in hand to perform prayers. Since Elders always have drinks in their stocks, anyone approaching Elders could offer money for the Elders to replenish their stocks. This implies that researchers must show up to Elders with a drink or some money in the form of gifts. Further, the value of the gift changes depending on the ranking of the Elder. Example, meeting the Omanhene (Paramount Chief) of an Asante community requires that the research include among the gift two bottles of schnaps, two bottles of whisky (where whisky is not available, four bottles of schnaps are acceptable), and an envelope containing cash. Omanhene is a ruler of a nation or a large territory and therefore wield great power. Such individual does not move or sit alone but must always be accompanied by linguist (the chief spokesperson) and helpers. It is costly for Omanhene to host researchers and therefore it is fair for researchers to recognize the sacrifice of Nananom by sending them gifts worthy of their ranks.

Issues of research questions in Indigenous research

Positivists' assumptions demand that researchers remain objective throughout the research. In this case, researchers must clearly define research questions before entering the field of research. Consequently, researchers enter the research field with knowledge of exactly what they are looking for and will not hesitate to dismiss any data that do not fall within the category of their research questions. Within Indigenous setting, researchers cannot claim to know beforehand what to expect in the field of research. Indigenous knowledges are there to be discovered in the field of research; hence structured questions prior to entering the field of research should not be encouraged. Although researchers need to have some questions to guide the research interview, the actual research information will emerge in the general conversation with participants. Daniel (2005) warns that entering the field of research with preset questions can limit researchers' ability to explore local settings to the maxim. Moreover,

allowing research participants the opportunity to define the nature and application of the research, and for that matter research questions, affirm their roles as active participants in the research while researchers assert themselves as learners rather than knowers. Finally, as Daniel (2005) notes, when researchers opened themselves to any information available at the field of research, they strategically neutralize the power imbalances inherent in traditional researcher-participant relationships. The relationships become symbiotic rather than parasitic.

Data Analysis, Interpretations, and Reporting

Beyond the participants' views - how can narratives be linked with structural and macro-forces of society. Thus, researchers must ensure that the interpretation, analyzes, and reporting of research information recognize the struggles of research participants to challenge their hegemonic conditions. After all, research takes the precious time and effort of research participants, yet hardly do researchers bother to find out how their research will bring meaningful change in the lives of the research participants. Researchers working in Indigenous communities must ask: How can research advances Indigenous communities' knowledge base and their sense of intellectual agency? How can research make difference in the lives of Indigenous communities? In what ways can we make the voices of research participants be heard? These questions cannot be taken for granted anymore, because Indigenous land base research is supposed to promote Indigenous wellbeing and the connections to the Land, Nature and Culture. Indigenous land base research is also expected to challenge oppressive and exploitative relations in society. It is supposed to encourage researchers to match academic rights and freedom with personal and social responsibility, sensitivity, and commitment to the struggles of Indigenous groups. The tasks of Indigenous land base researchers are not just to understand the Indigenous peoples and their struggles for land, cultural, socio-economic and spiritual freedoms, but also to help end White hegemonic dominations. Thus, researchers cannot achieve these tasks if they continue to maintain the valued free or neutral position in data analyses, interpretations, and reporting. When researchers remain or choose to be apolitical in the face of White colonial dominations and exploitation, then researchers have already taken position to support colonial dominations. Researchers committed to Indigenization make no apology to the claim that they have personal and political interest in both the research outcomes as well as the general wellbeing Indigenous communities. If that makes Indigenous research less scientific, then one should similarly dismiss the works of Max Weber and other Western social scientists, whose Eurocentric values and worldviews were never lost in their research agenda.

Within the context, data analyses, Interpretations and reporting are first and foremost intellectual and political undertakings. All data are subject to multiple interpretations and researchers must work with multiple viewpoints. The data analyses and interpretations must focus not only on

what research participants are saying but also must read the sub-text of what are not always clear but implied. This is why researchers must pay particular attention to the diverse social and historical contexts of what is being said. The researcher can avoid committing errors when the data analysis become a collaborative venture with Elders and Knowledge Holders to help situate voices within diverse social and historical contexts. In reporting the voices, better for researchers to give a context (background) to each voice to personalize the discussion as it is helpful for understanding each voice. Interrogate and where required problematize the stance of the voices that highlight colonial tropes. Work with the meanings brought to bear on the topic of the study and never leave a quote hanging without teasing out in detail the nuances and complexities of the voice. In reporting too, Elders and Knowledge Holders' voices must be centered to help for verification and affirmation of multiple and diverse voices in the research.

Issues of ethics and politics of Research

Ethical issues remain a major component of Indigenous research. There are always moral concerns and dilemmas that researchers face when the topic of study involves human participation (Berg 2001). Among the most serious ethical concerns over the past years is the assurance that research participants are voluntarily involved and have been duly informed of all potential risks involved in the research. In view of that many academic institutions, if not all, have ethical review boards that ensure that researchers have taken all the necessarily precautionary measures to protect the interest of research participants before particular research is approved by the ethical review board. As part of performing their task effectively, members of ethical review board ensure that researchers provide certain information before they are approved to embark on research. This information includes:

First, researchers must assure the ethics review board that the study participation is free will and there are no elements of deceit, fraud, duress, or unfair manipulation to recruit research participants. In view of that researchers are supposed to include *informed consent form* to the application they submit for ethical review. *Informed consent form* contains a written statement of explanation to the effect that the potential risk and benefits in given research have been fully made known to research participants. As a rule, *informed consent form* must be dated and signed by both research participants and the researcher. In the case of research involving minors or mentally impaired, whose exercise of choice is legally governed, the consent form must be endorsed by the person or agency legally authorized to represent the interest of the individual. The *informed consent form* must detail the following information: (a) A statement to the effect that research participants are fully informed of their rights to withdraw from research at any time they feel uncomfortable continuing it without any consequence. (b) A statement to the effect that research participants are informed of their rights to refuse to answer any research question they feel uncomfortable answering. (c) A statement to the effect

that research participants are provided with all the information they need to know about research before they agree to take part in the research.

Second, researchers must show how they will maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participations. Although "confidentiality" is sometimes confused for "anonymity", they are not the same. "Anonymity," is its basic sense, is the effort to ensure that the research participation remain unknown to the public. This means where possible, researchers will remove or modify any information that could review the identity of research participants when reporting the data. "Confidentiality" on the other hands, is an active attempt on the part of researchers to remove from the research records any elements that might link the identity of the research participants and their responses to research questions.

Understandingly, ethics review is meant to protect research community from any harmful research, yet ethical review has woefully failed to protect Indigenous people and their knowledge system from appropriation by researchers. Under the rubric of maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of research participation, local knowledges have been appropriated and patented by academic researchers. The nature of academic settings and its requirements demand that author of research findings is credited with the source of that knowledge. Thus, many researchers have today gained authorial control and discursive authority over Indigenous issues that they have no embody connection to them. We argue that issues of confidentiality and anonymity should not apply in certain cases of research involving Indigenous peoples. Within Indigenous community, there are certain knowledges that belong to the land. Just as all property of the land have custodians, in the same way, certain types of Indigenous knowledges have custodians. Thus, when custodians of Indigenous knowledges agree to share sacred knowledge with a researcher, the researcher must report their names, titles, and their community in the research findings as they are, and not as pseudonyms. Among the Asantes of Ghana, the culture of mentioning the identity of a person who has passed on certain knowledge to another person is not unethical. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear an adage preceded by the name and title of the person who coined the proverb. For instance, *Opanin Kwesi Okyere na oka nsem bi se, woforo dua pa na yepia woto*. (It is Elder Kwesi Okyere who once said, the person who climbs a good tree deserves support). Thus, researchers cannot anonymize custodians of Indigenous knowledges. Their names and title should also be reported in the final research, especially when reporting their names and titles will not in any way harm or affect them. Issues of custodianship and ownership about Indigenous research outcomes must be addressed. Indigenous knowledges belong to the community and individual research cannot claim ownership to it. The Western academic model of protecting and patenting knowledge, in the name of intellectual property, put at risk Indigenous peoples' complete access to outcomes of Indigenous research. These naked intellectual thefts and appropriation of Indigenous

stories and knowledges are part of the reasons Indigenous peoples are very suspicious of academic research and researchers.

Conclusion

We have argued at the beginning of this essay that research as it stands now remains unfavourable subject for Indigenous community. Rightly so, because positivist social science and science research has been responsible for some of the exploitative relations Indigenous people have had with Western world. Historically, social science research emerges from European positivists approach to study social phenomena. The positivists approach as seen in the works of Comte (1875) and Durkheim (1964)) saw scientific theories as a series of logical facts. Thus, only by observing these facts from neutral and valued free positions that researcher can claim to have arrived at the knowledge of logical laws. In this sense, facts that cannot be observed in empirical manner have to be dismissed as myth and unreal. Unfortunately, these Eurocentric ways of viewing the world were applied and used to define what later became known as legitimate knowledge. The effect is that a racial hierarchy was created to privilege White European male version of knowledge over other forms of knowing. Thus, all other forms of knowledge system that were based on different ontology, epistemology and axiology outside Eurocentric knowledge system were dismissed, disparaged, and delegitimized.

Today, Indigenous people have become part of the Western academy and yearning to have a say in how knowledge is defined, validated, and disseminated. There is unstoppable desire on the part of Indigenous learners to prove in the Western academy that Indigenous knowledge systems are as legitimate as Eurocentric system of thought (Dei 2004, Dei et al 2000; Graveline 1998). How do we go about researching Indigenous knowledges? Do we use the same positivists' research tools, which are responsible for disparaging Indigenous peoples, to investigate Indigenous knowledges? How can we use the master's tool to dismantle the masters biased views about Indigenous peoples?

We have recommended in this essay that research in Indigenous communities should redefine research methodologies to be consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing. In this case, all elements of positivist approaches to research that will constrain or dictate to researchers on how, why, where, who, and when to do research in Indigenous communities should be reviewed and reformed to fit local conditions. Furthermore, and probably more importantly, they should be reformed to conform Indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Already in the critical works of many anti-oppression scholars, there have been efforts to re-examine and reform positivist approaches to research to conform to the standard of feminism, antiracism, and anti-colonial research (see essays in Dei and Johal 2005). This essay is no different from what has been done by other critical and transformative researchers. Understandingly, there are still much to be said under this subject, and

hardly can any single work do justice to this issue. We believe this discussion will continue beyond this essay.

In conclusion, Western intellectuals have historically cornered and defined the parameters of research among Indigenous communities. Yet, it has never occurred to them that this near monopoly of defining the tools for research is unethical, intellectually problematic, and morally unacceptable. Today, Indigenous peoples around the globe are demanding that researchers renegotiate with Indigenous peoples on crucial issues such as discursive power, ownership, access, control, and interpretive authority in research. Never again should researchers be allowed to assume that Indigenous communities would accept without questioning the interpretations, meanings, and analyzes they place on research data. Indigenous peoples are now seeking for a central role in the final analyses and reporting of research data. After all, they are partners to the research and should be treated as such by researchers.

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