Transcript: Decolonising Research Methods

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Ros Edwards: I'm Ros Edwards and I'm professor of sociology at Southampton, and I'll be introducing and chairing the session. And I'm going to say a little bit about decolonising methods generally, specifically about interviews within indigenous approaches. And then I'm going to hand over to the two main speakers who are doing, you know, genuinely amazing work, and then we'll take questions and comments from you. So I'm just going to first introduce them before I carry on.

I'd like to introduce Rachel Jane Liebert, who's based at the University of East London and also Massey University in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Rachel will say more about herself and her work later, but she's got a broad commitment to questioning/imagining how we do whiteness and gender and madness, and she's got a lovely website that I recommend that you visit. Rachel is currently PI and co-lead on an AHRC project that explores decolonising of participatory action research and on which I am very lucky to have a support role. And then our other main speaker is Wanda Canton, who is a doctoral student at the University of Brighton, and she's going to talk about the relationship between rap as a decolonial philosophy and subverting knowledges. And Wanda, I think, is really active in this field. And she also has a lovely website, which you should visit.

So moving on, I'm going to assume that I don't need to say much about decolonisation, generally; I've just noted processes on the slide. But one key foundation of decolonisation for this discussion is the understanding that all knowledges and ways of finding out about the world are grounded in the specificities of people's worldviews. But western knowledges/worldviews are recognised, they're accorded more legitimacy and privilege over others, and indigenous ways of finding out about and accounting for the world are marginalised. So decolonising knowledges is about challenging our perceptions of what counts as knowledge and how it's generated. And decolonising and indigenous approaches to research raise a whole set of questions around who initiates and owns research issues, whose interest the research is carried out in and who is it for, who has control of the research, how are the power relations and decisions negotiated, what counts as knowledge, who's being transformed by it, and whose is the authorial voice.

Now, where interviews as a research method, where these take place within the western dominant methodological mode, then it's part of a worldview that is asserting a set of universally applicable rules about what counts as legitimate research and as knowledge and that sort of imperial cultural paradigm and the power processes from which this abstracted universal reality springs. In fact, they're there, but they are rendered invisible. In contrast to that is indigenous and African-based methodologies, which are rooted in the worldviews of their peoples. There is acknowledgement of diverse intellectual sets of knowledges, methodologies are contextualised and there are non-extractive ways of finding out about the world. And these methodologies are in the service of transformative research because the aim is to understand the constellation of oppressions and injustices that stem from colonialism to identify the struggles and resistances to them and to address social and environmental processes and relations and transformations.

Now, if you're interested in how this applies to statistics, then I really recommend Maggie Walter's work, but we're focusing here on qualitative methods. So I hope you gathered that interviews that are conducted within western modes of research, they are quite a different endeavour from what seems to be the same process of data creation that's enacted within an indigenous

methodological approach. And Bagele Chilisa, who is a Botswanan scholar, has argued that the dominant, the conventional interview method is founded in asymmetrical interviewer/interviewee relations and that standard academic disciplinary theories and terms and concepts, they are what counts in shaping interview questions. And she says that the established rules and codes that are drawn from the western archive of the knowledge systems and values, that's what frames the very idea of interviews and they shape interview practices that are individualistic, they're outside of relationality and they're devoid of context. They are supposed to float above it.

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And, you know, I'm using the terms here for ease of communication, but from an indigenous perspective, the idea of and the term of 'research' and 'interview' is loaded. It's associated with colonial appropriation and exploitation. And in an indigenous knowledges paradigm, what those of us who are schooled in these dominant ideas think of as one-to-one and group interviews, they flow from a conventional conversational method that's based in oral storytelling, sharing stories as a deep means of knowledge-sharing between individuals and groups, and relationality and context, assisting and being accountable to others are really crucial in this.

So this is a quote from Margaret Kovach, who's a Canadian academic of First Nation ancestry, and she's explaining in this quote that interviewing in an indigenous approach is integrally linked through to an indigenous worldview. And a core issue is the relationship between methodology and epistemology. You can't just lift indigenous methods of whatever sort out of the soil in which they're rooted. Now, as well as the link to particular situated knowledges, Kovach puts forward in that quote six further characteristics of interviews within an indigenous framework: relationality; purpose; protocols; informality and flexibility; collaboration and dialogue; and reflexivity. And, for example, she notes that the conventional preparation for research where you're using interviews might include ideas about doing a literature review, designing the study, the relevance to the disciplinary theory, the appropriate techniques for obtaining and analytically extracting knowledge, and so on. But she says with indigenous approaches, there are preparations that are relational, such as participating in ceremonies, and clear planning for how the research and the researcher will give back to the community.

So, for example, Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng'andu have identified four types of research yarning processes, which is a particular indigenous conversational method. There's social, which is the before the research yarning. There's the research topic, which is what we would consider the semi or unstructured interview yarning. There's therapeutic yarning, which involves emotional disclosure during the research. And there's collaborative yarning, which is about the research and the research findings at various points.

But taking this further, Teah Carlson, who is co-lead of the Tipuna project with Rachel, she's explained to me that the underlying spirit within a Māori way of doing things from a Kaupapa Māori research perspective and interviews as part of that, that it concerns shifts of power across a range of material, non-material, effectual, relational and decisional ways. And it means a deep respect for human and non-human relationships and connections and being accountable to them. And it invokes the building and the sustenance of relationships. So the interviews are seen as inter-views, as an interweaving of views and energy, strangers of breath as you speak, and movement, and not just a gathering of words. So there are ethical considerations around safety and protection, aiming for a safe, comfortable interview experience for indigenous participants to counter the worry and the nerves and the context of historical trauma and violence.

So I want to move towards the finish by saying a bit more about accountability and how that might position me and other non-indigenous others who are interested in colonising research interviews and indigenous approaches. At the top of the slide is an acknowledgement of the people who've

taken time personally to help me think about decolonisation and indigenous approaches to knowledge, especially Kaupapa Māori ways of making sense of the world. And one issue that I find both fundamental and challenging about indigenous approaches such as Kaupapa Māori research is, as I say, accountability. As peoples with more relational worldviews can see knowledge about experiences and traditions as held by and having implications for the group and environment as a whole, and accountability and responsibility is held in common. And so, as I understand it, a Māori researcher is accountable to their research subjects and to the wider environment and non-human in a very different way to me.

So Helen Moewaka Barnes, who's a significant Māori scholar for my learning, she's explained to me that she carries her wider family connections or whakapapa with her, and her actions aren't just her own, as you can see from the quote on the slide. And there's also a similar accountability that's captured in the quote from Margaret Kovach on that slide. So as an academic who's entrenched in western models of ethical practice, I don't have that deep sense of accountability investment generationally and communally in quite the same way. So if I acted badly, which I hope I don't, but if I did, then my university and my professional association will see that as a breach of academic and disciplinary regulations, but it's me as an individual who bears the damaged reputation; it's not my past and present and future allegiances and contexts.

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So I would say that for a non-indigenous researcher, it is possible to engage with decolonising interview methods with attention to who owns and produces and uses and benefits from their practice through reflection on who we are and the effects of how we see interview methods, and through allyship and through indigenous and non-indigenous research partnerships. So these are the references that are to underlie the things that I've been saying. There's a lot more I'd like to say, but I'm going to rein myself in because I'm sure that, like me, you want to hear from Rachel and Wanda. So I've unshared my screen and I'm going to hand over to Rachel to speak about the Tipuna project.

Rachel Liebert: Tēnā koutou katoa, mihi mai mihi mai mihi mai, e ngā kaiwhakahaere o tenei hui, tēnā koutou. I just want to say thanks for having me, hi to everyone and acknowledging the guardians of this hui, of this collective, this kōrero that we're going to have this afternoon. So not just Ros and the folks who helped to put together the Zoom, put out the invites, but also the ancestors of the lands that we're all standing on, our own ancestors who are in the space with us, and all those folks and all that labour that we can't see that goes on behind the scenes in this kind of talk. So kia ora, thanks very much.

So, yeah, as Ros said, I have the honour of being a co-lead of the Tipuna project, which is a project around intergenerational healing, settler accountability and decolonising participatory action research. Tipuna is te reo Māori, which is the indigenous language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. 'Tipuna' means ancestor. So I just want to give you a little bit of background about who Teah and I are. So I mentioned I'm co-lead of this project. The other lead is Dr Teah Carlson. And so when I asked Teah what imagery she would like me to use to introduce her, and when giving an overview of this project, she sent through the collective of images that you see at the top, which is of her most recent birth to Tengaru ariki, who is her beautiful new babe. She is a mama of four, and they range from Wiremu, who is 16 and is also the wonderful artist behind the imagery that you saw on the previous screen, all the way down to Tengaru, who now must be around about six/seven months. Teah is a Kaupapa Māori researcher and evaluator and she whakapapas to the east coast of Aotearoa/New Zealand in Te Ika-o-Māui.

So if you look on the right-hand side, top right-hand corner, there's an image, there's a map of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Some of you who are familiar with the shape of Aotearoa will realise that

it might look what we consider to be upside-down. So the way that the kind of colonial mapping of New Zealand is often the other way, but within a Māori cosmology, Aotearoa, which is the indigenous name, is actually this way up. So the bottom island in this image, Te Ika-a-Māui, Teah whakapapas to just the kind of the big knobbly bit on the left-hand side, and that is known as Tairāwhiti. And her ancestral lines go from Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Ngāti Porou and Waikato-Tainui through there.

And then the bottom set of images are ones that I chose to represent myself. So I whakapapa to Ireland and Scotland and England mainly, and also to Germany. This project was really inspired through my ancestors by my maternal lineage, who were Irish missionaries who travelled down through Gujarat in India and played a prominent role in the colonisation of those lands and peoples before then moving on to Aotearoa, where they landed in Ngāi Tahu land in Te Waipounamu, which is the uppermost island you see in the map there. And they were also missionaries.

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And the inspiration for this project really did come quite literally from my bones. In 2016, I was diagnosed with a serious arthritic condition that I inherited through my maternal ancestors, and I came to understand that condition as being one where I'm being asked by my bones, by my iwi, because the word for 'bones' in te reo Māori is 'iwi', which means 'tribe', so by my ancestors to listen, that they have a story to tell and my job is to learn how to listen. So ever since then, I've been experimenting with kind of more-than-human creative practices to learn how to commune with my ancestors, and this project has kind of grown a lot out of those bones and has really been about kind of building community and building accountability around this ancestral praxis.

So just very quickly, I was born and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau in Aotearoa, which is in Te Ika-a-Māui, which is the bottom island in the map. And I was raised by my mum, a single mama, with my three brothers, and then she's the person holding the big giant cat there. And on the right-hand side of her is Rangitoto, which is a maunga, a mountain that I used to see every single day when I was living in Tāmaki Makaurau, and a lot of folks do, and I think of this maunga as almost having like whangai-ed or adopted myself and my three brothers and really helped my mum to raise us. And then to the right-hand side of that are my own children. So being a mama really is a massive point of connection and a massive priority for Teah and I. It's not unusual for us to both be breastfeeding our babies while we're having our korero and figuring out what to do next on the Tipuna project. So that's us.

And down the right-hand side are all the incredible people who have kind of played an explicit role in the project so far, but there are, of course, so many, many more who aren't named. So, yeah, I will… Actually, before we move on, this is a question for all of you out there. This is who we are. But ko wai tātou, who are you? I'd really love to know what your relationship is to colonisation, and I wonder if folks might be up for just raising your hand in regards to these kind of questions about your ancestors, so just if people identify as having ancestors who were colonised, who were colonisers, who were enslaved or who were enslavers. So I'm going to ask each of those four questions in a row, and if you are someone who has those ancestors, if you could just raise your hand. I'm not going to ask anyone to speak, or anything; it's just to get a sense of who's in the room, yeah, and their relationship to colonisation.

So if you have ancestors who were colonised, with a 'd', could you raise your hand? Thank you. Great, thank you. And, of course, you can say yes to more than one. And if you had ancestors who were colonisers, could you raise your hand? Okay. And ancestors who were enslaved? And ancestors who were enslavers? Great. Thank you. Thanks, all. So I imagine you all were looking at the numbers as I was then too. And so, yeah, it seems like out of folks who participated in that

exercise, the majority of folks identify as having ancestors who were colonised, and then the next, ancestors who were colonisers. So the Tipuna project is really about forefronting our ancestral connections to colonisation, but also, more broadly, thinking about how an ancestral practice might contribute to decolonisation.

Okay, so he aha te kaupapa, why are we doing this, why ancestors? So Teah and I talk about how coloniality is structured by a hierarchy of knowers, knowing and knowledge that violently denigrates indigenous ways of being in the world. So this KKK hierarchy - and, no, the acronym is not a coincidence, it is to explicitly evoke white supremacy - it's premised on a figure-cum-standard of the human as one who is separate from flesh, past and cosmos. Countering coloniality therefore requires counter practices, and this is from Nelson Maldonado Torres, that open up multiple other forms of being human.

So we see promising counter practices in these three things: the Kaupapa Māori wairua approach that attends to expressions of the unseen and research including ancestors; Kaupapa Māori and other embodied practices for healing intergenerational trauma and people with colonised and/or enslaved ancestors. So these practices have already been successful within Kaupapa Māori services as well as in racial and healing justice movements in the US and the UK. And then the third kind of promise we are wondering about is engaging settler ancestors through pagan cosmologies. So through my work with whiteness, in particular… So, as I mentioned, I was born and raised in Aotearoa/New Zealand, I have settler ancestors. However, I've spent the last 16 years living in the US and in the UK and I've just moved back there this year, in part, to do this project with Teah. And in trying to do decolonising work and anti-racist work in those contexts, particularly here in the UK, it's become very apparent that we need more than cognitive modes of building accountability with white folks, as otherwise we're just reproducing this KKK hierarchy and, therefore, this kind of figure-cum-standard of the human and, in particular, a human that is masterful and innocent. And those are two very problematic white ways of being within coloniality.

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And also we're wondering if there's promise within pagan... These are European pagan cosmologies that might help us to avoid the trappings of trauma. If we just draw on these practices that are being used in the intergenerational trauma fields that I mentioned above… Some folks are doing that within the US, white folks are doing that within the US, but we believe that it risks centring a kind of white victimhood. I think we have to be very, very careful when we work with whiteness. It's very slippery and it's very quick to co-opt practices and reproduce them for white supremacy and coloniality. So we're trying to find other ways of engaging settler ancestors. And also we are trying to be wary of the risk of appropriation, which, obviously, just reproduces colonial extraction and theft. So what does it mean to draw on practices, pagan practices that come from our own ancestral lineage? So these are the three areas where we see promise and the project has kind of been built around this.

So he aha te tikanga, how are we doing this? So we're using PAR as both a methodology and a case study and we're asking these overarching questions, this over-arching question, sorry: what are the decolonial possibilities and complexities of including ancestors as co-researchers in PAR? So the 'we' within our project is currently a co-researcher collective of approximately ten 'decolonial practitioners', and I can talk more about that phrase later, five Māori and five Pākehā, and our ancestors. So you can see from this that the way we understand decolonising research methods, or at least the way we're doing it in this project, is the word 'decolonising' as an adjective. So we're trying to think about how we do decolonisation through our research methods, how do we collect, analyse, report data in ways that dismantle rather than reproduce coloniality - KKK, as in that hierarchy of knowing, knower and knowledge - can we change our methods as a way to change/disrupt this episteme.

As we were designing this project, we were… So the project was designed for the AHRC, so they put out a call, they were looking to fund collaborations between non-indigenous researchers based in the UK - that's me - and indigenous researchers based elsewhere, and they wanted it to be a three-year project. And those of you who do PAR will know how it feels oxymoronic to write a kind of plan and a proposal for PAR, and it's the same with drawing on that Kaupapa Māori methodology, as well. So we were kind of doing this dance of trying to say what we might do, but also trying to leave it very open and keep emphasising that it's an emergent process and everything will be decided by the collective and will be responsive to feedback that we get from each other, community, the world as we go.

However, in this designing project, there was this really key moment for me where Teah wrote a comment in our Google Doc and she said something like, "This reminds me of the words, the reflections that Captain James Cook," who is the person who is kind of known for having, I guess, led the scientific expeditions that ultimately led to the colonisation of not just Aotearoa, but many other places around the world, which some of you will be familiar with, and that after his… She said, "This reminds me of his reflections after he killed my tipuna." And she wrote about his reflections on how it was, effectively, better to have a dead native than a native who thinks that they're superior to us Europeans. And this comment was so… I can't even find the words for it and it actually makes me feel tearful because it really brought in the violence of coloniality. And I realised at that time that I had been kind of hustling to write the proposal and hadn't really sat with how violent it was and is.

And, therefore, what we were really asking when we were asking… Of course, we're all sitting here with all our ancestors anyway - this project is just about making them explicit - but what is it really doing when we're trying to ask both Māori and Pākehā to be in a room together and their ancestors, and what are we actually asking of Māori and asking of indigenous ancestors when we do that, to be in the same room as someone who killed them, killed their people? And so it was a real defining moment in the design of the project.

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And we decided from there that we would split the project into three spaces and there would be a Māori space, a Pakeha space and a relational space. And so the Māori and Pakeha co-researchers would work in parallel, and then as and when Māori, in particular, are ready, and maybe they never will be, we will move into a relational space and work together. So this model is based on Matike Mai, or it's drawing on the guidance of Matike Mai. Matike Mai is a Māori-led movement for constitutional transformation that's happening right now in Aotearoa. It's really exciting. And the vision of Matike Mai is to have a constitution, have, I suppose, a government structure that is set up that has these three spaces - a Māori space, a Pakeha space or a tauiwi space or a non- Māori space, and a relational space.

And this vision came out of hui, came out of meetings with over 10,000 Māori throughout the motu, throughout the country, and it is all about trying to respect the Treaty of Waitangi, which was the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand that was signed between… It was an agreement between the British crown and Māori leaders signed in 1840 where the British crown guaranteed Māori sovereignty. And so the British crown turned around and broke that promise immediately and actually have tried to convince successions of New Zealanders afterwards that the treaty was actually about Māori ceding sovereignty. This is absolutely not true; It's about respecting Māori sovereignty in Aotearoa. So Matike Mai is the culmination of ongoing anti-colonial resistance movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand to manifest this promise and this vision of the Treaty of Waitangi. So we are, out of both wanting to tautoko Matike Mai, wanting to support it, but also wanting to have its wisdom kind of guide us, we are also structuring our project based on these three spaces.

So the project, we've said, will be structured over three years. We've just begun it - sorry, I don't think I said that - in February this year, so we're early, early stages. We're at the point now of what we call finding our people, which is recruiting our co-researchers. So is actually a value that Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes about in 'Decolonising Methodologies'. She isn't the one who… Actually, I can't quite recall who put it down on paper, but she's published it in her book. Titiro, whakarongo, korero means 'look, listen and speak'. So in the first year, it's about learning ancestral practices either from Kaupapa Māori, from embodied practices which I talked about earlier or from kind of pagan cosmologies. The second one is about us using those practices to invite, welcome, fully engage our ancestors as co-researchers in a PAR project - that's the whakarongo, the listening phase - in year two/phase two. And the third phase is to have a kind of pop-up public space where the public can also experiment with communing with their ancestors as a way to create a space for dialogue and action around decolonisation. So throughout, all co-researchers will be journaling in a form of their choosing.

So an important commitment to the project is to ground it in the methodology of wananga. So wananga are spaces for the relational, collective, wise transmission of knowledge, including between human and non-human, and it's both a noun and a verb, so it's kind of hard to describe. But the reason it's important for our project is it allows us to continually power shift back to indigenous rules and protocols and also the land and, therefore, to indigenous sovereignty. So while we're mixing kind of indigenous and non-indigenous methods, we are always wanting to be grounded in wananga. And if you could just flip to the next page, this is Teah's image. Teah drew this image to represent the project. So you can see we have the three spheres and then we have titiro whakarongo kokero, the three phases. And Teah writes in her caption there about Papatūānuku, who is our Earth mama, binding our connection to the land and environment, reminding us to first look and listen and then speak, while Matariki, the star cluster, is our kind of constant through change, and atua of the winds, you know, Hineomairangi and Tawhirimātea, they boundary our relational spaces. So we're always trying to do the kind of non-human and the more than human in our process as well as, yeah, in our outputs in terms of involving ancestors.

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Just to say that another important commitment is knowledge-sharing throughout, because this acknowledges and interrupts the potential for research to be violent against indigenous peoples. And if you could flip to the next slide, please, Ros. The picture in the background, by the way, is what the moon is up to here in England tonight, and it's a waning gibbous moon, and it's known as a moon of retribution or dissemination, and it's a time for intuition, reflection within Celtic cosmology - a time for intuition, reflection, making amends. So I thought it was really timely, actually, for us to be doing this talk today.

And so when I'm starting to kind of reflect on the process so far, I think about how much this process of designing the project and starting it has made me just realise just how much these colonial binaries, these colonial borders are just permeating through the western research process, and so how much we're trying all the time to kind of disrupt those. In particular, if you look at the bottom, by bringing in, we're not just talking about knowledge, right, and knowing, but we're talking about being, we're talking about relating. So that if we want to do decolonising research methods, it can't just be about how we're kind of doing the data collection and analysis and what kind of knowledge we're producing. It has to be about how *we* are doing it, who we are and *how* we are being as people, but also how we are in relation to each other and in relation to non-human ancestors - Earth mama.

So there's just one last slide and it is a list of questions that I currently have, yeah, so far in this process, but I'll leave those there because of time. Thanks.

Ros Edwards: So I'm going to hand straight over to Wanda to continue on, and then we'll come back to the questions that Rachel has posed and other questions you might want to raise.

Wanda Canton: Thank you very much for having me here. Thank you for being here. So I'm doing a PhD at the University of Brighton, which, in part, explores what rap music might tell us about the criminal justice system and how to better respond to violence and conflict. Essentially, I work within the disciplines of criminology, psychoanalysis and musicology. My work primarily explores abolitionist politics, which, in a nutshell - and we can go into this a little bit more perhaps later - is the movement against the criminal justice system and its components. So I'm going to be using that to outline some thoughts on decoloniality and its methods, which is, effectively, building on a paper that I recently published for the 'Interfere: Journal', which is available for free online and it's linked at the bottom or somewhere or your screen 'interferejournal.org', in which I'm considering the implications for rap music and hip hop scholarship, in particular, in the context of decoloniality.

So this paper was written because I was thinking a lot about the significance of rap and its positioning within academia. My concern is, and I think this is worth saying from the outset, that applying the standards of decoloniality too rigidly might inadvertently overlook the apolitical or even problematic genres or artists. So within my work, I am looking most centrally at UK drill, which is a genre of rap you may or may not be familiar with, but it's widely been accused of perpetuating knife violence in the UK and is heavily criminalised and censored. For me then, it seems pointless to argue that drill doesn't contain aggressive or outright violent imagery and lyrics, but from my perspective as an abolitionist, I'm working to advocate that the criminalisation and censorship of this rap is not only futile; it actually perpetuates the violence it claims to prevent. So when I come across arguments that rap should be defended because it's decolonial, I worry that this doesn't do anything to protect, even if we're critical, drill or other subgenres. Hopefully, that will make sense by the end, but who knows? Let's give it a go.

So within this discussion of decolonial method, my caution is, to some degree, to consider - and this has been echoed already by the other speakers - who decides what is decolonial, why does it matter, what are the repercussions for methods which do not consistently fit decolonial framework. So, as an overview, I will look at what is decoloniality as opposed to post-colonialism, what does this mean for methodology or some strategies that I'm thinking through, the context of hip hop scholarship, and I'll interweave my work throughout. So although I'm not suggesting that there are contradictions or opposites, I do want to distinguish decoloniality from post-colonialism. So whilst there are commonalities between both, particularly in challenging the logic of colonialism, there are distinct differences which have implications for their methods. So post-colonialism fundamentally refers to the intellectual contributions of scholars, primarily from the Middle East and South Asia. And these scholars offer analysis of particular historical events from the perspective of colonised people.

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Now, this shifts the assumption and knowledge of the sociopolitical contexts. However, it does not necessarily attack the sites or framework of knowledge itself. For example, it might change the membership and scholars of academia without deconstructing academia itself. In this situation, the theoretical framework of the global north might remain intact even if they're applied from an entirely different perspective. So an example, which I'm not married to - I'm happy to debate - would be Fanon, whose work I definitely am inspired by - clearly, one of the most influential post-colonial thinkers - but still utilises psychoanalysis and psychiatry. So although the 'post' in post-colonialism is not claiming that racism and colonialism are over, for me it does suggest something being after the fact. So it denotes, to me at least, this kind of sentiment of recovery or addition or diversion.

'Decoloniality', on the other hand, would dispute these frameworks should be reapplied at all. Instead, as Mignolo puts it, and I quote, 'It is not enough to change the content of the conversation. It is of the essence to change the terms of the conversation.' So, basically, it's not enough to change the narrator of the story without deconstructing the story itself, or to quote Audre Lorde, 'His master's tools will never dismantle his master's house'. So decoloniality has been developed by thinkers in the global south more broadly, but also racialised groups in the west within which I would include rappers. So the use of 'decoloniality' suggests that something is incomplete and that deconstruction continues to be necessary. Decoloniality is not satisfied with the so-called achievement of modernity because it views them as Eurocentric, it problematises notions of this rational, scientific, objective concept which is assumed to be universal or to privilege western ideas of knowledge and philosophy over others.

So 'epistemology', which I'm going to be saying a lot, refers to the theory of knowledge itself. There is a reason I'm using this word. Sometimes when I say it, I can hear people just switch off and are just like, "I don't want to talk about it." That's kind of my point, like why do we keep on coming back to this term. So epistemology is being the theory of knowledge itself. Post-colonialism certainly challenges what we know and who produces knowledge, whilst decoloniality, I would argue, is more concerned with how we come to know it, with a focus on deconstructing academia, in some cases, as a central site of knowledge.

So criminologists such as Ferrell, for example, have provocatively advocated to kill method, and this means challenging research or what Ferrell refers to as fetishised methodologies, and these are those that put the scientific method on a pedestal as though they could be free of error or bias. In fact, one of the most interesting but perhaps uncomfortable implications for decolonial methods is tolerating uncertainty, mistakes, misdirection and the unpredictable. These are often not only devalued, but seen as an active problem, particularly in the increasing privatisation of education and universities and the pressures on researchers to be financially productive. And I think this kind of the point I was making at the very beginning also.

Something I've come across as a frontline worker or a service manager is having to evidence impact in order to bolster commissioning, so the funds that are used to pay for services, but simultaneously utilising tools or numerical frameworks which simply cannot encapsulate the nuances and the humanity of the poor services. And this is at odds with the open curiosity of decoloniality. Katherine McKittrick, who I refer to quite a lot and I'll write her name in the chat later, explained that what is of importance is, and I quote, 'not to master knowing and centralise our knowingness, but to share how we know'. And this idea of the sharing how we know, I'm going to come back to. So decoloniality deconstructs the logic and formula of so-called modernity by questioning what is known through lived embodied experiences which don't necessarily conform to and should not be colonised into existing academic frameworks. Rather, McKittrick claims that forms such as poetry, music, art, cultural spaces enable us to groom and to feel forms of knowledge, particularly those embodied by people of colour.

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So what does this look like in practice? I'm going to make three kind of key points. Creativity as participatory - my favourite word to say, watch me struggle - the independence of non-text text and authorship and citations. So in her work, 'Dear Science', which is not so much about science at all, in a way, McKittrick plays with poetry, footnotes, structure, or the lack of structure, as a way to decolonise or deconstruct the text itself. So I do recognise as a slight sidebar that this is probably not my most innovative presentation. Usually, I would try to include something that's more interactive or music-based, but as a sound artist, we can be a little bit particular about our audio and on Zoom sometimes that can be an issue, but if you would like to see an example, I have something on YouTube if you just put my name in or I can link it to you later as an example

of something I'm talking about, so using kind of creative methods in how we present. But that's also why I'm not using that style today.

So creativity, by its very nature, encourages forms of play, experimentation and, at times, uncertainty. This can diversify the way in which we communicate and share ideas through visual-audio experiential means, but also provide participatory methods - that was quite well said, 'participatory methods' - whereby those who may not ordinarily engage with academic research or themes can be involved not simply as consumers, but as producers of knowledge. So I've included here an image referring to reggae sound system, and this is to kind of represent or to acknowledge the wealth of literature that has considered how reggae sound systems operate on a collaborative basis, whereby the crowd or the audience respond to a DJ selector, and vice versa. So the music itself becomes a co-creative space rather than it being a kind of a passive experience, which is more evident in commercial clubs, for example.

However, this should not be mistaken as simply involving non-academic participants, which can sometimes feel quite patronising. Rather, engaging those from different disciplines or people that we don't agree with, basically. For example, I have audio-visual presentations like the one I mentioned, which are made to encourage scholars of art history to reconsider any misconceptions of rap music by trying to involve them in both creating and listening to it, rather than just providing a formal rational defence. And this isn't to say that I don't also subscribe to written academic formats - clearly, I'm talking about a journal article, so I do - but that I'm trying to consider other means of discussion which can complement or innovate the expected format. And I'm also making a point here, which I haven't fully formulated, but around how our peers as academics and as researchers, like what's the level of participation there.

So I teach criminology - this is the second point. Often my students… I encourage my students to engage with what I call non-text texts. Unfortunately for them, this doesn't mean entirely dismissing the key reading, but rather this is about recognising that there's a wealth of knowledge and experience which isn't typically represented in academic reading or in their reading list, for example. So podcasts, documentaries, music exhibitions where incarcerated people can speak for themselves on their own terms rather than being spoken about or for. So the image that you can see in the middle is of Ear Hustle, which is a podcast made in San Quentin Prison. Significantly in decoloniality. these texts and materials should not be designated as add-ons or evidence to bolster something that already exists, but be valued as sources or forms of knowledge in and of themselves.

A really important point here is the right to disagree. So I used to produce a podcast called 'Women in Prison' and I was exploring how we we're using recorded sound as a way to support women to speak for themselves rather than me going consulting and then writing something in isolation. I didn't agree with everything that was said. Certainly, as an abolitionist and having worked in prisons, not every prisoner is an abolitionist. This independent (inaudible 0:48:59) assumptions or priorities of academics. So even if we think about research questions, for example, like how are we formulating those - and I'm going to come back to this again later - just as we accept our academic colleagues will problematise and criticise our work, we must also ensure the same freedom of thought is encouraged for participants of research.

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And this links to the final point about authorship and citations. If my work is primarily focussed on rap music, why would it not cite rappers as key experts and thinkers? So in my recent paper, I explore rap subversion of the dominant discourse around policing as an example, and so I reference N.W.A, who you can see in the third picture, who you might be familiar with as the creators of the song 'Fuck Tha Police'. Of course, in research we want to ensure that we are

considering peer-reviewed materials, but in decolonial work we have to take care that this doesn't result in dismissing or speaking for other voices. A non-academic text does not mean that it is not specialist or credible, but it may face obstacles in entering academic fields. Decolonial methods calls for us to consider how to recognise authorship and inclusion in research citation which does not only privilege academics as experts.

A slight sidebar, when I'm transcribing freestyles, for example, it's just there's, so much is lost. Like number one, you basically can't do it. Number two, all the lyrics, the rhythm, every beat to the bar gets completely lost when you transcribe it into an academic text. So my point here is, as well, like what happens if you're just squishing all this knowledge and this music, like what methodological and ethical problems does this raise? So, hopefully, you can see how the three things below are interlinked and also how they begin to demonstrate the relevance of rap.

Okay. So in my recent paper, I work through three, because it's my favourite number, probably, key reason. I noticed that Rachel said a lot of threes too - I was here for that. I worked through three propositions, literally and visually striking through each one as I find problems and shortcomings, which I'll show you what I mean by that in a sec. So my intention was to involve the reader in my thinking, like in a maths exam where you show your working out and not just the answer. And I consider this consistent with the decolonial method of subverting written texts, encouraging participation and tolerating uncertainty.

So I begin with the assumption that rap is a decolonial epistemology. I said earlier epistemology being a theory of knowledge. Many scholars will refer to rap as a radical political medium, but I was concerned with how this might defend rap, which is more reactionary or problematic, which is what I mentioned at the beginning. So rap itself is a method and not a genre. There are numerous genres from hip hop to drill, but even within these individual themes, there is no unified party line. For example, gangsta rap and conscious rap - I don't like either of these terms, but anyway - they might both be hip hop, but they're completely different in lyrics and tone. And, respectively, the artist in each of these sub genres would differ with their content and message.

So I've included an image of 6ix9ine, who I'm going to again return to in a minute, as an example of a rapper who I would say embodies a contemporary stereotypical gangsta rapper, which I do not consider decolonial, as distinct from artists like Mos Def, Lupe Fiasco, Mic Righteous, Lowkey, who explicitly discuss politics, and defiantly so. They are all rappers, but clearly their genres are significantly distinct. Therefore, from the outset we can say that rap is not a theory of knowledge or an ideological doctrine, but this does not mean that it doesn't have political implications or a radical component; to some degree, it's the opposite. So I'm currently working on a book, which I hope to publish at some point, which explores precisely this. So who has political agency and how is it acknowledged or recognised in those who do not purport to be activists? And I'm particularly interested in sonic agency, so the political outcomes of sound irrespective of the intention or the purpose. However, the point here is that I'm not convinced that rap by default is a decolonial epistemology because it does not provide a centralised theory of knowledge itself, which, by the way, could be one of the good things about it.

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So I question whether rap decolonises epistemology. This would, effectively, mean subverting dominant discourse and challenging ideas of racialised groups, in other words what is known about such things as race and racism. Certainly, as I argue, rap does challenge norms and ideas, especially around the police, particularly in the context of race and racism and brutality, but it may also be shaped by a white-dominated commercial industry which, effectively, regulates what type of rapper, what image of blackness is financed and promoted. So it's really important here not to ignore the commodification of racist stereotypes which conflate blackness with things like gangs

and violence, and we have to acknowledge the valid criticism of black communities who experience the repercussions in everyday life of these depictions.

So 6ix9ine, who I showed earlier, is an infamous example, I would say, of rappers who commodify and embody racialised caricatures. 6ix9ine has notoriously been affiliated with gangs as well as the objectification and even abuse of women and girls. On the other hand, criticising stereotype without nuance, especially as though it were limited to rap, which it is not, might fail to account for the subversive element of working-class black artists appropriating the wealth and status that is usually reserved for the white middle class, so, for example, rappers like Jay-Z or 50 Cent who are entrepreneurs now and have often talked about how music elevated their business ventures in comparison to the childhood that they had. And it's also worth noting that many drillers refer to their music as being a way out of the life.

Clearly, grotesque displays of wealth which retain this kind of standard of consumerism or lifestyles that are unattainable to most people is not decolonial, but we have to be careful not to dismiss the subversive component of even problematic personas. Effectively, through this kind of like this hyper visualisation, the general lack or the wider discrepancy is revealed. This, in part, also relates to assumptions or a further question about rappers and their purpose or ambition, which includes making deductions or unwelcome differentiation between good and bad rap. And I'm critical of hip hop scholarship which forcibly applies frameworks and discipline onto rap, thus inadvertently colonising it.

Mignolo wrote, and I think this is a really, really key quote, 'intellectual colonisation remains in place even if such colonisation is well-intended, comes from the left and supports decolonisation'. So in the process of trying to decolonise, we may inadvertently colonise. An example for me would be the over-analysis of rap music according to disciplines such as literature or anthropology; rap becomes the object of study rather than a contributor. And just as a personal anecdote, I remember studying poetry at school and spending the entire lesson talking about the coordinating conjunction in the initial position, which is the word 'but', and having written music and poetry and rap my whole life, I have never, ever thought, "I know what I need - a coordinating conjunction in the initial position." So, effectively, what happened is that any of my spontaneity or the rhythm of my choices were completely lost to this theorisation, which, effectively, eclipses any true purpose, feeling or context.

I also think there's something - and, again, it's not fully formulated - but I have a feeling that this kind of language around clever constructions of rap is particularly used in discourse relating to white rappers. So, for example, Eminem, Mac Miller, Macklemore, lots of them are often talked about as if they're genius, and I wonder how that can be contrasted with other rappers. This also raises the question of whether rappers want to be included as sources or data to research projects or theory and whether they are being invited into discussions that they already have a right to and are being denied ownership to as though rap can just become this tool or a sexy case study, but not the foundation of theory itself. Like I said, it becomes a contributor or consumer of ideology, but not the producer. So that is, effectively, that rap is interpreted, transcribed or translated through the lens of a separate framework rather than being the source.

I also write in the paper about the potential tokenism of giving honorary degrees to rappers such as Stormzy, who, if you don't know, is a UK grime artist. During his graduation, he was referred to only by his birth name, Michael, which, as far as I'm concerned, amounts to divorcing his achievements and roots in UK grime. It's as though his stage name, Stormzy, had to be dropped in order for him to be credible and to have a right to that academic space, so he becomes 'Michael'. Stormzy had established a scholarship for black students to attend Cambridge University, and whilst this is admirable, particularly given that in the UK a meagre 1%, that's 1%,

of UK professors are black - one! However, this still celebrates the university as a space to aspire to.

This is similar to rappers like Akala, whose book you can see in the image, who promote formal education and reading as a means of freedom, and, actually, I go into this a little bit in the paper, which I'm extremely unpopular for. But, actually, Akala also criticises other rappers in the process in order to elevate education. Irrespective of whether or not we agree with his stance, and certainly it would be highly problematic for me as a white academic to discourage black scholarship, which is not what I'm doing, we can nevertheless see that it is not decolonial, per se, - postcolonial, maybe. But diversifying academia is not the same as deconstructing it, even though there's not necessarily a problem in seeking either of these things. And if we return to the example of Stormzy, whilst I'm critical of the way in which his grime credentials were whitewashed, he nevertheless has rightfully claimed space on major stages like Glastonbury as well as universities through his achievement as a grime MC, a genre which, by the way, has historically been criminalised and dismissed. And he has consistently used these platforms as a grime MC to bring attention to issues, including Grenfell, which he addressed directly during his 2018 BRIT Awards performance. So I'm definitely not dismissing… I really rate Stormzy; let me be very clear on that. I think he's great. But I'm also not romanticising all rap and rappers as decolonial when it isn't or they aren't necessarily.

So I settle on a final proposition that rap is epistemic and its methods have decolonising properties. It may not be consistent or dogmatic, which, again, could be a good thing, but rap does communicate a range of experiences across genres and historical or geographical contexts. It is therefore epistemic. And because I'm no longer suggesting that it is decolonial by default, what I'm not doing is foreclosing the significance of other forms of rap music which may have problematic lyrics. These, by the way, can still be epistemic and a form of lived experience or knowledge. So by removing this expectation that it has to be whatever is perceived as decolonial, we can still actually listen to and acknowledge what is being reflected, even if we disagree with it. So by conceptualising rap as a method and lyrics or genres as a theoretical framework, this enables a range of music to be included, including those that are ordinarily dismissed as problematic. This also enables or expands rap's capacity to engage with a variety of academic subjects rather than being limited to linguistic or sociological subjects. So, for example, I'm exploring what rap knows of crime epistemically, how rap discusses crime within and responds to crime, which is methodologically, and therefore how rap can effectively take that criminological position. I hope that kind of makes sense.

Okay. Just to wrap up, to persevere... My argument here is to persevere too strongly in proving that rap is decolonial has an urgent ethical dilemma. That is, in trying to defend some rap or rappers, it might inadvertently strengthen the attempt to condemn and criminalise others. Like any other discipline, rap progresses, develops, stumbles and stutters, but too often is denied the right to exist in as many shades as any other school. By relinquishing the need to claim that all rap is a theory of knowledge, and a decolonial one at that, we can learn from rap by providing space for it to be championed as a multidimensional episteme and that, as a method, it can certainly contribute to a decolonial cause.

So to finish, I thought I'd offer some question either to open the discussion or for you to explore in your own time or to completely ignore - it's totally up to you. So here are a few. What methods do you use in your work, whatever that work is, academic or not, and what assumptions might these rely on? How do you communicate your ideas or research, and are there any other, including creative methods, that you could explore? If not, why not? Which voices are elevated in your work and are any obstructed? So, if so, why and how? And asking these for me is really a

kind of a key part of exploring decolonial methods and, hopefully, will lead to some interesting observations. And now I'll catch my breath. Thank you for hearing me.

[End of Transcript]