ENGAGING CONTRADICTIONS

Theory, Politics, and Methods
of Activist Scholarship

Edited by

For Michael Zinzun
in memoriam

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Dani Wadada Nabudere

Karl Marx once summed up the contradiction between theory and practice when in his thesis on Feuerbach he argued that philosophers had hitherto interpreted the world but that the real point was to change it. This implied that philosophy should not merely be an arena of scholarly speculation about being; rather, it should concern itself with daily human experience, including action and reflection on that experience. Marx's contribution was to question the then dominant conceptions of the relationship between the state and society in mid-nineteenth-century Europe in a period of political turbulence. His main concern was to create an intellectual atmosphere that could change the old social order to a new revolutionary order (McLellan 1973, 68).

For his part, Gramsci (1971) demonstrated that within the working classes there existed a "spontaneous philosophy" comprising language (as a complex of knowledge and concepts), common sense, and a system of beliefs. He argued that although such philosophies were at times incoherent and dispersed, they were valuable in that they articulated the everyday practice and experience of working-class people. Leftist scholars of the Third World later came to see spontaneous philosophy as the expression and existence of a "common peoples' science existing within their folklore and their practical, vital and empirical knowledge, which has allowed them to survive, to interpret, to create, to produce and to work over centuries" (Fals-Borda 1980, 19–20). It was seen as having a rationality of its own that had to be understood from observations of working-class people's practices.

In this chapter I will examine the continuing polarization of theory and practice as an expression of power relations in the modern world and demonstrate how social science research has been problematized and practiced to confront it. I will recount some of my research experiences in marginalized societies in Africa that demonstrate how the activities of ordinary people have overcome this theory/practice dichotomy through contestation and action.

TOWARD A PEOPLE-CENTERED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The tension between the two spheres of human cognition and social activity has continued up to the present day in struggles over the social and political order and its consequences for human existence. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), attempted to overcome the theory/practice dichotomy by empowering individuals and communities to engage in productive and reflective activities of learning through action. He argued that modern politics had created a "fear of freedom" among the oppressed, who were politically subjugated in societies where theories about freedom and democracy and their practice did not coincide. Education through what he called "conscientization"—the creation of a critical consciousness through struggle—was therefore the only way that the oppressed could practice freedom and, more importantly, accomplish change.

This was an emancipatory and liberatory pedagogy aimed at eliminating the "fear of freedom" through dialogue and struggle as tools of learning and acting on one's own condition. Freire's work came at a time of intense debate generated by what Talcott Parsons (1978) called the "reflective revolution" of the 1960s, which was characterized by national liberation struggles, the feminist movement, student and workers movements, socialist movements, civil rights struggles, peace movements, and debates about "limits to growth" and its relationship to ecological crisis. The debates about the role of the intellectual in society that had begun in Latin America in the 1960s, and to which Freire was contributing, took place in this context.

In East Africa and specifically in Tanzania beginning in 1973, such academic debates centered on challenges to social science research methodologies with regard to issues of "development" and "social transformation" and the rejection of functionalist anthropology in Africa as an ideological tool of colonial domination and exploitation. The "objectivity" of current social science research methodologies was disputed, and the debates produced a school of thought and a new methodology, combining theory and practice, that came to be called "participatory research."

This methodology had to some extent already been envisioned a few years earlier by leftist activist scholars in Colombia who set out to build a field they called "proletarian science" to counter and neutralize "bour-

geois science," which they held responsible for much of Latin American scholars' alienation from the conditions under which most people lived. One of these scholars, Orlando Fals-Borda, later recalled: "We, who participated in these experiences and ideological search, had set to ourselves acceptable goals: we wanted to reduce the gap between labor and intellectual work in order that workers, peasants and Indians ceased to be spiritually subjected to intellectuals; . . . stimulate their most developed cadres, so that they could assume some investigative and analytical tasks; and create reference groups constituted by peasants, workers and Indians" (Fals-Borda 1980, 21).

In initiating their own form of "action research" in Colombia in 1972, this group of activist scholars wanted to "fight dogmatism and follow Marx's advice of helping build a social science as the product of the historical movement, and as a science which becomes revolutionary when it ceases to be doctrinaire" (Fals-Borda 1980, 21). Fals-Borda elaborates that this is why they were opposed to the "intellectual leftist colonialism which had castrated so many revolutionary and university student groups." They did not want to appropriate theories and methods of "action research" as these had been formulated in other "latitudes" and countries, in the context of social realities that differed widely from their own. Instead they adopted Marx's historical materialism as the "only guide to devise proletarian science" that could oppose bourgeois science, given what they considered the success of Marxism as an ideology and a science in the Cuban, the Chinese, the Soviet and the Vietnamese revolutions (ibid.). This approach was later found to be inadequate with the rise of neo-Marxism.

Scholars in Tanzania similarly challenged the new "participatory research approach" (PRA) that was then emerging as a qualitative methodology for investigating rural phenomena. They argued that this approach was rooted in the research method of participant observation that was central to the fieldwork of the functionalist school of anthropology and that was used during the colonial period in Africa side by side with neo-positivist survey techniques.

Participant observation emphasized the observations of anthropologists who lived and participated in the societies where they carried out their research. Long-term physical proximity to the people studied and direct communication with them in their own language were regarded as vital to the method. The data collected were from opinions and descriptions articulated by the people being observed, as well as from researchers' own observations of events and social interactions in everyday life.

Researchers recorded their observations in an ethnographic diary and collected and studied folklore and magical formulas as evidence of native mentality and experiences. Despite their immersion in the communities they studied, as well as in the larger context of power relations between their own society and that of their research subjects, participant observers maintained a level of scholarly "detachment" that, in their view, enabled them to secure an "objective" description of what they observed in the society.

In fact, however, the scholars did not study these societies in their historical settings and hence missed deeper meanings that came from the people's cultural-historical background, which the method could not study. They conceived of the societies they studied as harmonious wholes, existing in a timeless present in some kind of state of equilibrium that was not "disturbed" by Western influence, and they drew on the features of these societies to make generalizations about the common features of all "primitive" human societies, with a view to constituting "social laws" that would explain their behavior and actions (Mbilinyi et al. 1982, 34–66).

According to Peter Rigby (1985), another leftist anthropologist working at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1970s, the very term *participant observer* implied a false standard of objectivity that had been derived from the natural sciences. In the sociological context, it allowed the logical possibilities of being an "observer" without being a "participant" or a "participant" without being an "observer," both of which were "absurd":

> All participants (actors) must be observers in their own right, interpreting and analyzing the situation, or else they would be unable to act or "participate"; similarly, all observers (social scientists?) must, if only by their presence, participate (act?). Unfortunately, some social scientists have either ignored or deliberately denied these fundamental elements in any data collection process. . . . What presumably is meant by the term "participant observer" as a method of data collection . . . is that the "observer" writes down or otherwise records what he has gleaned from his participation in a particular social situation in the light of his "critical" scientific training. This being so, the "observer" is not merely "objectively" scrutinizing what is going on around him, but is involved as a "whole" person, albeit a person with an interpretive equipment which is different from one not trained in his scientific discipline. Any subsequent interpretation of the data resulting from his participation is therefore "an interpretation of an interpretation," not an analysis of self-evident, ontologically objective "facts." (30)

It was no wonder that the new post-Independence scholars who advocated a different approach critiqued this anthropological methodology. Because of these challenges and critiques, international aid agencies eventually dropped their references to the participant observation method and put forth a new approach, called social soundness analysis, that reconceptualized the problems of development in terms of a radical structuralist analysis of underdevelopment and a historical materialist analysis of the implications of capitalist development. According to this new approach, "traditional" societies, far from displaying irrational economic behavior, were after all well adjusted to local conditions and able to make conscious and recurrent decisions about the use of productive assets, the organization of labor, marketing, savings, and investment. But this approach, though in some ways corrective, was still focused on understanding "the other" rather than people determining their own course of action and existence.

In this context PRA emerged as an approach that had its roots in policy-oriented applied research and was aimed at devising strategies to "fight poverty." Tanzanian critics of PRA argued that it was intended to create an "ideological smokescreen, which mystified the nature and underlying contradictions and struggles of the poor" (Rigby 1985, 61). They claimed that donor agencies and foundations had resorted to qualitative methodologies in research for purposes of intervention only because quantitative methodologies had reached a dead end in this field. But the qualitative research approach in its new formulation of PRA merely allowed researchers to "camouflage" themselves as participant observers once again.

Tanzanian critics of PRA advocated instead a methodology they called participatory research, which they referred to as a "pragmatic" approach and distinguished from PRA. They defined it as "research structured by the democratic interaction of the researcher and the oppressed classes of people" that took the form of a "dialectical unification of theory and practice reciprocally between the researcher and the oppressed classes." When this approach was tested in practice, however, it turned out to be incapable of achieving its ideal of unity between the researcher and the oppressed.

The debates surrounding PRA developed into a major movement throughout the Third World and parts of the developed world that called for direct involvement of the people being researched in the research activity so that they would participate in knowledge generation and social transformation (Grossi 1980, 71). By 1977, consensus seems to have been reached within the movement or network about what participatory re-

search was. In the 1980s, a more integrated approach, called participatory action research, began to emerge. Francisco Vio Grossi (1980, 70) reported that "when the network [of researchers from Latin America, Africa, and Asia] met for the first time in Toronto in 1977, participatory research was defined as a research process in which the community participates in the analysis of its own reality in order to promote a social transformation for the benefit of the participants, who are the oppressed. It is therefore a research, educational and action-oriented activity." According to Grossi, this statement, like similar ones published simultaneously, "captured the attention and enthusiasm of social scientists, popular educators, and political activists" because the new consensus was seen as "an approach able to resolve the permanent tension [existing] between the process of knowledge generation and the use of that knowledge, between 'academics' and the real world, between intellectuals and workers, between science and life." But this permanent tension was real and continued to express itself even after the new understanding. This is why Grossi admitted that although the network since then had been in "continuous expansion" and had contributed to "enriching the discussion" and "opening new avenues," the approach had "originated some trends that rely on conceptions [that were], though not absolutely erroneous, at least insufficient" (70).

One of these trends was a "spontaneously naïve" attitude that, according to Grossi, expressed an "idolization" of popular wisdom (73–74). Those who held this attitude believed that participatory research "must start from the representation of the community itself." According to this view, "The people have all the answers because they have the real knowledge." Grossi questioned this, arguing, "If this were the case, then we would not need either adult education, or activists, or even participatory research." The masses had been subjected to centuries of subjugation based on indoctrination; participatory action research would need to initiate a process of deindoctrination that could lead to the liberation and social transformation of the masses.

But then it appeared that the very notion of "social transformation" required more elaboration. According to Grossi, it incorporated the Hegelian concept of "praxis" in that it meant, not just any action, but specifically activity that led to structural social change—that is, change "in the fundamental conditions that engender poverty, dependence and exploitation" (77). Yet the catalyzing of a community to this kind of social transformation was more a political act than a process of participatory research, and it opened up all sorts of possibilities for radical manipula-

tion of the people being studied. But these debates became sterile, and the discussion in East Africa shifted to new areas of contestation.

HISTORY AND THE DAR ES SALAAM SCHOOL

In East Africa, the issue of the relationship between theory and practice took another twist in the humanities, especially in the writing of history and the teaching of law. In history, the Eurocentric challenge was whether Africa had a history and if so what its canons were. The new African historians argued that the history of the people of Africa was "written" in their languages and their traditions and was transmitted orally. Already a rewriting of African history had begun with a group of historians at the University of Dar es Salaam, led by Professors Arnold Temu and Asaria Kimambo, who would later become the chief academic officer of the university. These young Tanzanian scholars had written a history of Tanzania, inspired by the African revolution in general and in Tanzania in particular, that from oral material was able to challenge the view of European historians that Africa had no history because it had no written canons they could consult. It was the beginning of an epistemological revolution concerning Africa, and it challenged the dichotomy between theory and practice because the theory and practice in African history lay with the people who were the custodians of the history and the interpreters of the oral texts.

The scholars who engaged in this rewriting of Tanzanian and African history developed a methodology, based on the use of oral material, that attempted to dynamically interpret African history from an African viewpoint and epistemology rather than from the viewpoint of the colonizers. European peer reviewers of this history regarded it as "nationalistic" and "unscientific" because it did not fit in with the methodological and theoretical approaches of Western historians. They called it "the Dar es Salaam School" to single it out as an approach that was not based on "universal" principles of history writing. Nevertheless, this challenge coming from the African historians eventually began to undermine "mainstream" approaches to the writing of African history and indeed to influence Western writing and understanding of history in general.

Jan Vansina, a Belgian anthropologist and historian who became convinced of the value of the oral tradition earlier than most European historians, recounts in his book *Living with Africa* (1994) how at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) battles were still being fought in the 1950s about the validity of oral history and the relevance of the then

dominant "rules of evidence" paradigms that dominated mainstream Eurocentric scholarship. He says that in 1957 the second conference on African history at SOAS was still caught up in debating the validity of oral tradition. But Vansina's reporting of the results of his own research based on oral materials created a change of attitude on this issue by the end of the conference: "This exposé convinced most of the participants, although they did not necessarily accept the necessity for historians to engage in fieldwork yet. Henceforth the argument that oral tradition could be handled like written sources was the main argument historians of Africa used to convince outsiders that the oral source of 'indigenous African history' were respectable. For many years to come historians would no longer agonize about the overall respectability of oral tradition as a source but would try to locate and use traditions in different types of societies" (54). In this way African history, as told by the people of Africa as producers of their knowledge, was recognized as a distinctive discipline in the European universities and given chairs at various Western universities. This was because it cut across the existing disciplines then dominating the discourse on the humanities and social sciences. The approach also resolved the problem as to whether the history of "Tropical Africa" could be taught as "a subject." From then on, it was.

Indeed, the "methodological problem" had been overcome by the time UNESCO's *General History of Africa* was being written in the 1980s. The research for that book had shown that scholars using oral material collected from ordinary African men and women had to work as a team to interpret it; no single social science discipline or branch of the humanities could make sense of the evidence. Hence interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches became essential, an innovation that in the wide-ranging work of Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) cast new light on African prehistory. The momentous result, as P. D. Curtin (1989) has stated, is that "nowadays, the history of the world is no longer synonymous with the history of Western civilization. In the longer run, the success of these developments will depend on the quality of the work done by African historians and other historians of Africa, and on the broadening of the other social sciences to the point where they take due account of the findings of African researchers before hazarding any generalizations about human society" (24–25).

All in all, the Dar es Salaam debates about "participatory action research" moved the discussion about theory and practice a step further. They brought into the discourse the role of the ordinary African men and women in the production and use of knowledge. They raised issues of

representation, and the use of the oral tradition broke down the dichotomy between structure and agency in the production of African history. According to Curtin, the Dar es Salaam school humanized the writing of history, transforming it from a story about kings and dynasties of rulers to a popular history, and this in turn had changed the way Western historians looked at history in general.

The Dar es Salaam school imbued students of African history with national pride and a commitment to the African liberation movements that were active at the time. On a broader scale, it showed the need for an entire university to address the demands for transformation of the African people, and such a university would emerge in time, as we shall see below.

POPULAR ACTIVISM AND POPULAR KNOWLEDGE

In the theorizing about participatory action research, the most significant achievement was pedagogical: the adoption of participatory methods of dialogue developed by the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire. These methods were an attempt to bridge the epistemological divide between the researcher and the researched subject by getting rid of the power imbalance that typified their relationship and instead building a horizontal relationship of equality that would promote dialogue between the two actors in order to develop a new, emancipatory knowledge.

Key to both Freire's pedagogy and participatory action research is the sequence of action, reflection, questioning, researching hunches, drawing conclusions, evaluating options, and planning further action based on the learning that has been generated. This spiraling sequence ensures control of the investigatory learning process by all the participants and thus breaks down the anthropological "participant/observer" dichotomy. In this dialogical approach the research activity and the evaluation of the results are on a single continuum. There is no distinction between the researcher and the researched subject; all are involved in the research, dialogue, action, reflection, and further action (McTaggart 1991). In the study to be described below, this methodology for activist research, which aims at linking ordinary people to their world of knowledge, was best achieved by encouraging people to tell their stories orally and making it possible for those stories become part of the historical record.

Traditional and tacit indigenous knowledge from individuals and communities is best discovered and disseminated through the joint endeavors of dedicated scholars working within the rural communities. I felt that my own task as an academic and a progressive lawyer was to com-

bine ideas from Freire's work and that of a Danish adult educator-philosopher, Bishop Frederick S. Grundtvig, with African indigenous knowledge and wisdom drawn from local communities to meet the needs of poor peasants in rural communities. I wanted to try to empower them through the application of their experiences to new forms of activities intended to bring about self-transformation on the basis of their own knowledge as well as that which they considered appropriate from other cultures. This was the beginning of the Yiga Ng'okola (Learn as You Work) Folk Institute in eastern Uganda, an indigenous membership–based nongovernmental organization (NGO) that attempts to empower and position local communities to actively participate in and to favorably influence local governments regarding the issues and policies that affect their lives.

The organization's conceptual and operating values were based on the African cultural values of community work and lifelong learning through activity and human interaction. By way of cross-cultural exchange, the philosophy drew inspiration from the Danish humanistic educational philosophy of learning through dialogue and "education for life."

The activities of the local groups that make up its membership are initiated by cultural animation relevant in their communities. For example, groups are encouraged to begin their projects by carrying out a collective cultural activity such as singing a song, engaging in a dance, telling a story, or retelling a proverb that has a bearing on what the group is trying to achieve. This sets a cultural framework and context to inspire members and creates an environment that is conducive for the activity. It places culture at the forefront of the endeavor, a process that enhances the legitimacy of what the group is trying to achieve. And in accordance with the African belief that, as expressed in a Luganda proverb, *Amagezi ssi gommu* (knowledge is not a monopoly of a single person), all activities end with a similar cultural animation of a congratulatory or critical kind so that the members who have done best are recognized and those who have not done as well are critically encouraged to do better. This cultural approach is intended to be a bottom-up model of transformation instead of the top-down model characteristic of many state-sponsored "development" programs. The Folk Institute has been the starting point for creating other organizations run along similar lines. At the end of ten years six of these organizations have emerged, including the Marcus Garvey Pan-Afrikan Institute, to be discussed below.

Another such organization is the Afrika Study Center. This is a small center aimed at doing research in local communities. More generally, its

purpose is to reinforce the research undertaken by community-based organizations in order to create synergies in their work and to bring out the actual experiences gained by the organizations in the course of their activities. Complex cultural and social problems in marginalized pastoralist communities have been further complicated by new globalization pressures that are increasing these communities' marginalization. Some research has contributed to a global understanding of these problems, but much of it has not been accessible to the affected communities. The center's research has been geared toward producing locally usable literature and knowledge that will be more readily accessible to the communities. I have promoted both the Yiga Ng'okola Folk Institute and the Afrika Study Center and worked to link their local activities to the work of international organizations.

FIELD BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE ACCESS

The activist scholars in the community-based organizations that I have described have understood the importance not only of employing a bottom-up approach but of establishing local-global collaborations to promote the work being conducted in the local communities. As a member of the Global Security and Cooperation (GSC) Committee of the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC), I embarked on an SSRC-sponsored research activity focusing on local understandings of human security in East African pastoralist communities. This formed part of the larger "field-building" component of the GSC program, described in the Introduction, intended to explore the contributions of "activist scholarship" to "collaborative research" in general. The GSC program's new approach to what had been called "security studies" originated in the realization that the field had changed greatly since the early 1980s as it had become increasingly clear that threats to security of individuals and communities around the world originated from a variety of sources besides the military competition between the Great Powers engaged in the Cold War. Such "small events" as localized wars, small arms proliferation, ethnic conflicts, environmental degradation, international crimes, and human rights abuses were starting to be regarded as central to the understanding of security at local, national, regional, and global levels.

Grassroots work that was already being undertaken in the pastoral communities of East Africa revealed a general sense of extreme insecurity springing from confrontations between the pastoralists and agricultural-

ists over grazing lands and water for cattle. I therefore considered it important to take advantage of the new global awareness about the importance of localized conflicts by showing how research in these communities might contribute to the GSC program's field-building efforts.

The custodians and practitioners of indigenous knowledge systems were major actors in the production of knowledge about security and cooperation in their communities regarding the issues that affected their lives. But academic researchers, NGOs, and other practically oriented organizations had only minimally analyzed and disseminated the knowledge that indigenous people produced because they had not considered it to be "true knowledge": they had hypothesized that such knowledge was used in limited contexts by few people for immediate purposes and hence had very little replicability and applicability to different conditions.

Therefore I considered it vital to build intellectual capacity that could tap into localized, indigenous forms of knowledge and relate different dimensions of security such as the environment, ethnicity, nationalism, migrations, infectious diseases, food supply, biodiversity, global finance, and crime to each other. It also became necessary to relate these dimensions to the more traditional range of security issues for purposes of continuity and coherence. This meant there was a great need for collaborative (as distinct from merely comparative) research that transcended national boundaries and led to the development of regional and global networks. Such a new approach, I argued, would provide the intellectual tools that could connect the local to the global and move toward a truly global community in which different kinds of knowledge would be integrated and synthesized to promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Previous field research on security issues in pastoral communities revealed a different framework of perception and understanding of the issues involved that could not be understood by the academic researchers who worked on the field-building project. For this reason, our research team decided to relate this indigenous knowledge to the problems of real communities by engaging in outreach work in East African communities that would test our understanding of the knowledge that previous researchers had obtained and would encourage further participatory research by communities to apply this knowledge to deal with problems of domination and exploitation.

The group assigned by the Afrika Study Center to carry out theoretical reflections on epistemological and methodological implications of field building produced a founding document to guide research in other areas. This paper, which I authored (Nabudere 2003), was soon published by the

African Association of Political Science, although it was still in draft form. It was an attempt to establish a philosophical and theoretical foundation for the possibility that different kinds of knowledge producers can relate to each other through their own ways of understanding. It was also an attempt to generalize and theorize a methodology for fostering dialogue between cultures in which such knowledge is conserved, enriched, and developed further. This reflection was based on the experience gained by the Afrika Study Center through earlier research (in 2000–2001) on conflict and violence in agro-pastoral communities in northeastern Uganda.

During workshop discussions, we realized that scholars needed to understand these different epistemological frameworks if real progress aimed at integrating all forms of knowledge was to take place. We therefore turned our attention to epistemological issues connected with traditional systems of governance, concepts of justice, and conflict resolution and management and how these interface with modern systems of justice and administration. The interface between indigenous knowledge systems and modern systems was considered essential to exploit the strengths of each of the systems. Moreover, our research revealed a conflict between traditional natural resource management and modern resource management. For instance, indigenous knowledge research had revealed that in Uganda there were 261 land races (seed varieties) of superior-quality sorghum that were resistant to drought, disease, and pests, as well as being more nutritious, palatable, and lasting. In contrast, the varieties developed in scientific centers such as Kabana in eastern Uganda were not drought resistant, palatable, or bird resistant. Further, communities had many practices, based on spiritual and cultural ideas, that preserved seeds for planting and prevented them from being consumed in periods of scarcity. These practices included creating taboos about seed consumption, mixing seeds with wine, and storing them in skulls.

Workshop participants cited the activities of the Lutheran World Federation in pastoralist communities as a good example of how an NGO tried to assist the communities in seed multiplication and storage in a way that also allowed communities to draw on their indigenous knowledge systems to supplement modern systems. Modified seed banks were created in accord with traditional practices. Funds were provided to purchase indigenous seeds for distribution by creating community seed banking. Indigenous planting practices of "broadcasting" mixed stands, intercropping, and cultivating in scattered locations to spread risks proved most useful. Scientific investigators and practitioners working in local

communities could embrace these ideas instead of imposing "scientific solutions" that were foreign to the indigenous cultural context.

Local communities in the Teso area of Uganda had their own traditional systems of weather forecasting and observation of the phase of the moon and the location of certain stars to decide when to plant crops. Communities accumulated this knowledge over centuries of scientific observation and experimentation. Researchers could investigate such systems to find out their secrets. For instance, research by the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) has shown that the traditionally used herb called *ecucuka* is effective in granaries as a repellent against insects that consume millet and sorghum. Government campaigns that encourage the use of high-yield varieties of crops and chemical fertilizers and pesticides tend to undermine indigenous practices, when in fact the latter are more effective.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN SECURITY

The field-building research process, in which indigenous knowledge producers and academic researchers educate, inform, and communicate with each other, confronted a central challenge: how could research findings be communicated and made accessible to the communities where the research had been carried out? The researchers who participated in the field-building process noted that the educational system in the relevant communities consisted not only of the formal schooling system, which was based on foreign education theories and philosophies, but also of an informal system of education through which indigenous knowledge was theorized, developed, communicated, and stored.

Feedback between the researchers and the producers of indigenous knowledge was necessary so that this knowledge could be validated. This had pedagogical implications in that the informal education system utilized different techniques of oral communication and communication through art. Such traditional techniques needed to be included in the pedagogy of the mainstream formal schooling system so that education could be linked to the values and norms of the particular community and so that curricula that fit the African cultural context could be developed.

There was therefore a great need to integrate traditional-indigenous education and modern (Western) education in African educational systems. The former was rooted in the cultures and languages of local communities and based on their norms and value systems. The latter was rooted in the ideas of the European Enlightenment and was based on the

norms and value systems of those societies. The dominant Western knowledge system's exclusion of African norms and value systems had resulted in the alienation of African people and communities, since the Western ideologues did not understand the indigenous knowledge systems. This meant that Western-educated individuals became hostile to local knowledge systems, which they regarded as "primitive" and "backward." Such alienation and the continued dominance of Western educational systems and paradigms in Africa had contributed to the problems of African development.

The conclusion from this experience was that education was primarily a form of dialogue between different knowledge systems because through dialogue knowledge was created and communicated as information. The more centers of knowledge, the more dialogues and the richer the experience of human existence. Without dialogue communities cannot understand each other and the different kinds of knowledge held by communities around the world cannot be shared. This recognition expresses the African philosophy of "Ubuntu" (humanness)—the belief that without others one cannot exist as a human being. There is therefore a need for what Habermas called "communicative action": communication of information and knowledge between different kinds of communities based on a shared search for answers to problems. For information so communicated to be effective and positively received, it must be relevant to the recipients and expressed in the indigenous languages of the communities concerned. As one participant said: "Communication in people's own languages builds people's self-confidence and in the process empowers them through social transformation. It builds initiatives, and the messages delivered are not obliterated. If messages are given in rough translation, a lot is lost in the process. The result is that the recipients of the knowledge cannot use it, and if they do they are bound to get unsatisfactory results."

This recognition led to the conclusion that education in one's mother tongue is essential to the broadening of global knowledge because it takes into account indigenous knowledge systems. Only through education and research can this process of knowledge creation, retrieval, and communication be sustained and mainstreamed. Carrying out research and educational activities in African languages is therefore key to developing African knowledge, expressing and preserving African values, ethos, norms, and spiritual systems, and bringing about social and economic transformation. Although it is now possible to communicate indigenous African knowledges to a wider public via the Internet, efforts should be made to ensure that it is communicated not only in translations but also in the

original language. This is the only way that African communities can learn from other cultures while also promoting their own cultures in a global system of mutually respecting cultures.

In our field-building research exercise we focused on how we could disseminate the knowledge we had obtained through our research. The field-building team felt that much anthropological research was never disseminated back to the communities that had cooperated in producing the knowledge so that they could reflect on it and, if necessary, critique its presentation. This omission amounted to the "colonization" and expropriation of indigenous intellectual property.

One reason researchers had not attempted to communicate their findings back to the communities they had studied was that such communication was not one of the goals of their research in the first place. Another was that the researchers' knowledge production paradigm included only the recognized mainstream systems of dissemination through reporting, article writing, dissertation and thesis writing, and book publication, which turned the knowledge so produced into a new form of "property" owned by the researchers.

We considered this appropriation to be a form of domination, expropriation, and disempowerment of the dispossessed community, who were the true owners, or at least part owners, of the knowledge thus acquired. Most of the research done by scholars was for academic purposes, while the research done by practitioners was for the use of a particular organization and was restricted to that organization's intervention programs. Thus, even without the language barrier, such knowledge was rendered inaccessible to the majority of the population who had helped to produce it. And even if such knowledge were to be translated into local languages, the overwhelming majority of the people would not be able to read it because they were illiterate.

Thus a three-pronged approach to knowledge production within communities was necessary. First, people needed to be involved in the research process, so that the research would become a process of self-definition and self-affirmation for them; and they needed to be involved in designing and determining the issues to be researched, the methods to be used, and the paradigms to organize the data. Second, the results of such research would need to be discussed with the wider community before publication. Third, the most important findings would need to be translated into the local languages and transmitted to the community in a culturally appropriate manner so that the producers of the knowledge

could comment, critique, and further develop the "discourse." We called this "research within research."

Finally, the team felt that we needed to do outreach into the communities so that our findings could be communicated to the communities from which the information had been obtained. Our objective would be to get the ideas assimilated and debated through people's own traditional techniques of communication and learning. Techniques such as audio or audiovisual forms of communication in the peoples' languages were considered suitable. In this way, the community could discuss the results in what would be another form of research through dialogue and further action. This implied that we had to pass on the findings to the communities in such a way that the people could appreciate them culturally. The techniques we came up with were drama, dance, poetry, songs, proverbs, and stories.

Africans are very good at relating to situations through such cultural forms as songs and dance. We decided to organize the research results in such a way that they could be put in the form of songs, dances, lamentation, and other forms of drama and performed for audiences, who would then be called upon to discuss and comment on the play or the drama. Local museums could also be built to preserve some of the material cultures of the people. We considered the use of drama in Uganda to sensitize the population about HIV/AIDS as an instructive example.

We conducted our "research within research" through two approaches. The first involved selecting a group of "community facilitators" to investigate communities' understanding of the concept of "security." The second involved feeding back the findings of the research to the community through drama.

In the first research activity, forty "community facilitators" were trained in participatory action research and then deployed to the communities of four countries: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and the New Sudan. They were told to ask about fifty people of both genders and all ages in each community just what the term *security* meant to them.

The answers to the question from all the four countries were similar in that they showed a broader understanding of the concept "security" than that current in mainstream social science. According to one community facilitator working in northern Tanzania in the pastoral communities around the Ngorongoro crater, one elder woman he had asked for her definition of *security* simply answered, "We can say we have enough security if the following are absent: *emuoyian* [diseases that cause death]; *olarraba* [war/conflicts in the community or society]; *olameyu* [drought

that may lead to food insufficiency]." And a group of young men and women answered that *security* meant being unintimidated and in harmony, and living in an environment that is physically healthy, produces enough food for human beings and animals such as livestock, and lacks individual and social conflicts. The community facilitator from the Maasai and Kikuyu in the Gilgil division of the Nakuru district of Kenya similarly reported that the Maasai herdsmen had defined security in terms of their ability to engage in nomadic pastoralism, while their Kikuyu neighbors, who lived by crop farming, viewed it in terms of being able to farm without the threat of attacks or eviction by their neighbors. The reports from Uganda and the New Sudan again gave similar answers, and there is no need to repeat them here. What is significant is that all the communities related security to well-being and to the availability of resources to sustain their lives. They perceived insecurity as an inability to meet their physical, economic, social, and psychological needs. The responses also indicated that there was general agreement as to how "insecurity" could be addressed, managed, and controlled. From these responses further programs of action were drawn up that could enable the communities to address some of the obstacles to their security. Further research and action aimed at communities' self-empowerment would be required.

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

The community feedback obtained through the "research within research" was revealing. In some places the communities were not clear on what the exercise was all about. They suspected that the facilitators were trying to benefit from their plight. This reaction was to be expected: it reflected a deep mistrust on the part of people who had developed "research fatigue" from constant harassment by hordes of researchers since colonialism had first knocked on their doors. They had seen researchers come and go while their own conditions had steadily worsened. This suggested to them, with some justification, that the researchers were part of their problem.

To what extent could "activist researchers" be trusted to be different from earlier researchers who had established a relationship of domination over them and had expropriated their knowledge? This was the moment of truth. Some of the participants demanded to be paid for their participation in the discussions, while others argued that the discussions were a government activity intended to weaken them even further. Their inter-

rogation of our research team and their analysis of our explanations became the communities' own process of "research within research."

If indeed, as the researchers and facilitators explained, we were different from earlier researchers, how could a new, qualitatively different relationship be established between them as "objects" of research and ourselves as "activist researchers"? If, as we have argued, control of knowledge is a power relationship between subject and object, could the community participants redefine this power relationship so that both they and the researchers would be subjects of the research? These questions would find an answer in the process of the self-empowerment of the community research subjects. For the time being, with some inducement, some of the community members cooperated and listened to the researchers' presentations.

The discussions generated through workshop discussion were deep and relevant to their conditions. Some in the communities demanded the means to overcome their difficulties such as lack of education for children and lack of food. But they welcomed the use of cultural techniques to address these problems, and some wanted the techniques to become a continuing part of their cultural festivals in order to help raise the community's political awareness about the issues brought up by the research. Some elders commented that the researchers' questions had raised community members' awareness of how pervasive and long-standing the community's problems were. They insisted that the exercise could stimulate the community to seek ways of getting engaged in community development projects.

As part of the attempt to act on the concerns raised by community members' responses to the research questions, one community in Uganda sent a representative across the border to Kenya and discussed with the local Turkana community there the need to increase peaceful contacts between the two settlements. This led to the opening of the Nakiroro road to Kenya, where traffic had been disrupted by raids and counter-raids for cattle.

Different groups articulated the need to become active in addressing the problems facing them, especially the insecurity caused by cattle raids by neighboring communities. This was a step toward what Paulo Freire (1972) called "conscientization," which could be reached only through critical dialogue. The next step was to find how to engage the communities to face up to these challenges and perfect their tools of struggle for self-empowerment through knowledge production and dialogue.

TOWARD A SYNTHETIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The above experiences, though limited in scope, have added a new dimension to our understanding of knowledge production, power, cultural identity, and self-empowerment. They have shown that earlier demands that communities "participate" in academic research have been overtaken by more specific demands that communities appropriate the process of knowledge production with the aim of their own empowerment. It has come to be recognized that culture and language are key to the creation of both identity and knowledge and that knowledge production is a right, not a privilege. Further, knowledge production and control are enmeshed in power relations and therefore cannot be neutral.

While "culture matters" (Harrison and Huntington 2000), it cannot be cultivated in isolation to produce desired "development." Development and social transformation are the product of a people's struggle for rights and must be premised on a recognition of their right to education and control over their resources. Culture on its own cannot be a "constraint" to development. Mistaken "development" strategies are what lead to cultural alienation and social fragmentation. Thus, in the struggle for self-empowerment, the people must emphasize their right to produce and share knowledge through education and dialogue. Philosophical and social hermeneutics has added to this understanding.

New philosophical questions have been raised by these developments. Critical theory has postulated a hermeneutic approach in which different propagators of knowledge confront one another through a dialogue in which statements and counterstatements are "validated." As stated earlier, our research method, which draws on the pedagogical participatory approach of dialogue developed by Paulo Freire, has in practice tried to eliminate the power imbalance that typifies the relationship between researcher and research subject and to instead promote a relationship of equality that promotes dialogue between the two actors. The methodology also tries to develop emancipatory knowledge through participatory research. This is the approach we arrived at in our field-building exercise, which attempted to bring different epistemologies and methodologies and their actual representatives into the same "field" of knowledge creation (Nabudere 2002, 26–29).

Our approach centers on researchers' initiation of dialogue between individuals and communities, with a view to creating a common pool of knowledge accessible to all users. Dialogue, unlike monologue, entails the joining of thinking and feeling to create new meanings for everyone in-

volved. New understandings emerge from the interplay of meanings among people. Through this process different contributions can be integrated and synthesized to produce a qualitatively new knowledge in which all the contributions are represented. This is the result of a change in philosophical worldview that goes beyond the "scientific paradigm" and epistemology to recognize that knowledge is not an exclusive preserve of any single individual or community but a human act of all human beings. It is a hermeneutic turn for the better.

The training we undertook later on in our project was aimed at presenting the knowledge produced in the participatory grassroots research to the communities for their intellectual assessment and collective reflection on it. An experienced traditional and modern dramatist trained twenty community facilitators in utilizing all the traditional techniques of African drama-dance, total theater, songs, stories, lamentation, laughter, poetry, dialogue/palaver, proverbs, riddles, and so on to communicate information to the communities and to provoke a response from them.

The idea was to engage people in such a way that the audience would take part in the drama. After the drama, the community facilitators would turn the gathering into an adult learning class in which participants would discuss what they had seen in the drama. In this way, people would be able to comment critically on what was being communicated, and this in turn might lead to further reflection and action, thereby continuing field building within the community.

We used a conference held in Uganda in February 2003 to sum up these experiences. At the end of it, we agreed to continue with field-building activities as a general practice. The scholars associated with the Afrika Study Center now accept field building as something that adds a new dimension to our research and practical work with communities, researchers, NGOs, the private sector, and governments at all levels. Our idea is to strengthen the linkage between modern and traditional knowledge in new ways that recognize the epistemological basis of indigenous knowledge and affirm its validity in this context. We also recognize scientific knowledge as valid in its own cultural context to the extent that it helps indigenous knowledge play a role in forming a global knowledge to which all cultures and knowledge systems contribute.

To this end, we decided to set up five networks, which were to operate separately for the purpose of bringing in new actors. Afrika Study Center was requested to continue to coordinate the networks in their field-building activities. These networks were to enhance the development of indigenous knowledge systems and to define them as "sites of knowl-

edge." A number of sites were indicated, and we planned to build on the experiences in those sites.

The topic of higher education also emerged in our discussions of field building. We decided that a new kind of university was needed that would connect institutions of higher learning to the knowledge generated in communities as part of the process of making education available to all. A first step has been taken in this direction with Afrika Study Center's establishment of the Marcus Garvey Pan-Afrikan Institute in Mbale, Uganda.

The Institute will be an innovative attempt to highlight African indigenous knowledge as a source of valuable human achievement by mainstreaming it through rediscovery, research, and recognition. Registers of the sites and depositories of indigenous knowledge will be created and continually expanded to broaden awareness of these "other" knowledge sources, and the experts, theoreticians, custodians, and carriers of the various forms of knowledge and their practice will be identified.

The Institute will use indigenous sites and knowledge producers, propagators, and practitioners to structure teaching and research. The university that will emerge from this project will at first operate at the postgraduate level. For 20 percent of the time allocated to the program, students will be assigned to these sites according to the knowledge and expertise that they seek. They will be required to establish human relations in the chosen community that will make it possible for the theoreticians, custodians, and practitioners of such knowledge to impart it to them. This will entail entering into cosmological and epistemological encounters with the producers of the knowledge and in that way will open up the avenues of intersubjective communication that facilitate learning.

The institute, and later the university, will develop protocols with the faculties at the sites in which the producers and imparters of such endogenous knowledge will be protected with regard to their intellectual property rights as well as the application and reproduction of their knowledge. It will develop rules for recognizing and acknowledging the knowledge imparted and will reward the producers, practitioners, teachers, and research assistants allocated to the learner. Learners will also be required to use 20 percent of the time they spend at the site to teach some subject in which they are qualified to some individuals in the community. This will ensure a "give and take" relationship with the community at the sites of knowledge and will avoid the one-sided "colonization" and ownership of knowledge characteristic of the present elite-oriented system of education.

The university will include in its planning the creation of some infrastructure for learners as well as for teachers at the sites of knowledge. Where possible, this will include capacity building and the creation of information and communications technology facilities in the form of broadband Internet to which the community and students can have access. It will also include building huts to accommodate students while they are at the site and developing a library facility where the downloaded knowledge and other learning materials from the community will be deposited in the community's language. This procedure will not only enable the recording of such knowledge but also create archives for its preservation.

The community teachers and research assistants who will take part in teaching the students will be given a certificate as recognition of their contribution by the university. The holder of the certificate will use it for accreditation in the form of "recognition of prior learning" (RPL) in the process of admission to higher institutions of learning. Since the Fifth International Conference on Education (CONFITEA V), UNESCO has officially recognized such accreditation as a channel through which adult learners can have access to higher education. Since the Mumbai Statement, issued by the University of Mumbai (Bombay) after the UNESCO 1997 world conference, implementation of this "prior learning" accreditation principle has begun. RPL certification will lead to the diminution and eventual elimination of the knowledge-based divide between African elites and the wider African population.

On return to the university site, students will be guided by their supervisor in analyzing and better understanding the material they have obtained from these new sources by using and at the same time going beyond existing multidisciplinary and comparative analytical methods and techniques. Initially the use of these methods and techniques will reveal their limitations in giving students a full understanding of the "other" knowledge that they have just accessed.

Students will attempt to develop an open-ended hermeneutic approach that will eliminate these conceptual limitations by bringing forth the meanings of the "other" knowledge understood in their cultural contexts. To fully develop a holistic, all-inclusive epistemology and paradigm, students will need to explore new approaches to research that can enable a continuous accessing, integration, and synthesis of knowledge that includes all forms of knowledge from all cultural sources, including African sources.

Information and communication technologies will be promoted to establish e-learning and e-health/telemedicine in rural communities and to set up broadband Internet links through satellite to educational, health, governmental, and other centers of knowledge. This will open up opportunities for lifelong learning and distance education in collaboration with the Global University System based in Finland and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology and will facilitate institutional collaboration around the world in advocacy to encourage field building in all areas of knowledge.

The struggle for self-determination and participation in knowledge production and practice has at a cultural level produced a new understanding of the need to develop new forms of knowledge through self-empowerment of all actors. The replacement of vertical power relations between the researcher and the researched with horizontal relations that promote communities' involvement in learning and research ensures that all knowledge producers can, through dialogue and collaborative effort, contribute to building fields of knowledge accessible to all. A hermeneutic approach ensures that all knowledge sources are recognized, and welcomed, and integrated and that all human experiences are taken into account.

The field-building project that was embarked on in Uganda as a result of the research activities that had been under way in the pastoral communities has added a new dimension to these collaborative efforts. A new sense of direction and identity has emerged among scholars, practitioners, and indigenous knowledge experts and custodians (Nabudere, Wambette, and Mukuma 2003). New programs in which the communities play a direct role as active producers of knowledge have enriched the work of the three types of actors in the field.

The activity has also created an awareness of the need to set up a pan-African university that is rooted in local communities. In such a university, students would both learn directly from experts in the communities and impart some knowledge to the communities so that everyone would share in the production of knowledge. Learners would be credited with their prior acquired knowledge, upon which they could build and advance to higher learning. In this process, no distinction would be made between "modern scientific" knowledge and "traditional" or "indigenous" knowledge. Both would contribute to a new global knowledge located in different cultural and civilizational sites.

Our research project shows that in people's struggles for self-empowerment much can be achieved by building bridges between the different kinds of skills and expertise that are to be found in different knowledge locations. The institutionalization of the idea of a cultural and civilizational dialogue between peoples of the world is the only way we can make the twenty-first century a century of peace.

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