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FB09 | Agricultural Sciences, Nutritional Sciences, and Environmental Management – Institute for Agricultural Policy and Market Research

Decolonising methods in fieldwork-based socio-economic research

Stéphanie Domptail, Martin Petrick, Oluwatoyin Kolawole, Felix Ndayisaba

- Context: Call to decolonize science and the academia
- Aim: What does it mean for us, who do applied research on farming and natural resource management as well as rural development?



Rhodes Must fall Students at Cape Town University
<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/>

Decolonizing science?

- ❑ Dominance of the Western Cartesian worldview in the knowledge system

=> mechanistic and reductionist view of nature

- ❑ It defines what is knowledge and what is not, what is valuable and what is not.

=> Imposes which concepts are relevant to characterise the world:

- ❑ CO2 emissions to characterise the env impact
- ❑ Efficiency to characterise the economy

- ❑ A dominance of Western theories, scientific knowledge and the scientific method on other forms of knowledges (local, tacit, indigenous) – also present in the „West“.

- ❑ Other forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are ignored

- ❑ Challenge to integrate them

➤ How to do science in cross-cultural contexts?

Workshop process

- Introduction: Stéphanie Domptail (5')
- Group work 1 => 7' in groups + 10' feedback
- Food for thought: Stéphanie Domptail, Felix Ndayisaba, Toyin Kolawole and Martin Petrick (30')
- Group work 2 => 30'
- Plenary presentation of the pictures: (5' each, max 20')
- Wrap up (5')

Group work 1: Your interest in the topic of decolonization in research?

Time: 7' in groups of 4

- **Brainstorm on what is your interest in the decolonization question in research/ your motivation to join the workshop.**
- **Use cards to note the different interests**

Plenary: 10' feedback

Positionality
awareness

research
transparency

Normalize
decolonization
+ critical reflection

...ing inequity without having lived it.

Nurture existing
reflections

awareness
on unconscious biases

ion

Coming from
colonized country

Questionnaire top-down

Role as ~~field~~ ^{we} doing field work

② methods in the field

can I incorporate other visions in my research?

Researchers' values using decolonized approaches

Are there ways to do research (esp. indigenous community) that are less intrusive / colonial?

intrinsic nature of research methodologies (science method)

actual transdisciplinary

Inclusion + representation different

Learn app

③ Challenges knowledge

Maintain existing reflections

on unconscious

coming from colonized

● Inclusion +
sentation
different

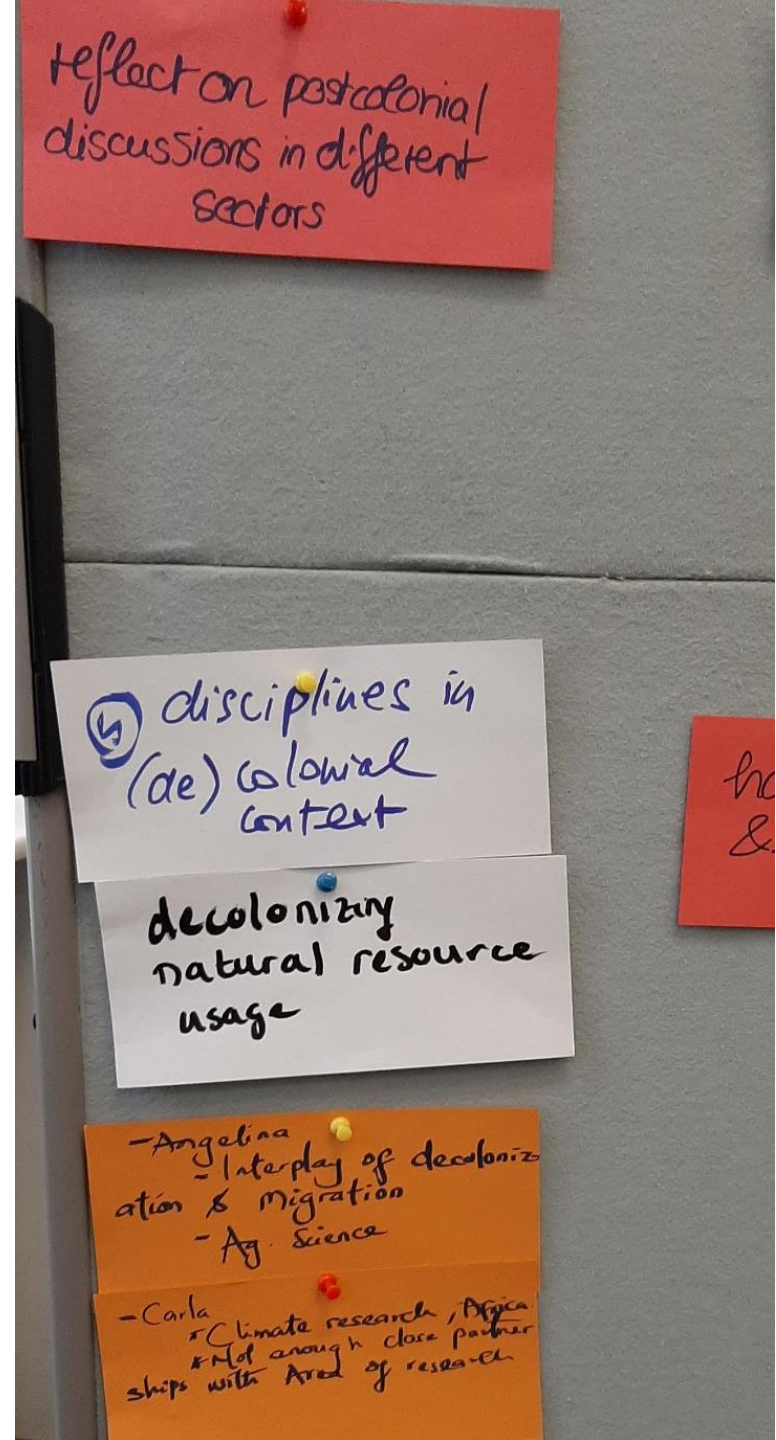
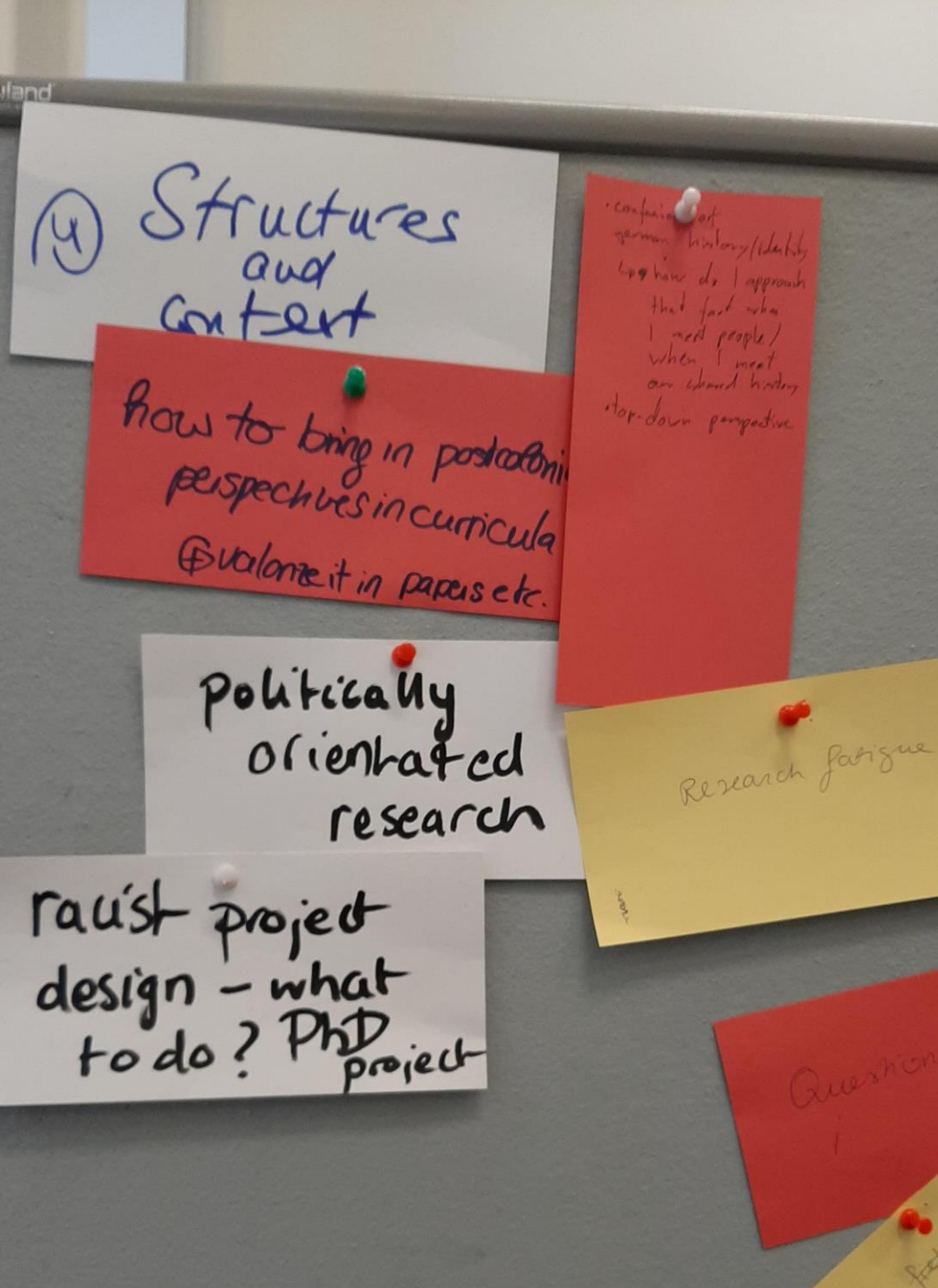
Learn app
valorize local knowledge

③ Challenges of
knowledge
integration

How can we make knowledge
sharing & creation more
equitable

Vishanth
- How to constructively
re-evaluate Western knowledge
and create room
to accommodate Indigenous know-

Validation of alter-
native approaches
by science?



Results Group work 1: Main domains of decolonizing science and research

- 1 Positionality
- 2 Fieldwork methods
- 3 Challenges of knowledge integration
- 4 Structures & context constraining a decolonised science
- 5 Challenges for decolonizing specific disciplines

Food for thought for an epistemological decolonisation of research

Stéphanie Domptail - "Introduction: Methods and their framing of research and results"

Felix Ndayisaba - "Researcher positionality and field work outcomes in the context of epistemological decolonisation: What could I have done differently?"

Oluwatoyin Kolawole, - "Indigenous way of knowing in natural resources management and Western fortress conservation approach in southern Africa"

Martin Petrick - "Standpoint epistemology vs modern science: friends or foes?"

Group work 2: Rich-pictures of the relevance the decolonization call can bring for your research

We identify 3 to 4 sub-themes to work on based on the initial brainstorming (5')

- You explore and Investigate by drawing a rich picture in a group (30' total):
 - **How is this sub-theme relevant to your work and your past experiences: describe relevant problems, challenges, successes.**
 - **What are the pressing questions in your current practices and projects with regards to decolonization in science (and that science or epistemology should address)**
 - **If applicable, what are your recommendations for better fieldwork practices/research methods that worked/can work for you?**
- Designate a moderator
- Make use of your respective experiences; use the flipcharts to create a rich picture.
- Plenary presentation of the pictures: 5 min each

Positionality

Presumptions
Red flags with
our thoughts

Interests as
scientists
Purpose

What do we do,
understanding / assessing
power relations?

Conflicts arising
from participants
selection

Create awareness
from our own actions
in interaction with others.
Our role as the alien.

Being transparent
from the start:
Expectations clear

Being clear with
your resources, objectives
and expectations

demand-driven
research??

Research
fatigue

→ Rejection
→ Acceptance due to ~~exhaustion~~

Structure & Context

Takes time /
intergenerational
challenges

decolonial Theory
+ Knowledge development
in Projects / studies

structural bias
through financing
/ hierarchical
structures

So funding
problems can
not be solved?

different level
of income

is it an
excuse?

awareness
/ sensitivity

inclusion in
curricula

dialogue /
translation
(takes a lot of
time & exhaustive)

critical
reflection

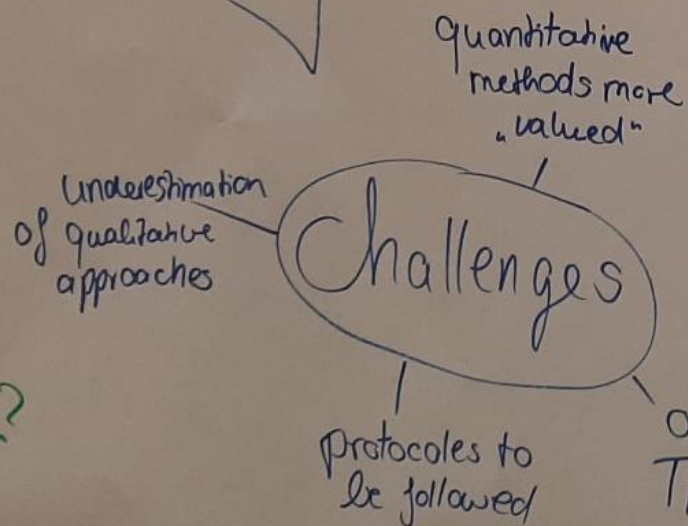
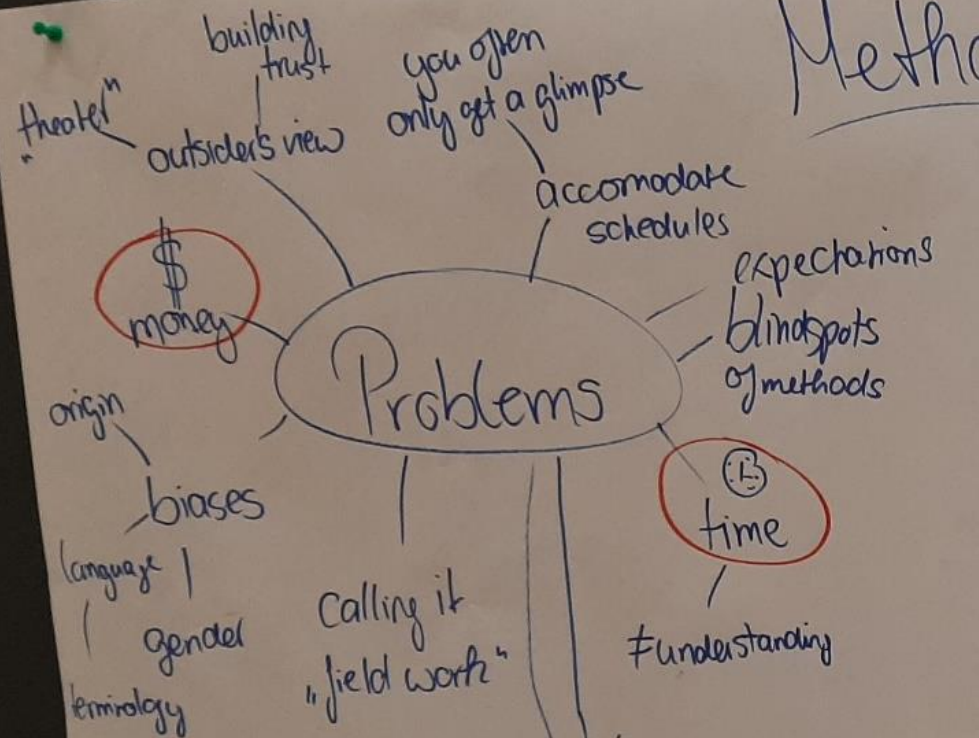
collaboration
with
local NGO?

long-term
collaboration

flexible
budgets

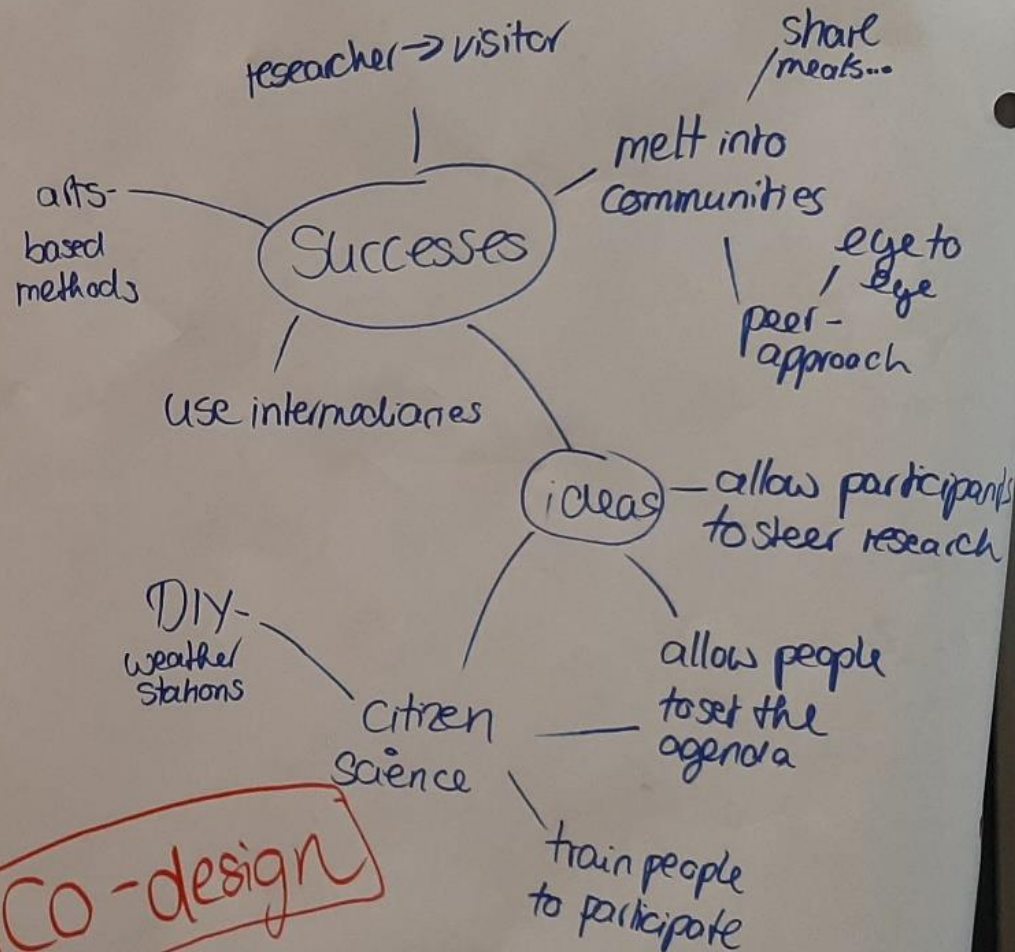
• Role of those in
position of power in change

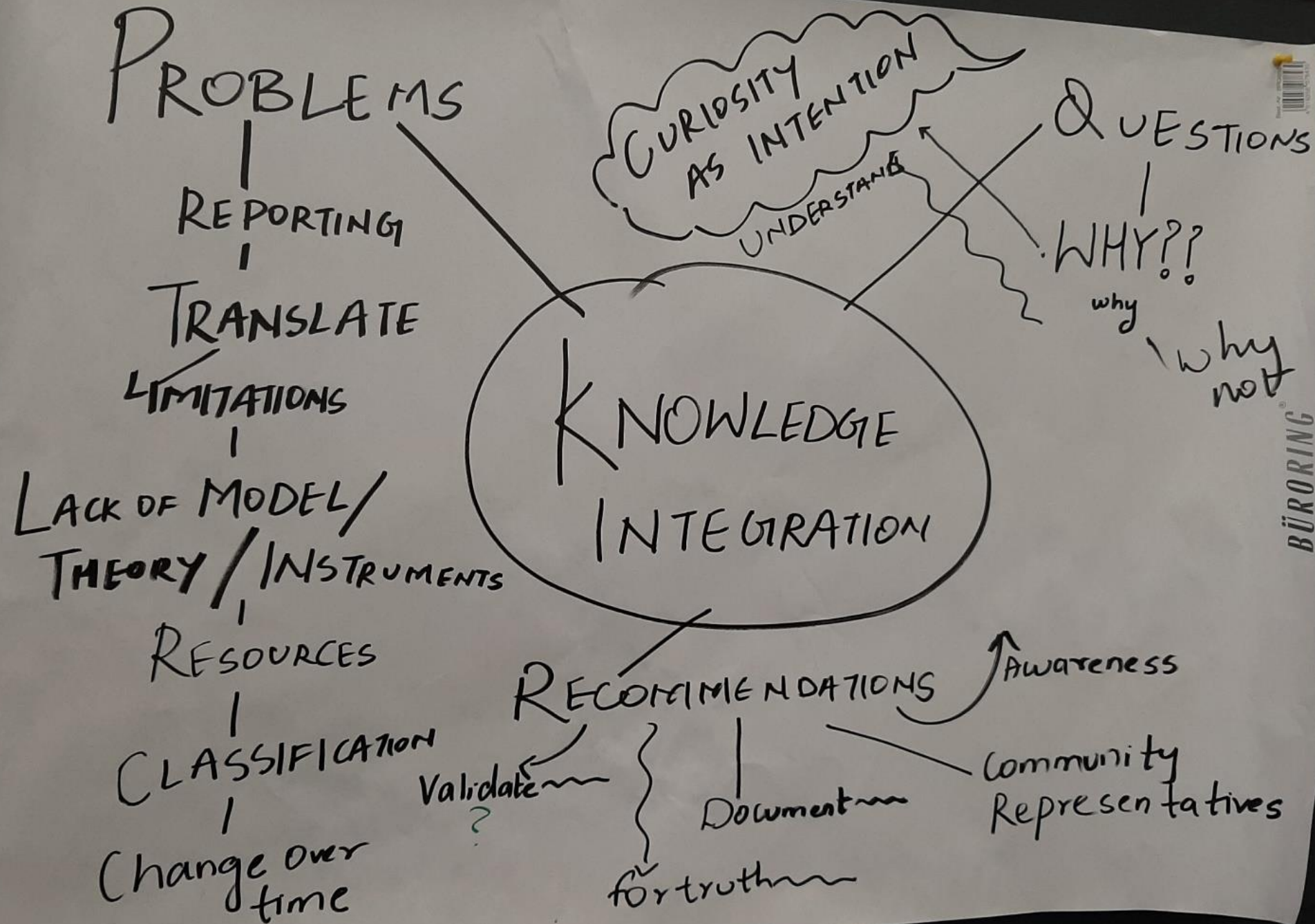
Methods



term
"field"?

Co-design





Thank you for your participation!

We will send a recap of the results to all persons who registered with me to the workshop.

Feel free to contact us if you have interest in our research or to discuss the topic of decolonization in fieldwork!

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Martin.petrick@agrar.uni-giessen.de

Methods and their framing of research and results

Dr. Stéphanie Domptail, Jessica Mörsdorf.

Justus Liebig University of Gießen

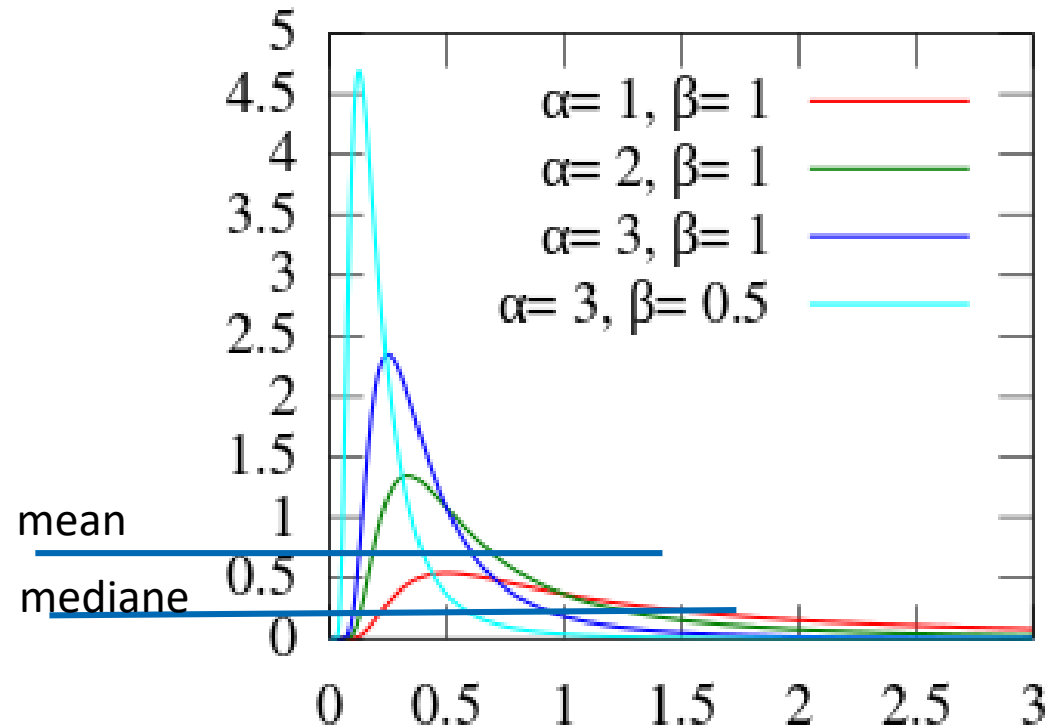
Stéphanie.domptail@agrار.uni-giessen.de

ME:

- French-American,
Established in
Germany
- Scientist, supervisor
- Women
- Agricultural systems
- Teaching PhD
candidates from the
Global South
- Researcher in Southern
Africa



„Average rainfall in Nama Karoo“



Source: Wikipedia: incomplete gamma distribution

Questionnaire: „what is the average rainfall on the farm?“

Afrikaans group: 122 mm/year

Orlam group: It depends

Risk aversion theory: attempts to reduce variability

High reliability theory: attempt to make best use of high rainfall inputs when available (Roe, 1999)

Consequences for stock management: large areas with private property and expensive livestock vs. mobility, emergency areas and cheap and prolific stock

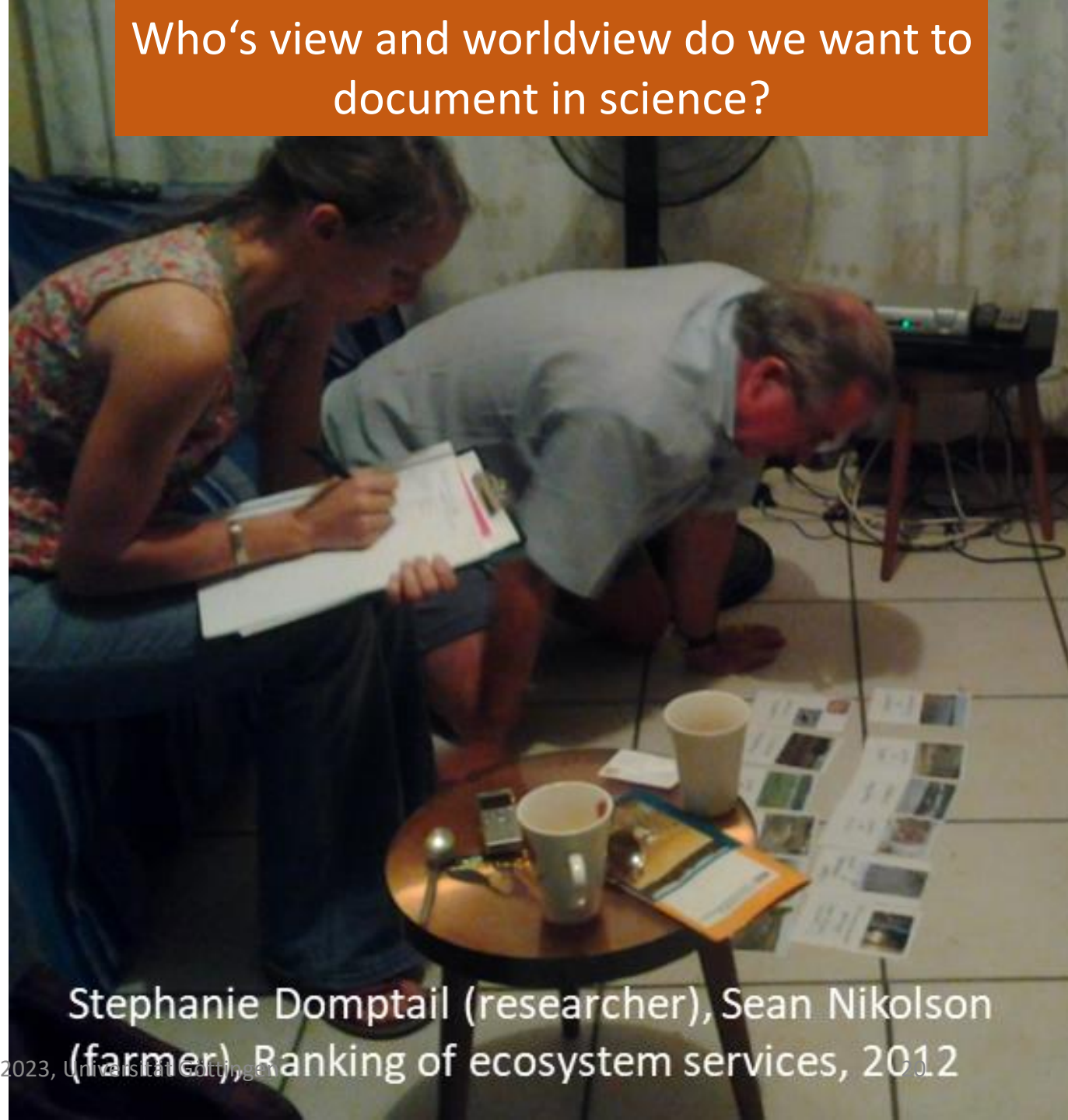
Ecosystem services in the Okavango River Basin

„Please rank these different ecosystem services in their order of importance for you:“

ES = scientific concepts which do not necessarily correspond to the ontological meaning of nature of the interviewees

The concept of ES precludes a holistic/relational perception of nature/the environment

Who's view and worldview do we want to document in science?



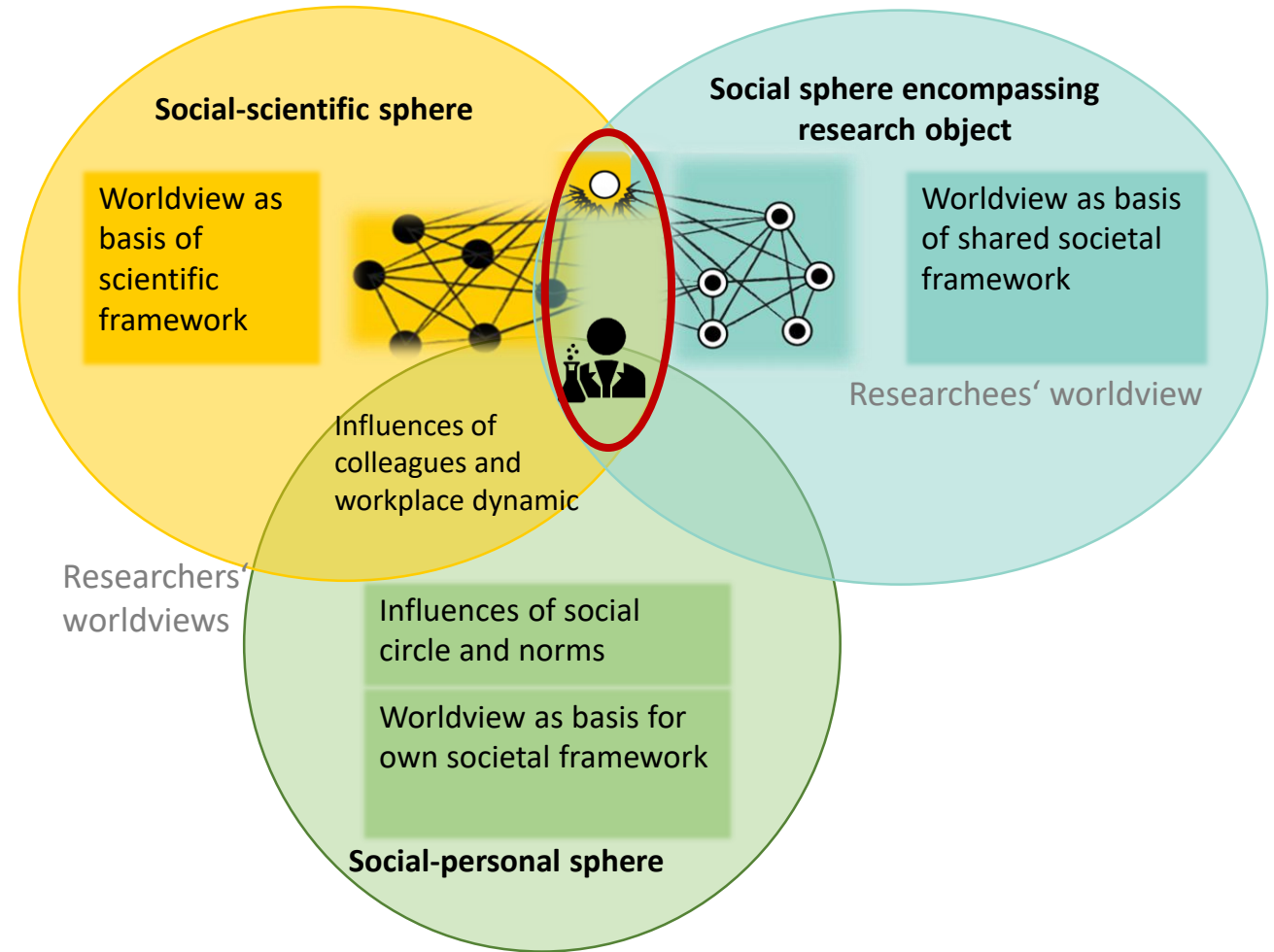
Stephanie Domptail (researcher), Sean Nikolson (farmer), Ranking of ecosystem services, 2012

Ideal of scientific objectivity revisited

=> Reposition the researcher as an actor

=> Acknowledge their individual and systemic **situatedness**

- Acknowledge positionality and the situatedness of the research activity



(authors' depiction)

Practicing research as a reciprocal relationship



Teaching research as a reciprocal relationship

Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal women by the Québec Native Women's Association (QNWA, 2012) adapted from Basile et al. (2018).



Guidelines	Application example in Basile et al. (2018)
Initial contact	
Extensive consultation	Got informed consent from the community and important aboriginal governing bodies before initiation of the study
Defenition of research subject	Valued their voices and incorporated the feedback on the protocol
Local needs and priorities	Interviewed three Atikamekw Women to get their opinion on the research protocol
Aboriginanl knowledge	
Research methodologies	Developed research protocol following these guidelines
Voice of Aboriginal women	Made sure to let the women involved review the findings for validation
Holistic vision	
Reciprocity	
Communication	

SAN CODE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

South African San Institute 2017

Teaching research as a reciprocal relationship

- Open up to to **see more** /differently
- Methods where the choice of indicators is reflected

e.g. Participatory statistics,
Observation,
?.....

Problem statement

Data collection

Theories and
indicators

Results and
interpretation

Long term relation
(relational context)

Revise theories and
concepts together with
partners and
researchees

=> Meaning of „conservation“
=> Meaning of „resource“
=> Meaning of „management“



Teaching research as a reciprocal relationship



Reflect our
interaction with
researchees

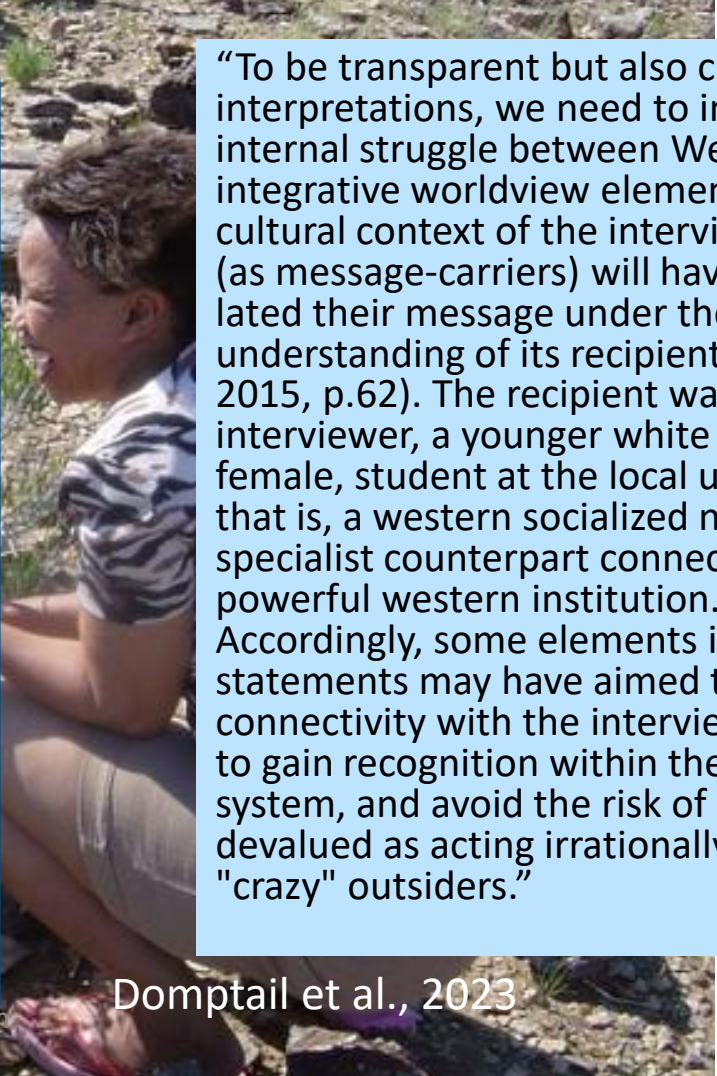
Problem statement

Data collection

Theories and
indicators

Results and
interpretation

Long term relation
(relational context)



“To be transparent but also clearer in our interpretations, we need to interpret this internal struggle between Western and integrative worldview elements from the cultural context of the interview. Farmers (as message-carriers) will have formulated their message under their understanding of its recipient (Kruse, 2015, p.62). The recipient was the interviewer, a younger white German female, student at the local university, that is, a western socialized non-specialist counterpart connected to a powerful western institution. Accordingly, some elements in their statements may have aimed to generate connectivity with the interviewer, that is, to gain recognition within the Western system, and avoid the risk of being devalued as acting irrationally, or as "crazy" outsiders.”

Domptail et al., 2023



Thank you for your attention

Contact: stephanie.domptail@agrar.uni-giessen.de

Part of the work was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) from funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), SDG nexus Network (grant number 57526248), program “exceed - Hochschulexzellenz in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit”

Felix
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WHO AM I ? - POSITIONALITY

- Rwandan by birth and by nationality.
- Primary education: Kinyarwanda as the medium of instruction
- Secondary education (from age 12): French as the medium of instruction
- Bachelor studies (from age 21): English as the medium of instruction, by professors and lecturers mostly trained in Belgium, Netherlands,
- Masters: English as the medium of instruction, by professors from Europe and Asia
- Up until recently, if not till today, an individuals' level of competence and skills was measured by their ability to communicate in foreign languages!

Research Topic, Field work objective, Researchees

My research topic:

- Specialty cultivated Mushroom Industry in Rwanda: challenges, opportunities and prospects from both producers and consumers' perspective

Field related objective: Understanding the mushroom value chain in Rwanda

My interviewees:

- Predominantly rural
- Generally Low level of formal schooling
- Think and act in the vernacular language: Kinyarwanda
- Live in a community –not isolated individuals

An epistemologically colonised researcher willing to decolonize research methods??

CHALLENGES:

- I and researchees have different world views and operate in non-identical socio-environmental spheres

For example, I was escorted by a driver, and a research assistant in a hired car with nice clothes, smart phones, camera and voice recorders, that further portrayed our outsider image.

- I was taught and trained to think and act in languages that are exotic to them

For example, my interview guide was first drafted in English and translated afterwards! It should have been the other way around

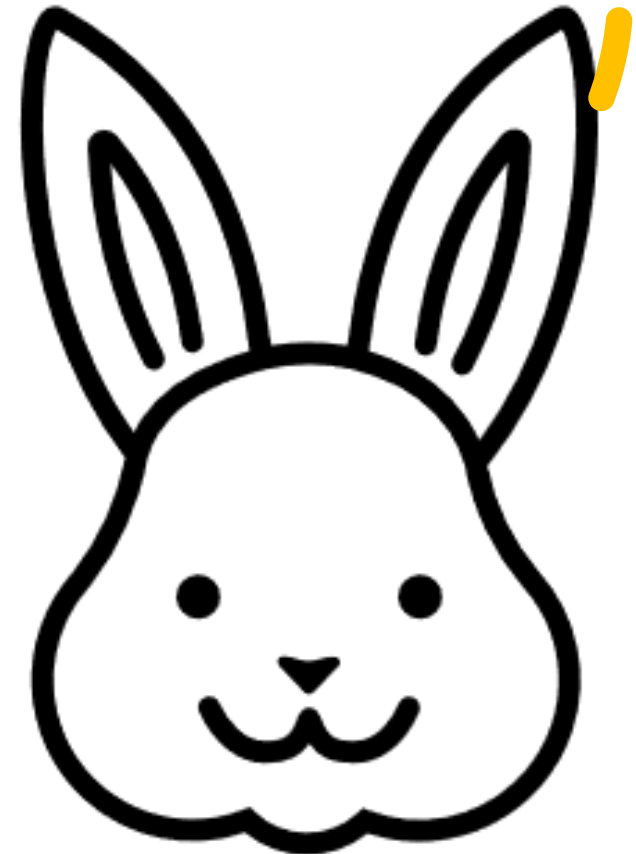
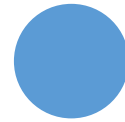
- Concepts and theories underpinning my research are also foreign, sometimes make no sense to my researchees. I also struggle to find indigenously appropriate terms

For example, my respondents had to choose their dietary style by answering whether they were vegetarians, flexitarians or vegans! These are purely exotic concepts that have no equivalent terms in Kinyarwanda

Failure to meet researchees' expectations

- As I left it to my R.A to organise contacts and interview scheduling, she would tell them that I am a PhD student from Germany. Which rose the expectations of the interviewees.

Some mushroom farmers told me that they were expecting a white guy from Germany. And, 'white' means money and project funding



Failure to meet researchees' expectations

- We went to Rubavu, the northwestern province of Rwanda, shortly after the deadly floods killed more than 120 inhabitants, destroyed houses and infrastructure, killed cattle.

When they saw us, non-participating neighbours were asking why we don't put them on the list for property damage assessment and aid relief

- Shouldn't we also be mindful about what matters most to our research participants and their communities at the time of our data collection?



Misappropriation of knowledge

- Case of Amanita Bweyeyensis
- Paper is out!
- No single mention of local populations, not even in acknowledgement
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?ap=desktop&v=PtjRvTmg3GY>



Involving researchees in defining the research problem

- There's a discrepancy between my research problem and their problems.
- Researchees' problems were more of a practical nature while my research problems/questions were more of a theoretical and conceptual nature.

Ex:

*why would people prefer to buy mushrooms from your farm? How did this idea come to your mind? **versus***

Where do I get a cheaper substrate? How can I make a seedling spawn myself?

- **Need for reconciliation?**



Indigenous knowledge and natural resource management

'Toyin Kolawole

Tropentag 2023, Berlin

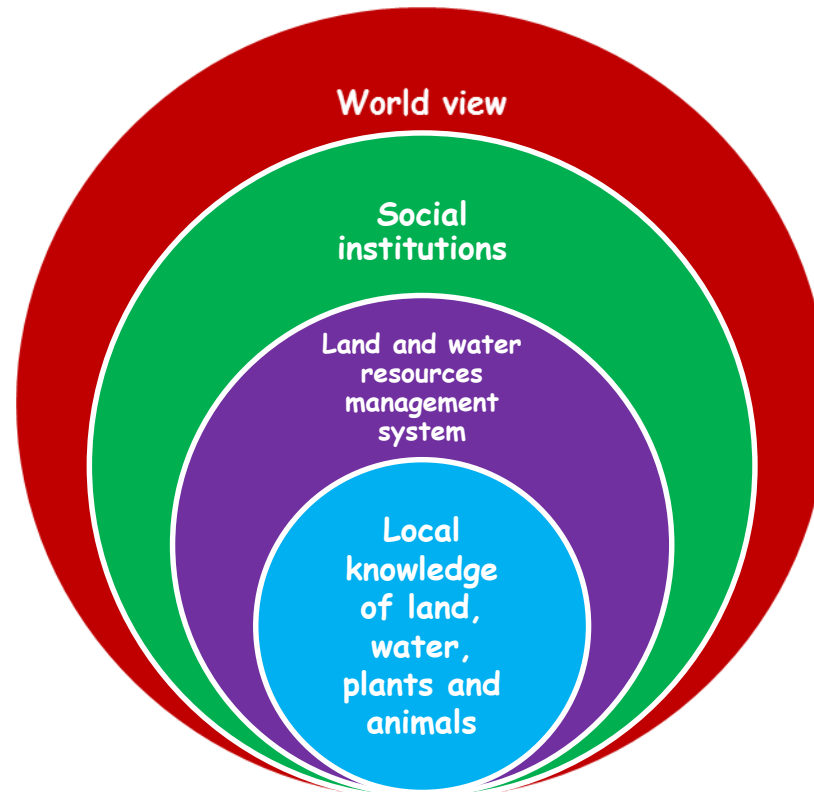
22 September 2023



Decolonized research methodologies in NR management

- What decolonized research might mean:
 - ✓ It is about focusing attention on the world views of non-Western individuals
 - ✓ And respectfully knowing and understanding theory and research from previously "Other(ed)" perspectives (Battiste, 2000; Datta, 2018; Smith, 2012)

Levels of IK analysis



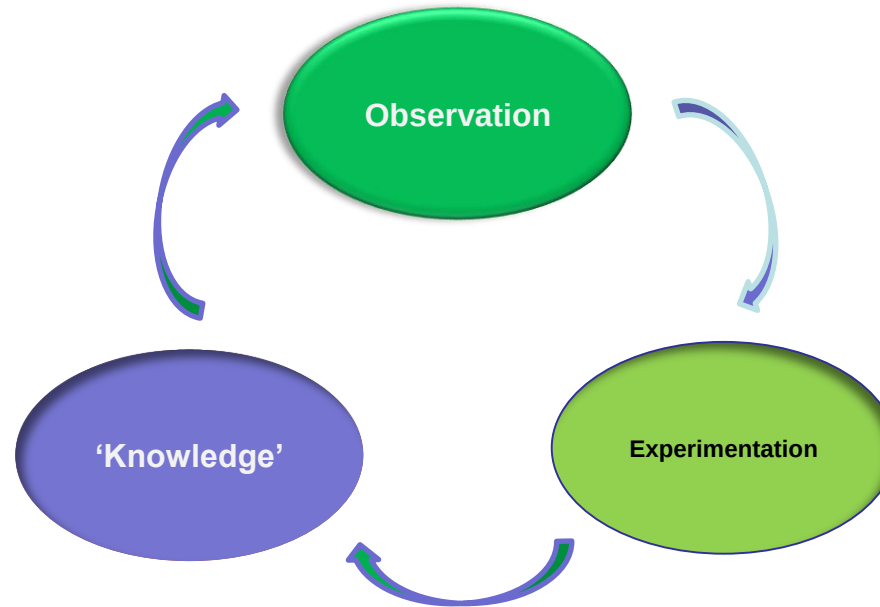
Between science and LK – a theoretical statement

CONVENTIONAL SCIENCE	LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
- Quantitative, objective and positivist	- Qualitative, subjective and experiential
- Truthful, rational, dependable	- Mythical, irrational
- Focussed on mechanisms and predictability	- Rich in context information
- Precise, time consuming, expensive	- Relatively inexpensive and quick
- If done in optimal conditions, so controlled as to be disassociated from the complexities of reality	- Highly confounded with complexities of the real world
- Universally applicable	- Locally applicable
- Linear	- Cyclical
- Eurocentric, narrow physical scope	- Ethnocentric, spiritual/cultural focused
- Focussed on single/present generation	- Focussed on future generations
- Materialist and individualist	- Reciprocal and multi-dimensional
- Economic growth focus	- Socio-cultural focus
- Mechanical/segmented/ reductionist	- Holistic , collective
- Etic	- Emic
- Ex situ	- In situ; autochthonous

Sources: Peters (2010); Kolawole (2012)

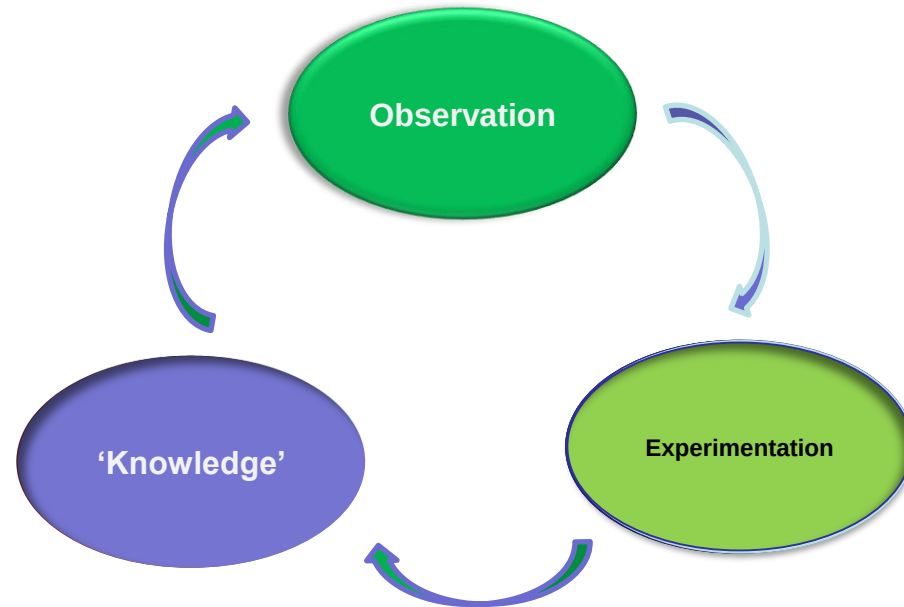
Local [popular] and [erudite] 'scientific' knowledge

- Similarities/commonalities



Local [*popular*] and [*erudite*] 'scientific' knowledge

- Farmers' experimentation



Stages of innovation adoption and IK utilisation

ADOPTION OF SCIENTIFIC INNOVATIONS (Rogers, 1962; 2003)

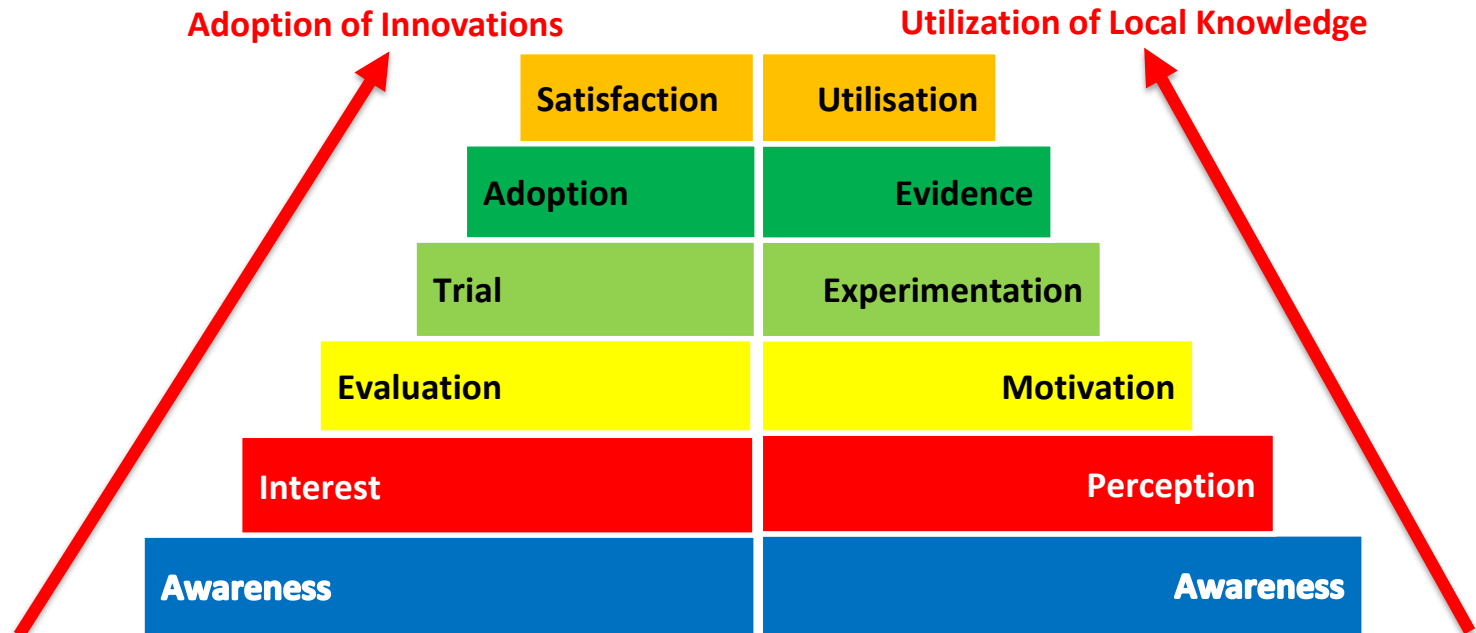
- Awareness
- Interest
- Trial
- Evaluation
- Adoption
- Satisfaction

UTILISATION OF LOCAL INNOVATIONS (Kolawole, 2001; 2012; 2015; 2022)

- Awareness
 - Perception
 - Motivation
 - Experimentation
 - Evidence
 - Utilisation
-

Stages of innovation adoption and utilisation of LK

(Rogers, 1962, 2003; Kolawole, 2001, 2012, 2015, 2022)





Suggested practices in qualitative research

- The need to exercise critical reflexivity
- Reciprocity and respect for self-determination
- Embracing Other ways of knowing
- Embodying a transformative praxis (Thambinathan and Kinsella., 2021)



Thank you so very much!

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Martin Petrick

Standpoint epistemology vs modern science: friends or foes?

Tropentag Berlin 22 September 2023



Source: <https://www.praxis-johanniskirche.de/>.

The hallmarks of modern science

Truth claims should be

- Applicable across time & space (“**universal laws**”),
- Objectively representing the world as is, not as anyone likes it to be, **independent of values of researcher**,
- **Evaluated by universal standards** independent of rival hypotheses about truth, e.g. reason, empirical experimenting, testing.

Benton & Craib 2011, Philosophy of social science 2nd ed.

Problems with the principles of modern science

- Human **social life is ontologically different** from subject matter of natural sciences, e.g. role of consciousness & meaning in humans,
- Scientists always theoretically pre-occupied by a “paradigm”, (**Theory ladenness**, Kuhn 1962),
- Hypotheses can never be isolated from auxiliary assumptions, (**Undetermination thesis**, Quine 1951).

Hands 2001; Benton & Craib 2011.

Modern science & cultural domination

How to challenge the imposition of modern science in a process of cultural domination? Some options:

- A relativistic “welcoming of cultural diversity” – morally unacceptable
- Use emancipatory science to criticise domination as “bad science”
- Uncover & criticize values behind knowledge claims – raises question of justifying values
- Take a standpoint view of knowledge claims as landscapes, arguing that some standpoints give better views than others.

Benton & Craib 2011; Harding 2015.

Standpoint epistemology

Claim: underprivileged groups have a distinct way of knowing:

- If any viewpoint can make truth claims about the subaltern, it is the subalterns' viewpoint of themselves!

Standpoint epistemologists & modern scientists both insist on:

- **logical consistency**, i.e. avoid self-contradiction,
- a **non-relativist realism**, i.e. there is a world independent of our thought about it, some thoughts more reliable than others

Benton & Craib 2011; Harding 2015.

An emancipatory marriage?

Methodological challenges	Modern science	Standpoint epistemology
Human values	Strives hard to exclude value judgements	Source of inspiration
Unobservable entities (e.g. worldviews)	Hard to accommodate	Explicitly acknowledged
Empirical evidence	Objective measurement possible	Stresses contextuality
Quality control & testing	Elaborate methodologies available	Emphasises creativity in hypothesis formulation

Based on Benton & Craib 2011.

A more democratic science

- Standpoint epistemology offers **reform options** to modern science
- A science **considering values & worldviews** is a more modern science in a deeply emancipatory sense
- Science from below may be a **better science** even in a traditional account of epistemology!

Open questions

- How to practice a more diverse & inclusive social science?
- Examples of best-practice standpoint epistemology in agricultural development
- Implications for academic publishing
- Implications for academic teaching

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Thank you for your attention!