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The Conflicted Decolonial Scholar

A Journey Through the Dialectics of Becoming, Un-becoming and Being, in Struggle with the People

My country, the Philippines, was first colonised by Spain from the 16th century onwards, then by the United States at the turn of the 19th century, a period that ended with 'flag independence'[1] in 1946 after a 3-year occupation by the Japanese imperial army.[2] This colonised history has left a legacy in my mind that coexists with imprints of my people's rich history, inherited stories and imaginations, my lived experience; and colonial mentality.

In my mind persist stories of Filipino heroes walking to the garrotte or facing the coloniser's firing squad, heads held high; of the insurrecto's hands weakened with hunger and disease, holding tight an old carbine in mountains and fields across the islands. In my father's and brothers' stories are themes of our great ancient people – brave, free, attractive, strong... of guerrillas who valiantly held off the Japanese practically with their bare hands; of peasants who fought the firepower of the Americans with bolos. Juxtaposed with memories from these stories, though, are my memories from childhood, of statues at home of white-skinned Jesus and Mary, of myself singing the 'Star Spangled Banner' every morning on the primary school grounds, being fined by teachers for speaking the local language instead of English, learning that we had been introduced to civilisation and democracy by the US. Internalising the idea, always present everywhere, that whiteness is a privileged skin colour. At home, in school, in church, in jokes, in fairy tales, this is the ontology. Capecia apparently was present also in my childhood.[3]

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1 'Flag independence' refers to the token recognition by the US of Philippine independence; it is widely known that the US continues to wield tremendous influence on the government.

2 Japan, entering into an alliance with Mussolini and Hitler, which carved up the world into their desired enclaves of control, wanted to be an Asian colonial power.

3 Mayotte Capécia is the pen name of Lucette Ceranus, author of the 1948 semi-autobiographical novel *I Am a Martinican Woman*. Fanon refers to this book to describe the feelings of self-hatred that colonialism instils in black women, encouraging them to pursue white men at any cost, even when this leads to unhealthy relationships and eventual abandonment. LitCharts "Mayotte

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In this paper, I am bringing you along with me in my personal journey to illustrate that the scholar is a bearer of both colonial and liberatory consciousnesses that coexist. I wish to show how the scholar is heir to colliding histories, that this inheritance is often not recognised but suffered, and how, eventually, liberatory tendencies take precedence. I want to tell of the reflexive lesson-learning that characterises my scholarship. As I am a senior academic in the most prestigious university in the country, influencing colleagues and students here and abroad as a scholar-educator, getting to know my complex conflicted cognitive inheritances is an initial step toward ethical and humane scholarship. I am thinking that, for me to contribute meaningfully to decolonial work, I first must recognise and deal with the fact that I am both the object and subject of the decolonial project.

Drawing from my own story, backgrounded by my country's history, I write about two strands of thought, one holding that (1) the decolonial scholar in the South is a bearer of colonial mentality while attempting to create liberatory scholarship in complex, conflicted, step-wise processes; and another contending that (2) this internal conflict is acted out in the overlapping, and also colliding fields of research and ethics. Toward the end of your journey with me, I will point to a discovery: I found my mooring by taking part in my people's struggle for liberation. The scholarship, therefore, that I have affinity with and am working for is necessarily insurgent.

Why from my story? Because it is a most familiar terrain. I want to illustrate as well the fusion of the personal and political, of biography and history, of the small and large, of mentality and structures. Besides, telling personal stories is an act of reflexivity. Finally, if I am to describe conflicted consciousness, it has to be mine. (I have no privilege speaking about other people's conflicted consciousness.)

Now we start the journey.

Conflicted Inheritances: Colonised and Liberatory

Colonial mentality is the term used by Filipino nationalists in reference to colonised consciousness. Jose Rizal,[4] Filipino intellectual-philosopher-activist of the

Capécia (Lucette Ceranus): Character Analysis." https://www.litcharts.com/lit/black-skin-white-masks/characters/mayotte-capecia-lucette-ceranus, accessed May 29, 2022.

4 He was the best evidence of the falsehood of the colonisers' narrative about the inferiority of Filipinos. Intellectually gifted, he was a physician, spoke ten languages fluently, was able to converse in another twelve; an experimental scientist, a teacher, sculptor, musician, celebrated epis-

Philippine revolution against Spanish colonialism, caricatured the native elite for their futile attempts to look and sound Spanish, a point which Frantz Fanon, over half a century later, would theorise in *Black Skin, White Masks*.[5]

In the late 19th century, in the essay "The Philippines: A Century Hence," influenced by progressive thought and events in Europe, Rizal foretold the emergence of Filipino consciousness for nationhood and independence, that they will rise and fight for freedom. His novels, *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891), had a tremendous impact on Filipino revolutionary consciousness. In August 1896, the Philippine revolution against European colonisation, the first in Asia, broke out, led by the underground organisation, Katipunan, organised by Andres Bonifacio and deeply influenced by Rizal.[6] The revolution cut across social classes and ethnicities. At the age of thirty-five, Rizal was executed by the Spaniards in December 1896. The execution swelled the ranks of revolutionaries.

Among the colonised, recognising the falsity of claims of racial superiority-inferiority, and in their place holding up truths about human dignity and agency and risking one's life to claim them does not happen in a single spark nor does it come from one great idea. These interlinked phenomena have many sources and multiple processes. Thus for example, while European colonisers abused countless peoples in the world, the decolonial project can trace among its headwaters the progressive-humanist ideas of European scholar-activists. Among those who influenced Rizal's thinking were Pi y Margall, Spanish liberal, socialist and anarchist leader of the short-lived Spanish revolution against the monarchy,[7] thinkers of the Enlightenment[8] like Victor Hugo, Voltaire, even Friedrich Engels[9] and Rudolf Virchow. These thinkers, too, are among the sources of my standpoint. In the belly of the beast are comrades for liberation.

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tolary writer, playwright, poet, essayist, and novelist in both Spanish and Tagalog. De Stephano 2015. Rizal is the first intellectual in Southeast Asia to think systematically about social and political issues. His thoughts about the nature of Filipino colonial society laid the foundations for an original Southeast Asian sociology of colonial society. See Alatas 2011. Rizal was actively supported by many intellectual-activists in Europe at that time, where he studied and lived for several years, and where his political program was formed.

5 It is quite interesting that among the leading decolonial thinkers are Mignolo, Quijano, and Maldonado Torres who are from countries colonised by Spain and which are now objects of US imperialist interventionism, just like the Philippines. As interesting, Rizal was a medical doctor, like Fanon. The symbolism is striking: Rizal was a doctor of the eyes, Fanon of the mind.

6 Quibuyen 2021.

7 Araneta 2021.

8 Sicat 2019.

9 Quibuyen 2021.

Decolonial scholarship is not defined by geography or race or historical period. It goes deep back in history, enriched by various races, peoples, histories, stories and geographies. It is a project, not only of and for the colonised but of and for humanity.

When the Philippine revolution against Spain was rapidly gaining ground, in large part inspired by Rizal's martyrdom, in 1899, the US and Spain made a deal for a mock battle that would end in the latter's defeat. In turn, Spain was paid $20 million by the US and guaranteed protection of Catholic Church and Spanish properties in the colony. The islands became a US colony in the Pacific. Filipino revolutionaries continued the fight for independence, this time against the new oppressors.

There was public uproar in the US over reports of American troops' brutalities against Filipinos. Many Americans strongly opposed US colonisation of my country, including the writer Mark Twain. Despite their well-reasoned arguments, including the use of principles from the US Declaration of Independence, their government took no heed. Instead, President McKinley, after paying Spain for the Philippines, said it was the US' 'Manifest Destiny' to civilise the Filipinos. In 1902, speaking before the graves of American soldiers in Arlington, Virginia, President Theodore Roosevelt framed the Filipino-American war as a race war, as "the triumph of civilisation over forces which stand for the black chaos of savagery and barbarism."[10]

While Filipino resistance ebbed, notably after the surrender of Emilio Aguinaldo[11] to the Americans, and the collaboration of many local elite personalities like the *hacienderos*[12] in my home island, Negros, many Filipinos continued the resistance. Notable are Macario Sakay and Miguel Malvar who, unlike many other revolutionary leaders, refused to accept US offers of a government post in exchange for their surrender. In Negros, the healer (*babaylan*) Papa Isio,[13] who came from a very poor family, having mobilised peasants, sugar workers and

10 "Remarks on Memorial Day in Arlington." *The American Presidency Project*. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/343493, accessed May 5, 2023.

11 Aguinaldo became the leader of the Philippine revolution against Spain after the assassination of Bonifacio. There is credible historical evidence that the assassination was done with the knowledge of Aguinaldo.

12 Owners of large tracts of land, usually planted with sugar cane and rice. *Hacienderos* were mostly creoles (of European descent born in the Philippines), and, later, US-American and Chinese families.

13 Alvarez-Castillo 1989.

montañosas[14] against the Spaniards, waged a class-based war for independence until his surrender and imprisonment.

Among the first programmes of the US in the Philippines was public education.[15] It established schools including the University of the Philippines (UP). *Pensionados* (scholars) were sent to study in US universities. Up until the 1980s, the most prestigious professors in UP were the *pensionados*. They were seen as the most advanced in knowledge and pedagogy. The goal of the US-American education program was to develop a class of Filipinos whose mentality was Americanised and who would be loyal to the United States.[16]

After just a little over three decades of American occupation, the Philippines, hosting the US' two biggest overseas military bases, was bombed by Japan right after Pearl Harbour, followed by Japanese troops landing on the islands. Just about three months into the war, in March 1942, the US military, led by General Douglas McArthur, left, leaving Filipinos to fight on our own. Filipinos fought valiantly against the Japanese troops. The revolutionaries against US colonialism shifted focus to fight the Japanese. My father himself was a guerrilla fighter. About a million Filipinos died. When McArthur returned in 1944, he announced via radio: "People of the Philippines. I have returned." The people rejoiced, welcoming the chief implementer of US-American imperialism in Asia, believing he was our saviour.

The United States is glorified in the country. This was the narrative I grew up with/in having been born during 'peace time'[17] in a lower middle class family. Up until high school, my dream was to study in the US and marry a US-American, imagining them to be the best of the male species.

My parents had decided early on that each of us their children would get a university degree despite our meagre means. Still alive in my memory are lectures of my father, the intellectual in our family, that the only way for us to have a better life than what we were having was to get a university degree, the passport to a bright future. My father, a high school graduate at the top of his class, and my mother, a public elementary school teacher, inspired, cajoled and exhorted us, with assurance that no one would stop their schooling for lack of finances; and we had the freedom to choose the kind of studies we wanted. But he emphasised

14 A mixed group of rebels, thieves, deserters who escaped from Spanish authorities and hid in the hinterlands.

15 Filipino historian Renato Constantino calls this 'mis-education.'

16 The huge success of this project is evidenced by Philippine academia's adherence to and imitation of US-American universities' systems, standards, and culture of scholarship up to this day.

17 The folk term for the few years after the Second World War.

that we choose a career that would ensure we would not have masters; that we would be free agents. He told us of the indignities of being a peon, a paid servant of sugar-baron families. At seven years old, I already had teachings from him about agency. I also grew up with his stories about the oppression and exploitation of sugar cane workers by *hacienderos*. I remember his passionate anger at the injustice of it all.

My undergraduate college education at the University of the Philippines, the premier state university in the country, did not do much to shatter my 'American dream.' What did was the education from my students in the early 1970s, what we now term the *First Quarter Storm*, the height of student activism against US imperialism[18] and its local partner, Ferdinand Marcos. It was my first teaching year in a provincial campus of UP. I was only two to three years older than my undergraduate students in political science, many of whom were from the upper middle classes and candidates for Latin honours when they graduate from university. Several of them did not. They dropped out of university when Marcos declared martial law, and activists were rounded up, imprisoned, tortured, disappeared, and murdered in the thousands. Some died fighting Marcos' troops.[19] But back to my education.

There were heated discussions in class, as my students questioned and critiqued my lessons, mostly taken from textbooks in political science authored by US-Americans, the same textbooks my political science professors used. The students' irreverence often angered me. Yet, they waited for me after class to continue the discussion. They gave me writings of Renato Constantino,[20] Jose Ma Sison,[21] Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Mao Tse Tung, materials about the theology of liberation,[22] among others. "Please, mam, read them, and then we talk," they said.

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18 The US, after the Second World War, became the leading global power, having transformed from a colonial-mercantilist power to capitalist-imperialist power. It henceforth behaved as a rapacious, exploitative military-industrial hegemon.

19 The brutal dictatorship was met by an intensified people's movement for liberation from the stranglehold of feudal landownership, a monopoly of political power by a small class of compradors and capitalists, and US-American imperialism. A broad united front of peasants, workers, intelligentsia, students and youth, progressive religious sectors, indigenous peoples, was formed that continued even after the fall of the Marcos' dictatorship.

20 Influential Filipino public intellectual who changed the perspective of countless Filipino youth on the nature of American-Filipino relationship.

21 He founded the new Communist Party of the Philippines and led the youth movement for the establishment of national democracy in the country.

22 In the late 1960s, activist-priests in the Philippines, who were mostly involved in the Church's social action programs, were intently following the developments in Latin America, especially

They invited me to join discussion groups organised by students and some teachers; I watched them in various places on the campus, huddled in small groups, intently discussing, from dusk till dark. I started reading their materials; joining their discussion groups and then I joined the rallies, wrote manifestoes and did more. Thus began my education from my students on US imperialism, colonial mentality and more. And my involvement in the movement for national liberation.

Layers and threads of overlapping, intersecting and colliding inheritances of ontologies, epistemologies and ethics, from our childhood stories to history subjects in high school and university to our professional work are sources of a core perspective which we use to view the world and guide our practice.

So where does my almost reflex reaction of outrage to suffering, acts of cruelty and injustice come from? From my people's history and heroes? My father's stories? From my brothers' tales about Hiawatha, Ivanhoe, my mother's abiding grace and quiet grit, her prayers to the Virgin and the crucified (white) Christ? From my students' martyrdom? My own life experiences? From these and more. In other words, without design, despite (or perhaps, because of) my colliding inheritances, I have formed a standpoint that aligns with justice, kindness and dignity. Much of this, I suppose, was because my scholarship was grounded in the actual struggle of my people against local and foreign oppression.

The scholar is both the subject and object of the decolonial project; she carries the colonial consciousness, but must liberate herself from it by recognising it, turning it around while engaging at the same time in the process of constructing/forming ideas, recognitions – consciousness; thus the liberatory project seeks to recognise what is veiled. Our struggle to decolonise our world cannot happen without our struggle to decolonise ourselves in dialectical fashion.

This is thus not a straightforward process; there are twists and turns, maybe sometimes painful. The intellectual needs to turn herself against herself and be her most intense critic, for there are so many layers of false (and cruel) consciousness interwoven into our psyche. This is a constant struggle within ourselves, habits, and predispositions. Fanon said: The goal of this attitude is "nothing less than the liberation of the black man from himself."[23] So, too, the scholar; so, too, in research and ethics.

after the Second Vatican Council. Several of them joined the New People's Army as one way of living in practice the philosophy of Gustavo Gutierrez' *A Theology of Liberation*.

23 Fanon 1986, xii.

The Conflicted Arena of Research and Ethics

With the constant funding drought for research in the university, it was common among those who have not yet established a track record in research to unquestioningly accept offers to be a part of studies that many times were initiated and designed by scholars in US universities. Often the only thing that mattered was 'do we think the project is worth doing and can we do it?' This, and the older, submerged conception of American scholarship as superior, which I had absorbed since childhood, strengthened and polished during my college education and by the university's subculture of academic excellence, explain why I never thought of asking why those we would study had no participation at all in designing the projects we were to implement. The subconscious colonised strand of mentality kicked in, despite the fact that I was already an activist.

A story illustrates this. In the 1990s, HIV/AIDS was a major concern, especially in the United States. Little was known about the nature, cause, and transmission of HIV/AIDs; there was a lot of fear, victim-blaming and prejudice. Among the projects that received funding were efforts to prevent the spread of the virus among what were seen as high-risk groups. Commercial sex workers had been identified as a high-risk group. They were among those targeted for education about HIV/AIDS toward behavioural change.

As a component of a multidisciplinary project, I led a social science team that aimed to educate and train female commercial sex workers (CSWs) working in clubs in Manila, on HIV/AIDS prevention. This was among the then fashionable prevention strategies in the US, from where the project funding came. With the funding also came the project design. After introducing ourselves and our project to the women, as an initial strategy, we tried to familiarise ourselves with their workplace and work conditions. The women later told us that, when they first saw us enter the clubs, by the way we were dressed, they thought we were Born Again bible teachers. This gives you an idea how ignorant or insensitive we were.[24] We asked them to attend a meeting where we provided an overview of HIV/AIDS, how it is transmitted and how transmission can be prevented. We also discussed the project in more detail. This was followed by several meetings during which we learned about each of them, including how and why they had entered this work. Then we made tentative lists of the women we would recruit as peer educators, following a set of criteria for selection. The peer educators would educate other CSWs about HIV/AIDS and methods of prevention, which included

24 I am reconstructing this from distant memory, so there might be errors with a few details, but none with the story line and the core issues.

condom-use for the male clients. Then we did in-depth individual interviews with the candidate-peer educators, which we used in making the final list.[25]

From about 20 women in the cohort, six eventually became peer educators. After they accepted the offer, we gave them additional education and trainings, such as on how to negotiate for non-penetrative sex or for using condoms. The idea was for them to pass on the learnings and skills to other CSWs. The training included putting the condom on the penis of the customer without them being aware of it (given the prevalent male opposition to condom use).[26] We brought them to trainings, lectures, conferences and workshops. We gave them easy to use/read education materials on HIV/AIDS. We provided them a cash allowance for going around the joints and skipping work so that they could undertake peer education and training continuously.

During the first two months, we had periodic assessment meetings with them. Then, about three months later, we learned that: (a) two women had been beaten by male customers when they realised that the condom has been placed on their penis; (b) several women had lost regular customers because they tried to negotiate for non-penetrative sex; and (c) the peer educators had become targets of envy and hostility from other women in our cohort because they were perceived to have received favoured treatment from the project. Very few of the peer educators have remained active.

I was shocked, ashamed and humbled. At this time, I was only beginning to learn about feminist research and feminist ethics from US-American feminists (primarily via the Ford Foundation Philippine program officer, Nicola Jones, an US-American feminist who was funding my transdisciplinary work in health). We scrambled about; sought advice from colleagues and local women's rights organisers. But we failed to salvage the project.

Let me now proceed to a much later research experience.

About twenty years later, I was the principal investigator and team leader for the Philippines of a multi-phased, multi-country research aimed to produce a gender-fair measurement of poverty. (We called this project FemPov.) After several meetings of all the country teams, during which there was intensive discussion

25 There was no practice as yet of ethics review nor of formal, documented prior informed consent taking.

26 We used a wooden, look-alike penis during the training. We often had them in our bags, so that, from school we could proceed to the training sessions. One time, when I opened my bag to take out my purse in a public transport to pay fare, I was shocked to see the penis in my bag. I must have been in such a hurry that I forgot that I had placed it there after the training session with the girls the previous night. The girls work at night till early morning, and sleep during the day. So our trainings had to be in the evenings.

on every aspect of the project – from the technical to the paradigmatic, methodology and ethics – the project was submitted to and subsequently funded by the Australian Research Council. Colleagues at the Australian National University (ANU) led the project. Aside from the Philippines, three countries in Africa and two in Southeast Asia took part. Among our consultants were esteemed feminists and philosopher-activists. We partnered with an international women's NGO.

In the first two phases of the study, we did three case studies: a rural poor community, an urban poor community and a highly marginalised community (i.e., we studied the Bajau in Mindanao).[27] We did focus group discussions (FGDs) with boys separately from girls, and similarly with men and women. We also had individual key informant interviews with women and men from the communities who gave us insightful and nuanced data about their experience and conceptualisation of poverty, with particular interest in how gender particularises poverty. Our key questions in the first two phases were: what is poverty? And what is needed to get out of poverty? Our study passed two layers of ethics review: the local Philippine ethics review committee and the ethics committee at the ANU.

In the Philippine team, we took stock of our own individual worldview and standpoint on poverty. At certain junctures during field work, we, as a team, shared beliefs, attitudes, uncertainties about the emerging findings. In short, we tried to know more about ourselves, especially our deep-seated beliefs on poverty, in preparation for the tasks ahead. Maybe this can be termed group reflexivity? The idea was to have a team unified on the fundamentals of studying poverty: why study how the poor conceptualise poverty; how women and men, boys and girls experience it; what is the justice of this study? How best can we represent, and how fair can we be in representing, their notions and experiences of poverty?

By this time, for about two decades since the HIV/AIDS project, I had been working on formal research ethics, primarily in policy and standard-setting for ethics review, and in the training of researchers and ethics reviewers. I had also already internalised some key perspectives in intersectionality theory, transdisciplinarity, radical feminism, Marxist anthropology, to name some. These have merged with earlier strands from liberation theology, Freirean pedagogy, Fanon-

27 The *Bajau*, indigenous peoples in southern Philippines, used to live in boats and in coastal areas, as their food and livelihood were dependent on the sea. Years of armed conflict between the Moro liberation fighters and the state, plus predations by pirates, forced many to move to various parts of the country. Our case community has been living in a garbage dump on a coast of a city in Mindanao, having temporarily been allowed to stay there by the city government after several attempts to return them to their previous place of residence failed.

ian critique, indigenous epistemologies and the much earlier learnings from my childhood, my students, from comrades, researches and other engagements.

Our personal and collective preparations, particularly our ethics, were tested several times during the project. I give details of two tests.

During our interviews with one of our key informant women in the urban community, we learned that she was a victim of repeated violence from her male partner. We were not surprised (having educated ourselves about the lives of women in poverty), but we were troubled nonetheless. We stopped the data collection temporarily; talked to her, told her about the law that she could use to defend herself. We offered to link her to support groups that provide services, including legal aid. We wanted to convey to her that our concern for her safety was greater than our interest in finishing the interviews. After some time, though, she decided that she wouldn't take any of our offers and suggestions. We said we fully understood. I thought then, yes, she can bring the partner to court at best, but how about her children? How much change in her life would external help provide? Perhaps she was thinking along the same lines, too. This was a major concrete lesson on the infirmity of laws in the lives of women in extreme poverty and vulnerability.

The second test was in the Bajau community. We learned that because there was no clean water service in this community, they (usually the boys) had to get water from a government-installed facility located in the community of Bisaya.[28] And it was their usual experience to be bullied by the Bisaya children. Inspired by the idea in *Relief of Oppression*,[29] after discussion with the Bajaus and getting their approval, we negotiated with colleagues at the ANU to allow us to use part of our project funds to set up a water supply facility in the Bajau community. This is because we expected that, although we would lobby the local government to install such a facility, the process would be quickened if we put in counterpart funding as a donation from the project. True enough, the water service was installed in less than a year.[30]

28 *Bisaya* is a term referring to descendants of migrants from the Visayas Islands. They are also poor, but not as marginalised and discriminated against as the *Bajau*; they happened to be the majority ethnic group in the area.

29 Lavery and Bandewar 2010.

30 Up till now, our project colleagues continue their partnership with the Bajau community. Led by Nimfa Bracamonte, they have set up an NGO (Friends of Bajau-Iligan) that initiates fundraising projects with the full participation of the Bajau, and never as a dole out.

Learnings From the Stories

The two stories of the CSW and FemPov are less polar opposites than nodes in a continuing process of unlearning and learning. The first story demonstrated the dangers of assuming the academic's a priori expertise and privileged role in formal knowledge production. Second, I had to develop the courage to critique packaged projects (that in particular tend to use powerless groups as guinea pigs for testing intervention designs),[31] even if this could mean the project being offered to someone else in the country, where hunger for research funding is enormous. Conversely, if more Filipino scholars critically examine predesigned projects and/or actively participate in the development of project designs, funders and academics in the Global North would learn to behave as partners.

The second story, while more flattering than the first for our efforts and sensitivity, underscores the painful reality that extreme deprivation makes it impossible for externally initiated, piecemeal reforms to make a meaningful impact on the life of the poorest of the poor and highly marginalised. Aside from the terrible sense of helplessness regarding the victim of partner abuse, this realisation came to me fully some years later, when I was conversing with a leader of women CSWs[32] in what is popularly known as the largest community of sex workers in Nairobi. After she told me about their HIV/AIDS prevention project, I told her that their approach was very similar to what we had done in Manila. I then told her about the experiences of the women in our project (e.g., being beaten, losing regular customers as the men simply went to other bars/women). She laughed. Then she said the words that I consider to be among the most important words in my unlearning, and which up till now I often cite in research and ethics trainings I give: "Here, no customer will be entertained if he will not use the condom. There is no use going to another joint (club/bar) or woman. He won't have a woman. Here we are organised." Yes of course! I suddenly grasped a fundamental fact. Why train the women to dupe the men so that they can protect themselves[33] from

31 Only much later did I realise that that project was part of the programme to develop and test social intervention designs to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, then a major problem in the US.

32 I was there as advisor for the project on benefit-sharing funded by the European Commission, with case studies in Kenya, South Africa, and India, led by Doris Schroeder of the University of Central Lancashire. The CSWs were part of a study to develop a vaccine for HIV/AIDS using genetic samples from the women.

33 One example is for the women to intoxicate the customers so that they won't notice the condom being put on them or that they won't be able to do penetrative sex. What happened, however, many times was that the women got drunk ahead of the customers and failed to use the condom.

infection (as we had tried to do)! Our focus should have been the men and their responsibility in the sexual transaction. But, of course, the project design imported from the US was strongly biased against women, and especially women commercial sex workers, a posture I failed to recognise at that time.

This is one key lesson that threads through my two stories: when project participants are members of organizations, they are able to take meaningful roles in research such as in participating in the formulation of project objectives, of the project design and in the sharing of benefits from the project. This resonates with my experience with people's organizations (POs) in the Philippines with whom I did pro bono research who also used the study findings to capacitate their members. Not only that they had a primary role in determining the objectives of the study, the POs also used the findings to educate, capacitate and organise. In short, this kind of work puts research data in the hands of the people. Ultimately, this is how research ought to be valued – how has it made the world a little less unjust and inhuman. This brings me to the collision of research and ethics.

When we got involved with the battered woman respondent and the plight of the Bajau, we could be criticised for abandoning the rule of distancing ourselves from our subjects to maintain scientific objectivity. Our data analysis could have been clouded by our emotional and mental involvement. To this, I say there are methods and procedures, including reflexivity, transparency and triangulation developed by feminist and other engaged researchers, that would ensure scientific soundness.[34] These procedures do not require neutrality in the face of injustice or suffering. I say further that our research ethics should help us clarify to ourselves: what is the relevance of my work to those who are being victimised? Research ethics is (or must be) about justice, solidarity, caring and empathy. In decolonial scholarship, questions we may consider for our methods of work and our ethics are: for what and for whom is our decolonial work? How best do we carry it out toward this end?

Threading through our world view, epistemology and methodology is our ethics. Our intellectual project and our ethics and our politics are intertwined. The decolonial programme, at its most basic, is a programme of ethics. By this, I mean not the technical, narrow ethics from Europe and the US of deontology and utilitarianism, but a broader, substantive ethics. I quote Maldonado-Torres:

34 Drawing rich lessons from her work in Southern Philippines, Castillo (2015) offers an approach embedded with reflexivity that researchers can deploy when facing dilemmas similar to what I have outlined above.

> In face of the entire arrangement of modernity/coloniality, Fanon's cure of the colonised, but also of psychology, psychiatry, and the human sciences involves, not the application of specific methods, nor the understanding of tradition, but the cultivation of a decolonial attitude, which is profoundly epistemological as well as ethical, political, and aesthetic.[35]

It is an ethics that is self-reflexive, always conscious of and struggling against remnants of colonial tendencies in our psyches. That guides us to be brave as we risk the loss of our projects or promotions, because we insist on questioning dominant and oftentimes official definitions of what is good, true and valid. Our response to the sacred canon of neutrality is precisely to do activist scholarship, but we cannot use activism to excuse sloppiness, for this, whether in the colonial or decolonial mould, would be wrong. We must hold ourselves to high landmarks of truthfulness, rigour and ethical vigour.

The decolonial ethics I am thinking of is captured in Fanon's words: "Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?"[36] Because decolonial scholarship is liberatory scholarship, we then need to construct liberatory ethics that underpin our effort to liberate ourselves from captive consciousness and ways of doing and of being, as we take part in the larger effort of building a more just and kinder world. Our guiding question is: for whom and for what are our strivings? And to this, my response is also my discovery: that in the twists and turns, complexity and confusion of my intellectual journey, I found my mooring by taking part in the struggle of the people for liberation. The scholarship I have affinity with and am working for is necessarily insurgent.

Solidarity-building within the university, with the people, with other workers, across sectors, identities, across national borders, is the strategic response to globalised coloniality that was set up, maintained and invigorated by the global system of imperialism. International solidarity movements around the environment, workers' rights, indigenous peoples and human rights are gaining ground. We place our scholarship in the service of these movements and unite with them.

Reflections, Discernment

While participating in the people's struggle helped me find my mooring, I also now recognise the value of reflection and discernment in seeing my way through

35 Maldonado-Torres 2017, 439.
36 Fanon 1964, 3.

a little more clearly, for sometimes the road cannot be easily seen. These reflections are in many ways spontaneous, such as when years later, suddenly, in a bus stalled in traffic, I remembered the CSW project. Or the Bajau, when I prepared for a lecture on critical qualitative research methods and ethics. Mainly via spontaneous moments of discernment. Not via structured, methodical, scheduled reflections.

Reflexivity, I came to know, becomes a habit, an integral component of thinking, and gets honed to some finer essence by sparks of conscientious remembrances, but always starts from a basic sense of fairness, dignity and kindness that I had formed from diverse sources and influences in my childhood and in people's history. This sense of fairness has somehow become a part of my view of the world and my reflexiveness.

Perhaps my mentality is less vague, confused and conflicted today than it was decades ago, which of course should be the case for scholars who learn from experience, practice and mistakes, who are willing to be educated outside of the university, in struggle with the oppressed. Decolonial scholarship has many sources of knowledge, methods, techniques, tools, wisdom, both subaltern and mainstream. We don't have to invent, mostly. Rich materials have been developed in feminist pedagogy, critical studies, indigenous studies, and by decolonial scholars. What is needed, perhaps, is more imagination; more praxis.

I end with some lines from my reaction to Maldonado-Torres' keynote lecture during the 6th International Conference on Community Psychology in 2016 in Durban, South Africa:

> We must be decisive in constructing insurgent scholarship that is truthful, brave, imaginative, and idealistic. Idealism is mocked today as foolishness of dreamers, privileging instead practicality. When we peel away its wrappings, the notion of practicality is intended to stop any fundamental changes to the global system of coloniality and its exploitative economic structural arrangements. We must insist on our ideals and draw inspiration from the suffering of people. More than ever, consciousness is a crucial arena of struggle for liberation. This is our arena. We need to first decolonise our own consciousness to produce liberatory knowledge to support workers, peasants, students, the urban poor, and indigenous peoples to construct a more humane world. Some of us in academia have reproduced myths for domination, while others are trying to produce knowledge in struggle with the people.[37]

37 Alvarez-Castillo 2017, 446–47.

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