

Invoking “re” Towards Potentialities for African Agency in (Re)search

International Journal of Qualitative Methods

Volume 23: 1–9

© The Author(s) 2024

DOI: 10.1177/16094069241258621

journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq**Delali Amuzu** 

Abstract

This essay is a provocation that seeks to contribute to the (re)naissance of African-centered scholarship through a critical interrogation and engagement of words or concepts that exude criticality yet are frequently used superficially. For Africans (globally), conceived by unfavorable imaginations, critical reflection is vital to enable them to engage in deep, reflective analysis of their thoughts, actions, and experiences. Having been dislocated in many ways, (re)examining assumptions, biases, and beliefs and (re)considering alternative perspectives and ideas must preoccupy African researchers. Through an onto-epistemic prism that centers on both Afrocentric assumptions and decolonial thought, the paper interrogates how the prefix “re” extends beyond simplistic meanings like “again” or “repeat” to offer potentialities for African agency. The paper seeks to contribute toward critical African thought and education as well as supporting the pathways for the African Renaissance. The aim is to explore how the prefix “re” can help to empower Africans to shape their own futures.

Keywords

African agency, provocation, African renaissance, (re)search, afrocentricity

Introduction

Contemporary discourse surrounding knowledge production, research methodologies, and practices has increasingly emphasized the imperatives of reflexivity and decolonization. As scholars grapple with the intricate dynamics of power, representation, and knowledge production, there is a growing recognition that traditional approaches to research may inadvertently perpetuate imbalances and marginalization. In the African context, the discourse on agency within the realm of research is particularly poignant, given the historical legacies of colonialism and the ongoing challenges of navigating a globalized knowledge landscape (see [Amuzu, 2023](#); [Asante, 2023](#); [Masaka, 2018](#); [Mazama, 2018, 2020](#); [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021, 2023](#); [Tamale, 2020](#); [Zezeza, 2020](#)).

[Chilisa \(2012\)](#) situates the academic research process within a historic, ethnic, and geopolitical framework to address “social justice issues that arise from the research process itself” (p. xv). This is vital because “current academic research traditions are founded on the culture, history, and philosophies of Euro-Western thought and are therefore indigenous to the Western academy and its institutions” ([Chilisa, 2012](#), p. 1). The societies that have been on the unfavorable spectrum of

academic research are mainly “non-Western, third world, developing, underdeveloped, First Nations, indigenous peoples, third world women, African American women, and so on” ([Chilisa, 2012](#), p. 2).

This article seeks to delve into the nuanced terrain of African agency in research, leveraging the powerful prefix “re” to invoke a multifaceted exploration of its potentialities towards African agency in research. [Smith \(2021\)](#) contends that to Indigenous people, “research” is among the dirtiest words in their consciousness (p. 1), owing to centuries of imperialism.

While the prefix “re” carries quite unsophisticated meanings like repetition and amendment, it could also evoke critical and important denotations like reclamation and restitution. By employing this linguistic tool, I aim to spotlight the ways in which African scholars and communities can actively engage

University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

Corresponding Author:

Delali Amuzu, Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, University of Ghana, Box 31, Legon, Accra, Ghana.

Emails: delamuzu@ug.edu.gh; delaamuzu@yahoo.co.uk



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE

and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

with the prefix “re” to (re)shape, (re)define, and possibly dismantle the research process [to (re)search] to empower and assert African agency and cultural thoughtfulness that amplifies African voices in the global academic arena.

The (re)search paradigm advocated for in this article calls for a deliberate reconsideration of established methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies. It encourages a conscious (re) turn to local knowledge systems, traditions, and narratives, acknowledging the richness and diversity of African perspectives often overlooked or sidelined in conventional research frameworks (see [Chilisa, 2012; 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019, 2020; Smith, 2021; Tagoe, 2012](#)). Furthermore, the prefix “re” prompts a critical examination of power dynamics within research relationships, fostering a space for collaboration, reciprocity, and equitable knowledge exchange. In undertaking this (re)search journey, I endeavor to navigate the complex intersections of culture, identity, and methodology, with a commitment to unpacking the layers of epistemic violence that have historically shaped African scholarship. By (re)imagining research as a dynamic and reflexive process, this article seeks to contribute to a broader conversation on the radical transformative potentialities of (re)search for African agency.

In essence, this article invites scholars, practitioners, and stakeholders to engage in a collective introspection and (re) imagination of (re)search practices that empower African voices, challenge existing power structures, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable knowledge landscape. Through invoking the transformative power of “re,” African scholarship must aspire to catalyze a renewed commitment to fostering agency, reclaiming narratives, and contributing to a more just and representative global discourse on knowledge creation.

Onto-Epistemic Framing

[Ndlovu-Gatsheni \(2019\)](#), in his exploration of the concept of decolonization in the context of research methodology, argues that decolonization involves conducting research in a way that allows the perspectives of historically oppressed and marginalized groups to be heard on their own terms. In highlighting the dirty history of the research enterprise and its role in perpetuating power dynamics, concealing conceptions of humanity, and imposing Western ideologies on colonized ‘Others’, he draws on the works of these scholars: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Chela Sandoval, and Bagele Chilisa. In a similar vein, I rest or construct my ontological and epistemological framings on the selected works of these scholars. I find them appropriate in my quest to critically interrogate the prefix “re” because they provide a desired decolonial outlook to the study because they all seek to project the cultural agency of people marginalized by Eurocentrism.

The scholarship of [Smith \(2012, 2021\)](#) has significantly impacted various fields of study and provided the foundation for discussions on decolonizing research across multiple disciplines. The influence extends to scholars and researchers who want to reconsider their approaches to working with

colonized communities. The various forms of onto-epistemic violence and the dehumanizing foray against non-Europeans cause Smith to hyphenate research, classifying it among the dirtiest words in non-Western vocabulary. She challenges the foundations of traditional research methodologies to unravel their colonial exploitative underpinnings and advocacies for a radical shift in the way knowledge is generated. According to Smith, conventional Western approaches are deeply embedded in a polarized Eurocentric worldview that perpetuates power imbalances and marginalization.

[Smith \(2012, 2021\)](#) goes on to deconstruct the historical context of Western research, exposing the inherent biases and ethnocentric perspectives forced on non-Europeans as universal. These relationships have shaped academic inquiry and actively contributes to the ongoing (re)colonization of Indigenous peoples. She urges researchers to recognize the diverse ways of knowing that exist outside the Western epistemological framework and critiques the exploitation and objectification of Indigenous knowledge because traditional research methods often extract information without reciprocity or respect for cultural context. Research paradigms must thus be collaborative, participatory, and driven by the needs and aspirations of specific communities. This calls for a fundamental (re)orientation of research relationships to dismantle power differentials.

The central theme of [Sandoval \(2000\)](#) revolves around the development of a new methodology for social and cultural analysis, blending feminist, postcolonial, and critical theory. Sandoval introduces the concept of “differential consciousness,” a mode of thinking that emerges from the intersection of social categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. This framework is designed to address the complex and overlapping nature of oppression experienced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities. Sandoval draws on a wide range of influences, including postmodernism, Marxism, and feminist theory, to construct her methodology. She critiques traditional research methods for their limitations in capturing the diverse experiences of oppressed individuals and proposes a more inclusive and flexible approach that accommodates the complexities of identity.

Another idea Sandoval engages is “oppositional consciousness” ([Sandoval, 2000](#)), a form of resistance that emerges from the margins of society. Sandoval argues that individuals who occupy multiple marginalized positions have the potential to develop unique perspectives and strategies for resistance that challenge traditional power structures. Like [Smith \(2021\)](#), Sandoval’s “Methodology of the Oppressed” also contributes to the ongoing discussions within academia about the intersectionality of oppression and the need for more nuanced research methods. By combining various theoretical frameworks and proposing a methodology that addresses the complexities of lived experiences, Sandoval’s work has impacted feminist and postcolonial scholarship, encouraging scholars to adopt more inclusive and dynamic approaches to understanding and challenging oppression.

Furthermore, [Chilisa \(2012; 2019\)](#) also contributes her quota to the conversation on redressing research methods within the context of Indigenous (African) knowledge and perspectives. She provides a theoretical framework for understanding the “Other”, emphasizing the importance of cultural appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and respect for “Other” worldviews. Chilisa argues for the need to decolonize research methods, develop collaborative and participatory approaches, and recognize and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing in order for research to be beneficial to marginalized populations.

The work provides valuable insights into the complexities of navigating the intersection of “traditional” and academic knowledge systems. It encourages a reflexive approach for researchers to continually reflect on their own biases and assumptions in the research process. This self-awareness is crucial because power dynamics and historical legacies significantly impact the research process.

Overall, [Chilisa \(2012; 2019\)](#), [Sandoval \(2000\)](#), and [Smith \(2012, 2021\)](#) have presented strong arguments and cogent advocacy for the critical (de)construction of the (re)search process from multiple perspectives and cultural dispositions. Chilisa offers African cultural tenets and foundations; Smith brings Maori (Pacific) experiences; and the Americas are represented by Sandoval. These jurisdictions and their people have experienced and continue to experience varying forms of colonial subjugation and violence. Experiences that have negatively affected their sense of being and place in the world. These scholars fault the foundation of research because of its colonial roots and thus advocate for a radical transformative shift. Scholars from these spaces, and to some extent even European scholars, must endeavor to question their methods, challenge power dynamics, and embrace a decolonized framework that respects and uplifts the voices of Indigenous peoples.

In [Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s \(2019\)](#) view, colonial Eurocentric research is “the form of undressing other people so as to see them naked” (p. 482). This ought not to be so, and the works of critical scholars like [Chilisa \(2012; 2019\)](#), [Sandoval \(2000\)](#), and [Smith \(2012, 2021\)](#), among others, “inform the decolonial position taken on rethinking and unthinking research methodology” ([Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019](#), p. 482). This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonizing knowledge and education.

Provocations

My initial encounter with “provocations” as a prominent event on the scholarly schedules of my department’s calendar happened during my PhD years in Aotearoa (New Zealand). This is not to suggest that stimulating thoughts and events that instigated provocations were absent in my other higher education experiences. However, having it as a title of an academic event radiated unique attention, intention, and an unambiguous quest to be intellectually confrontational,

stimulate some critical thinking, discussions, and debates among the audience.

Although the provocations took the form of seminars and panel discussions, the name “provocation” appeared to have created a subliminal inclination to present topics that generally challenged metanarratives or grand narratives (see, e.g., [Lyotard, 1984](#)), philosophies, concepts, doctrines, theories, etc. These sessions inspired intellectual curiosity, stimulated deeper understanding of complex issues that push the boundaries of conventional thinking, and encouraged people to explore new avenues of (re)search and inquiry. By challenging existing knowledge and assumptions, provocations inspired creative solutions, novel theorizations, and innovative approaches to problem-solving. The platform created a conducive environment for lively scholarly debates and discussions through the expression of (un)conventional viewpoints and ideas that can be (re)examined, analyzed, and refined through rigorous intellectual discourse. The provocations often transcended disciplinary boundaries, fostering the exchange of diverse perspectives, encouraging collaboration, and enhancing the quality of scholarship. Furthermore, in addressing contemporary issues, the academic community is engaged and keeps abreast of real-world challenges and developments.

Numerous provocative scholarly articles based on Afrocentric, anti-colonial, and decolonial persuasions that intersect primarily to challenge established power structures, colonial social norms, and systemic biases and redistribute power have gained attraction in the academe (see [Amuzu, 2021, 2022, 2023](#); [Asante, 2014](#); [Mazama, 2018, 2020](#); [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019](#)). [Ndlovu-Gatsheni \(2019\)](#), for instance, explores the concept of decolonization in the context of research methodology, arguing that decolonizing research methodology calls for a reevaluation and revolution of research practices to address the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism. This includes challenging the Eurocentric biases in research, acknowledging and rectifying power imbalances between researchers and researched communities, and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems (see also [Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019](#)).

This article seeks to also sustain the chain of provocative scholarship being undertaken to liberate the African mind towards empowerment and development. It is for this reason that the paper seeks to utilize a critical approach to suggest analytically ways in which the prefix “re” can help to drive African cultural centrality in (re)search to contribute to the potentialities for African agency. These ideas would help learners (both scholars and students) to develop intellectual resilience and adaptability by questioning their own assumptions, confronting cognitive biases (held uncritically), and developing a deeper appreciation for their intellectual subjectivities. This process of intellectual growth would enhance African scholars’ ability to navigate a complex and evolving academic landscape. It is important to note that while provocations can be valuable in academic settings, they should

be presented and discussed in a respectful and constructive manner to enrich scholarship and advance research practice, as they seek to promote the contextual relevance of African educational experience. The purpose is to challenge ideas and promote intellectual growth, not to incite hostility or disrespect.

The historical roots of the current African higher education system and its colonial methodologies can be traced to the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. The Cartesian philosophy's emphasis on reason, skepticism, and the dualism of mind and body and the concept "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore, I am) influenced scholarship and the coloniality of being (see [Maldonado-Torres, 2013](#)). These ideas contributed to the emergence of Eurocentric universalist (white supremacist) thoughts that justified colonial endeavors (see [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, 2021](#)). [Mudimbe \(2013, p. 19\)](#) accordingly argues that the "colonial library served as a transdisciplinary space" that justified atrocities like enslavement and colonialism. These concerns remain relevant and topical, and as [Smith \(2021\)](#) argues, the research process is a complicatedly biased partisan venture that requires decolonization because non-Europeans remain largely defined (conceived both as a people and territorially) and ruled by colonial systems (see [Mamdani, 1996](#)).

Invoking "Re"

The need to invoke "re" is crucial because the colonial system is a living organism that keeps perpetuating itself through complex avenues. It is with this in mind that "re" evokes the need to adopt a critical outlook on concepts in order to portray African agency. Language is the primary tool for human communication, enabling people to express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas to others to facilitate meaningful interactions and the sharing of knowledge. To communicate meaningfully allows people to convey their needs, collaborate with others, build relationships, and influence opinions. Through language, people can engage in intellectual pursuits, explore diverse perspectives, and expand their understanding of the world (see [Wa Thiong'o, 1998, 2009](#)). Decolonial and Afrocentric theoretical frameworks provide a lens to (re)examine phenomena, concepts, and ideas in order to nurture the cultural centrality that is necessary in many fields of study. Cultural centrality helps in having clarity of purpose, unequivocally stating that purpose, and aligning actions and goals accordingly. Therefore, centrality in African consciousness should provide a clear direction and a guiding principle that helps Africans to prioritize tasks and make decisions that are in line with the central focus of African agency. In this regard, resource use would be optimized because, by identifying the central point, time, energy, and resources can be allocated in ways that best support and serve that central focus. Unnecessary distractions from efforts would be ignored to facilitate better decision-making and the ability to prioritize tasks based on their alignment with the central focus (see also [Amuzu, 2021](#)).

The need for African education to be culturally centric is crucial to facilitating alignment and consistency in narrative (messaging) and praxis (action) to nurture the required critical mass for development. This process would foster shared vision and understanding to create the sense of unity and coherence required to organize for liberation. The importance of invoking "re" for centrality cannot be understated because [Amuzu \(2022\)](#) argues that linguistic dislocation is among the utmost dislocations Africans have experienced. Lacking a deep appreciation of language and its embedded politics thwarts criticality. This disempowering effect has both symbolic and real outcomes, thus his suggestion for what he calls Critical African Education (CAE): a "reflective process where Africans make critical efforts to nurture knowledge, skills, and attitudes beyond Euro-Asian thoughts, forms, ideals, and categorisations" (p. 12). As well, CAE must "endeavour to expose dominant hegemonies that silence the humanity of other people and their ways of knowing, striving to detach from such hegemonies" (p. 12).

Invoking "re" with an African centrality challenges scholars to confront their complicity in the perpetuation of colonial structures and to actively engage in decolonial practices. Numerous scholars offer roadmaps for researchers to navigate the complexities of decolonized inquiry by encouraging reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to social justice (see [Amuzu, 2021](#); [Chilisa, 2012](#); [Mudimbe, 2013](#); [Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021](#); [Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda, 2019](#); [Tamale, 2020](#); [Wa Thiong'o, 2009](#); [Zezeza, 2020](#)). The quest for "re" serves as a rallying call for a more inclusive, equitable, and ethical approach to research that recognizes the plurality of knowledge systems without hierarchies—to seek epistemic justice.

(Re)member

To delve into some of the words with the prefix "re" and how it could (re)orient African learners let us first examine (re)member. [Myerhoff \(1982\)](#) is widely acclaimed for having introduced the concept of "re-membering". She argues that "re-membering" refers to an active process of revitalizing, reinvigorating, and reconnecting with one's personal and cultural memories and traditions, particularly among elderly individuals. This act helps them create a sense of continuity, purpose, and identity in their lives. Myerhoff's concept of "re-membering" emphasizes the importance of memory and cultural traditions, particularly within the context of marginalized communities, to create intergenerational connections that foster a sense of belonging and continuity.

[Wa Thiong'o \(2009\)](#), in his commitment to the liberation struggle for the African people, contends that Africans have undergone dismemberment owing to the colonial enterprise and primarily through the suppression of African languages. To [Ndlovu-Gatsheni \(2015\)](#), Wa Thiong'o's conception of (dis)membering and (re)membering corresponds respectively with coloniality and decoloniality, thus can be analyzed in

decolonial frameworks (see also [Sibanda, 2021](#)). This is vital because colonial Eurocentric narratives use language as a tool to justify and solidify their perception of being human, which historically excluded the colonized. [Wa Thiong'o \(2009\)](#) thus intimates that the process of (re)membering can only occur by returning to the languages of people maligned by colonial tropes. It is important because the obliteration of language is a violent act that essentially decapitates people's humanity and dismembers their being. By reclaiming and revitalizing these languages, they can restore their voices and (re)connect with their rich cultural heritage.

[Dillard \(2020\)](#) also employs (re)membering as a tool to invoke the need to integrate spirituality, cultural awareness, and the wisdom of Blacks into educational practices, with a focus on creating spaces that affirm and center Black life and culture. The process must draw on personal experiences, historical reflections, and the ethos of Black culture to advocate for a more inclusive and spiritually grounded approach to education, particularly in the context of Black children in the U.S. Dillard reflects on the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of sharing the narrative of Black experiences.

According to [Amuzu \(2023\)](#) "engaging in a re-member-ing project will be a key step in fostering a mind-set shift among African learners" (p. 4). (Re)member(ing) is "not simply an act of recall (remember) but personifying the remembrance process—this is where the consciousness deficit may be addressed" ([Amuzu, 2023](#), p. 4). The essence of this task is that the act of (re)membering elicits "attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story" ([Myerhoff, 1982](#), p. 111). In this regard, [Amuzu \(2023\)](#) employed the idea to "member(ing)" to embody Africa and Africans in technological and scientific inventions, owing to Africa's dislocation in those respects. To this end, any African scholar in the act or process of (re)membering must ask whether Africa and Africans have been membered in that said task. Doing this would bring forth African ideas and inventions, redress negative stereotypes, and mainstream these ideas to situate Africans meaningfully in scholarship to empower and liberate the African mind. (Re)membering can be thus seen as a process of decolonization where people once dis-membered are (re)membered meaningfully in all facets of human endeavor.

(Re)search

Maori and Indigenous scholar [Smith \(2012, 2021\)](#) appears to have popularized the prefix "re" in research in her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, where she hyphenated research (re-search) to demonstrate the need for its critical (re)examination. There have been historical and systemic factors that have contributed to a disparity in research outcomes and resources available in different parts of the world, including Africa. Europe's quest to enslave and colonize Africa led to disparaging narratives being created as scientific knowledge and, in some cases, the basis for education and research. Africa has thus been

unfavorably imagined by European anthropologists and historians, and this has had long-lasting effects on Africa's development and research capabilities. Smith therefore asserts that research is a perverted word because of the centuries of human and material exploitation, violence, and death it has supported, leading to the economic and technological disadvantages meted out to the colonized. Consequently, there is a dearth of research infrastructure and capacity.

The dominance of Western institutions and researchers leading research collaborations in Africa illustrates the imbalanced power dynamics, limited local ownership, and inequitable distribution of benefits from research projects. Some critical questions that could be asked are: What are Africans searching for? What is the basis for such searches? Who prescribes and validates those searches?

According to [Dillard \(2020\)](#), an African (Black) centered research approach must emphasize the importance of proactivity where educators delve into Black heritage, history, and culture, starting from the African continent, to explore the epistemological, cultural, and historical dimensions of Black history comprehensively. This form of (re)search is crucial because the academic community often downplays the value of Africa, and it is through such proactivity that misconceptions about Africa can be confronted and (re)dressed to embrace African truths to radically transform the schooling process. Ultimately, Dillard argues that the (re)search process through a (re)membering spectrum encourages self-reflection among educators and strives to build relations with like-minded people across the globe to build community.

It is my contention that efforts to address the systemic disparities in research must center on African scholars who are conscious of the politics of the research process and the desire to change the status quo. I am not ignorant of the funding challenges and the proverbial saying that "the one paying the piper calls the tunes." However, the liberation drive must be charted fundamentally towards a greater cause than just material lures and personal aggrandizement. It is largely through this consciousness that a path towards a more equitable and inclusive (re)search practices for Africans to gain centrality in their cultural outlooks or agency in order to cure imbalanced power relations can be realized. This (re)search trajectory should offer African (Black) educational agenda and the desire for meaningful education and development some hope. Engaging in this process would provide opportunities for reflexivity, contextuality, and relationality toward prescribing meaningful solutions to problems. The ambition is to (re)direct the searches being done, thus to "re" search. What African-centric consciousness does in such a (re)search process is to direct the process where stories are told based on the realities and understanding of the specific group being studied.

(Re)View

To (re)search based on African consciousness and centrality could lead the charge towards potentialities for African

agency. The importance of (re)viewing in any research process cannot be understated. Indeed, the key word in research is to search, and in many instances, to search requires viewing. However, instead of simply seeing review (of literature, artefacts etc.) as a careful pursuit of synthesizing works on a phenomenon, (re)view can be performed as an onto-epistemic quest to scrutinize phenomenon. In this way, (re)viewing delves into the fundamental nature of the subject, where the epistemological stance, the contextual reality(ies) in which the phenomenon or literature is situated, as well as an understanding of the ontology of the writer are examined. This automatically brings up questions about whether the (re)view is a subjective interpretation, an objective analysis, or a combination of both. Though a difficult question to answer owing to the European subjectivities sold to the world as universal, African (Black) researchers must seek to promote philosophical propositions, strive to develop theoretical perspectives, and (re)consider methodological requirements based on African needs and aspirations. African (Blacks) scholars should not be timid in presenting their subjective interpretations or analyses, as that provides the path to ensuring that their background, experiences, and worldview shape the (re)viewing process. This ontological quest should direct the systematic search, selection, evaluation, and synthesizing of relevant literature or materials to further explore how African identity, existence, and consciousness contribute to the meaning of situations. It is through this process that Africans can create African (re)presentation(s), mediate the slippery path of politics, and advance African subjective perceptions of reality to nurture ‘intellectual sovereignty’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). This requires critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to draw connections and identify patterns across multiple sources. In this space too, there is a need to understand the important role language plays in shaping perceptions of reality.

The critical eye to (re)view based on African cultural centrality is bound to extend to other areas of the school system to interrogate issues of structure, privileges, ontologies, etc. that need (re)construction. The need to (re)construct cannot be overlooked and naïvely judged as outdated because African realities and institutions have been products of biased and shallow appreciation of African culture and dehumanizing tropes by European anthropological endeavors (see Ake, 1979, 2012). Overall, the nurtured intellectual sovereignty (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021) towards mental liberation is primary to extinguishing the negative stereotypes about Africans. The need to unpack (deconstruct) African issues is crucial towards the (re)construction of meaningful education and societies and must be applied to many facets of African life for Africans (Blacks) to appreciate their local realities.

Overall, operating in the “re” consciousness plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities because it calls for critical interrogation. Individuals would analyze ideas, evaluate arguments, and engage in logical reasoning to debate, negotiate, and collaborate to find

innovative solutions to challenges, both personal and societal. It is a powerful tool that could shape Africans’ interactions, thoughts, and actions, enabling individuals and communities to thrive and effect positive change. Individuals and communities would be empowered to confront stereotypes and prejudice, cultural erasure, and manipulation. Through activism and the formation of collective movements, African scholars would articulate grievances, demand justice, and drive societal progress. These would amplify their voices and contribute to cultural expression to boost African worth and potential.

A focus on African agency

African agency, conceived as the process where Africans (globally) self-determine to center African culture—thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and being—to life and relationships with other people, is crucial. Historically, foundational research on Africa (African studies) in the West has been conducted primarily by external entities to justify European expansionism (see Nkrumah, 1963). Currently, even though the dynamics have changed, the level of significance remains debatable because the nature of the African school system denies the average student the politics of knowledge, leading to the perpetuation of colonial legacies and neocolonial research practices. By promoting African agency, research can be decolonized and power imbalances addressed because traditional research methodologies often perpetuate colonial power structures and exploit marginalized communities (see Chilisa, 2012; 2019; Smith, 2021).

Africans remain dislocated due to the historical and ongoing impact of colonial ideas and structures particularly in the context of “education” where the school system continues to reinforce colonial ideologies and power structures (Amuzu, 2022). Scholars argue that colonial histories have marginalized and suppressed alternative knowledge systems, leading to epistemic injustices (Amuzu, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Smith, 2021). Decolonizing African research therefore should aim to rectify the colonial disrespect extended towards African societies and realities that cause many “educated” Africans to belittle their cultural outlooks. Such ‘miseducation’ disempowers Africans by denying them cultural respect and sensitivity.

Many colonial baggage need redress in order for African scholars to suggest and mainstream alternative research paradigms that align with African worldviews. The prospective research models must encourage both the development and normalizing philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and analytical outlooks that serve African needs and aspirations. Such agency in research will help in knowledge generation and ownership rooted in the experiences and perspectives of African people, thereby providing context and relevance to Africans. The need to have deep understanding of local contexts, (sub)cultures, and dispositions become paramount as they have the potential to influence research outcomes. This local centrality is essential for addressing local issues,

promoting sustainable development, and advancing evidence-based policies and interventions. For instance, African culture, despite its diversity, agrees on holistic worldview to life therefore research may adopt holistic approaches that consider the interconnectedness of various aspects of life, including spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental well-being. It is noteworthy to state that the current inclination toward interdisciplinary scholarship and research align with many African and Indigenous cultures (see [Smith, 2021](#)).

Given the continuous need to offer resistance to liberate the global African population, “re” searching would provide the required strategies individuals and communities would need to overpower oppressive systems and work toward social justice through solidarity and collective action. African researchers’ positionality and reflexivity would be enhanced culturally to (re)examine their biases imbibed uncritically through schooling. African education must question the power imbalances between the Global North and Global South and its continuous influences research. Through this, attention will be given to representation in research and even influence language choices. These should generally aid in the drive for decolonization and empowerment considering that decolonizing research involves using inclusive and culturally sensitive language that challenge stereotypes or biases in the representation of communities (see [Smith, 2021](#)).

African Re-naissance

In 1987, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), adopted a resolution designating the 30th of June each year as the Day of Scientific Renaissance of Africa (DSRA). The aim of this celebration is to prompt reflection among African governments and citizens on the vital contributions of Science and Technology to national progress. Additionally, it serves as a commemoration of the continent’s significant historical influence on the advancement of modern Science and Technology (see [UG, 2023](#)). The occasion is celebrated across many higher education institutions and usually presents an opportunity to display scientific and technological accomplishments. However, to foreground Africa’s historical influence which has been systematically marginalized in the vast tapestry of global scholarship over the past five centuries ([Amuzu, 2022](#)) reiterates the need to invoke the “re” in renaissance. Africans must reclaim their naissance — knowledge of Africa’s classical history and corresponding knowledge of self. The naissance (the centrality aforementioned) will provide a platform to nurture meaningful onto-epistemic framings to undertake critical self-reflection and (re)search (see also [Sebola & Mogoboya, 2020](#)).

Until the invocation of the “re,” the quest for African scientific endeavors will lack centrality as a resilient force to significantly disrupt the colonial interruptions and legacies to shape the collective aspirations and destiny of African people. The prefix “re” in renaissance further highlights the importance of interrogating the “re”.

Perennial Concerns

Africa’s research and scholarly potential have been inhibited by historical, social, economic, and political factors, negatively impacting its ability to attract funding. The colonial enterprise through the exploitation of resources and the suppression of local institutions has had long-lasting effects on the economic and educational systems, making it difficult for them to compete on an equal footing in the global research community. Having been usurped and integrated into the global capitalism, the ensuing economic disparities between Africa and other jurisdictions have limited the financial resources available for research. Additionally, the global distribution of research funding and opportunities is often skewed toward more economically developed regions, making it difficult for African researchers to secure funding and access international collaborations.

Other factors could be attributed to the instability and conflicts that channel resources into security concerns and issues of brain drain, where many talented African researchers have sought better opportunities abroad due to limited funding, infrastructure, and career prospects in their home countries. This “brain drain” further hampers the development of a robust research ecosystem. In the midst of these conflicts, the limited research resources and infrastructure get destroyed or abandoned.

Generally, insufficient research infrastructure, including laboratories, libraries, and technological resources, hinders the ability of African researchers to conduct high-quality studies. This lack of infrastructure also makes it difficult to attract funding and support for research projects. Despite these challenges, the biases and stereotypes about Africa that may influence funding decisions cannot be ignored.

Concluding Remarks

This article is a provocation aimed at challenging advocates of African-centered scholarship and potential soldiers of the African Renaissance army to critically examine words or concepts prefixed with “re.” The prefix “re” is often employed in African scholarship without due critical reflection; however, this paper seeks to unravel its potentialities for African agency. For individuals of African descent who have been subjected to unfavorable imaginations, engaging in profound and reflective analysis of thoughts, actions, and experiences becomes essential. The interrogation of the prefix “re” emphasizes cultural sensitivity and reflexivity, making it a foundational text for anyone interested in decolonizing research methodologies and promoting more inclusive and equitable research practices.

The dislocations that Africans have endured emphasize how critical it is to examine presumptions, prejudices, and beliefs enforced into their consciousness. This article thus employs a dual framework, integrating both Afrocentric

assumptions and decolonial thought, to interrogate how the prefix “re,” can extend beyond simplistic meanings like “again” or “repeat” to more critical connotations to potentially empower African thought and perspectives toward African agency.

This exploration offers a pathway for a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between language, scholarship, and the construction of African narratives. The paper encourages scholars to move beyond conventional interpretations, unlocking the potential for radical transformative and empowering implications for African identity and agency.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Delali Amuzu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3904-3334>

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

References

- Ake, C. (1979). *Social science as imperialism: The theory of political development*. Ibadan University Press.
- Ake, C. (2012). Social Science as Imperialism. In H. Lauer, & K. Anyidoho (Eds.), *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives* (pp. 1–30). Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Amuzu, D. (2021). Rastafari and reggae music as tools for critical pedagogy in the African academe. *Muziki*, 18(2), 74–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2021.2011612>
- Amuzu, D. (2022). Moments of dislocation: Reflections on the colonial vestiges embedded in African higher education. *Africa Education Review*, 19(1), 15–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2022.2150241>
- Amuzu, D. (2023). “African magic” or “African science”: Issues of technology in African higher education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 54(6), 1505–1519. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13357>
- Asante, M. K. (2014). *Facing south to Africa: Toward an Afrocentric critical orientation*. Lexington Books.
- Asante, M. K. (2023). *Afrocentricity in AfroFuturism: Toward Afrocentric futurism*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.
- Chilisa, B. (2012; 2019). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Sage publications.
- Dillard, C. B. (2020). (Re) membering blackness, (re) membering home: Lessons for teachers from a primary school in Ghana, West Africa. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(7), 698–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1751893>
- Lyotard, J. F. ([1979] 1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Manchester University Press.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2013). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. In W. D. Mignolo, & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Globalization and the decolonial option* (pp. 94–124). Routledge.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.
- Masaka, D. (2018). The prospects of ending epistemicide in Africa: Some thoughts. *Journal of Black Studies*, 49(3), 284–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717753731>
- Mazama, A. (2018). Cognitive hiatus and the white validation syndrome: An Afrocentric analysis. In *Black/Africana communication theory* (pp. 25–38). Springer.
- Mazama, A. (2020). Afrocentric instructional practices: An assessment. In G. Kmt, Shockley, & K. Lomotey (Ed.), (pp. 1–18). *African-centered education: Theory and practice*.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (2013). *On African fault lines: Meditations on alterity politics*. University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Myerhoff, B. (1982). Life history among the elderly: Performance, visibility and re-membering. In J. Ruby (Ed.), *A crack in the mirror: Reflexive perspectives in anthropology* (pp. 99–117). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2015). Genealogies of coloniality and implications for Africa’s development. *Africa Development*, 40(3), 13–40.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2019). Provisional notes on decolonizing research methodology and undoing its dirty history. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 35(4), 481–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796x19880417>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2020). *Decolonization, development and knowledge in Africa: Turning over A new leaf*. Routledge.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2021). The cognitive empire, politics of knowledge and african intellectual productions: Reflections on struggles for epistemic freedom and resurgence of decolonisation in the twenty-first century. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(5), 882–901. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1775487>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2023). Ten challenges in reconfiguring African studies. *Review of African Political Economy*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2023.2256561>
- Ndofirepi, A. P., & Gwaravanda, E. T. (2019). Epistemic (in) justice in African universities: A perspective of the politics of knowledge. *Educational Review*, 71(5), 581–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1459477>
- Nkrumah, K. (25th October, 1963). *The African Genius: Speech delivered by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah at the opening of the institute of African studies*. Government Printer.
- Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN and London, UK: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sebola, M., & Mogoboya, M. J. (2020). Re-Imagining Africanisation of sustainable epistemologies and pedagogies in (South) African higher education: A conceptual intervention. *South African*

- Journal of Higher Education*, 34(6), 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.20853/34-6-4078>
- Sibanda, B. (2021). Language as being' in the politics of Ngūgĩ Wa Thiong'o. In M. Steyn, & W. Mporo (Eds.), *Decolonising the human: Reflections from Africa on difference and oppression* (pp. 143–163). Wits University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18772/22021036512.11>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Tagoe, M. A. (2012). Incorporating cultural action models in university-based adult education: The Ghanaian experience. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31(5), 591–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2012.693956>
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.
- University of Ghana. (2023). *2023 celebration of day of scientific renaissance of Africa (DSRA)*. University of Ghana. ug.edu.gh
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1998). Decolonising the mind. *Diogenes*, 46(184), 101–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219804618409>
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (2009). *Re-Membering Africa*. East African Educational Publishers.
- Zezeza, P. T. (2020). The turbulent 2010s. *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement*, 45(1), 47–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26936564>