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Reimagining Subjugated Voice in Africa: A Battle for Hearts and Minds in Terrorism Studies

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Abstract: A rare consensus points to the question of normativity, with an inclination towards the Eurocentric Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, which seems to have been central to Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). Given the universality of knowledge exerting pressure on scholars to conform with traditional theoretical perspectives, terrorism studies pose inequality from Eurocentricity emerging in “the battle for hearts and minds” research. Some of these studies fall to the allure of connivance with the progressively “authoritarian demands of Western, liberal state and media practice”. Consequently, terrorism research risks being dominated by ethical and logical blindness within established research formations. In Africa, for example, some CTS scholars are subdued to cynically use their Africanity to authenticate the neo-colonial and neo-liberal agenda in terrorism research. This article explores the reimagining of subjugated knowledge through decolonisation of methods in CTS. Rooting for cognitive justice and adequate space for alternative knowledge to imperial science, the article contests the battle for Africa’s hearts and minds as a failed process that needs transformation. Consequently, this work is a contribution to epistemological debate between the global North and South, and the subsequent theoretical contestations in CTS. We argue for hybridity by re-constructing alternative frameworks of knowledge production.

Keywords: decolonisation; terrorism studies; Critical Terrorism Studies; Africanity; subjugated knowledge; terrorism; global North; global South; war on terror; colonialism

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1. Introduction

Debates around context-informed research continue to dominate the discursive front for reducing both the political and imperialist influence in the programmes for counterterrorism in the global South. Many of these views permeate through Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). Some scholars, especially in the global South, have sought to set the geopolitical disparities in terrorism scholarship, while many others remain complicit to the assumptions in the universality of knowledge. Hence, the issue of political manipulation is seen, for instance, not only to have influenced the understanding of counterterrorism as it takes effect in the “local” intervention strategies, but also to be creating trouble around identity politics. These cynical gaps inform contemporary discussions on re-conceptualisation, like in the global South, with frantic attempts to counter the “synthetic conceptualisations” in terrorism research (Lewis 2017, p. 7). The extreme tendency of “orthodoxy” in counterterrorism is often associated with programmes initiated by the international donor community, some of which are criticised for being oblivious to local cultural values, belief systems, and customs.

In this respect, a rare consensus emerges towards questioning the normativity in counterterrorism as a central tendency that shapes the local scholarship and that is central to the Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). Given that CTS itself portrays an inclination towards the Eurocentric Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, this article problematises the

theory of “winning hearts and minds” (Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019, p. 8), which continues to infiltrate literature in Africa. Research on the battle for hearts and minds often strives to elicit and bolster “public support” (Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019, pp. 7–8) of local citizens devoid of space for subaltern voices. According to Corradetti (2016), the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory itself rejects the “notion of objectivity in knowledge”. Hence, CTS would subscribe to the thinking about knowledge as being “embedded in historical and social processes” (Corradetti 2016, p. 8). However, some lacunae continue to be connected to CTS, demonstrating that despite this “fashionable approach” of criticality that acknowledges the subjectivity of knowledge, a significant limitation arises in the field through distorted conceptualisation from “over-identification with the Western-centric perspective on terrorism” (Jones and Smith 2009, p. 292). Consequently, the criticality and self-reflexivity claimed by CTS fail to recognise “the misunderstood, non-Western, other” (Jones and Smith 2009, p. 292). It is the chasm related to analysing contextual relativism of the “non-Western other” that leaves this void for the battle to win hearts and minds in the global South.

Emerson (2009) raises a pertinent question, following a series of counterterrorism activities in Africa and wondering whether most of the Western-led initiatives are indeed part of the global fight against terrorism, or rather a mere manifestation of the long-term struggles for power in Africa. Faced with this dilemma, Emerson argues that the international community has come to consider Africa as the next battleground for the “Global War on Terror (GWOT)”. Jones and Smith concur with Emerson, by arguing that “the War on Terror constitutes the single, all-embracing paradigm of analysis where the critical voice is not allowed to ask: what is the reality itself?” (Jones and Smith 2009, p. 294). This concern is reinforced by fallible fears that Africa is home to “impoverished societies”, a scene of “ceaseless political and social turmoil”, and collectively, a plethora of “weak and fragile governments” (Ayinde 2010; Emerson 2009; Schmidt 2018). The vilest assumption, of all these, is that Africa is a rich ground for international terrorism research, which culminates in “the battle aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the African people” (Emerson 2009, p. 57). These assumptions perceive the African public as the object rather than subject of terrorism research. Theoretically, therefore, we contest this ingrained orthodoxy as disseminated by an analogy of “winning hearts and minds”. The argument of this paper demonstrates how the narrative simply portrays a sense of imperialist influence, and lethargy among the African scholars to challenge this imperialist theory. This implies that the battle for hearts and minds narrative not only denotes a sense of cognitive superiority over Africa but also creates a troubled identity politics in terrorism research, intimating African society in general as a social object to be researched by the international community. Likewise, subaltern voices have become docile for fear of being vindicated as “spoilers” by [their own] African governments, which are seeking favour from Western allies. At the same time, African researchers refrain from challenging leading Western scholars who often make vicious critiques of non-Western researchers whose language of writing is often considered to be illegitimate or inappropriate irrespective of the arguments presented. These elusive pressures have produced a complacent generation of scholars of terrorism [in the global South] who, for the most, are in search of a new sense of identity and a colonised sense of belonging that seldom dare to unsettle the status quo.

This article uses theoretical analysis using multiple discourses to re-construct knowledge production in counterterrorism studies. It examines how critical theorising might be subjugating the local voices through racial superiority, to also win the hearts and minds of the African scholarship. By suggesting a transformational agenda that incorporates cognitive justice, this paper tackles the battle for Africa’s hearts and minds through CTS by advocating for expanded space for alternative knowledge to imperial science. Cognitive justice is a terminology designed by Santos to express an idea about recognising that many different sets of knowledge coexist in in different geospatial spaces. Hence, knowledge about counterterrorism cannot be absolutely unique to the West in isolation without recognition of indigenous knowledge, as an alternative framework, existing

among the communities who are directly facing the form of political violence. Decoloniality in CTS, thus, starts with the recognition that different sets of knowledge exist for counterterrorism. (Dawson 2019, p. 12) emphasises that “a key aspect of cognitive justice is the promotion of an “ecology of knowledges” combined with intercultural translation”. This standpoint pervades the principle of hybridity and transcends the “dominatory” theorising embedded in the Eurocentric nature of CTS. This analysis, thus, invokes the need for mainstreaming indigenous knowledge, as produced in the global South, to provide a complementary system of conceptualisation. Principally, this questions the coloniality of knowledge that imbues both counterterrorism research and interventions through contemporary versions of “global capitalism”. In so doing, the article engages with the enduring epistemological and theoretical contestations regarding the space to re-construct alternative frameworks of knowledge in pursuit of cognitive justice, especially, in the global South.

This conforms to Santos’s central ideology that global social justice is not tenable “without global cognitive justice”. Hence, we argue for transformative and progressive theorising as a precursor to building an unorthodox worldview through the radical decolonisation of CTS research. While arguing for enhanced space for local voices in terrorism research, “the voice” is measured through knowledge production. Hence, subjugated voice is equated to subjugated knowledge. This discussion, therefore, adopts an analytical discourse framework to explain facets of subjugated knowledge, and the ensuing superiority dilemma, in terrorism research within the African contexts. The next sections connect the narrative about the battle for hearts and minds to the coloniality discourse. Finally, this paper sums up by exploring mechanisms for reimagining the subjugated knowledge for a transformative decolonial methodology in CTS.

While the discussion mentions interchangeably the global South, the primary focus of subjugated knowledge is on Africa. This intersection between Africa and the global South, thus, is meant to capture some shared experiences of colonial continuities in both geopolitical spaces. It is based on the understanding that contemporary systems are enforced by historical “conquest and pro-longed foreign intrusion” (Oando and Achieng 2021, p. 4) through slavery and colonisation in the past two centuries, which sets the platform for coloniality in multiple disciplines. The historical subjective realities, therefore, lead to manipulating knowledge in both Africa and parts of Asia in an equal manner. In this regard, this paper underscores that the global South and Africa are not the same thing, but a reflection of shared identities in subjugated knowledge through the colonial past. Likewise, the article interchangeably uses the global North and the West, given the commonalities of Eurocentricity manifested both in the language and prevalent knowledge systems of the colonial powers that dominate both the global South and Africa alike. A battle for hearts and minds in terrorism studies is, therefore, presumed to be shaped by these historical and international relationships between colonial masters and the corresponding countries of Africa (Oando and Achieng 2021; Smith 2005).

Conceptually, the historical plateau of colonisation is used in this article to outline some determinations about Africa upon subjugated knowledge that is examined to explore the future of terrorism research towards cognitive justice. This underscores,

... how Africa has been overdetermined by various discourses that tend to characterise the entire continent as a global security threat; a continent that is unsafe, dangerous, and negatively emblematic [...] and demonstrates how the problems that plague Africa today can be connected to the foreign intrusion into African affairs. (Oando and Achieng 2021, p. 5).

The nexus between strategies for winning hearts and minds and coloniality, therefore, informs my interrogation of circumstances under which contextual knowledge has been dominated and deprived of agency for a shared space that also accounts for subaltern perspectives, experience, and life-long aspirations.

2. Discourse of Counterterrorism and Cognitive Justice

From a discourse analysis, this paper underscores that concepts are constituted in language, which also comprises very complex cognitive nuances of systemic knowledge constructions to “define and assign meaning” in different social contexts (Douifi 2018, p. 2). However, language by itself is never completely sufficient to comprehensively express knowledge. Discourse frameworks, therefore, add some legitimacy to understandings around meaning that fit to examining this call to win the hearts and minds of the African people. So, what does this narrative of capturing the hearts and minds of Africa mean? Emerson describes this as the decisive action by the international community, to “align the ends, ways, and means for counterterrorism strategy within the context of the [...] African security environment” (Emerson 2009, p. 61). The description raises a critical dilemma in the realisation that these strategies are crafted to influence “the national security in Africa [but which] Africans remain wary of their command and intentions” (Emerson 2009, p. 61). Using the example of Eastern Africa, many globalised Western approaches are demonstrated through the “Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism” (PREACT) and “Prevent” programmes funded by the US and UK respectively.

A major challenge is raised in their agenda of building capacity of both African military and civilian actors on “how best to do counterterrorism”, without acknowledging the diversity of understanding about terrorism that exists differently in each local context. Both strategies are also designed to employ a “top-down approach”, where the funding agency “controls all aspects of the programmes” (Ilyas 2021, p. 7), while grossly ignoring the possibility that a “complex set of knowledge exist [or can be] developed around specific conditions of populations and communities indigenous to a particular geographic area” (Ocholla 2007, p. 2). Hence, according to Maloba (2017), the battle for “hearts and minds” can simply be understood to entail a ruse of colonialism that embraces continual onslaught on African people’s dignity or an attempt to deprive people of the right of recognition. The centrum of colonialism, thus, erodes the very agency of the subaltern voice. Subjugated voices then emerge through coloniality as part of the systemic imbalance in terrorism studies in the African context. As a way to address terrorism, which often has multiple logics and colonial legacy and the imbalance mentioned above, governments need to resource local academics to develop approaches based on local epistemologies and methodologies to tackle political violence.

This kind of contestation in terrorism research revolves around the fear that most programme ideas are designed largely in the systems of Western knowledge and applied with minimum inclusion of local ideas developed in the local context. International research, nonetheless, struggles to bridge the gap of inclusion, but still finds difficulties from many studies that end up [re]presenting a collection of abstract idealism distinct from the daily experiences in the community of practice and non-contexts. Consequently, as Kundnani and Hayes (2018) argue, the global agenda risks being perceived locally more as part of the global political agenda than as initiatives for a targeted African war on terror. An argument about the obscurity of language and theory, therefore, explains how interventions, which do not consider the local voices, fail to address the people’s fears and commitments. It is the same obscurity that also engulfs the battle for hearts and minds as part of the strategies grounded in Western “formal” programme systems.

Discursively, this narrative of hearts and minds is mostly imbued with a tone of superiority, derived from the universal framework of the international order (Tamale 2020). It is the sense of assumed racial superiority that poses a risk of institutionalising the perpetuation of cognitive injustice. Ultimately, a continued application of this narrative in terrorism studies demonstrates a strategy submerged in the abstractness of “universal” ideas while assuming to “elevate” the contextual thinking. This implores the hypothesis of international order built around liberal state sovereignty. A scholarship based on such liberal models, therefore, displays a discourse of double consciousness that might reproduce a contradiction between an “inferiorised” African identity, among some African scholars in terrorism research, and a disguised commitment to the decolonisation

paradigm. Subsequently, an element of intellectual proclivity emerges that fails to candidly engage with the prevailing epistemological manipulations and the dominant but hegemonic methodologies of the global North, shaping the CTS research.

3. Subjugated Knowledge and the Superiority Dilemma in Terrorism Research

At this point now, it is important to describe what constitutes subjugated knowledge and how subjugation is assumed to be expressed. We will use two standpoints adopted by Jackson to explain this Foucauldian concept. First is the description of subjugated knowledge as part of “endogenous knowledge that is present within the functional and systemic ensemble of terrorism studies itself [...] but which has been masked or buried by more dominant forms of knowledge” (Jackson 2012, p. 13). For example, knowledge about conflicts indigenous to the African context has always existed, but much of these systems of knowledge have often been transmitted through “experiences and intentional actions aimed at achieving expertise and excellence that transcend several generations” (Oando and Achieng’ 2021, p. 365). However, “mainstream” CTS scholarship has rarely engaged with these contextual experiences. Moreover, CTS inadequately engages with intentional actions and narratives that make specific assumptions about Africa as a political creation which is alien to “formal ways of knowing, seeing and thinking”, which predominantly remain to be a preserve of Western methodology (Ezeanya-Esiobu 2019; Oando and Achieng’ 2021; Zeleza 2019).

Consequently, CTS research is ostensibly moulding a fleet of scholars in Africa, some of whom cynically use their Africanity to authenticate the neo-colonial and neo-liberal agenda in terrorism research. This troop of CTS scholars in Africa or about Africa is mostly influenced by the “pressure to be relevant” to the epistemic community of CTS. Hence, this emerging scholarship constitutes the “comprador intelligentsia” (Zeleza 2019, p. 4), who derive the benefits from serving as agents of international community institutions financing interventions for counterterrorism in Africa (Djohy 2017). Hence, both native African scholars and dogmatic Western experts are equally responsible for perpetuating broad-based subjugated knowledge in terrorism research in the African context. Consequently, crucial “kinds of knowledge” specific to the African situations and interventions of counterterrorism “remain unacknowledged and excluded from terrorism studies” (Jackson 2012, p. 14), through the hegemonic narrative of winning the hearts and minds of the African population.

Secondly, subjugated knowledge is described to point at the challenges facing interventions for countering violent extremism that encompass diverse efforts faced by multiple actors in different contexts of the global South. For example, this explanation brings out the imperialist institutionalisation of counterterrorism research. This meaning can be associated with interventions, which do not only overlap in scope, but more often than not “rely on multiple layers [and] on multi-faceted missions” (Randazzo 2021, p. 141), as controlled by an institution of knowledge system beyond which no other knowledge is recognised. This includes interventions and studies that are designed to institutionalise democratisation, to reform the security sector, and/or to establish transitional justice systems transcending the field of terrorism studies. This conceptualisation of subjugated knowledge portrays,

[...] knowledge [which] is outside of, or exogenous to, the field of terrorism studies. Such forms of knowledge have been disqualified and excluded by terrorism scholars and their practices as naïve, inferior or below the required level of scientificity. They include both the knowledges of other scientific fields and the non-scientific and subjective experiential knowledges of [...] practitioners, [...] who work in conflict zones, [...] and groups who experience the direct effects of counterterrorism ... first hand. (Jackson 2012, p. 15).

The aspect of “disqualifying” knowledge based on “scientificity” points to the imperialist mechanisms that shape the international intervention frameworks, and inform the

studies associated with them. For example, a couple of programmes designed by international agencies hardly acknowledge or seldom recognise any form of knowledge indigenous to the context of interventions. Hence, the only knowledge acknowledged in these programmes must be in sync with the “international discourse” (Ahmed et al. 2012). These systems of knowledge are likely to disregard the concerns that counterterrorism needs to be ubiquitous at all levels, including within grassroots groups and in distinct national contexts (De la Rey and McKay 2006).

As I engage further with the concept of subjugated knowledge, it is important to trace some background evidence about this contentious phenomenon in the African context, and how it has been historically manifested in Africa. This commences from an observation made by (Oando and Achieng 2021, p. 5), who noted that:

Over the past two centuries, Africa has been under the tight grip of foreign powers—at first through the slave trade and later through colonisation. Nevertheless, it is from the colonial rule that Africans were conquered and denied [by the colonisers] the opportunity to define and create their world, based on their aspirations and understandings.

This observation creates the necessity to start by tracing the history of African studies, curiously, in the global North. It is from this analysis that fears about subjugated knowledge share a direct link with understanding African studies, through the parallels in the “epistemological imperative to internationalise knowledge, and [partly], the desire to reinforce supremacy of the Eurocentric disciplines” (Zezeza 2019, p. 7). Using a perspective of the United States, the ultimate need to reinforce White supremacy, as argued by Zezeza, emerges as influenced by pressures from political competition during the Cold War, given the stiff rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States (US) in the 1950s. The morbid competition exposed a dire ignorance of the latter about the global South. Of great interest, then, were the countries in Africa and Asia, most of which had just secured their independence from colonial authorities or were due to attain self-rule. The American focus was, therefore, to gain as much information as possible about the global South not as equals in the knowledge production system, but as objects of study for purposes of enhancing their territorial defence.

Similar threats between the global powers emerged in the post 9/11 period, which shifted a great attention of the global North about terrorism, again to Asia and Africa. A special interest by the Bush regime, also shared by European powers, informs the global strategies for the GWOT and its subsequent security campaigns in the global South. Hence, the ensuing counterterrorism strategies received huge funding and facilitation with “massive weapon acquisition” (Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene 2019, p. 1152). Mostly designed by the global North to fend off unknown threats, these strategies are intentionally targeting the “unknown” enemies. This concern by the West, compelled by the unknown knowns (Jackson 2012), has also intensified well-funded counterterrorism studies focusing on parts of Africa and Asia. While so much of these researches is dedicated to gathering intelligence by the world’s powerful countries, some programmes have been specifically funded through NGOs as part of “financial inducement aimed at winning hearts and minds of the local population” (Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene 2019, p. 1152).

An emerging aspect of similarity in display of White supremacy, therefore, recurs in the GWOT informed research. Strongly, the knowledge generation process, in this realm, faces systemic imbalance just as it happened in the supremacy of Euro-American African studies during the Cold War. For example, a parallel can be drawn from Zezeza’s hypothesis of epistemological imperative to internationalise knowledge to the situation witnessed in the counterterrorism research that reinforces the supremacy of Eurocentric knowledge. Ironically, Zezeza opines as well that implementation and mainstreaming of the supremacy of “Euro-American African Studies” succeeded in the American academy not because of superior intellectual outputs but due to the generous funding by the federal

government in accordance with the provisions of the National Defence Act of 1958 (Zezeza 2019).

Of course, terrorism, or rather, violent extremism, has no doubt become an international concern that raises a “highly prioritised social problem” in all spheres (Wahlström 2022, p. 1). The question, however, is whether the internationalisation of knowledge through dominant Euro-American research, factually recognises or acknowledges subaltern knowledge in African contexts on a relatively equal measure as that of the West. Wahlström (2022) argues, for instance, that despite the widespread “international diffusion and coordination” of knowledge generated or disseminated in terrorism research, we cannot afford to ignore some nationally specific meanings conferred to terrorism or violent extremism as a social problem. It is imperative that the nonrecognition of, or the failure to acknowledge, such specificities in preference to the internationally (donor) generated knowledge for interventions creates a scenario of subjugating local knowledge. Despite consensus on this regard, many interventions and terrorism studies continue to remain monoculturally enshrined in the universality of knowledge. Hence, they still pay minimal attention to the contextual (subjective) reality, partly as “a product of ideology” (Kloosterboer 2022, p. 2).

This tendency of non-recognition, also associated with the strategies for winning hearts and minds in Africa, ignores the specificity of national contexts by relying on the “White” history about the contexts that predominantly [mis]informs programme design in counterterrorism (Ibhawoh 2008). Moreover, [White] scholars of terrorism, being pioneers of research in this field, might remain unaware about existing understanding in Africa, literally falling under the “other literature” (Jackson 2012). This can be attributed to the diversity within the divisions of Western and African academies and given that research in the latter faces dismal dissemination. In this sense, we submit that “the particular ontology and epistemology of terrorism studies” (Jackson 2012, p. 12) generated by the global North have the potential to create subjugated knowledge, given the racialised barriers to the necessary “cross-fertilisation” between the Western and African specific knowledge systems.

Correspondingly, CTS, also dominated by Eurocentric scholars, have tended to “institutionalise” methodological interrogation of terrorism research “as a separate scholarly field of inquiry”, hence, falling prey to what they seek to critique about orthodox terrorism studies (Jackson 2012, p. 12). The institutionalisation of CTS scholarship creates a subtle existence of a special “epistemic community”. It is on this ground Oando and Achieng’ (2021) question some aspects of subjugated knowledge, in terrorism research, expressed through manipulative international systems, alongside the foreign policies that seemingly dominate the systems of knowledge production in African contexts. This argument portends that CTS may be under the influence of similar historical Eurocentric biases that seek to dominate the “local discourses” in Africa and other contexts in the global South (Oando and Achieng’ 2021). The resulting geospatial biases are, for instance, dominating the scholarship whereby early research in the global South struggles not only “to fit in”, but also to find favour in the “popular circles among the ideologues” (Zezeza 2007, p. 457) of CTS, and of the Western scholarship.

Similar imperialist subjugation of knowledge in African contexts is equally perceived in terrorism research, which dominates many strategies for winning the hearts and minds. For instance, a generic “model of knowledge” is commonplace in many studies of this narrative. Regrettably, prescriptive designs of studies and interventions following the cues of winning hearts and minds, which tend to transfer a “template” of one solution applicable to multiple contexts, are often supported by UN agencies (Paris 2018). Despite being a popular model of international systems, numerous studies have “challenged the prevailing orthodoxy” on the basis that such studies over-emphasise and “prioritise security concerns, political reforms and economic development” (Cardozo and Maber 2019, p. 26) at the expense of the underlying conflict issues known to each context. This aligns with the consideration by Jackson (2017, p. 6), pointing out that scholars have to “articulate alternative” strategies, which have the potential to replace the “dominant paradigm”.

Tom (2017) opines, in this regard, that institutionalising knowledge, whether in counterterrorism, results in characteristic failures to secure desirable outcomes. This connects to the concerns that promoting a standardised framework of knowledge in peace and conflict studies often faces daunting challenges in delivering peace outcomes in “local” contexts (Mac Ginty 2008). Subjugated knowledge is, therefore, attributed to the failure to acknowledge dynamics in local contexts that are not always homogeneous, but rather heterogeneous (Tom 2017). Contextual knowledge that deserves recognition, for example in Africa, consists of a wide range of knowledge produced by local actors or institutional frameworks like the “customary authorities, community organisations, and local kinship networks” (Tom 2017, p. 45).

Given the diversity between Western standardised knowledge, often constituting what is acceptable as scientific research, and the heterogeneity of communities, internationalised knowledge preferred in the interventions not only obscures the agency exercised by local researchers, but also poses a contextual gap in knowledge production. This includes the failure to consider in terrorism research some aspects of the specific cultural, religious, political, and historical context of the hosting communities (Sakue-Collins 2021). Consequently, international scholarship continues to struggle to explain local contexts by creating a huge set of “foreign experts” on the global South at the expense of acknowledging the contributions of civilian populations based on experiences in “everyday life” (Pugh 2013). Njeri (2019), drawing from her experience in Somaliland, castigates imperialism witnessed in both interventions and scholarship in peace and conflict that rarely move beyond state-building strategies.

The argument tends to demonstrate that the manner in which external actors, mostly international donor organisations, engage and consolidate their role displays critical gaps in the African context, as many local communities remain sceptical about the future and sustainability of such work (Ahmed et al. 2012; Njeri 2019; Skarlato et al. 2012). Subjugated knowledge, perpetuated through the battle for hearts and minds in CVE can be the reason behind some gaps regarding poor coordination of the interventions by the key actors, most of which have different allegiances, priorities, and political ideologies (Njeri 2019). Based on such discrepancies, international interventions for counterterrorism obstruct context-based evidence building that guarantees local ownership, which is also necessary for establishing sustainability in the knowledge production for counterterrorism at local levels (Ingiriis 2018).

4. Dilemma in Counterterrorism and the Battle for Hearts and Minds in Africa

The literature continues to show that the situation in most affected sub-regions of Africa is worsening as the extremist or “terrorist” groups continue to gain ground and to occupy more significant locations in the continent (Okereke 2017). Rising fears are linked to the increasing recruitment of local community members and the successful running of “criminal economies” at the subnational level (ACSRT 2017; Falode 2016). In a few cases, extremist organisations have been reported in the literature to be working at the community level to win local support (Agbibo 2014; Iyekepolo 2016). For example, in Nigeria, Boko Haram continually causes devastating havoc as their means of terror evolve from the use of crude weapons to kidnappings and the abduction of children, some of whom are later deployed as suicide bombers. Somewhat, Boko Haram has not only infiltrated communities in Nigeria, but their activities are quickly expanding across the borders to the neighbouring countries of West Africa (Iyekepolo 2016).

Similar trends are recorded in the Horn of Africa, where the dominance of Al Shabaab continues to worry states in the region. Having set up a strong base in Somalia, Al Shabaab has conducted some lethal attacks in most of the neighbouring countries like Kenya over the last two decades. Most Eastern African countries continue to fall victim to the Al Shabaab extremist group and, in response, witness increased state-perpetrated violence. Just like Boko Haram, this group has persistently pledged allegiance to the Al-Qaeda group (Kessels et al. 2016; Mkutu and Opondo 2019). It is considering the expansionist

campaigns by the “terrorist” groups that elaborate counterterrorism measures gradually gaining the attention and response of state and non-state actors globally. International collaborations have been signed between African states and the Western powers to also expand cross-border response mechanisms for counterterrorism. This explains how Western powers have come to invest huge sums of resources in Africa, supporting a couple of counterterrorism programmes (Lakhani 2012). For example, Bradbury and Kleinman reported that:

The US government came close to approving military action in Somalia; the rationale being the alleged links between the Somali Islamist movement (Al Ittihad Al Islamiya), the Somali-owned money-transfer company (Al Barakat), and the Al Qaeda network. (Bradbury and Kleinman 2010, p. 13).

Ostensibly, concerns emerge around targeted mechanisms for “counterterrorism practices” (Meier 2022, p. 83), which dominated the GWOT campaign in the post-9/11 period. It is noted further in literature that both counterterrorism strategies and studies in Africa are more significantly influenced by the Western military interventions than by decisions of African states themselves. Some of the commissioned studies, for instance, reveal some realisation of the West concerning “the difficulties of operating directly in Somalia, [...], the absence of an active insurgency in the region, and the increasing policy concerns” (Bradbury and Kleinman 2010, p. 14), leading the US operations in the Horn of Africa, eventually, to be rebranded. It is the impending difficulties associated with military occupancy that counterterrorism strategies were refocused.

Kinetic capture and kill operations were de-emphasised in favour of a preventative strategy involving the provision of assistance to “win hearts and minds”, focused on Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, all of which are nominally allied to the US. (Bradbury and Kleinman 2010, p. 14).

Inherently, perspective and strategies for winning hearts and minds can be understood to represent merely a change of tack by the military agencies of the West, devoid of any interest in or about local communities. It is on such a foundation that international strategies for counterterrorism are likely to miss priorities and interests in the African response to issues of violent conflicts (Mkutu and Opondo 2019). Regrettably, some studies have simply adopted Western assumptions, informed by generalisations from the universality of knowledge. Hence, some international interventions in Africa have been criticised for lacking contextual considerations. This view is reflected in political policy often informed by military intelligence surveillance rather than context-based empirical research (Aldrich 2014; Ali 2017).

Consequently, Malinda Smith (2016), for example, problematises the numerous military campaigns initiated by the Bush administration, and more ominously, for securing Africa. Smith casts aspersions on the reasons behind Africa being designated by the US as a frontier in the GWOT campaign, while in August 1998, just three years before the 9/11, they saw no interest in supporting the victims of simultaneous attacks of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, where many local citizens perished. This concern raises valid questions about the sincerity of the emphasis placed on measures for counterterrorism in Africa in relation to the GWOT campaign. It is on the same strength that questions about sincerity, whether valid or not, make the battle for “winning hearts and minds” to be conceptually problematic. Given the military origin of the narrative, the definition of winning hearts and minds offered by the Department of the US Army remains relevant more to the US than it is to other contexts of the global South in which it has been used. This means the narrative is irrelevant in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. According to Bradbury and Kleinman (2010, p. 15), the definition of the phrase is in two parts.

“Hearts” means persuading people that their best interests are served by [counterinsurgency] success. “Minds” means convincing them that the force can protect them, and that resisting is pointless¹.

This definition connects counterterrorism strategies based on the narratives for winning hearts and minds to a kind of conceptualisation that seeks to identify foes and allies. It is an indication of how the international community struggles to rely on “poorly defined terms applied in their theory of change and pathways” (Innes et al. 2017, p. 264). Worse still, as Hardy (2018) argues, such contested definitions are still promoted to inform policies in many countries in the global South, as targeted by these strategies for winning hearts and minds. A case in point can be witnessed with programmes leaning on the Prevent and Contest frameworks, which are “often shaped less by evidence-based research, and more so by political, cultural and historical factors that are specific to each national government” (Hardy 2018, p. 78). The gaps identified in the narrative, therefore, reinforce further a concern raised by Aziz (2017) that many counterterrorism programmes, like those in Africa, are not only flawed contextually, but might also be systemically counter-productive. Hence, the entire battle for winning hearts and minds is both a strategy and concept, which is “fundamentally unnecessary” for many contexts in the global South (Aziz 2017, p. 257).

Subsequently, it is indicative for Africa that the perspectives driven by the battle for hearts and minds are more likely to develop varying imperialist positions, like using mechanisms for counterterrorism as a tool of control (Jackson 2011, p. 391). Thus, conceptualisation in this regard would only remain valid as long as there exists a means of dominating the international public, most likely of allied countries, through international political agencies. The goal of the international political agencies then draws a shift from counterterrorism towards the achievement of specific political and capitalist interests as opposed to supporting local interests. It is in the same strength that controversial meanings have also significantly contributed to the dominant discourses used for (international) interventions to fix local problems.

The orthodoxy in the battle for winning hearts and minds also feeds into the “western narratives of fear [just like the GWOT campaigns] behind the blame-it-all on Islam” (Sage-man 2014, p. 567). Hence, there’s little doubt how “the rubric of hearts and minds” creates a declaration of wide-ranging intentions, “but remains somewhat vague and open to [mis]interpretation” (Bradbury and Kleinman 2010, p. 15). Interventions designed under this strategy, whether implemented by state or non-state agencies, remain overly “prescriptive” and frequently anchored on borrowed scripts of the powerful countries of the global North. Similarly, such interventions and the respective knowledge systems only perpetuate a fallacy of “uniform and bureaucratically imposed structures that fail to pay due attention to the understanding of local conditions and contextual readiness to accommodate variety of voices” (Ramsbotham et al. 2011, p. 226).

It should be worrying, therefore, that the resulting relationship between the international community and their local allies demonstrates unique dependency patterns that not only validate biased power relations against the national interests of local communities, but also have significant effects on the resolution of violent conflicts. Subsequently, the challenge of terrorism targeted by such strategies of winning hearts and minds is that they risk turning into a “new normal” of permanent preference for military interventions in the local horizon (Charbonneau 2017, p. 416). In the end, the Western capitalist institutions, like those dealing in arms trade, thrive on the resulting obscurity to expand their space for developing “forms of appropriation and sovereignty” permeating the local contexts, and remaining as the pillars of Western domination (Campling and Colás 2018, p. 780). All these predicaments raise fundamental doubts about the subaltern’s intellectual capacity to engage, and the African states’ political will to develop, and cultivate a reversal process through decolonial approaches to counterterrorism.

It becomes inherent, the need in CTS specifically and terrorism research in general, to heed a rallying call by decolonial scholars like Walter D. Mignolo, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Anibal Quijano, often offering to challenge the predominant “Eurocentric historiography” in many fields (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020, p. 882). It is also the decision to unravel the cognitive empire and to interrogate intellectual imperialism, for example, those nuanced

in CTS and in counterterrorism research, that cognitive justice can be sought. Challenging Eurocentricity through a decolonial turn facilitates the subaltern agency for interrogating “why the African genealogy of decolonisation scholarship is often side-lined” in international circles (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020, p. 883). This standpoint sounds rather radical, but delves into “epistemic debates and politics of knowledge”, which is necessary for CTS, which also underscores the existence of “the primacy of epistemology as a creator of ontology” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020, p. 883).

5. Decolonial Discourse and Prospects for Reimagining CTS

It is rather a fragile move to engage in debates and contentions that define the paradox between the knowledge systems of the global North and South in relation to CTS scholarship. This effort, however, comes from the realisation of the need to step up “epistemic decolonisation” from the confines of academia (Ilyas 2022, p. 417), by seeking to deepen the analysis of the dynamics of peace and conflict studies. Taking the cue from challenging counterterrorism strategies built around the battle for hearts and minds, we devote significant thoughts to the radical theorising for decolonising politics of knowledge production towards realisation and recognition of knowledge indigenous to African contexts. These are the knowledge systems exercised by beneficiary states of global interventions for counterterrorism support before they are manipulated. Efforts for knowledge recognition pursue an interrogation of complex imperialist doctrines mainstreamed through governmental institutions like the military as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) “that are part of the terrorism industry” (Ilyas 2022, p. 417).

Strategies and conceptualisation for winning hearts and minds, notwithstanding, provide a clear basis for cognitive empires that remain to influence knowledge production in terrorism research through “discursive resources” like technologies and ideologies used by the global North to execute the GWOT campaign (Ilyas 2022; Sabaratnam 2017; Zondi 2018). As much as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) sounds a warning about the circumstances in the international scholarship in which the African genealogy of decolonisation has been sidelined, there is no doubt it offers a new pathway for enriching CTS research to reflect voices of the global South, beyond the limited battle of winning hearts and minds. Hence, the question of decolonisation in this article is not necessarily a new concept, but rather a sturdier contestation of the “discourses of knowledge and power” (Zondi 2018, p. 16) that have dominated academic research for decades. It can be described as the renewed call for “de-imperialisation [...] connected to broader struggles for the [de-liberalisation] of economy, space, memory and politics” (Zondi 2018, p. 17). Somewhat, the zeal is evident in sporadic calls for a revolution of the knowledge production systems in the global South.

As a new conceptualisation in terrorism research, however, decolonisation brings into focus a different way of researching terrorism beyond the “Eurocentric scientificity” (Jackson 2012). The conceptualisation around decoloniality, thus, emerges from evidence in post-independent scholarships that work towards “reconstructing the relationship between [the colonised] and the colonisers” by overcoming naivety in the fear of returning to “a romanticised pre-colonial past” (Austin 2015, p. 490). Therefore, this concept of decoloniality is explored in the article as a form of “fundamental rethinking and redoing of how knowledge is produced, taught, and disseminated” (Zondi 2018, p. 17) in terrorism research to usher a new dawn of a “decolonial turn” in CTS.

Reimagining subjugated knowledge through the decolonial turn can be expressed by a related concept, “de-coloniality”, which implies an “active action of undoing or reversal of colonialism” (Tamale 2020, p. 20). Hence, Tamale urges great caution to be taken with clear reflections about what needs to be achieved by decoloniality in any context. She observes, for example, that in the African context, “the concept is heavily burdened with deep histories, many of whose consequences are irreversible” (Tamale 2020, p. 20). Demonstrating this complexity that confounds decoloniality, Tamale asserts that,

[Decoloniality] speaks to the dismantling of several layers of complex and entrenched colonial structures, ideologies, narratives, identities, and practices that pervade every aspect of our lives. Most of these systems have become commonplace, if not common sense in our day today lives. [...] We witness the legacies of colonisation every day when our presidents beg for aid from Western capitals. (Tamale 2020, p. 21).

Ilyas (2022) confirms this complexity by arguing that many scholars of terrorism and CTS in the global South often become indifferent (tackling the concept), fearing that undoing coloniality can be a counterintuitive move not only to their “ideological convictions” but also to their “personal interests” vis a vis job security and funding from global north actors. Such fears point attention to imperialism and dependency relationships in both political, economic and academic spaces that have shaped, historically, the international platform of terrorism research. This domination is mainstreamed through the captive mind.

[imbalance] between the global North and South can be adduced as “dominatory” ..., whereby organisations from former colonial states position themselves as the knowledge producers, while the latter are passive subjects. The latter are given (or receive) the ideas, and the funds, on condition of committing to compliance and reporting the outcomes to the foreign entities. [...] such flawed phenomena ... constructed through the lens of the captive mind, ... portrays a perpetuation of collective thinking and behaviour by groups or individuals to unquestionably replicate both the knowledge systems and the stereotypes of the West. (Oando and Achieng’ 2021, pp. 357–58).

This dilemma of being trapped in the “state of the captive mind” calls for a point of departure by acknowledging the understanding that all paradigms are seldom fully recognised in the Western theories of knowledge (Gumede 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). It follows, therefore, that CTS research in Africa has to be contemplated “beyond deconstruction [to] consider the agenda for decolonisation [which] involves re-construction” (Tamale 2020, p. 21) and undoing the “captive mind”. To achieve reconstruction in CTS, the African scholarship must endeavour to collectively generate counter-narratives embedded in African knowledge systems that can build trust (Ike et al. 2021) in both intervention frameworks for counterterrorism and in CTS research. Ilyas (2022, p. 420), however, proposes a radical approach of “epistemic decolonisation that entails epistemic disobedience”, by seeking to delink from Eurocentric research on terrorism, in preference of approaches in research “based on global South epistemes”.

The aim of this argument is to undo some tendencies of the “captive mind”, and intellectual imperialism, in the form of dependencies, and to create space for African approaches to develop and flourish. A rare consensus by African scholars about decoloniality, nevertheless, conforms to the quest for transforming the methods by seeking to challenge “the colonial matrix of power” in terrorism research (Yako 2021). It is, therefore, a commitment towards reimagining the subjugated knowledge in CTS and the broader terrorism research that anticipates a journey in CTS scholarship, taking “epistemic decolonisation as a first step” (Ilyas 2022, p. 421). Such a journey is not going to be easy, and many obstacles will need to be overcome, not only the “captive mind”, “epistemological control”, and “the politics and economy of knowledge production, which are skewed towards and favours academics and centres of knowledge production based in global North countries, but also convincing African academics that the decolonial direction is the “future”.

Consequently, the body and practice in CTS research, discussed in this article, address the project of decoloniality by de-emphasising Eurocentricity as a fundamental step towards restoring equal space for knowledge generated in the African context. There is no attempt made to offer concrete solutions to counterterrorism, but provides a case for recognition of work by African researchers (Okech et al. 2021) who may choose to utilise African epistemologies and methodologies. A paradigm shift is, therefore, inevitable,

given the tremendous changes globally that provide no room or excuse for sustaining Eurocentric hegemonies or creating an alternative African hegemony in the knowledge production systems (Kithinji et al. 2016). It is, thus, imperative that challenging the orthodoxy in the agenda of winning hearts and minds opens a panacea for addressing gaps associated with interventions focusing on a specific group of individuals who are often taken as being “at risk” of, or “vulnerable” to, terrorism.

In this argument, decoloniality is considered to enrich CTS methodology as a way of contesting the prejudicial generalisation, such as the classification of community subgroups, like Muslims, as being at risk. The argument in the article holds that deleterious analysis in CTS methods is fundamentally flawed and is likely to perpetuate a counterproductive interpretation in the different local contexts. It takes that an approach based on subjective analysis is, thus, a possible preserve for stigma or prejudice (Sommers 2019). Likewise, mainstreaming decolonial analysis in CTS also helps to acknowledge some culpabilities associated with traditional studies that link the bulging youth population in Africa to the direct risk of terrorism. On the contrary, existing evidence from the literature (Calhoun 2016; Cuadro 2020; Lindahl 2016) shows that, in many countries, most youth are not necessarily terrorists, despite their different contextual challenges. Hence, even if counterterrorism programmes never existed, many youths are still unlikely to join extremist groups (Sommers 2019), which gives the impression that such programmes may have ulterior motives.

Epistemic decolonisation engages with contextual experiences to theorise and reinforce empirical evidence suggesting that an individual does not need to have any prior contact with a terrorist group (seen as being at risk), or to have ever travelled to those “blacklisted” countries where the groups are active (as implied by racial anti-terrorism laws against African and Muslim immigrants in some countries), to become radicalised into terrorism (Hearne and Laiq 2010; Sommers 2019). Globally, therefore, some individuals are erratically marked as being at risk or even risky by virtue of travelling to the wrong countries (Kessels et al. 2016). Hence, a decolonial approach in CTS acknowledges the need to focus on the context of engagement based on indigenous knowledge and subaltern voices without the fear of inferiority (Walker 2004).

In sum, I submit that reimagining subjugated knowledge in CTS stipulates tangible and evocative measures towards decolonising “the way we read, write, and engage with the slippery processes of knowledge production” (Yako 2021, p. 2). While this process is not directional, epistemic decolonisation in CTS hopes to engage with terrorism research by questioning the flaws and gaps mainstreamed in the Eurocentric discourse, and by raising substantial reservations about the authenticity of “genuine” intent in the battle for hearts and minds. Subsequently, analysis of epistemic hegemonies and internationalisation reinforces the argument that substantive decolonisation underscores decoloniality in CTS “as a counterhegemonic project” (Dawson 2019, p. 2), which may not be welcomed by some academics. This project must, thus, incorporate cognitive justice, which requires, as a basic component, the acceptance of hybridity in knowledge production between the global North and South, which is not controlled by the former. Cognitive justice in itself entails an intellectual paradigm “aimed at transforming the knowledge structures that facilitate dehumanisation” (Dawson 2019, p. 2).

6. Conclusions

Reimagining subjugated knowledge commences from the realisation that terrorism studies require some radical transformation of its methodological aspects, which assume universality in “terrorism” research. This kind of transformation recognises that CTS are not essentially meant to “deconstruct [only] the ambiguity of the word “terror” [...] and the complicity of “orthodox” terrorism studies” (Jones and Smith 2009, p. 293). Instead, the methods used in CTS must “dispense with negative materiality and procedural formalism” of the West by going beyond “ontological eurocentrism” (Bhambra et al. 2018, p. 78). Without tackling such structural gaps, subjugated knowledge in Africa continues to emerge and recur through the works of colonial historians about Africa. Some of the works on the battle for hearts and

minds, as much as the authors claim reflexivity, tend to rely on “manipulation by ostensibly liberal democratic state actors, and the complicity of orthodox terrorism studies in this authoritarian enterprise” (Jones and Smith 2009, p. 293), which seek to suppress local facts in favour of “the colonial” knowledge.

It is on this fallible foundation that gaps in the battle for winning hearts and minds are censured for steering some interventions by both NGOs and state agencies. Counterterrorism strategies or terrorism research drawn from this narrative of winning hearts and minds, therefore, are likely to thrive on exclusionary domains that suppress subaltern voices. The strategies also risk falling into the trap of framing universal messages based on laws and conceptualisations that are abstract to the local masses. The abstractness, subsequently, leads to the ensuing failure in many interventions, by creating situations of “us versus them”. Hence, it is inherent that ramifications from the Western constructions resist from incorporating indigenous understandings in the interventions. Reimaging subjugated knowledge, thus, demonstrates that narratives behind the battle for hearts and minds are based on superficial colonial theories drummed up, for instance, without appreciating the space and role of local knowledge in terrorism research. As argued by Oloka-Onyango (2015), the language, structure, and foundation of scholarship that ignores subaltern voices have been imported directly from colonial institutions. Consequently, intervention systems that seem to impose the same structures on the communities are very much likely to be misunderstood, rejected, and resisted in favour of the local knowledge systems tied to the traditions of indigenous people (Nebe 2012).

The susceptibility to resistance in many intervention outcomes is also reflected in the confusions and suspicions between the state security and non-state actors. By failing to contextualise competing interests in international funding, Simoncini argues that “at the centre of attention” reinforces the fear that international donors are used by their parent states “to impose control through cooperation” (Simoncini 2020, p. 182). This kind of suspicion, most likely, assumes that Western allies in counterterrorism are more interested in gaining control of the security sectors in non-Western countries than in gaining peaceful outcomes. Hence, Sakue-Collins (2021) argues, frantically, that many NGOs and state agencies find themselves in an awkward position by virtue of uncritically subscribing to Western ideologies, which makes them function more as ideological stooges in the African contexts that also results in perpetual fear of external control.

Indeed, the fear of external control, whether real or perceived, is embedded in the conflicting policies between the funding countries or their agencies and the hosting states. Some fears are, however, genuinely pegged on the competing interests to gain access to valuable or protected information as a way of keeping at bay the interests of the global South, fearing intrusion of the East. Following the cues and same script from the Cold War period, Western allies like the US and UK, have always switched focus between financing counterterrorism and providing funds for security assistance as they compete to establish privileged relationships (Simoncini 2020; Tsui 2020). The battle for hearts and minds, therefore, shapes the politics around international interventions that further generate multiple obstacles arising from suspicions and phobias about espionage. In connection to such contentions, for instance, Tamale (2020) argues that racial homogeneity generates suspicions and ignores the diversity in the local culture and value systems. These predicaments perpetuate silencing the local voice, resulting in both systemic and self-subjugation.

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Note

¹ Definition derived from Department of the Army Counterinsurgency (FM 3-24, 15 December 2006)

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